Evaluation of Skills@Work

Draft final Report

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Contents

Glossary

Acronym	Definition
BAWSO	Black Association of Women Step Out
BIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
CCC	Cardiff County Council
CCT	Cross Cutting Themes
CCTV	Close Circuit Television
CELT	Connect, Engage, Listen and Transform
CEMP	Community Evaluation and Monitoring Project
CFW	Communities for Work
CFW+	Communities for Work Plus
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CSCS	Construction Skills Certificate Scheme
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESF	European Social Fund
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HGV	Heavy Goods Vehicle
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
JCP	Job Centre Plus
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender
MCC	Monmouthshire County Council
NCC	Newport City Council
NEET	Not in Employment Education or Training
NHS	National Health Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PaCE	Parents Childcare and Employment
PLA	Personal Learning Account

SIA	Security Industry Authority
SMEs	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats
WAVE	Women Adding Value to the Economy
WEST	Wales Essential Skills Toolkit

Summary

The Skills@Work Project

1. The primary objective of the Skills@Work project is 'to reduce levels of poverty' in Cardiff, Monmouthshire and Newport by 'supporting access to sustainable employment'. The project is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and started in January 2019 and is due to end in December 2022. It aims to engage 1,462 participants, and to support them to acquire generic, transferable skills from entry level 1 to level 2, in order to improve the mobility of the workforce and increase the sustainability of their employment.

The evaluation

2. As outlined in the specification, the evaluation aims to: '…provide a critical assessment of the regional approach to increasing the skill levels…of those in the workforce with no or low skills.' It focuses upon five key areas:

    - management and implementation of the project;
    - delivery of the operation;
    - outcomes and impact of the operation;
    - contribution to the Cross Cutting Themes (CCT); and
    - achievements and sustainability.

3. The evaluation draws primarily upon three sources of data:

    - a desk-based literature review;
    - quantitative and qualitative data collected by the project, including data drawn from the project's participant database and progress reports; and
    - qualitative research (primarily interviews) with 12 project staff, 25 participants and 7 partners.

Project performance engaging participants

4. The project has performed well and has achieved its targets[1] for engaging:

    - men and women with a qualification[2] (achieving 92 per cent and 85 per cent of the target respectively); and
    - men without a qualification[3] (achieving 105 per cent of the target).

5. However, the project struggled to engage women without a qualification and despite <mark>a considerable improvement in the engagement levels of women towards to later stages of the project[4]</mark>, it is currently considerably below target (at the time of writing, this stood at 43 per cent of the target). It was reported that other projects have experienced similar problems engaging women and, as outlined below, external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic contributed.

6. In assessing performance, it is important to bear in mind that before the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020), the project was on target in terms of the engagement of men and women, but the pandemic created substantial challenges for the project. Although staff, participants and partners felt the project had responded well to the pandemic, it:

    - disrupted training provision, which was initially suspended, and which took time to re-establish online;
    - created new barriers, particularly for women who, for example, bore much of the burden of managing childcare while schools were closed; and
    - made it difficult for the project to plan ahead, due to the 'stop start' nature of government restrictions.

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[1] The project allows for a 15 per cent variation in terms of achievement of targets. Therefore, if the levels achieved are within 85 per cent to 115 per cent of the target, they are deemed to have been met. These figures include the reprofiled figures in Newport; Monmouthshire are also reprofiling, however, these figures had not been confirmed during the production of this report.

[2] For the purposes of the project this is defined as having qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education.

[3] For the purposes of the project this is defined as having no formal qualifications.

[4] <mark>Each quarter (within the project timeframe) has individual targets, and in the 8th quarter (i.e.1st Dec 2020 – 28th of Feb 2021), the progress on the engagement target for women was as low as 7 per cent, however by the 12th quarter (1st Dec 2021 – 28th of Feb 2022), this had increased to 76 per cent given a constant steady increase in progress from the 8th to 12th quarter.</mark>

7. Moreover, both before and after the pandemic, engagements have differed between beneficiary areas; for example:

- Monmouthshire performed strongly in terms of engaging men (214 per cent of the target) and women (153 per cent of the target) with qualifications; and
- Cardiff performed strongly in terms of engaging men (191 per cent of the target) without qualifications.
- in contrast, in Newport performance was initially strong but faltered following the COVID-19 pandemic and the establishment of a neighbourhood hub system, which disrupted delivery of the project.

8. Three main factors supported engagements:
- strong links to employment support projects, often managed by the project beneficiaries themselves, which, having helped people into work, could refer potential participants onto Skills@Work to help them progress further;
- referrals from partners, such as Job Centre Plus and housing associations who were in contact with potential participants; and
- to a lesser degree, direct recruitment, using traditional promotional methods such as flyers, posters and attendance at events such as career fairs, enhanced by 'word of mouth' recommendations.

Project performance converting engagements into training outcomes

9. The project aimed to support participants to gain an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving (the project's 'results'). Overall, the project struggled to achieve these aims. The project just achieved its target for results for men without qualifications (85 per cent of the target) but fell far short of its targets for results for women without qualifications (33 per cent of the target) and for men and women with qualifications (79 per cent and 62 per cent of the target respectively).

10. In assessing performance, it is important to bear in mind that before the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020), the project was on target in terms of achieving

results for men with qualifications but had struggled to achieve results for women. It is also notable that performance in each of the three areas differed; for example, Monmouthshire had very strong results for men (155 per cent of the target) and women (132 per cent of the target) with qualifications and Cardiff had very strong results for men without qualifications (159 per cent of the target). In part this reflects differences in performance in relation to engagements, but it also reflects difficulties converting engagements into results. Whilst the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (upon the delivery of training and the situational barriers women faced, given their additional caring responsibilities) is likely to have depressed conversion rates, even before the pandemic the conversion rates were not as high as expected.

The impact of COVID-19

11. It is difficult to definitively assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; for example:

    - the pandemic depressed engagements, which in turn had a knock-on effect on the project's ability to achieve results (as it worked with fewer participants than anticipated) but this does not appear to explain all the variation observed in results;

    - the pandemic also made it more difficult for the project to convert the engagements it achieved into results (so the conversion rate was lower than anticipated) given, for example, the impact upon training delivery and upon the barriers participants faced, but again this does not explain all the variation observed in results;

    - while all areas were affected, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon labour markets was different in each area, and some areas such as Newport were particularly badly hit (McCurdy, 2020); and

    - 'local' factors, such as the move to a neighbourhood hub system in Newport and initial weakness in project management in Monmouthshire also contributed to under-performance.

12. Despite this uncertainty, the evidence suggests that it is reasonable to assume that the project would have been on target to achieve its intended results for men

with qualifications, were it not for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is currently only 6 percentage points below its target (achieving 79 per cent of its target) and with the recent easing of restrictions, there is good chance that the project will meet this target before it ends in December 2022. However, it is unlikely that the project would be on target to achieve its intended results for women with and without qualifications (absent the pandemic), given how far short performance against targets has been.

Project management

13. Overall, the project was well-managed and the devolved approach enabled local adaptations. This included good project guidance, well organised data 'health checks' and a supportive working relationship between managers. However, the project may have benefitted from greater collaboration between beneficiary areas to, for example, share training and make it easier to recruit enough participants to make it viable to run courses. In addition, the project may have benefitted from a stronger challenge from the central team, for example, in the underperformance of Monmouthshire County Council (MCC)[5] in the first 15 months of the project.

The Cross Cutting Themes

14. The project undertook many activities to address Cross Cutting Themes and the related Case Level Indicators. Although most activity was focused upon sustainable development, the biggest successes were in relation to equal opportunities, given the strong performance with participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and disabled participants. However, engagements of, and results for, women without qualifications were weak and little progress was made in gender mainstreaming as the project, for example, struggled to promote non-traditional job roles amongst women and men and for women to pursue STEM courses. As outlined below, tackling poverty and social exclusion was the core aim of the project, and the project made an important contribution to this.

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[5] The project was initially managed by the Adult and Community Learning department in MCC but it was reported to have insufficient time to manage the project effectively. In response, action was taken by MCC and the project was transferred to the Employment and Skills department, which resulted in a step change improved performance.

The impact of the project upon participants

15. Participants interviewed for the evaluation consistently described the positive impact that they felt that the project had upon their lives, most notably in terms of their confidence and other soft skills, knowledge of the job market and training provision and improved employment, such as more stable work, better pay, longer hours and/or more interesting work. This is supported by the literature reviewed for the evaluation, which identifies a range of economic and personal outcomes associated with gaining skills and qualifications (see e.g. Schuller, 2017).

16. A theory based approach to impact evaluation was used to draw conclusions about the project's impact, by testing whether the causal chains expected to bring about change were supported by sufficiently strong evidence and that alternative explanations could be ruled out (HM Treasury, 2020)[6]. Figure 1 below illustrates the main causal chains expected to bring about change.

Figure 1. Skills@Work activities and intended outcomes
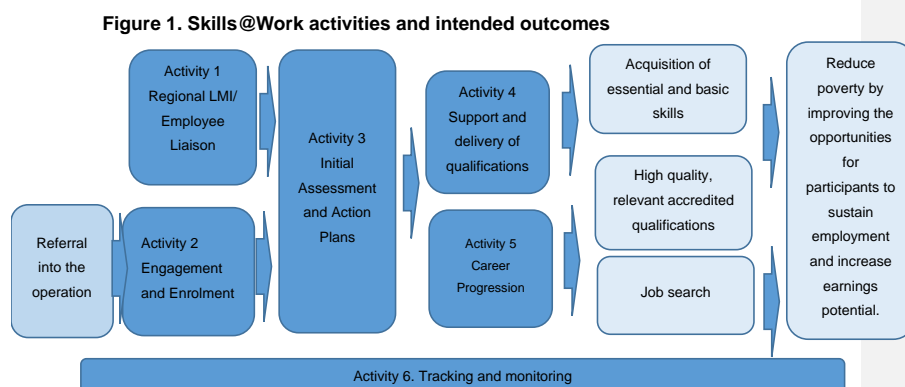
17. The evidence suggests that the causal chains worked in practice, although not always as well as anticipated, and this weakened the impact upon outcomes,

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[6] The lack of data (given the small sample of Skills@Work participants in the ESF leavers survey) means it was not possible to use experimental or quasi-experimental approaches to infer the impact of the project.

such as increased sustainability of employment, earnings and ultimately, poverty reduction; for example:

- as outlined above, engagements of participants, with the exception of women without qualifications, were strong (see Activity 1 and 2).
- feedback from project participants and staff interviewed for the study suggests that assessment and action planning was effective, although there was less use of the Wales Essential Skills Test than anticipated[7] (Activity 3).
- however, COVID-19 disrupted delivery and take up of training, particularly amongst women (Activity 4), which affected the acquisition of skills and qualifications, which in turn supressed the impact upon the sustainability of employment, earnings and ultimately, poverty reduction.
- staff and partners reported that employers' recruitment processes were becoming more demanding, which increased the importance of advice and support to aid career progression (Activity 5), which also contributed to the sustainability of employment, earnings and ultimately, poverty reduction.
- tracking and monitoring was robust (Activity 6), although there was a lack of action to act upon data that highlighted areas of underperformance, such as the engagement of women without qualifications.

18. It is also reasonable to rule out alternative explanations of the results and outcomes that were observed, as:

- the barriers reported by participants and project staff and identified in the literature reviewed for the evaluation suggest that without the project intervention, participants would have struggled to gain the skills and qualifications they achieved; and
- the evidence from participants, project staff and the literature reviewed also suggests that increases in skills and qualifications can be expected to

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[7] This was reported by staff to be because, in their judgement, participants did not need the assessment because participants' basic skills were 'good enough' and the COVID-19 pandemic limited face to face contact, which made it difficult to use the tools properly.

increase earnings and the sustainability of employment, helping reduce in-work poverty.

19. It is notable that some staff reported that many participants did not need much support to gain the outcome they were looking for; for example, it was reported that many just needed the funding and access to the course that they desired, in order to gain the qualification. While this suggests that, without the project, these participants would not have gained qualifications (so it does not undermine the evidence of impact), it suggests that results could potentially have been achieved at a lower cost. This type of support was, in essence, an administrative task, which suggests the potential for developing a different type of model with less emphasis upon action planning and support for those groups of participants judged not to need additional support. Notwithstanding that many participants did need additional support.

Future opportunities and recommendations

20. The evidence gathered for this evaluation, including the literature reviewed, evidence of project effectiveness, and interviews with staff, partners and participants, identifies:

- a clear need for the in-work support that Skills@Work offered, given high levels of in-work poverty;
- that without the project's support, participants would have struggled to gain skills or qualifications; and
- that by helping people upskill and gain qualifications, the project is likely to have contributed to reducing in-work poverty.

21. The evidence from interviews with staff, partners and participants also identifies a gap in the market for an 'up-skilling' project such as Skills@Work, (given the absence of alternative initiatives offering similar support in Cardiff, Monmouthshire and Newport). Interventions like this also fit well with the Welsh Government's Employability and Skills Plan (Welsh Government, 2022).

22. Given the strengths and weaknesses of the project, the need for, value of, the strategic fit of this type of intervention, and the absence of alternatives, the following recommendations were identified.

Recommendation 1. Explore funding and collaborative models to deliver a similar project in the future. These include:

- Identifying lessons learned from the Community Renewal Fund pilot[8] that provides an entry opportunity into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Collaborating on accessing funding streams (such as the Shared Prosperity Fund) to deliver a similar project model in the future.
- Adding the 'upskilling' element of the project (and considering lessons learned, see recommendation 2) to future bids for planned employment support-based interventions[9].
- Considering developing a lower cost upskilling model that targets people with low level support needs (i.e. only need administrative support to access courses) and that operates on more of a brokerage, than support model. While cheaper and potentially more affordable, this model would limit the number and range of potential beneficiaries. Even if this is not possible, beneficiaries should continue to refer people who want to upskill (for example, through the local authority community hubs) to external services such as Personal Learning Accounts and strengthening relationships with local colleges that deliver such training.
- Exploring the feasibility of gaining funding for a project that could cater for more expensive courses (in addition to the ones covered in this project).
- Working in partnership with employers, public sector (e.g. NHS) and the third sector to deliver a training programme for employees in need of upskilling.

Recommendation 2: Future beneficiary projects should consider lessons learned (including good practice) in this project. These include:

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[8]This pilot aims to enhance the employability and skills offer in the Cardiff Capital Region (one of the project's beneficiaries) by developing the triage system to access all employment and skills services within the local authorities. This provides entry opportunity into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
[99] For example, beneficiaries were considering a bid for an employment support type intervention similar to Journey2Work.

- Greater scrutiny when forecasting expected recruitment levels and subsequent conversion rates into outcomes given, for example, local demographics, qualification rates amongst local populations, performance of similar projects, established referral routes and management capacity/structures.
- Building on the strengths identified on this project, such as establishing an effective database like CEMP; streamlining administrative systems, offering blended learning provision (online and face to face) and requiring participants to complete standard accredited courses before supplying wider options of courses (in order to test their commitment).
- Planning how to address weaknesses identified on this project, such as the failure to develop initiatives to engage women and enable participants to overcome barriers that depressed the conversion rate of engagements to outcomes.

Recommendation 3: Sharing good practice around engagement and support for participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups with partners and other local authorities and projects in Wales.

1. Introduction

Skills@Work

1.1. The primary objective of the Skills@Work project is 'to reduce levels of poverty in East Wales through supporting access to sustainable employment.' The project is funded by the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF), started in January 2019 and is due to end in December 2022. It aims to engage 1,462 participants in the local authority areas of Cardiff, Monmouthshire and Newport, and enable them to acquire generic, transferable skills from entry level 1 to level 2, in order to improve the mobility of the workforce and support sustainable employment.

1.2. To be eligible, participants must:
- be aged 16 or over;
- have the right to live/work in the UK; and
- be employed/self-employed and have no or low skills (i.e. under level 2).

1.3. Table 1.1. below shows a breakdown of the project's targets (result indicators). The project is working towards achieving these targets by the end of the project. In line with the recommendations from the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), Newport City Council (NCC) reprofiled their targets in February 2022 (these changes are added to the table 1.1), Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) are in the process of reprofiling, whilst Cardiff City Council (CCC) retained their original targets.

Table 1.1. Project targets[10].

Engagement targets	Final Target
Employed, including self-employed participants with no formal qualifications	735
Male	*324*
Female	*411*
Employed, including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education	727
Male	*358*
Female	*369*
Result targets	
Employed, including self-employed participants with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving	512
Male	*225*
Female	*287*
Employed, including self-employed participants with up to and including a lower secondary education gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification at lower secondary level upon leaving	490
Male	*235*
Female	*255*

Source: Skills@Work Business Plan (2018) and NCC reprofiling spreadsheet (2022)

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[10] Monmouthshire are reprofiling, however, these figures had not been confirmed during the production of this report.

1.4.   The model used for the project was, to a degree, based upon Torfaen's Working Skills for Adults programme which was an 'upskilling' programme that offered support based around needs, career guidance and a wide list of courses from which participants could choose. The results of this programme showed that most participants chose courses that were not expensive, and this then helped offset the cost of the few participants that needed funding to pursue more expensive courses.

1.5.   Figure 1 below illustrates the Skills@Work operation's model and components.

Figure 1. Skills@Work activities and intended outcomes
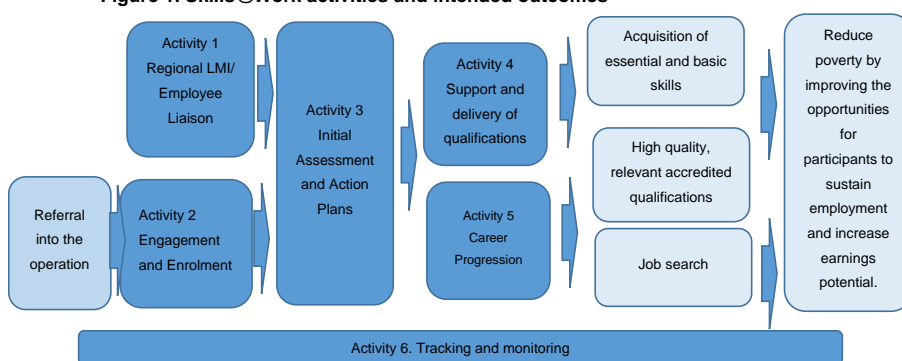
The evaluation

1.6.   In December 2020, People and Work were commissioned by NCC (as the lead beneficiary) to evaluate the Skills@Work operations on behalf of the other joint beneficiaries, CCC and MCC. The evaluation is due to end in June 2022.

1.7.   As outlined in the specification, the evaluation **aims** to:

'…provide a critical assessment of the regional approach to increasing the skill levels, including work relevant skills, of those in the workforce with no or low skills.

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As part of this, the evaluation should examine issues to do with the planning, implementation and management of the regional operation team, including the effectiveness of the operation and the suitability of the interventions offered to the needs of the participants.

The evaluation should provide an assessment of the short and medium term outcomes of the operation and its ability to help participants improve opportunities to sustain employment and increase earnings potential. It should also examine if there were any significant variations in different demographic groups or supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic, disabled and LGBTQ people in achieving these outcomes' (p.3).'

1.8.   As outlined in the specification, there are five core areas in which the evaluation will aim to answer key research questions, these are:

- management and implementation;
- delivery of operation;
- outcomes and impact of the operation;
- contribution to Cross Cutting Themes (CCT); and
- achievements and sustainability.

1.9.   A breakdown of the research questions associated with the five core areas above are included in appendix 1.

This report

1.10.   This is the final report, following the inception report produced in April 2021 and an interim report in October 2022.

1.11.   In this report the term **'beneficiaries'** is used to describe the lead, NCC, and joint beneficiaries, CCC and MCC. The term '**participants with qualifications'** describes participants with qualifications up to level 2.

1.12.   In this report the phrase ''**staff, participants and partners reported**', or "**interviewees**" is used, to describe the data collected in the qualitative interviews for the evaluation (see section two for details).

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1.13. In terms of achievement of engagement and outcome targets, the project allows a 15 per cent variation. Therefore, if the engagement levels are within 85 per cent to 115 per cent of the target, then the targets are deemed to have been met.

2. Evaluation approach and methods

Introduction

2.1. The final report draws upon three sources of data (discussed in more detail below):

- a desk-based literature review;
- quantitative and qualitative data collected by the project, including data drawn from the project's participant database and progress reports (see appendix 2); and
- qualitative research (primarily interviews) with project staff, participants and partners.

Desk-based literature review

2.2. Broad searches were undertaken using Google. Items identified through searches, such as evaluations, were included if they met the following inclusion criteria:

- they focused upon employment programmes and opportunities for the specified client group; and
- they were relevant (i.e. addressed at least one of these areas outlined in the research questions); and
- they were published from 2005 to the present; and
- they met the quality criteria outlined below.

2.3. The quality of research was judged by assessing whether:

- the aims and objectives and the approach were clearly reported;
- there was adequate description of the context in which the research was undertaken to enable conclusions about, for example, its external validity and whether it should be considered;
- there was adequate description of the methods used to collect and analyse data (including description of the sample and how it was identified and recruited);

- the methods used to collect and analyse data were appropriate, given the research aims and objectives and context (including availability of data); and
- the findings and conclusions were supported by data presented.

Project data

2.3.   Data provided by the project included:

- quantitative data on performance against output targets and data on the proportion of participants engaged who had characteristics relevant to the project (i.e. ethnicity, gender, disability and language); and
- qualitative data, collected from sources such as 11 progress reports and project case studies (appendix 2 provides a breakdown of all types of project data accessed).

Qualitative research

2.4.   Interviews with a purposive sample of project staff, participants and partners was planned. In total, 25 participants, 12 staff members (seven of whom had been interviewed twice)[11] and seven partners were interviewed. The number of participants interviewed was below the target of 40, which was mainly due to fewer participants taking part in the final round of interviews (10 out of a target of 20). It was suggested that the contrasting response may have been because during the interim report fieldwork many participants were isolating at home and therefore had time to take part in an interview, whilst during this final phase most were in work and hence did not.

2.5.   Although fewer were interviewed than planned, the characteristics of the participants, in terms of their gender[12], ethnicity[13] and qualification level[14] broadly reflected what was planned. The main exception to this was a

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[11] Four in coordinator roles (two in NCC, and one each in CCC and MCC) three of whom had been interviewed twice during the evaluation, and eight in front line posts such as mentors (four in CCC and two in NCC and MCC) four of whom had been interviewed twice during the evaluation.
[12] 14 women and 11 men.
[13] Seven from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.
[14] Nine with no qualification and 16 with qualifications.

geographical issue because, despite efforts[15], no participants from Newport chose to take part in the final round of fieldwork.

2.6.   As planned, 12 staff members were interviewed, seven of whom had been interviewed twice (once during interim fieldwork and a second time for the final fieldwork). Interviewees included the Central Team Coordinator, two Operational Managers and an Assistant Coordinator (each representing a beneficiary area) and eight frontline staff members, four from CCC and two from NCC and MCC.

2.7.   The planned number of seven partners were interviewed, this included referrers from the public sector, staff members from a comparable project and a training provider.

2.8.   The evaluation also drew from the findings from the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021).

Quality of the data

2.9.   Although the number of participant interviews was lower than expected, overall the evaluation draws upon a good range of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data provides the basis for a robust assessment of project performance as a whole and within each beneficiary area. The qualitative data drawn from the participants, staff and partners and progress reports provides insight into questions such as how and why did project performance differ from that expected.

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[15] For the fieldwork for the final report a sample of participants were contacted on three different occasions between December 2021 – March 2022. Moreover, due to this an online questionnaire was sent to all participants so that feedback on the project from NCC could be collected, however, this was not effective either, resulting in just one response.

3. Literature review

Introduction

3.1. This section discusses findings from a desk-based literature review focused upon identifying the evidence in relation to four key questions.

- What barriers exist which prevent participants from increasing their skill levels?
- What works in responding to the needs/challenges of supporting those with low or no skills and in employment (16+ hours a week) into higher qualifications, alternative careers, advancement in their current workplace or increased hours of work (including good and innovative practice, and which practices are more effective than others)?
- What is known about gender segregation in work, and stereotypical employment opportunities?
- What works in providing opportunities for participants to develop skills and access opportunities that challenge stereotypical employment opportunities?

3.2. It includes information that was also used in the evaluations of other employment support projects, such as Journey2Work.

What barriers exist which prevent participants increasing their skill levels?

3.3. Too few people in low paid jobs are able to develop a career which involves progression to better paid jobs. The evidence suggests that somewhere between 40 and 75 per cent of workers remain stuck in 'dead-end' jobs[16]. In order to progress, workers need:

- the **motivation** to, for example, pursue progression opportunities;
- access to **opportunities** to progress (or increase their skills, to enable progression); and
- the **capability** to, for example, negotiate application processes and demonstrate to employers that they have the skills and knowledge needed to progress.

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[16] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Nunn, Mitchell, Mcquaid & Egdell (2011) 'The role of skills from worklessness to sustainable employment with progression' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

Motivation

3.4.	There is evidence that low skilled workers value both training and qualifications in order to enhance their employment and feel that it will enable them to do a better job. However, very few employees felt that training would actually lead to a substantial change, such as getting a new or better job or a pay rise or promotion[17].

3.5.	There are mixed findings in the literature around the motivations of low-skilled employees to increase their skills, with different emphases on the relative importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and barriers such as a lack of confidence or self-efficacy; for example, research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)[18] found that lack of confidence was highlighted by participants as one of the key barriers to progression. There is also evidence that:

- those in low skilled jobs (retail, catering and care jobs) often view these jobs as short term positions, rather than as a stepping-stone to a career in the sector;
- the incentives to progress from entry level jobs are often small, with those promoted receiving only a small pay increase and often expected to take on more (sometimes considerably more) responsibility, with some expected to also work longer hours;
- some employees are reluctant to engage in job progression if the investment of time or responsibilities are judged to outweigh the financial recompense[19 20 21 22 23].

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[17] McQuaid, Raeside, Canduela & Egdell (2012) 'Engaging low-skill employees in workplace learning' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[18] CIPD (2018) 'Over-skilled and underused: investigating the untapped potential of UK Skills'.
[19] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[20] Green, Sissons, Ray, Hughes & Ferreira (2016) 'Improving progression from low-paid jobs at city-regional level' Joseph Rowntree Foundation cited in Webb et al. (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[21] Ussher (2016) 'Improving pay, progression and productivity in the retail sector' Joseph Rowntree Foundation cited in Webb et al. (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[22] O'Leary & Deegan (2005). 'Career progression of Irish tourism and hospitality management graduates' International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 17(5), 421-43 cited in Webb et al. (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[23] Deery & Jago (2015) 'Revisiting talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies' International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 27(3), 453-472 cited in Webb et al. (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.

3.6.   However, the range of barriers which can limit access to opportunities, which are discussed below, means some research concludes that the most salient barriers to progression are extrinsic rather than intrinsic[24]. Although interestingly, employers reported that they felt intrinsic barriers mainly hindered participation in training by low-skill employees.

Access to opportunities: in-work barriers to progression

3.7.   Workforce development opportunities tend to be inequitably distributed in the workforce, with those with the lowest level of skill least likely to have learning opportunities offered to them. Research identifies a range of in-work structural barriers to progression, which include:

- the nature of employment contracts, as in-work progression is correlated to working on a full-time permanent basis (rather than, for example, part-time, casual, temporary or zero-hour employment contracts). Workers on non-standard contracts can be disincentivised if they have to sacrifice working hours for development opportunities, and part-time and other non-standard workers can be disincentivised when development opportunities happen outside of contracted work hours. Part-time or non-standard workers may also find it harder to find out about progression opportunities[25] [26].

- the absence of jobs to progress into in organisations with flat employment structures, where many low paid, low skill jobs are located, leading to the question 'progression to where?[27]'

- management practices and arrangements that deny employees the autonomy and flexibility to pursue job progression opportunities[28].

- limited access to opportunities to upskill and some employers' scepticism about the value of upskilling; for example, the quality of education and training to which

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[24] McQuaid, Raeside, Canduela & Egdell (2012) 'Engaging low-skill employees in workplace learning' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[25] CIPD (2018) 'Over-skilled and underused: investigating the untapped potential of UK Skills.'
[26] Baharudin, Murad & Mat (2013). 'Challenges of Adult Learners: A Case Study of Full Time Postgraduates Students' Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences, 90, 772-781 cited in Webb et al. (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Wales Centre for Public Policy.
[27] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Wales Centre for Public Policy.
[28] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.

low paid workers have access can be lower[29] and there is evidence that some employees feel trapped due to an excessive focus on formal training for their existing job rather than on transferable skills[30].

Barriers to upskilling

3.8.   Increasing people's skills (their capabilities) may be an important precondition for progression. Barriers to upskilling can include situational barriers, with finance and time constraints due to family commitments amongst the common situational barriers for all learners, whether they are employed or not[31] [32] [33] [34].   Women in particular may face additional barriers, such as having to travel at night to attend education or training or employment[35], while some disabled people may find it difficult or impossible to travel early in the morning[36] [37].

3.9.   There is some evidence that outreach or online classes assist those with limited access to regular classes due to other responsibilities[38], and may also assist some disabled learners[39]. However, lack of digital access may be an issue for some groups of people who are long-term unemployed or economically inactive[40].

3.10.   Even when training is available, the evidence on mobility suggests that education and training does not guarantee upward mobility from a low paid job to a higher paid

[29] McKnight, Stewart, Himmelweit, Palillo, (2016) 'Low pay and in-work poverty: preventative measures and preventative approaches- Evidence Review' European Union.
[30] Schmuecker (2014) 'Future of the UK Labour Market' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[31] Hughes, Adriaanse & Barnes (2016) 'Adult education: too important to be left to chance' Research Report for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education (APPG) – Inquiry into Adult Education London: All Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education.
[32] Aldridge, Jones & Southgate (Nov 2020) 'Learning Through Lockdown – Findings from the Adult Participation in Learning Survey' National Learning and Work Institute.
[33] St Clair (2006) 'Looking to learn – motivations to learn and barrier faced by adults wishing to undertake part-time study' Scottish Executive Social Research.
[34] McQuaid, Raeside, Canduela & Egdell (2012) 'Engaging low-skill employees in workplace learning' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[35] Perez (2019) 'Invisible Women' Penguin Random House UK.
[36] Kantar Public and Learning and Work Institute (2018) 'Decisions of Adult Learners' Department for Education.
[37] Welsh Government (2018) 'Evaluations of communities for work – stage three – Social Research Number 36'.
[38] Turkmen (2019) 'Triple Glazed ceiling – barriers to BAME women participating in the economy' Chwarae Teg.
[39] Kantar Public and Learning and Work Institute (2018) 'Decisions of Adult Learners' Department for Education.
[40] Beaunoyer, Dupère and Guitton (2020) 'Covid-19 and digital inequalities: Reciprocal impacts and mitigation strategies' Computers in Human Behaviour.

job. This may be due to the type and the quality of education and training to which low paid workers have access[41], absence of jobs to progress into or lack of incentives for progression.

The Impact of COVID-19

3.11.   There has been a loss of on-the-job learning during the pandemic. Participation in informal learning (learning from others, learning by doing and learning new things at work) due to the lockdown of economic activities is estimated to have decreased by 25 per cent within OECD countries, with non-formal (workshops and employer provided training) learning decreasing by 18 per cent[42]. Within the UK, the CIPDs Learning and Skills at Work Survey (2021) found that the disruption by the pandemic led to 31 per cent of organisations saying that their learning and development budget had decreased over the last 12 months and 32 per cent said that their learning and development headcount had declined[43].

3.12.   With regard to lower skilled workers in particular, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that lower-skilled workers are likely to have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis as, when the sector shut down, jobs requiring a lower level of skills were less capable of being carried out remotely. It is estimated that medium and low-skill workers have experienced a reduction in their informal learning and non-formal learning opportunities that are over twice as large as for tertiary educated adults. Reduced learning opportunities may not be easily recovered and may be felt in terms of firm's productivity and worker's future earnings[44].

3.13.   A further OECD report argues that to ensure longer-term recovery, governments must address pre-existing structural challenges to remote and teleworking that are likely to accelerate due to COVID-19. This includes the need for public investment to

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[41] McKnight, Stewart, Himmelweit, Palillo, (2016) 'Low pay and in-work poverty: preventative measures and preventative approaches- Evidence Review' European Union.
[42] OECD (2021) 'Adult Learning and Covid-19: How much informal and non-formal learning are workers missing?'
[43] Crowley and Overton (2021) Learning and Skills at Work Survey 2021. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (based on a survey of 1,200 organisations)
[44] OECD (2021) 'Adult Learning and Covid-19: How much informal and non-formal learning are workers missing?'

improve digital infrastructure and the provision of adequate support to low-skilled and vulnerable workers through effective retraining and upskilling policies[45].

What works in responding to the needs/challenges of supporting those with low or no skills and in employment (16+ hours a week) into higher qualifications, alternative careers, advancement in current workplace or increased hours of work?

3.14. Initiatives promoting job progression have historically focused on high skill/high value industries in Wales. Promoting job progression in low pay sectors is more challenging due to the complexity of the task and the lack of evidence-based models available[46].

Building and sustaining motivation

3.15. If, as suggested by research, extrinsic barriers to learning are more salient than intrinsic barriers, then where employees are keen to undertake vocational training employers can capitalise on this to upskill these staff.[47] However, research by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) into levels of motivation found that claimants with lower levels of motivation and greater barriers to progression were more dependent on the type of support offered, and the motivational role of the work coach was crucial. In these cases, even when the practical (extrinsic) barriers were addressed and training completed, their personal and motivational issues meant they did not increase earnings over the trial. In cases where personal motivation was low, and the support offered was limited, this often led to claimants remaining 'stuck' or dropping out of the labour market altogether[48]. Therefore, the role of the employment support work coach or mentor is vital[49].

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[45] OECD (April 2021) 'An Assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on job and skills demand using online job vacancy data'

[46] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.

[47] McQuaid, Raeside, Canduela & Egdell (2012) 'Engaging low-skill employees in workplace learning' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

[48] Department for Work and Pensions (2018) 'Universal Credit: In-Work progression randomised controlled trial.'

[49] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.

3.16. The frequency of support and encouragement provided to employees also appears to be important. A randomised control trial by the DWP found statistically significant differences in progression for the Frequent (met their work coach fortnightly to get support and review agreed action) and Moderate Support groups (met work coach every eight weeks to get support and agree actions) when compared to the Minimal Support group (initial telephone call followed by another call eight weeks later). In week 52 the proportion of participants who had increased their earnings by 10 per cent or more was 2.9 and 2.4 percentage points higher in the Frequent and Moderate Support groups respectively than in the Minimal Support group[50].

3.17. Qualitative research also found that tailored intervention was central to achieving progression at work. Participants who received an intervention which addressed their personal barriers were more likely to increase their hours or earnings or find that it opened up opportunities to do so in the longer run. It was important that practical and motivational barriers were addressed as well as skill barriers[51].

3.18. Low-income workers can be fearful of the impact upon benefits, such as tax credits, if they increase their earnings/hours. Once this issue was identified amongst low-income workers at a local health board, Women Adding Value to the Economy (WAVE)[52] facilitated a programme of seminars with staff and their line managers, jointly provided by Job Centre Plus (JCP) and Citizens Advice Cymru, to explain working tax allowances and other available welfare transfers. As a result, line managers could advise staff and were also better aware of the need to provide stability when offering additional hours, to avoid the financial insecurity that can result from offering 'one-off' opportunities[53].

Working with employers to extend opportunities

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[51] Department for Work and Pensions (2018) 'Universal Credit: In-Work progression randomised controlled trial'.
[52] This 'programme was funded by the European Social Fund, through the Welsh Government and key partners: the University of South Wales, The Women's Workshop @ BAWSO and Cardiff University (CU). The first phase of WAVE ran between 2012 and 2015 with the aim of understanding and 'interrupting' the ways in which gender pay disparities are consistently reproduced through occupational segregation in employment and self-employment, through the ways in which 'women's work' is valued and contracted and through the operation of pay systems.' (Cardiff University).
[53] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.

3.19. Working with employers to change workplace cultures and extend opportunities was found to be important in encouraging upskilling and progression of low-skill workers[54] [55]. The value of training can be enhanced by being designed and delivered in partnership with employees[56] [57].

3.20. Progression Pathways and Internal Labour Markets are ways for businesses to develop their existing staff, as they help expand opportunities within firms into which employees can progress[58] [59]. Pathways promote a transparent labour market where employees can see the skills that are needed at various levels and the development processes to equip themselves with those skills[60]. The ways to develop progression pathways and workforce development include structured progression programmes for low earners, which promote advancement by linking training for low wage workers with structured progression opportunities within their firm, sector or community[61].

3.21. Prioritising filling vacancies with internal candidates also helps progression and employers felt this helped staff retention as staff knew there were opportunities for them. Offering jobs internally also created a cascade effect as staff moved around to fill positions, though this was more a feature of larger organisations[62]. Research with retail, catering and care sectors identified positive practices to develop progression which include:

- mapping of job roles at lower levels and their alignment with training and development opportunities to create structured progression ladders, although

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[54] McQuaid, Raeside, Canduela & Egdell (2012) 'Engaging low-skill employees in workplace learning' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[55] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[56] McQuaid, Raeside, Canduel &, Egdell (2012) 'Engaging low-skill employees in workplace learning' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[57] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[58] McKnight, Stewart, Himmelweit & Palillo (2016) 'Low pay and in-work poverty: preventative measures and preventative approaches- Evidence Review' European Union.
[59] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[60] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[61] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[62] Department for Work and Pensions (2018) 'Universal Credit: In-Work progression randomised controlled trial'.

this most aligned with large organisations with a larger number of job opportunities[63]; and

- skills audits which can help organisations to identify and make better use of people's skills[64].

3.22. Progression pathways and internal labour markets work well where employers are convinced of the benefits[65] of, for example, supporting progression and recruiting from within rather than externally[66]. Motivations for action by employers could include:

- recognition of the desirability of greater equity in workforce development in order to help reduce disadvantage[67]; and

- improvements in service, productivity and reduced costs due to lower levels of workforce turnover[68].

3.23. This suggests a role for intermediaries to support employers to identify the benefits of developing their workforce.

3.24. Many low paid workers feel unsupported and that any training provided traps them within their job rather than enabling them to progress out of it[69]. To overcome this, the ethos of progression and job development needs to be written into the performance objectives of managers[70], so that managers encourage staff to learn and provide positive feedback which supports development[71].

3.25. Some research also points to a disconnect between employers and employees, with employers underestimating employees' ambitions regarding training, progression or

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[63] Schmuecker (2014) 'Future of the UK Labour Market' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[64] CIPD (2018) 'Over-skilled and underused: investigating the untapped potential of UK Skills'.
[65] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[66] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[67] Hasluck (2011) 'Low Skills and Social Disadvantage in a Changing Economy' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[68] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[69] Schmuecker (2014) 'Future of the UK Labour Market' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[70] Schmuecker (2014) 'Future of the UK Labour Market' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[71] CIPD (2018) 'Over-skilled and underused: investigating the untapped potential of UK Skills'.

desire for more hours at work[72] [73]. This suggests that encouraging employers of low-paid low-skilled staff to ask them about their aspirations acts as a motivator for employers to improve training and progression opportunities for staff[74]; for example, when laundry workers at a local health board were asked about their ambitions, managers were surprised to find the workers often had high ambitions. This led to literacy and numeracy training which enabled some staff to become health care workers[75].

3.26. Because employers who believe that low staff turnover and retention of staff is good for the business and support training and development for staff on permanent contracts but are less likely to do so for staff on temporary or zero-hour contracts, changes to employment contracts may be needed[76].

3.27. Full-time staff also have an advantage. They are more likely to be offered training and evidence suggests that mentoring schemes are most effective for full-time workers. Part-time workers and flexible workers and those in irregular hours can struggle to align work patterns with mentor sessions or to access the same quality of mentorship as full-time workers[77]. In response, one employer, after consulting with staff who wanted flexible working which still enabled them to progress, developed job share posts, with each partner working three days per week and a part-time post of four days per week[78]. Part-time staff and staff on non-standard contracts may also be disadvantaged in finding out about employment opportunities. In response, one health board enabled over 90 bank nursing staff to move to permanent posts by giving them early warning that jobs would be advertised[79].

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[72] McQuaid, Raeside, Canduela & Egdell (2012) 'Engaging low-skill employees in workplace learning' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[73] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[74] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[75] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[76] Department for Work and Pensions (2018) 'Universal Credit: In-Work progression randomised controlled trial'.
[77] Durbin (2016). 'Women Who Succeed: Strangers in Paradise'. Basingstoke: cited in Webb et al. (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[78] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[79] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.

3.28. The best evaluated evidence strongly suggests that job progression initiatives work best when they are jointly designed by employers and employees who are supported by trusted intermediaries. This 'dual customer' approach enables benefits for both employer and employee[80]. Furthermore, the clear communication of the benefits of job progression for both employees and employers, as well as assistance in designing job progression models, could increase voluntary uptake.

3.29. A synthesis of literature on progression pathways concluded that the key elements in successful pathways were:
- collaboration between employers, employees and training providers in designing progression pathways;
- being objective orientated, ideally within specific sectors;
- implementing job progression initiatives which demonstrate an identifiable path of progression for employees from entry to progression;
- implementing job progression initiatives which provide appropriate skills that are relevant to organisations and ideally, particular sectors; and
- ensuring that employers have a long-term vision, supported by a commitment to provide more work and flexible job-design through adequately resourced training and development programmes[81].

Supporting upskilling

3.30. More evidence is needed on the benefits of employer-provided training compared with generic job-related training[82]. Nevertheless, some types of provision are considered promising; for example, mentoring is seen as a low-cost option to develop staff and provide opportunities for upskilling on the job. This type of informal learning, which can also include job rotation, shadowing and coaching, is typically

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[80] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[81] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[82] Department for Work and Pensions (2018) 'Universal Credit: In-Work progression randomised controlled trial'.

encouraged by employers who value recruiting internally[83] [84]. These informal learning approaches provide employees with a wider experience of job roles, potentially leading to job progression opportunities and can also be linked to formal accredited learning[85]. In one example, job swapping and shadowing enabled administrative staff to move into IT careers in the National Health Service (NHS)[86]. However, as stated above, full-time workers and those on permanent contracts are most likely to benefit from these development practices.

3.31. Some of the barriers low paid and low skill staff face in accessing training and development can be mitigated through employer support for learning with time off or support with the costs of learning. The provision of e-learning opportunities can help to overcome some of the barriers low-paid and low-skilled workers face in accessing training. Small pay increases associated with the successful completion of training, irrespective of promotion, provide an additional incentive for workers to develop their skills[87].

3.32. Once enrolled in formal training, action may be required to encourage or enable staff to see training to completion; for example, a Department for Education (DfE) (2014) review[88] looked at strategies to encourage persistence and identified that learners with no prior qualifications and no previous experience of self-study were more likely to drop out of courses. This highlights the importance of adequate support to inexperienced learners throughout their adult learning journey. Successful strategies identified to encourage persistence included:

- learning content being tailored to learners' goals, motivations and interests;
- blended learning offers;

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[83] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[84] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[85] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy
[86] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[87] Devins, Bickerstaffe, Mitchell & Halliday (2014) 'Improving Progression in low-paid, low-skilled retail, catering and care jobs' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[88] Melrose (2014) 'Encouraging participation and persistence in adult literacy and numeracy – literature review' Department for Education.

- family English and Maths learning (possibly due to parents being highly motivated to help their children); and

- promoting a growth mindset which has been shown to be effective in schools.

3.33. In terms of basic skills learning, persistence is supported when learners establish and set goals along the learning journey and outline the steps to achieve them, and when achievement of goals is recognised, this then leads to a further revision of goals. Implementation intentions ('if-then' plans that detail when, where and how a person will take action when a barrier arises) also help with persistence. Recognition of smaller gains is particularly important for vulnerable and harder to reach learners. Labelling courses so that they are seen as relevant to accomplishing a goal may therefore be particularly effective.

Working with SMEs

3.34. Workforce development is often identified as more difficult for small firms. However small firms are not heterogeneous and differ considerably in their characteristics and behaviour. Kitching and Blackburn (2005)[89] classified small firms' approaches to training as:

- strategic (aiming for a high skill production strategy);

- tactical (training when needed) and

- low (no training undertaken).

3.35. Edwards (UK Commission, 2010b)[90] argues that in small firms, training may genuinely be unnecessary while those adopting a tactical approach may be responsive to specific initiatives, but only if those initiatives are relevant to their business needs rather than generic[91].

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[89] Kitching, J. and Blackburn, R. (2005) 'The Nature of Training and Motivation to Train in Small Firms' DfES Research Report 330. DfES, Nottingham cited in Hasluck (2011) 'Low Skills and Social Disadvantage in a Changing Economy' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

[90] UK Commission (2010b) 'Skills and the Small Firm: A Research and Policy Review' UK Commission for Employment and Skills, cited in Hasluck (2011) 'Low Skills and Social Disadvantage in a Changing Economy' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

[91] Hasluck (2011) 'Low Skills and Social Disadvantage in a Changing Economy' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

3.36.   The CIPD argue that Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), particularly those in low-wage sectors, have the most to gain from the shift to higher value-added production[92]. Case studies with employers show those that offer progression routes are convinced of the business case for doing so[93]. However, SMEs often lack the capacity to carry out the work to achieve this goal. Research suggests that high quality human resource (HR) support provided to small firms through local key partnerships or local authorities can support owner-manager confidence and support productivity growth over time. There is also a need to persuade companies of the benefits of developing staff through a sound business case. Line managers were often viewed as the gatekeepers to progression and advancement, yet many said that their manager did not have the time, experience or training to fulfil this role effectively[94]. All of these are areas that HR support may be able to assist with.

A holistic approach to progression

3.37.   Given the potential need to address employees' motivation, opportunities and capabilities, holistic strategies can be more effective; for example, upskilling is more likely to lead to job progression where initiatives are supported by enthusiastic local actors such as local authorities, skills councils, trade unions and employer forums who are supportive of job progression in a sector[95] [96]. In addition, evidence suggests that upskilling is most likely to lead to job progression if other structural features of the labour market, such as irregular contracts, are addressed. Similarly, evidence suggests that there is a need to ensure that in-work training provision and career road maps are clearly communicated to people in low paid roles[97] and to match adult learning provision with job ladders[98].

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[92] CIPD (2018) 'Over-skilled and underused: investigating the untapped potential of UK Skills'.
[93] Schmuecker (2014) 'Future of the UK Labour Market' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[94] Schmuecker (2014) 'Future of the UK Labour Market' Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[95] McBride (2011) 'Lifting the barriers? Workplace education and training, women and job progression' Gender, Work & Organization 18(5), 528-547 cited in Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[96] Davis (2015) 'Implementing an employee career-development strategy: How to build commitment and retain employees' Human Resource Management International Digest, 23(4), 28-32 cited in Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[97] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.
[98] Webb, Parken, Hodges & Mathias (2018) 'Promoting job progression in low pay sectors' Welsh Centre for Public Policy.

3.38. In their review of supporting progression for low pay/ low skill workers, Webb et al. (2018) offer seven recommendations:

- investigate using the dual customer approach, (this is where both staff and employers are considered 'customers' of a workforce organisation/ employment project or policy).
- use social value procurement to promote job progression in low paid work;
- provide support for employers;
- expand job related in-work advice for low paid workers;
- tailor learning and development opportunities for workers;
- more research is needed on what works.

Future Scanning

Within the context of long-term planning about skills needs within the workforce, it is important to consider the future skill needs in the economy.

The FutureDotNow Report forecast that the most widespread area of underskilling in the UK by 2030 would be digital skills, estimating that millions would fall short of the needs of their job unless action is taken to reduce the skills deficit. They describe these people as the 'hidden middle', that is, those who are not digitally excluded but who also do not have advanced digital skills. These are people who do not have, or are not keeping up with, the digital skills they need to perform their job most effectively, and who will become left behind, potentially missing out on future work opportunities, if they are not supported to increase their skills. The report states that only 23 per cent of employees report receiving digital skills training from employers[99]. The acceleration of digital transition due to COVID-19 may mean that those lacking basic essential skills will be further marginalised and are unable to fully participate in online work and learning opportunities[100].

A number of areas are forecast to expand. Across the OECD it is forecast that new green jobs will be created in a few sectors: utilities, construction and manufacturing being the top three[101]. Upskilling is required for these industries necessary to build a

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[99] FutureDotNow (June 2021) 'Hidden Middle – Unlocking the Essential Digital Skills Opportunity'
[100] OECD (March 2021) 'Adult Learning and Covid 19: How much informal learning are workers missing?'
[101] PWC (March 2022) 'Women in Work: Building an inclusive workplace in a net zero world.'

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Commented [HP4R3]: Thanks, text amended to explain this.

green economy to meet the UK's commitment for net zero by 2050[102]. Within Wales specifically, the Future Generations Commissioner highlights similar growth in skills needs, stating that skills provision should be targeted towards industries which will help Wales meet its climate emission targets, respond to the nature emergency, and provide skills in digital, creativity and communication. The Commissioner identifies that sectors such as construction, heating, electrical installation, manufacturing, engineering and the foundational economy (such as roles in childcare and social care) have significant job creation potential, but that there are significant deficits in the skills pipeline for these industries, which include upskilling the existing workforce to expand the range and level of work they undertake [103].

An expansion and upskilling of the health and social care workforce is required to meet the needs of an ageing population.

The new skills-based immigration system introduced from January 2021 will mean that sectors such as adult social care, hospitality and construction will have to increasingly recruit from the resident labour force, creating a need to increase skills.

What causes gender segregation and what works in providing opportunities for participants to develop skills and access opportunities that challenge stereotypical employment opportunities?

3.39. The causes of gender segregation at work and the gender pay and opportunity gap are multi-dimensional and complex in both causes and consequences[104] [105]. Key reasons for these differences are likely to include:

- choices about, for example, education, training and employment which can be shaped by stereotypes;
- the demand for shorter or flexible hours of work because of an unequal care burden and differential income roles, and

[102] Hobbs (April 2021) 'Upskilling and Retraining the Adult Workforce' POST.Parliament.co.uk
[103] Future Generations Commissioner (May 2021) 'A fit for the future programme for Government.'
[104] Bosworth & Kersley (2015) 'Opportunities and outcomes in education and work: Gender effects' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[105] Bettio & Verashchagina (2009) 'Gender segregation in the labour market root causes, implications and policy responses' EU European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment.

- covert barriers and biases in organisational practices[106].

In terms of horizon scanning, the need for the economy to meet the target of 'net zero' will disadvantage women in the current status quo. As outlined above, across the OECD new green jobs will be created in a small number of sectors such as utilities, construction and manufacturing. These sectors employ nearly 31 per cent of the male workforce, compared to only 11 per cent of the female workforce. With new green jobs concentrated in sectors that are male-dominated, men are better placed to take advantage of these new opportunities[107].

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales also highlights that the areas with significant job creation potential in Wales, as well as having a deficit in numbers and in the skills pipeline, are also predominantly occupied by white males at the present. Although women dominate in the growth area of health and social care, many of these jobs are low wage. Unless targeted action is taken to increase the access of women to new higher paying jobs, such as those related to the green economy, progress to equality may be hindered or even decline.

Wage gaps and working patterns

3.40. Within the UK there is very little difference between the wages of men and women when they enter the workplace but from their late 20s and early 30s a large gap appears as women's wage progression levels out, and men's continues to rise. Gender differences in part-time work are important partial explanations for these differences. Whilst part-time and flexible working enable (predominantly) women to balance work and caring responsibilities (though this raises questions on why it is still women who overwhelmingly take on the role of balancing care and work), moving to this way of working limits career progression. Furthermore, there is a shortage of quality part-time work for women. Most senior women in part-time/ flexible hours contracts have negotiated this after reaching their senior position[108]. There is also evidence that searching for 'hour friendly' professional roles re-segregates women

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[106] Bettio & Verashchagina (2009) 'Gender segregation in the labour market root causes, implications and policy responses' EU European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment.
[107] PWC (March 2022) 'Women in Work 2022 Building an inclusive workplace in a net zero world'
[108] Government Equalities Office (2019) 'Improving women's progression in the workplace' Government Equalities Office.

into gendered niches or hinders entry or progression to roles and work with irregular or higher working hours[109]. Meanwhile part-timers in lower paid jobs (most of whom are female) have limited opportunities for progression. Another key difference is that women who enter the labour market in low-paid jobs experience 'sticky floors', rarely progressing upwards. By contrast, such jobs are 'springboards' for men into higher paid positions. This 'springboard' versus 'sticky floor' dichotomy has worsened over time[110].

Occupational segregation and pay

3.41. Occupational segregation remains a feature of the labour market. Occupations in which a high proportion of the workforce is female, such as retail, food services and administrative and support services, attract low pay. Typical male-dominated occupations in manufacturing and construction and in skilled trades are seen, by contrast, to attract higher median rates of pay. Occupational segregation risks limiting female access to these higher paying roles[111]. However, across the UK and most EU member states, mixed-gender occupations have increased, though unequally, as more male-dominated professions have become increasingly mixed gender than female-dominated occupations[112].

Institutional barriers

3.42. Although legal barriers or restrictive practices to women's entry have long been outlawed, covert biases or forms of impediment still operate, often restricting career paths and career prospects for women within occupations; for example, discretionary managerial practices for selection, hiring and promotions that favour men. There is evidence that most of the factors sustaining segregation are becoming less prominent among younger cohorts of educated, professional women. This is less clearly the case for women in low-paid occupations[113].

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[109] Bettio & Verashchagina (2009) 'Gender segregation in the labour market root causes, implications and policy responses' EU European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment.
[110] Government Equalities Office (2019) 'Improving women's progression in the workplace' Government Equalities Office.
[111] Bosworth & Kersley (2015) 'Opportunities and outcomes in education and work: Gender effects' UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
[112] Bettio & Verashchagina (2009) 'Gender segregation in the labour market root causes, implications and policy responses' EU European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment.
[113] Bettio & Verashchagina (2009) 'Gender segregation in the labour market Root causes, implications and policy responses' EU European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment.

The impact of economic change upon occupational segregation

3.43. A degree of polarisation is emerging in the pattern of future skill needs, with growing occupations at the lower end of the (recognised) skill spectrum, such as sales workers, unbalanced in favour of female employment, and growing occupations at the top end of the spectrum unbalanced in favour of male-dominated jobs, such as computing. For de-segregation to occur, men should be drawn into female-dominated areas such as care work, and women's advancement in managerial professions or the growing technical occupations should be facilitated[114]. This is important because, as outlined in the next section, there are reasons to believe that there are greater challenges in attracting men into female-dominated professions than vice versa.

What works in providing opportunities for participants to develop skills and access opportunities that challenge stereotypical employment opportunities?

3.44. Tackling gender stereotypes is extremely challenging as gender-based stereotypes in early childhood[115] can persist into later childhood and into adulthood[116]. Even where children are aware that all opportunities are open to them, their choices reflect existing occupational segregation patterns[117] [118]; for some people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, gendered beliefs around the role of each sex may be particularly strong. Such well ingrained expectations and beliefs around gender-based roles are extremely challenging for a single employment support organisation to overcome.

3.45. Because there was little evidence in the literature reviewed about what works in challenging stereotypical employment opportunities, evidence from other areas has therefore been included.

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[114] Bettio & Verashchagina (2009) 'Gender segregation in the labour market Root causes, implications and policy responses' EU European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment.
[115] Fawcett Society (2020) 'Unlimited Potential – the final report of the commission on gender stereotypes in early childhood'.
[116] Fine (2010) 'Delusions of Gender' Icon books.
[117] Ofsted (2011) 'Girls' Career Aspirations'.
[118] National Union of Teachers (2016) 'Stereotypes stop you doing stuff' Ruskin Press.

Changing social and cultural norms

3.46.   With regard to research on women from ethnic minorities, research by Chwarae Teg into Black, Asian and minority ethnic women and barriers to employment identified that supporting women to tackle cultural barriers can help them to advance in employment. They recommend revisiting views of the roles of men and women within the community and through social networks at a personal level. Mentoring was also a strong recommendation from research participants[119] and coupled with role modelling, may be effective in expanding the horizons of the breadth of employment opportunities for women and men from majority and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities[120].

3.47.   Indeed, mentoring and role modelling repeatedly appeared in the literature as an effective way to encourage people of all ethnicities, both men and women, to consider employment outside gender-based stereotypes; for example, mentoring and role modelling is seen as important in encouraging men to enter female-dominated professions, such as early years work or nursing[121] [122]. A report from Europe found that events which are designed to encourage atypical choices amongst boys and girls are typically used in countries with the longest traditions of 'desegregation' policies (that is, seeking to end gender 'segregation' in the work choices of men and women). These events initially encouraged mostly girls to enter male areas of work. However recent initiatives also encourage boys to enter female areas of work, like teaching or caring[123].

Support networks

3.48.   The benefits of gender-segregated support networks for those who are just entering, or are already in, a profession where their gender is in the minority are also important. These may be via single gender training or establishing single gender

[119] Turkmen (2019) 'Triple glazed ceiling – barriers to BAME women participating in the economy' Chwarae Teg.
[120] Engeli, Burgess & James (2018) 'Men's perceptions of gender equality' Wavehill Ltd.
[121] https://www.cdn.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Men-in-Early-Years-Seminar-26.09.19-Alison-Malcolm.pdf
[122] Clifton, Crooks & Higman (2020) 'Exploring the Recruitment of Men into the Nursing Profession' JAN Learning Global Nursing Research.
[123] Bettio & Verashchagina (2009) 'Gender segregation in the labour market Root causes, implications and policy responses' EU European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment.

networks or buddy systems or mentoring once in work or training[124] [125] [126]. Knowing that these supports exist may help people to consider professions dominated by the opposite sex.

3.49. Employers also need to be willing to challenge any discrimination or harassment that their staff face due to their gender. As well as zero tolerance approaches to sexual harassment, which will predominantly affect women, other support will be needed where people find their status diminished compared to their majority gender colleagues; for example, men working in childcare can find that parents object to them carrying out personal care on their children. Managers need to support their male staff in these instances to ensure that their status next to women early years workers is not diminished[127] [128].

3.50. Men entering female-dominated professions may fear shame about what others think of them[129]. In this way, men entering female-dominated professions may suffer from a societal judgement that males 'trade down' to take on 'female' roles whereas women benefit from 'trading up' to take on 'male' roles. The fact that male-dominated roles tend to pay better than female-dominated roles means that this fear is given weight by the financial recompense given to 'masculine' versus 'feminine' work. While men make up around 11 per cent of the nursing workforce[130] and 3 per cent of the early years' workforce[131], women make up a higher proportion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers, at 26 per cent[132]. There may be deeper rooted cultural and practical challenges to encouraging men into female dominated roles than vice versa.

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[124] https://epa.tquk.org/how-to-encourage-more-female-apprenticeships-in-stem-sectors/
[124] https://www.cdn.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Men-in-Early-Years-Seminar-26.09.19-Alison-Malcolm.pdf
[125] https://epa.tquk.org/how-to-encourage-more-female-apprenticeships-in-stem-sector
[126] Clifton, Crooks & Higman (2020) 'Exploring the Recruitment of Men into the Nursing Profession' JAN Learning Global Nursing Research.
[127] https://www.cdn.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Men-in-Early-Years-Seminar-26.09.19-Alison-Malcolm.pdf
[128] https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/parents-uncomfortable-with-male-practitioners-changing-their-child-s-nappy
[129] https://www.cdn.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Men-in-Early-Years-Seminar-26.09.19-Alison-Malcolm.pdf
[130] https://www.rcn.org.uk/congress/what-happened-at-congress-2019/Male-nurses
[131] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/calls-for-more-men-to-work-in-the-early-years

[132] https://www.stemwomen.co.uk/blog/2021/01/women-in-stem-percentages-of-women-in-stem-statistics

Challenging occupational segregation in apprenticeships

3.51. Apprenticeships are also affected by occupational segregation which leads to male apprentices earning a higher hourly rate than female apprentices[133]. This apprenticeship gender pay gap largely reflects differences in the sectors in which men and women undertake apprenticeships. Case studies included in a good practice toolkit from the Learning and Work Institute reflect the findings above as regards addressing occupation segregation; good practice examples include:

- targeting outreach at women and girls;
- using female apprentices as role models in outreach work;
- providing pastoral support for apprentices in professions where they are the minority gender and offering part-time and flexible working apprenticeships[134] [135].

3.52. However, it is worth noting that, while Union Learn and the Learning and Work Institute both title their publications as addressing gender equality, they both only address women entering male-dominated professions. This may reflect and also encourage an attitude of 'trading up' to male-dominated professions that subtly reinforces the idea that female-dominated professions are 'low status'. This may add to the discouragement of men entering female-dominated professions. In seeking to challenge gender stereotyping, employment support initiatives should be careful not to unconsciously encourage a bias against female-dominated professions as being low status.

Respecting and challenging people's aspirations

3.53. It should also be noted that there are tensions between taking a person-centred approach to employment support and seeking to challenge employment opportunities that people wish to pursue that are dominated by their own gender. A report on work experiences for school-aged young people stated that the 'freedom of choice' model may exacerbate existing inequalities[136]. This may be the same for

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[133] Male apprentices in 2017 earned an average £7.25 per hour, while female apprentices earned £6.67 - from Union Learn (TUC) (2018) 'Tackling Apprenticeship gender inequality'.
[134] Union Learn (TUC) 2018, 'Tacking Apprenticeship gender inequality'.
[135] http://www.employer-toolkit.org.uk/gender-3/
[136] Francis, Osgood, Dalgety & Archer (2005) 'Gender Equality in work experience placements for young people' Equal Opportunities Committee.

employment support work, as not all communities will have the same experiences or expectations of gender equality. However, this poses particular challenges for employment support projects, which have limited time for working with participants who may have established ideas about themselves and work expectations. Any approach should focus more on broadening people's horizons about employment possibilities, rather than challenging them.

Summary of what works

3.54. The research reviewed suggests that employment support agencies need to work with employers to reach out to participants to encourage them to consider roles which are not typical for their gender. This includes working with employers to engage in outreach, including employee/apprentice role models of the gender they wish to attract and ensuring there is support in place for minority gender employees, such as mentoring, single-sex networks and managerial support and encouragement where gender-based prejudices and harassment arise. Participants should be made aware, at outreach events, of this support.

3.55. Finally, while social and cultural norms can be difficult to change, these are not the only causes of occupational segregation and one of the key ways to overcome gender-based obstacles to employment is to ensure that caring responsibilities, which fall overwhelmingly on women, or the cost of caring responsibilities, and the challenge of overcoming practical and psychological barriers, do not form obstacles to education, training or employment.

> **Commented [HH(-W5]:** What are the overall conclusions of the lit review and how does they tie in to the aims and objectives of the current project?
>
> **Commented [HP6R5]:** Thanks, text has been added to address this.

Key messages for the project

3.56. The literature review evidences that:

- those with the lowest skills are least likely to have training offered to them, with employers likely to believe that these staff are not motivated to train or progress at work.
- Where low skilled workers are offered training, it is likely to be rigidly specific to their current role rather than offering transferable skills to help them progress.
- Low skilled workers have been harder hit by a lack of training opportunities during Covid than tertiary (post school) level educated workers.

3.57. Therefore, Skills at Work potentially fills a gap in training provision for low skilled workers.

3.58. The literature reviewed also suggests that the Skills at Work model is appropriate, but also suggests potential areas of development. For example, the effectiveness of a motivating work coach who offers tailored interventions to address barriers is well evidenced. However, the literature also evidences the benefits of working with employers to:

- Address often unfounded beliefs about the (limited) desire of low paid workers to progress;
- overcome barriers to the progression of low paid workers at their business and to develop structures and pathways at work which enable progression; and
- take action to address occupational segregation.

Therefore, work with employers (to address these issues) is an area of potential development for the Skills at Work project.

4. Project engagements

Introduction

4.1.   This section focuses on engagements of participants and under specific headings (outlined below) reports on the project's:

- performance against engagement targets;
- project weaknesses, challenges and barriers to engagements;
- positive external factors and project strengths in relation to engagements.

4.2.   Where relevant differences in performance between the three beneficiary areas are reported. Section 6 reports on the project's assessment, monitoring and management, which contributes to the project's engagement processes. Further data on engagements is reported in section 7 under Cross Cutting Themes. This includes, for example, data associated with the engagement levels of disabled people and people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

4.3.   Although changes in the engagement levels after COVID-19 pandemic are reported, explanations for the project performance are covered in detail in the following headings in this section.

4.4.   As outlined in section 1, the project allows for a 15 per cent variation in terms of achievement of engagement targets. Therefore, if the engagement levels are within 85 per cent to 115 per cent of the target, they are deemed to have been met. A black line has been added to the graphs in this section to indicate this point.

Performance against engagement targets

4.5.   Table 4.1 shows the target engagement numbers from January 2019 to February 2022.

Table 4.1. Project engagement targets

Engagement targets	Feb 2022 target
Employed, including self-employed participants, with no formal qualifications	637
Male	288
Female	349
Employed, including self-employed participants, with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education	648
Male	*324*
Female	*324*

Source: NCC summary of cumulative performance February 2022

Participants with no formal qualifications

4.6. Graph 4.1 shows the progress from the start of the project in January 2019 towards its cumulative targets for February 2022 for engaging participants with no formal qualifications (the target numbers are shown in table 4.1). It shows that in total (men and women), the project is below target in terms of engaging participants with no formal qualifications (71 per cent). However, there is a considerable difference between the engagement of men and women, with good engagement levels amongst men (105 per cent) and a considerable under-achievement in terms of women (43 per cent) (see para 4.49).

4.7. As stated in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), before the COVID-19 pandemic the project was notably over target in terms of engaging men with no formal qualifications (144 per cent) and within its target in terms of engaging women with no formal qualifications (98 per cent). This suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on the project's engagement levels (see para 4.34).

4.8. Performance differs across the three beneficiary areas. CCC has over performed in engaging men with no qualifications, almost double their target (191 per cent) whilst the other beneficiary areas struggled to meet their targets. However, all three beneficiary areas struggled to engage enough women with no formal qualifications (see para 4.49).

Graph 4.1. The percentage of engagements achieved in relation to the target in February 2022 (cumulative) for employed, including self-employed, participants with <u>no formal qualifications</u>
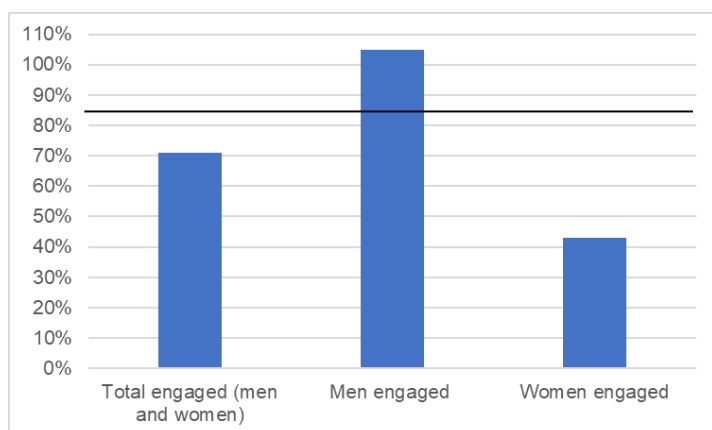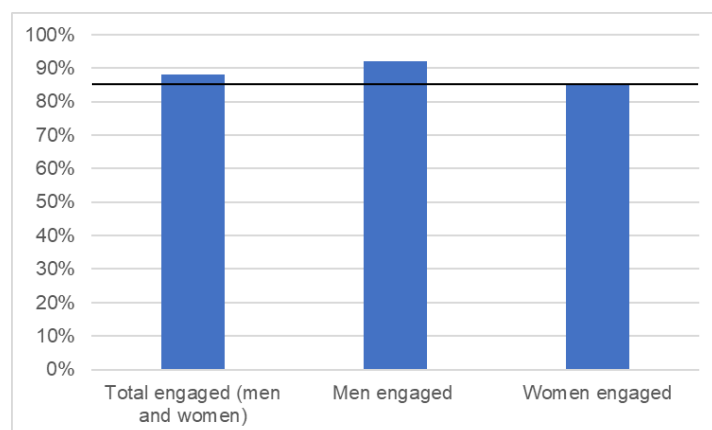

Source: NCC summary of cumulative performance February 2022

Participants, with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education

4.9. In contrast, graph 4.2 shows that, in total (men and women) the project is within target in terms of engaging participants with qualifications up to level 2 (88 per cent). Moreover, the project is within target in terms of engaging men (92 per cent) and women with qualifications up to level 2 (85 per cent).

4.10. As outlined in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, engagements of male and female participants with qualifications up to level 2 were over target (141 per cent for both). This suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on the project's engagement levels but that the project's pre-pandemic success provided a 'buffer' which helped moderate the impact of the pandemic upon engagement levels.

4.11. Performance differs markedly across the three beneficiary areas with MCC considerably over-performing in engaging men and women with qualifications (171 per cent), while NCC was a little under target (77 per cent) and CCC notably under (64 per cent) (see para 4.32 - 4.54).

Graph 4.2. The percentage of engagements achieved in relation to the target for November 2022 (cumulative) for employed, including self-employed, participants with <u>qualifications up to level 2</u>[137]

Source: NCC summary of cumulative performance February 2022

Enablers and strengths of the project

4.12. The overall success in engaging participants, with the notable exception of women with no qualifications, reflected a number of factors, <mark>identified through two rounds of fieldwork and the literature reviewed</mark>, and discussed further below. These included:

- high levels of in-work poverty and the gap in the market for in-work employment support;
- strong links to referral partners;
- a good match between the project's offer and participants' aspirations ;
- effective promotion of the project; and
- increased expectations of employers, which were leading to more demanding recruitment processes.

High levels of in-work poverty and the gap in the market for in-work employment support

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[137] I.e. Level 2 is equivalent to having A*- C grades in GCSE (CQFW, 2021).

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4.13. Staff and partners reported that the project filled a gap in the employment market which has often been ignored in Wales[138]. This reflected:

- the lack of in-work support in the beneficiary areas[139] as neither Restart [140]nor Personal Learning Accounts (PLA's)[141] are felt to offer a 'like for like' alternative; and
- the prevalence of in-work poverty.

4.14. For example, staff members commented:

'The project is needed, I worked for a food bank and it always surprised me how many people who accessed it were already in work, but couldn't cope with the cost of living.'

'There is a gap there's a lot of tenants in, in work poverty, low paid jobs in which they struggle to get out of.'

4.15. This is supported by the literature reviewed (and discussed in section 3) on the considerable number of people stuck in underemployment. Moreover, with the forecast rise in the cost of living due to inflation (ONS, 2022) which is likely to be sustained due to factors associated with the war in Ukraine (UK Parliament, 2022), in-work poverty is likely to remain high or increase in the future.

Strong links with referral partners

4.16. Staff reported that the project fitted well with their other projects, for example it was common for participants who had participated in Journey2Work or Inspire2Work to then go on to Skills@Work. Moreover, the project could refer to other projects such as Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE), local authority self-employment

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[138] I.e. with the focus being on projects that support people into employment.
[139] Working Skills for Adults 2, which has similarities to Skills@Work covers other areas in Southeast Wales.
[140] The interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) highlighted concerns that the newly established Restart scheme might offer competition to the project by offering in-work support to help people transition back into employment and stay in work (in addition to the planned employment support). Nevertheless, there was no evidence from the interviews that the scheme directly competed with the project.
[141] Despite staff reports of some competition from PLA's this does not appear to offer a like for like alternative; for example, as reported in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) PLA's do not provide the wider package of support that the project offers, many of their courses they fund are above level 2 and there were many examples where the project had referred participants onto these courses.

> **Commented [HH(-W7]:** Are these findings from the qual interviews?
>
> **Commented [RB8R7]:** Good question, we've clarified this now in the introduction i..e when we say 'reported' we are referring to qualitative interviews. We considered the alternatives (e.g. stating this is from qualitative interviews either in the main text or footnote). However, we concluded that this would make the report less readable.

support[142], Communities for Work (CfW) and Communities for Work Plus (CfW+) if the participant was no longer eligible for Skills@Work (e.g. if they had not worked during the pandemic). As the beneficiaries (MCC, NCC and CCC) delivered these projects, it meant they could help ensure that no one 'slipped through the net' via the triage processes (as one interviewee put it) and that the projects could benefit from referring to each other when needed. It also helped to encourage teamwork and collaboration within the local authorities. Notwithstanding this, there were also reported disadvantages to this (see para 4.41).

> **Box 4.1 Example of engagement via another local authority delivered project**
>
> Through Journey2Work, an employment support project delivered by two of the beneficiaries, Alan (not his real name) had funding to complete a railway course (Personal Track Safety) that enabled him to work on the railways. He then wanted to gain another more specific qualification to enable him to progress in work, so Journey2Work referred him to Skills@Work.
>
> Alan said that he doesn't think it is always recognised that men find it hard to ask for help, but that he found his Skills@Work mentor to be totally professional and that he went 'above and beyond' for him. He stated that his mentor explained everything, what would be required and what his future would be like once he finished the course and also liaised with the course provider. Skills@Work also paid for the personal protective equipment he needed to enable him to work once he was qualified. Alan said that he is now in better paid work, which has given him mental stability. 'I can't say how important that is. I'm in work, I have money for the bills, the kids are happy, they can go on school trips now as I can pay for them. We can save a bit each month.' Alan described the support he has had as 'amazing' and said, 'you can say that I am overblown in my thanks!'

Participants aspirations and motivations

4.17. Participants reported a range of motivations for engaging with the project (and the project's offer). The most commonly given reasons included gaining better

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[142] For example; https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Business/Support-and-Finance-for-Business/Business-Advice/Pages/Business-Advice.aspx

employment, usually in a new role and to a lesser extent in existing roles in order, for example, to achieve a promotion, longer hours and permanent or more sustained contracts. The majority of these were either clear about or had an indication of the kind of work they wanted to progress to; for example, as participants interviewed for this study put it:

'I knew the money was better on the railways and I needed what I had to pass to get an interview.'

'I am an assistant to a nurse, I have a social care and health qualification. You need those to get into NHS. This course will help my career progression and moving to a higher pay band.'

'I have always done menial jobs and I wanted more.'

4.18. However, others just wanted a change in their work life for various reasons, often spurred on by changes in their lives:

'I had worked for the ambulance service for years; partly due to things during COVID and partly due to other things I felt that I needed a change to do something less stressful.'

'My kids are grown up now, so the opportunity was there for change.'

4.19. Some participants were unsure specifically what they wanted to do but were aware that they needed to improve their qualifications and/or job seeking skills in order to improve their career and life chances; for example:

'I joined the project the improve myself. In my career and learn things like spelling properly. I had a job for a month but then I was made redundant. I don't want to work in a factory again. [But] I have no idea what career I do want.'

'I just need to get some courses under my belt so I can get a choice of what to do.'

4.20. Staff and participants also highlighted that, despite the many barriers the COVID-19 pandemic created (see 4.34), there were participants who had been spurred on to access the project due to the pandemic, for example, by having the time to reflect on

their employment situation during periods of isolating and wanting to ensure that their employment situation was more stable and/or rewarding; for example, as stated by a participant:

'I think I was just looking, I was furloughed, I was reassessing, it was tough been furloughed. I googled it and it came up in search when looking at training. [I] wanted a life change and COVID was the influence.'

Employers' expectations

4.21. Partners and staff reported that in recent months more employers were expecting staff to pass competency tests and/or role play scenarios in job interviews. Whilst competency tests had previously been used for well-paid public sector roles, they had become more common in the private sector and for lower paid roles. This meant people needed greater support in developing interview skills, which in turn created greater demand for a project such as Skills@Work which could offer this support (i.e. with partners being more likely to refer to them).

4.22. Furthermore, feedback from partners indicated that there could be increased demand for employment upskilling interventions, as the DWP put a greater emphasis on upskilling their clients, in order to ensure they gain employment with longer working hours (e.g. longer than 16 hours a week). Indeed, many participants in MCC were already referred to Skills@Work by JCP, Careers Wales and other projects because of this.

Promotion of the project

4.23. Participants interviewed had heard of the project from a variety of sources, most notably through word of mouth, which was often from participants who had already accessed the project or accessed other projects delivered by the beneficiaries. This suggests that participants had positive experiences they wanted to share; for example, participants commented:

'My wife used the service [the project] six months before me and had a very positive experience so I thought I'd give it a go.'

'I heard from my friend who had been in a similar situation to me, and it worked for him, so why not me.'

4.24. Other common ways of referral highlighted by participants included:
- organisations such as Job Centres and charities such as MIND (a mental health charity) and local authority third sector councils;
- internally delivered projects (i.e. within the local authorities) such as Journey2Work, Inspire2Work, CfW+ and Inspire2Achieve, and other local authority services; and
- social media and online adverts.

4.25. A few participants had also heard through employment events, for example at libraries and schools and/or had come across a leaflet or poster advertising the project.

4.26. Staff echoed the referral routes commented upon by participants and were also able to provide an indication of which referral routes were the most common:
- in Cardiff, the majority of participants were referred via the Gateway at their hubs; in addition, it was reported that referrals from JCP had increased recently so referrals from JCP, and employment events, were now common;
- in Newport, around half of referrals were from partners such as JCP and Remploy and community hubs who access the CfW+ triage system and the rest were participants who contacted the project directly (mainly due to word of mouth or online and traditional promotions); and
- in Monmouthshire, the majority of participants were referred from JCP and, to a lesser degree, via partners such as housing associations, other ESF projects, Careers Wales and social media.

4.27. In Cardiff, staff reported that the hubs which were allocated throughout Cardiff and experienced many daily visitors (due to their role as signposting 'points of contact' for public services) meant that outside periods of COVID-19 restrictions, the project could access a steady stream of participants referred via hubs. Although NCC had adopted a similar system, this had experienced 'teething issues' (see para 4.45).

Commented [HH(-W9]: Sentence a little unclear. Think about rewording.

Commented [RB10R9]: Agreed, ammended

4.28.   In Monmouthshire, staff and partners reported how changes to MCC's processes had made referrals from partner organisations easier; for example, previously partners had to complete a referral form and decide which project best suited the person, but now they pass on the contact details and the rest is done by MCC. This encouraged more referrals as it was an easier process.

4.29.   The project's framework limits work that can be done directly with employers. The project is not meant to engage directly with employers to train their employees on a large-scale, as this could potentially result in employers using the project as a source of free training provision and rather than investing in (and paying for) their own training[143]. Notwithstanding this, there is some flexibility, CCC had promoted the project (via leaflets) to employment agencies to refer participants and, as reported in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), an employer liaison worker had built a relationship with local employers who informed him, for example, of any risk of redundancies, meaning CCC can work with these workers to support them to gain other employment.

4.30.   Staff in each area commented upon the use of traditional promotional methods such as the use of flyers, posters and attendance at relevant events. As would be expected, these activities were more frequent prior to COVID-19 and overall, staff reported attending events had proved the most successful, especially in Cardiff. As restrictions eased, attendance at these events was starting up again.

4.31.   Before the COVID-19 pandemic, staff in Cardiff and Newport reported success in engaging participants via online promotion. In Cardiff this was continued and built upon after the pandemic. However, it was reported that restrictions around online marketing in Newport limited this (see para 4.45). Despite this, it was reported that weekly marketing posts are sent out on NCC social media and they have recruited a dedicated communications person to promote Work & Skills. MCC had little online marketing presence before COVID-19, but staff reported that they had developed their online marketing, such as an employment and skills website, which had proved successful following COVID-19.

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[143] 'The Skills@Work operation will only engage with individuals and not target engagement with employers' (Business Plan, p.25).

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Barriers to engagements and project weaknesses

4.32. The limitations of the project were reflected in a number of factors and barriers identified by interviewees and supported by the literature reviewed, including:

- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon participants and local labour markets, external factors that the project had limited control over and which impacted some beneficiary areas more than others; and
- weaknesses in project promotion, design and operation, some of which, such as eligibility criteria, were shaped by the ESF programme, whilst others reflected choices made by the beneficiaries.

4.33. The challenges the project experienced in engaging two groups: participants with no qualifications and women are then discussed.

The COVID-19 pandemic

4.34. As outlined above, engagements fell sharply during the COVID-19 lockdowns (i.e. from March 2020 onwards). Key reasons highlighted by staff and partners in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) included:

- periods of inactivity and reduced activity amongst training providers, meaning the project could not offer courses to participants and when courses re-opened, there were long waiting lists;
- the time needed to develop online provision and the initially disappointing take up of an online training offer;
- practical difficulties with assessment when face to face contact was limited, such as participants' reluctance to send ID details online, difficulties in obtaining 'wet signatures' when required and limited IT skills amongst some participants;
- potential participants (mostly women) having added time pressures due to home schooling and caring responsibilities, hence lacking time to engage in the project; and
- the disproportionate impact the pandemic and lockdown had upon Newport in particular and the socio-economic groups the project aimed to target.

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Staff reflected that, compared to other ESF funded projects delivered by the beneficiaries, prior to the pandemic this project had had less time to (i) establish itself and (ii) build up a 'buffer of engagements'. A staff member described how the early stages of a project are used to make sure processes run smoothly, and that is harder if you are also dealing with a pandemic; for example, establishing project awareness amongst other local authority services and key partners and adjusting administrative systems.

4.35. Although COVID-19 restrictions were eased over time, there were still periods when more stringent restrictions were reimposed, as in December 2020 – January 2021 and November 2021 - December 2021[144]. This made it difficult to plan and deliver effectively, due to the ever-changing situation and on-going restrictions.

4.36. Moreover, partners and staff felt the beneficiaries, as large organisations (in the context of Wales) with the set protocols associated with large public sector employers, made it difficult for them to respond as quickly as other delivery bodies to the COVID-19 pandemic; for example, in terms of how quickly they were able to once again meet face to face with participants (within restrictions guidelines).

4.37. During the fieldwork for this report staff also reported, in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- that there were people who would say they were employed, but had not worked during the pandemic, which meant they were not eligible and Skills@Work needed to signpost them to other projects; and
- that some people had been spurred on during a furloughed period that provided 'spare time' and a period of self-reflection, and which they used to access courses themselves without project assistance. The participants for this project were employed and, on the whole, faced fewer barriers to accessing courses than those who were unemployed (i.e. having enough time was enough to overcome their barriers).

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[144] Senedd Research (2022) Coronavirus timeline: the response in Wales.

Trends in employment

4.38. Staff and partners highlighted that the trend of declining unemployment rates[145] meant that employment support projects that the beneficiaries also delivered (e.g. CfW, Journey2Work and Inspire2Work) were experiencing lower levels of demand than anticipated (as employment was expected to grow after the pandemic). Because the beneficiaries relied on these projects to refer participants to Skills@Work, this meant that there were fewer than expected referrals.

4.39. In addition, staff reported that some of the participants the project were in contact with were offered training through their employers, as employers had become keener to hold on to and develop their staff due to labour shortages[146].

Weaknesses in project promotion

4.40. Although there was a mixed response from participants regarding how well the project was promoted, many felt the project could have been promoted better; for example, many had heard about the project through word of mouth and some of these reflected that this was down to 'chance' (in that they were lucky they knew someone who had accessed the project). Participants felt the project needed to be more visible online and within community settings; for example, as a participant commented:

'Needs to be better advertised. You know when you have something you usually notice it more, like if you bought a type of car, you then see it everywhere, but I don't see it [Skills@Work] even though I used it. It's so fantastic with its one-on-one help people need it and need to know about it'.

'I think they'd get more referrals if they advertised more, because its needed, so people will come'.

4.41. It was also observed by partners and staff that, as large organisations, the beneficiaries relied to a greater extent[147] on referrals from other projects within their

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[145] Senedd research (2021) Labour Market Update.
[146] (ONS, 2021)
[147] Notwithstanding, external referrals still accounted for a considerable proportion of participants (see section five)

local authorities. Although this supported engagements (see para 4.16) and created a 'pipeline' of referrals, it meant the project was potentially less motivated to secure strong external partners and become more involved in community engagement.

Weakness in project design and operation

4.42. Whilst the framework for the project was clear from the outset, and all projects have financial limitations, three aspects of the project were felt to unduly limit engagements:

- the ineligibility of those who needed qualifications above level 2[148]; this was a particular challenge in in Monmouthshire where employees' qualification levels were generally higher;
- the inability to work directly with employers to offer training[149], especially small businesses with limited training budgets, given, for example, the demand for health and safety training. Furthermore, the literature review (section three) showed that working with employers to provide training was worthwhile; and
- the restrictions on the costs of courses that could be funded. It was reported by staff that they could not pay for expensive courses (e.g. approx. over £500[150]) even when improved employment for the participant was guaranteed. In contrast it was reported that programmes like CfW+ had higher budgets and could also fund those who were employed in certain circumstances (although the main focus was on those who were not employed).

4.43. As described in section 1, the project model depended on the majority of participants taking inexpensive courses so there would be sufficient money for the few who needed to do more expensive courses. However, as the project has failed to fully engage the numbers anticipated, this has not materialised, meaning more expensive courses could not be covered as originally anticipated[151].

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[148] Notwithstanding, the project did have referral options such as PLA courses delivered by CareersWales and colleges.
[149] 'The Skills@Work operation will only engage with individuals and not target engagement with employers' (Business Plan p.25).
[150] Although there are circumstances where higher costs are covered, and costs are more of an issue in MCC due to match funding issues.
[151] As staff commented, the savings from 'economies of scale' could be considerable. For example, some courses would cost a similar amount if 5 participants or 12 participants attended (i.e. the main fixed costs were the tutor and the training room, which was often big enough to accommodate at least 12 participants).

Commented [HH(-W15]: I think I'm missing something here. If less participants engaged with the project, wouldn't there be more of a budget and therefore sufficient budget for expensive courses?

Commented [RB16R15]: Good question, feedback from two staff members was that the savings through 'economies of scale' were considerable, for example the cost of putting a course on for 12 people is similar to 5 i.e. one tutor and one room. I've added a footnote to provide clarity.

4.44. Generally, apart from some staff working late (e.g. until 7pm and an occasional Saturday), Skills@Work staff were only available during the traditional working week (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm). Staff and participants indicated that this meant the project was less suited to engage people who worked traditional hours.

Challenges within NCC

4.45. NCC have not met any of their engagement targets. In addition to general barriers already highlighted in this section, there were a number of specific issues reported in NCC; these included:

- social media posts are organised centrally (to ensure all posts are appropriate). It was reported that this made the online advertising less responsive and effective than when it was more devolved at the start of the project (e.g. previously local courses could be advertised within tight timescales, and customised for particular localities); and

- the move to a 'neighbourhood hub model' from a more centrally based one during the project's lifetime. It was reported that this had disrupted the delivery model staff were used to and took more time than anticipated to embed effectively, resulting in a more disjointed offer. It also resulted in uneven workloads amongst frontline staff as some areas had higher referral numbers than others.

4.46. Although, as outlined in the previous evaluation report (Bowen et al., 2021), staff were confident that these issues (listed above) would be overcome in time, in the second round of fieldwork, staff reported that it continued to be an issue and suggested it was possibly exacerbated by the fact that staff were considering other employment options as the project came to an end.

The challenge of engaging participants with no formal qualifications

4.47. As stated, MCC and NCC had struggled with engaging participants with no formal qualifications. MCC staff reflected that they had over-estimated the amount of people within this cohort, given people's relatively higher level of qualifications within this local authority[152]. Staff also felt that the rurality of the local authority meant that the

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[152] The proportion of the working age population with no qualifications is almost twice as high in Newport and around a quarter higher in Cardiff (StatsWales, 2020).

Commented [HH(-W17]: Are all the above findings from analysis conducted for this report? It is sometimes not clear where findings are coming from – the previous findings or the current findings.

Commented [RB18R17]: Good point, amended.

population within this cohort were geographically spread and hence more difficult to target, than Newport and Cardiff who had concentrated urban populations. As highlighted in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), steps had been taken to improve engagements of participants with no qualifications[153]. However, these proved ineffective. In Newport, no evidence on any specific issues regarding participants with no qualifications was collected. Instead, reasons for the shortfall were linked by staff to a general shortfall in engagements (including those with qualifications) due to the barriers reported above (see para 4.34-4.39) and the specific issues faced in NCC (see para 4.45 – 4.46).

4.48. In terms of the project overall, some staff and partners suggested that the community engagement element of the project was not strong enough and too reliant upon 'participants coming to them'. Supporting this theory, studies in the literature review show (section three) that those with no or very low qualification levels are less likely to re-engage in education than those who have higher levels of qualifications. Whilst most of those engaged in the project had low qualifications, there is still likely to be a difference in willingness to engage between those who have low levels and those with none. Moreover, staff suggested that the shift to more online provision due to COVID-19 meant the need for digital literacy was greater and those with no qualifications were less likely to be digitally literate.

The challenge of engaging women

4.49. With the exception of MCC, the project struggled to achieve targets for the engagement of women. Overall, 42 per cent of participants were female, compared to a final target of 52 per cent. As reported in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), women were reported by project staff to be more likely to be affected by caring duties during the pandemic. Similarly, the literature review (see section 3) suggests that situational barriers such as caring responsibilities are generally more of a barrier to women accessing education and training than they are to men. Moreover, although the difference is too small to make a considerable difference, there is a smaller proportion of women of working age with no qualifications (6.7 per cent) compared to

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[153] i.e. discussions with referral partners to prioritise referrals of this cohort; simplify the language used in promotional material; and distribution of promotional materials, including distributing leaflets via food banks and the use of banners at vaccination centres.

the proportion of men of working age with no qualifications (7.8 per cent) in Wales ([StatsWales, 2020](#)).

4.50. The project also struggled to engage enough women with no qualifications, and whilst there were contextual issues in MCC (see para 4.42), staff reported that they were somewhat surprised by this, especially given the high concentrated population centres of NCC and CCC, which meant that there should be enough eligible people to be engaged[154].

4.51. During the second round of the fieldwork, staff reported that this gender disparity was echoed in other ESF projects delivered in the area, such as Journey2Work and Inspire2Achieve. Reasons for such a disparity in all these projects were unclear, however, staff did suggest barriers that were faced in this project included (also see para 4.34):

- courses popular amongst women[155], such as hair and beauty and food safety, which required face to face delivery, were not as readily available as those which were popular amongst men, such as courses based around security;
- Cardiff and Vale College did deliver many courses which were popular amongst women, which could be accessed via funding streams such as [Personal Learning Accounts](#), which provided some competition for the project in Cardiff;
- in Cardiff there had been a considerable influx of men[156] (contributing to a gender imbalance) who wanted a Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) licence, as taxi drivers (mostly men) had struggled during the COVID-19 period and were aware of the [well-publicised shortage](#) and subsequent improved salary in the HGV sector; and
- the high demand for labour in the care sector meant that the sector was holding onto staff, who were predominately women, may have played a small part, as these women were then less motivated to engage with the project, as many participants accessed the project to gain new employment (not just progression).

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[154] For example, in 2020 the annual population survey ([StatsWales, 2021](#)) showed that around 7% of the working age population did not have any qualifications.
[155] As stated in section 7 on Cross Cutting Themes, the project aimed to promote non-traditional roles but overall, participants still showed an interest in traditional roles based on gender.
[156] Approximately 40.

Commented [HH(-W19]: What do you mean? Why was this a barrier? There wasn't enough availability for all women to engage in these courses?

Commented [RB20R19]: Good question, there was basically some competition from CAVC in Cardiff. It's a barrier as it meant they were competing with another provider for potentially the 'same participants'. Although this wasn't a major issue but it was stated as a factor and did not seem to be such issue in the other LAs. Amended.

4.52.   Staff interviewed in the second round of fieldwork also observed that the project tended to engage more male participants from minority groups than women, and this was reflected in the profile of participants (i.e. only 25 per cent of participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups were women). Because Cardiff and Newport recruited many participants from this community (around half of all participants in Cardiff and a third in Newport, see section seven for further details), this would undoubtedly be a factor that contributed to the overall gender imbalance. Although staff were unclear regarding reasons for the disparity in recruitment from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, they reflect national employment trends which indicate a larger gap in employment for men and women from some (but not all) Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, such as Asian men (77 per cent employed) and women (54 per cent employed) and Pakistani and Bangladeshi men (73 per cent) and women (39 per cent), compared to White British men (80 per cent) and women (74 per cent) (ONS, 2020). Nevertheless, these gaps cannot fully account for the disparity in the project

4.53.   Although throughout its duration, the project was more successful in engaging men than women, the percentage of women engaged in the later stages of the project's lifetime was considerably higher than at the start. Table 4.2 shows the project's performance against the individual quarterly targets for engaging women without qualification, and the strong improvement in performance from the 8th quarter onwards.

Table 4.1. **Progress on engagement of women within each quarter (timeframe)**

Quarter (timeframe)	% Progress on quarter target
8 (1st Dec 2020 – 28th of Feb 2021)	7
9th (1st March 2021 – 31st May 2021)	20
10th (1st of June 2021 – 31st Aug 2021)	28
11th (1st Sept 2021 – 30th of Nov 2021)	53
12th (1st Dec 2021 – 28th of Feb 2022)	76

Source: NCC engagement data 2022

4.54.   MCC engaged a higher proportion of women (61 per cent) than the other areas. Staff reported that this was due to referrals from the DWP, which MCC relied upon to a

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greater extent[157] than the other beneficiary areas, and these tended to be mostly women. MCC staff did not highlight any specific engagement tactics, although staff did indicate that women participants were probably more likely to tell other women (word of mouth) about the project. MCC had also started promoting the project via online community groups and this had increased the numbers of self-referrals to the project, most of whom were women.

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[157] Exact figures on referrals sources were not available; this is based on staff feedback.

5. Project results

Introduction

5.1. This section focuses on the project's results and impact and reports upon:

- performance against targets;
- positive external factors (enablers) and project strengths;
- barrier, weaknesses and challenges; and
- value for money.

5.2. As with engagements, the project allows a 15 per cent variation in results, so if results are within 85 per cent to 115 per cent of the target, then the target has been met. A black line has been added to the graphs in this section to indicate this point.

5.3. In considering project performance, further data on results is reported in section 7 under Cross Cutting Themes. This includes, for example, results data of disabled people and Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Section 6 reports on the project's assessment, monitoring, and management, which contributes to the results.

Performance against targets

Introduction

5.4. This heading reports on the project's performance in terms of results and, where relevant, it reports on the differences in performance between the three beneficiary areas. The section refers to different result levels after COVID-19; however, explanations for the project performance are covered in detail in the following headings in this section.

5.5. Table 5.1 shows the result target numbers from January 2019 to February 2022.

Table 5.1. Project result targets

Result targets	Feb 2022 Target
Employed, including self-employed participants, with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving	419
Male	*187*
Female	*232*
Employed, including self-employed participants, with up to and including a lower secondary education gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification at lower secondary level upon leaving	414
Male	*205*
Female	*209*

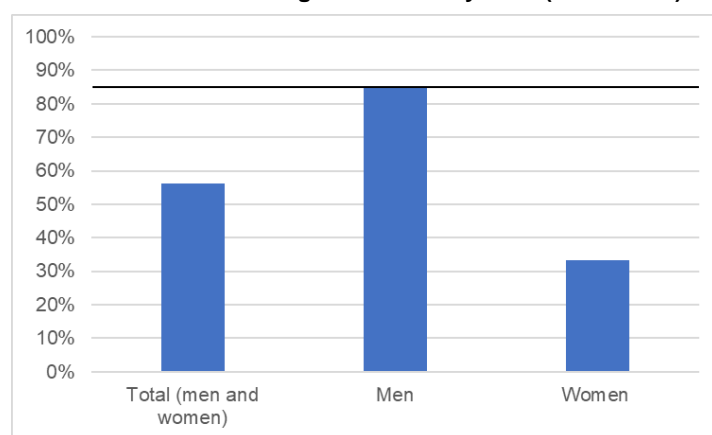*Source: NCC summary of cumulative performance January 2019 and February 2022*

Participants with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving

5.6.   Graph 5.1 shows the progress from the start of the project in January 2019 towards its cumulative targets for February 2022. It shows that in total (men and women), the project is below target in terms of participants with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving (56 per cent). As would be expected, given the higher number of men being engaged compared to women (see graph 4.1) there is a notable difference between the results for men and women. The project is on target in relation to the proportion of men gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving (85 per cent of the target), but considerably under target for women (33 per cent of the target). As outlined in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, results for women were far better (66 per cent of the target), although still under target.

5.7.   Following a similar pattern to engagements (see section 4), CCC has over performed, as the figure for men with no qualifications gaining an essential skill or

technical or job specific qualification upon leaving was 159 per cent of the target. The other two beneficiary areas struggled to meet their targets for men. However, all the beneficiary areas struggled in terms of achieving results for women with no formal qualifications.

Graph 5.1 The percentage of employed, including self-employed, participants with <u>no formal qualifications</u> who gained relevant qualifications or skills in relation to the target for February 2022 (cumulative)

Source: NCC summary of cumulative performance February 2022

Participants with up to and including a lower secondary education, gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving

5.8.   Despite engagement levels of participants with up to and including a lower secondary education being on target (see graph 4.2), the proportion of these participants (both men and women) referred to as those 'with qualifications', gaining an essential skill or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving are below target (71 per cent, see graph 5.2). Both results for men (79 per cent) and women (62 per cent) are under target. This shows that the conversion rate (from engagements to results) was not as strong as anticipated.

5.9.   As reported in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), before COVID-19 the overall results (men and women) were on target (86 per cent) although results for women were under target.

5.10.   Performance differs amongst beneficiaries. In MCC, the project is over target (139 per cent) including results for women (132 per cent of the target). In CCC and NCC the project is under target for both genders.

Graph 5.2. The percentage of employed, including self-employed, participants with <u>qualifications up to level 2</u>[158] who gained relevant qualifications or skills in relation to the target for February 2022 (cumulative).
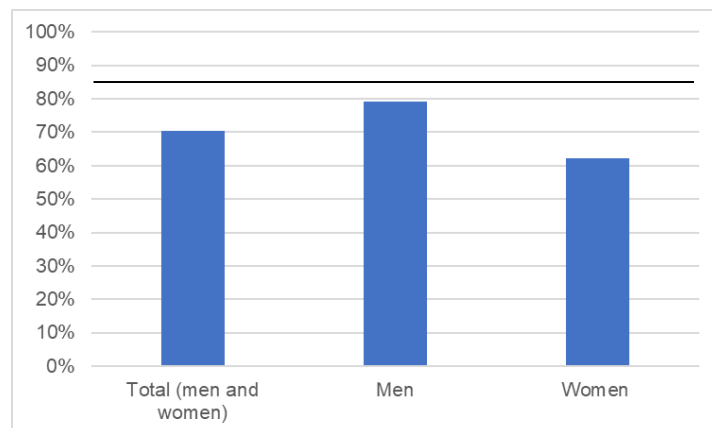

Source: NCC summary of cumulative performance February 2022

Enablers and strengths of the project

5.11.   A number of external factors (enablers) and strengths of the project were identified, by interviewees, and the literature reviewed, and are discussed below; they included:

- the project's ability to meet participants' support needs;
- the benefits of online provision for some participants;
- the project's response to the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and change in the labour market;

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[158] I.e. Level 2 is equivalent to having A*- C grades in GCSE (CQFW, 2021).

Commented [HH(-W24]: What is the source of this data?

Commented [RB25R24]: Thanks, amended.

The project's ability to meet participants' support needs

5.12. All frontline staff interviewed were confident in their abilities to support the participants, either due to the support and training they had received or through their previous experience in supporting people in employment support projects. Therefore, the participants who needed more intensive support were catered for effectively.

5.13. Feedback from participants (interviewed for the evaluation) regarding the quality of support, was universally positive; for example, statements regarding their experience included:

'It was excellent. The support was excellent. They were always at the end of the phone, and they were very good at responding and were always at the end of the phone. I couldn't have asked for more.'

'I cannot say enough about [name of frontline staff member omitted] – he was totally professional and went above and beyond.'

'She [frontline staff member] helped achieve my goal and it's the best thing that's happened in my life.'

5.14. Most of the support provided by the project was practical in its nature, however there were many examples of emotional as well as practical support, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with the project's desired outcomes, all participants were offered training and most participants interviewed had accessed this training. As reported in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) participants were helped onto courses to address basic skills gaps[159] (where appropriate) as well as being supported to access vocational training[160].

5.15. Participants praised the relationship they had with staff and the ways in which it helped them develop their skills and gain qualifications; for example, in some cases

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[159] For example, in MCC participants were signposted to Adult Community Learning for any Essential Skills courses and signposted to Adult Learning Wales if Adult Community Learning was not sufficient.
[160] For example, SIA and driving licences and courses related to construction, IT, phlebotomy, microblading, English lessons, health and beauty (e.g. nail technician), first aid, food safety, CSCS, manual handling and childcare.

they reported that staff had challenged them to complete accredited courses which were of greater value than they had anticipated and in other cases participants reported completing courses they had not expected to take. Moreover, participants appreciated that staff considered their aspirational goals and were not just aiming to get them on a course that may not suit their situation in the long term. Participants also reported that staff were patient; for example, participants' comments regarding training included:

'I was very sceptical at the start, I have never been in a process like this before. But [name of frontline staff member omitted] made it all simple, organised the course and doing at home was good because I was home schooling at the time.'

'They helped me do a mental health course, which was great as I could use what I learned on myself.'

'It took me a few attempts to pass my course as it was difficult, but they stuck by me and gave me the confidence to do it.'

5.16. Support with employability skills was also paramount, this included interview skills, help with CV, job applications and job searches; for example:

'I have never had as formal interview in my life, via Teams, X [frontline staff member] went through mock interviews with me, which build up my confidence and have me the type of responses I was likely to need. X [frontline staff member] was so good my son has also accessed it to help with his interview skills.'

'I didn't have a clue about job searching, he [frontline staff member] taught me how things work now, it's so different to when I was younger.'

'My CV was given a 'make over' and I didn't realise how much I didn't know about being ready for an interview.'

5.17. A number of participants highlighted the quality of personal support that staff provided, which was greatly valued:

'She [mentor] agreed to call me more often when I was struggling with things.'

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'They help to motivate you, I almost gave up as [i] was in a terrible job and thought I'd be there for life, but they did an action plan with me and supported me with that every step of the way.'

5.18. Staff echoed the comments made by participants. Staff in management positions felt that the frontline staff were highly dedicated and skilled in what they did and interviews with frontline staff highlighted their enthusiasm and dedication to the project and the satisfaction they felt when participants gained improved employment.

Overcoming barriers

5.19. The support provided (as described above) enabled many participants to overcome the barriers they faced. As the literature review (section three) identifies, participants are likely to faces a range of different barriers. Participants interviewed for this evaluation mainly highlighted situational factors[161], most notably the cost of training. In most circumstances (with exception of expensive and long-term courses) the project could help participants overcome this; for example, as participants described:

'For me it was about the money I just didn't have it.'

'I couldn't do it myself as I could not afford the cost of the training. I have to pay rent and I have my son and even with working there was never enough money.'

5.20. The availability of time was a common situational barrier reported by participants. As previously highlighted (see para 5.39) this was still an issue for many participants and was one of the main barriers the project struggled with. However, the flexibility of the courses (especially online) and the practical support of the mentors, such as helping with CVs and interview skills, meant participants saved on time as these things would have taken longer without their support. The project also helped participants to prioritise their time.

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[161] 'Arising from an adult's personal and family situation, such as time pressures and financial constraints' Pennachia et al. (2018, p.10).

5.21. Another common barrier was the dispositional barrier[162] of lack of confidence, which participants and staff felt was one of the areas where the project had particular successes (see para 5.34 for details).

5.22. Other less common barriers, included:
- lack of knowledge of how to job search and access training opportunities;
- health barriers, mainly around mental health issues such as anxiety; and
- lack of basic skills around literacy, oracy (identified during the assessment process) and Information Technology (IT).

5.23. Lack of knowledge was highlighted by staff as an 'easy win' as they could provide the participants with this directly. Most mental health issues tended to be low level and staff felt the issues could be managed well enough within the framework of what they project was aiming to achieve. Moreover, on rare occasions participants were signposted to mental health charities and public health services if the issues were not manageable. Staff reported that lack of basic skills could usually be addressed with regard to the levels needed, for example, to complete specific courses. However, there were a minority of cases where a longer-term approach was needed to help with basic skills. As reported previously (see section four) IT literacy remained a barrier to some learners.

5.24. One participant spoke of how their career choice was not feasible due to their criminal record; however, other options were made available through the project and staff reported that only a few had experienced this barrier.

5.25. Given the decreased face to face contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some staff felt that the project had become more of an 'administrative' intervention than they originally anticipated; for example, in its simplest form staff assessed what participants wanted via phone and email, then if courses were available and affordable, they placed them on the course, and then the participant got their recorded outcomes. The advantage to this brokerage model is that in many cases, the skills needed to support the participant are limited. Looking to the future this may

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[162] 'Relating to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adults, such as believing that they are too old to learn or lacking confidence or interest' Pennachia et al. (2018).

be a way to save money on such an intervention, as in practice a considerable proportion do not need 'additional support' and those that do could be signposted to staff who have the experience to offer more than just administrative support.

The benefits of online provision

5.26. As outlined in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) staff suggested that some of the participants who accessed the online courses (spurred on by the COVID-19 pandemic) were unlikely to have accessed courses face to face. There was also some evidence in the fieldwork for this report that participants valued the online option as a flexible means of learning without having to consider travel options (most notably in Monmouthshire). This is likely to be more salient if, as anticipated, the cost of travelling continues to increase.

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

5.27. As reported in the previous interim report (Bowen et al., 2021), MCC responded particularly well to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have their own accredited skills centre[163] and were able to offer online and blended courses which provided flexible options to meet participants' needs. In addition, they were able to source Chrome books via Communities First Plus to improve participants' digital access and during this period employed a Skills Training Officer and an apprentice, which improved their capacity.

5.28. CCC and NCC also responded well to the COVID-19 pandemic. They developed online training options and sustained support for participants via phone/video calls, emails, and texts. During the initial periods of the COVID-19 pandemic, when training was not available, a range of support, including emotional support through phone conversations and practical support, such as delivering food packages and help to access grant loan schemes for computer tablets, was offered. The emphasis changed to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic related issues that participants were facing, before moving the participants onto accessing training and gaining results.

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[163] The Highfield Centre.

5.29. Notwithstanding this, as highlighted in section four there were structural limits to how well the beneficiaries could respond.

Response to a changing market

5.30. CCC responded well to changes in the labour market, such as increased demand for HGV drivers[164] and the subsequent demand for HGV licences from participants. They have set up an HGV taskforce which has taken steps to streamline the process of gaining the licences, for example, ensuring participants pass their expected medicals before mentors support them with other aspects of the course. The time it takes to gain HGV licences, especially due to the well-publicised backlogs, means that many participants may not achieve outcomes during the lifetime of this project. Nevertheless, the project helps them to move closer to their goals and they are likely to achieve them in the longer term. This is an important outcome, as average wages for HGV drivers (approx. 32K) are considerably higher than those driving a taxi (approx. 23K) which was the job role of many who were seeking an HGV licence.

5.31. CCC also had a fruitful relationship with the Butetown Pavilion Hub Project (also delivered by the local authority) that has been placing people on Security Industry Authority (SIA) training, many of whom then accessed follow up courses such as SIA Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) training via Skills@Work.

5.32. Staff reported that mental health awareness training had recently proved very popular in Monmouthshire and the project has reacted well by supplying additional courses in larger venues to cater for this demand and improve results.

5.33. As reported by staff and supported by comments from participants, although some courses were easier to supply than others (see section four), overall it was felt that the range of training options available was good. Furthermore, although most of the training was done in groups, individual or small group courses could be supplied when needed. Staff indicated that the lower-than-expected conversion rate was not down to lack of choice, flexibility or quality but motivation to complete amongst some participants (as discussed in para 5.39). Indeed, MCC had reported better results

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[164] ONS (2021) Fall in numbers of HGV drivers largest amongst middle aged workers.

when they decreased the number of courses they offered (streamlining provision) as providing too much choice created difficulties with marketing and implementation.

Participants' perceived impact

5.34. Participants (interviewed for the evaluation) were asked directly what difference the project had made. Most participants mentioned how it had increased their confidence, usually through completing a qualification or doing well in a job interview they had been supported to attend; for example:

'I hadn't been out there [job market] for donkey years, my confidence just flew when I actually got interview offers.'

'It's funny I've always worked so you'd think I had believed in myself, but I didn't until I started doing this.'

5.35. For many of the participants, the project had made a considerable difference to their lives, for example, by providing more stable, better paid work and improved career prospects (also see appendix 4):

'I am actually in [new] work now, [because] what he [their mentor] did and others did behind the scenes. It has given me mental stability without knowing it.'

'I have a new job with better pay, conditions and prospects now, I wouldn't have happened without this [Skills@Work].'

'Even if I only work at the weekend and a day in the week I am getting as much as I was working five days before.'

'Without [staff member] help I would not have applied for the jobs I applied for – I thought they were not in my league but [name of staff member omitted] help has made a huge difference. He helped me to realise I have a lot of skills and experience.'

5.36. There were also examples that the benefits of the project been passed on to others:

'My son left college, COVID-19 had really messed up his experience. He wanted to do an apprenticeship and he got an interview offer. I used the notes and stuff I got from the [frontline staff member] to help him and he got it [the apprenticeship].'

'It has helped my daughter too. She is 16 and I am encouraging her to get into finance now, because of my experience. She is in college now and taking a finance course because I am encouraging her, so I am pushing my daughter too.'

Box 5.1 Andrea's and Peter's stories

For many years Andrea (not her real name) had always wanted to change her careers path, however, she had never acted upon this desire. She was then furloughed in her existing job in retail which she found 'tough' and this time for reflection spurred her on to act. She came across Skills@Work through an online search. Following the initial assessment process (via phone due to COVID-19) she was offered training in areas such as customer service and conflict management. Course activities were mainly online and helped to improve her IT skills which she previously lacked. During this period an opportunity came to apply for a good quality administrative job. She applied and was offered an interview. She had never had a formal job interview. Skills@Work staff prepared her for the interview by doing 'mock interviews' online and sharing ideas regarding her interview responses. Andrea felt this had really improved her skills and confidence for the interview and it resulted in her getting the job. This had many advantages over her previous role, including a permanent position, offering better pay and conditions and being more challenging and satisfying. Andrea stated she was proud of what she had achieved.

A family member (Peter, not his real name) at the time had left education and was looking to get an apprenticeship. Skills@Work agreed to help Peter with his interview for the apprenticeship. Following the 'mock interview' and interview tips, Peter's interview went well and he was accepted on the apprenticeship. He reflected on how the interview support was far better what he had been offered through his education settings. Both Andrea and Peter highlighted how they recommended the project to others due to their positive experiences.

5.37. The benefits described by participants were supported by comments from staff. Staff in the fieldwork for both stages of the evaluation highlighted the increase in participants' soft skills and improvement in participants' employment situation. For example:

'My clients [participants] have low qualifications and no access to better qualifications, paying for it and supporting them gives huge them a huge amount of confidence - and they stay in contact.'

'There are some participants who really improve their financial situation, which is much needed.'

Barriers, weaknesses and challenges

5.38. A number of external factors (barriers) and weaknesses of the project were identified (by interviewees and through the literature reviewed) and are discussed below; they included:

- situational and motivational barriers that could hold participants back and make it difficult for the project to convert engagements into outcomes;
- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon training provision;
- failures to mainstream good practice;
- the limited access to support and training outside the traditional working week; and
- failures to record the full range of outcomes, such as people progressing to work without accessing training.

Situational and motivational barriers

5.39. Participants and staff reported that a lack of 'time' to complete courses was often an issue. Given that participants were already working and many had caring responsibilities (see section 7) 'time' was a precious commodity and not all had appreciated this when they originally engaged with the project. Moreover, it was reported by staff that some participants' motivation could be lacking, as there was not always the 'urgency' to improve their situation, it was seen as a more long-term goal they could re-visit.

Commented [HH(-W26]: Can you provide some examples and some data to support this claim?

Commented [RB27R26]: Good point, added.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon training provision

5.40. As outlined in the previous interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the project's capacity to produce results (i.e. convert engagements into outcomes). The main challenge was the suspension and reduction of training activity by providers. In addition, other issues included:

- the negative impact of lockdown upon some participants' motivation to learn;
- changes to the employment market, which meant participants needed to be more open to changing their career goals and related qualifications, something that some participants found difficult to contemplate; and
- the lack of digital equipment and/or digital literacy needed to access online training.

5.41. During the fieldwork for this report, staff reflected further on the impact of COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, training could be delivered to around 15-20 participants face to face in one location. However, during the initial stages and subsequent lockdowns, face to face training was not available and, in the longer term, the number of people who can train face to face has remained low; for example, around 5-6 participants in one location, which meant fewer participants gained qualifications in face to face settings. Despite the development in online training, this has undoubtedly stifled some potential outcomes.

5.42. Staff also commented that low levels of digital literacy tended to be higher amongst participants with no qualifications, therefore achieving qualifications online was often more difficult with this cohort. It was reported by staff that online courses usually required greater self-motivation on behalf of the learner and disengaging was easier, when face to face relationships with other learners and tutors have not been established. This is consistent with the literature reviewed (discussed in section 3) which identifies that those with low or no formal qualifications are more likely to drop out of courses than other groups.

5.43. When reflecting on the overall results, project staff commented that NCC and CCC were somewhat over-optimistic in terms of what could be achieved and that this should be taken into consideration for future projects. In contrast, it was felt that MCC had been more realistic in their predictions in terms of results for those with

qualifications (although still overly optimistic in terms of results for those with no qualifications).

Mainstreaming good practice

5.44. As highlighted in section 6, staff reported the project was well managed and ideas were shared between beneficiaries. However, in terms of delivery, apart from the key elements of the evaluating and monitoring process, there was no evidence of a whole project-based approach to delivering 'good practice'; for example, as one staff member described, at key moments in the project, one of the beneficiaries was doing certain things better than the other areas, but these examples of 'good practice' were never implemented on a project wide basis. Given the differences between the three areas and how they operated (e.g. Monmouthshire largely a rural county and Cardiff and Newport are largely urban) there was a risk that what worked in one area, would not work in another. However, there have been clear limits on the levels of collaboration, which may have stifled innovation.

Limited provision outside the traditional working week

5.45. As most frontline staff typically worked from Monday to Friday and rarely at the weekend and late evenings, this limited the times they were available to support participants who worked a traditional working week (and who needed to access support and training outside these hours). However, as the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) identified, the growth in online training provision helped with this, and in addition, some face to face training was available on Saturdays.

Recording all results

5.46. Staff reported that sometimes participants gained the employment outcomes with the support of the frontline staff, such as job search support, without accessing training. This was not recorded as a result that contributed towards their official results (see graph 5.1 and 5.2) and was not recorded internally either for Skills@Work.

5.47. Staff also reported that there were cases in which participants had completed the modules of a course and gained the desired skills they needed but for various reasons (ranging from COVID-19 to time keeping issues) were unable to book the

Commented [HH(-W28]: That's a shame, it would be good to know how many participants only required this level of support.

Commented [RB29R28]: Good point

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exam and so did not have the required evidence to claim the result, despite having done the training.

Value for money

Planned cost in comparison with actual costs

5.48. Table 5.2 below illustrates the actual and planned costs of engaging and obtaining results[165] per participant. Despite unforeseen increases in the costs of some courses, such as SIA, due to changes to security protocols (Gov.uk., 2021), the costs of the project are within its planned limits. However, due to the lower-than-expected number of participants engaged (100% of targets not reached) and associated lower number of results, the costs per result are higher than anticipated.

Commented [HH(-W30]: Is this because if more participants were engaged then the higher SIA costs would be levelled out by lower costs for other courses?

Commented [RB31R30]: Good question, that would contribute (as this was part of the model). However, the main driver is that the 'value for money' is based on the number of outcomes i.e. the higher the outcomes the better the value for money. Less participants than anticipated and lower number of results (which are linked) mean that the costs are higher than planned. In some projects this might not make a difference as the conversion rate would be higher than planned but this is not the case for this project.

Table 5.2. actual cost and planned cost per participants in terms of engagements and results in February 2022

	Expected number of participants	Actual number of participants	Expected cost per participant (£)	Actual cost per participant Feb'22 (£)
Engagements	1,285	857	1,875	2,812
Results	833	528	2,892	4,564

Source: Financial summary and NCC summary of cumulative performance February 2022

Return on investment

The return on this investment is however likely to be far higher than the costs, as studies consistently identify that qualifications increase people's earnings during their lifetime (see e.g. BIS, 2009; Dorsett et al., 2010; Schuller, 2017). Table 5.3 below shows (subject to caveats) that people in the UK who have no qualifications earn considerably less than those with a level 2 qualification (there is no data on earnings of those with qualifications below level 1 and at level 1, which included many of the participants). Therefore, potentially these participants (so far 220 participants[166]) would earn more than the project invested in them, within less than two years.

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[165] This included gaining level 2 qualifications (around 85% of the results) and below (the remaining 15%).
[166] I.e. participants on the project who had no qualifications and gained a level 2 qualification.

5.49. It is important to remember that table 5.3:

- is based upon the cost of generating the recorded outcomes (results) and does not include unexpected outcomes, or outcomes that had not been recorded, such as job search skills; and

- that the return of investment is based upon a narrow range of benefits (i.e. the financial benefits of the individual) and does not include other benefits to the individual, such as health and well-being; benefits to employers, such as increased productivity; and benefits to the wider society, such as increases in active citizenship, associated with participation in learning (see e.g. Schuller, 2017).

Table 5.3. Indication of the return on investment, based upon the time it would take for a participant (with no qualifications who gained a level 2 qualification) to earn enough money to cover the costs of the project investment (subject to caveats - see para 5.49)

Actual cost per participant per result Feb 2022 (£) (Skills@Work)	Median salary for someone with no qualifications in the UK (year) (£)	Median salary for someone with a level 2 qualification in the UK (year) (£)	Difference between salaries (year) (£)	The number of years a person with no qualifications who gained a level 2 qualification would need to work, in order to gain a complete return on the project's investment (no. of years)
4,564	14,300	17,212	2,912	1.6

Source: Financial summary and NCC summary of cumulative performance February 2022 ONS (2018).

Commented [HH(-W32]: Don't know what you mean by this

Commented [RB33R32]: Agree it was very vague, amended.

6. Project assessment, monitoring and management

Introduction

6.1.   This section focuses on strengths and weaknesses in the project's:

- assessment and monitoring; and
- project management.

<mark>6.2.   The data discussed in this section is drawn from analyses of project documentation, two rounds of fieldwork and the desk based literature review[167].</mark>

Assessment and monitoring

6.3.   Except for some differences, such as the use of the STAR assessment tool[168] for some participants in NCC and CCC, the process of assessing participants' eligibility, their aspirations and needs was similar in each beneficiary area and focused upon three key steps:

- checking participants' eligibility (e.g. payslip, photo ID, proof of qualification level);
- discussing the barriers participants faced and what they wanted to achieve, and;
- developing an action plan.

Strength and weaknesses of assessment and monitoring

6.4.   Most of the participants had gone through the assessment process when there were COVID-19 restrictions in place, and hence had limited face to face contact. Typically, the assessment process was done on the phone and to a lesser extent via Teams. Overall, participants felt the whole process leading up to the action plans was informal and efficient and could not highlight any ways the process could be improved; as one participant stated:

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[167] <mark>See section two for further details.</mark>
[168] The results from this are not readily available for the evaluation. It is not used with all participants as it is better suited to participants who face many barriers to employment, which many of the participants on this project do not face (see section 4).

'We could not do face to face because of lockdown. We met for the first time this year. We had a lot of phone calls, [the name of mentor omitted] was good, he was very good. We did do a couple of plans. Nothing to it really.'

6.5. Participants commented that they would talk to the staff about their career aspirations and goals and any barriers they faced, whilst staff would outline training and likely career options available, before going on to develop an action plan (also see section 5); as a participant put it:

'They went through what I wanted to do, what jobs I had applied for, they helped me to zone in on what I should apply for, so they took an overview. They went through any training I might need to achieve the things that I wanted to. They did develop an action plan and what I could apply for and finding out what was out there and getting information on applying.'

6.6. As described in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) and in box 6.1, in CCC there was an expectation for all relevant participants to complete an accredited course before having access to bespoke courses and support. This was reported to have helped to demonstrate participants' commitment to the process and, in addition, ensure they gained a valuable qualification. This was not done in the other beneficiary areas. The feedback from participants and staff regarding this process was positive and it was suggested as an approach that would be used in similar interventions in the future.

Box 6.1 Example of the assessment process in Cardiff

Step 1. Check participant eligibility by reviewing photo ID and payslip.

Step 2. Identify participant's aspirations and the barriers they face to realising them, and any other needs. Depending on the participant, this could include STAR assessment that provides baseline data on the key headings: essential skills, confidence/self-esteem; career progression; qualifications; finance, and aspirations.

> **Step 3.** Develop an action plan which is reviewed every quarter. During this process, CCC asks the participant to choose and complete an accredited e-learning course from a wide range of options (manual handling, food safety, health and safety, customer service, control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH), emergency first aid at work) prior to accessing funding for bespoke training and further support.

6.7.   All staff were complimentary of the Community Evaluation and Monitoring Project (CEMP) system. It was reported to be user friendly and provided a useful 'one stop shop' for monitoring information[169]. The system was helpful in providing a platform for the regular data health checks the project was expected to complete. Staff who had experience of working on previous ESF projects or other comparable projects, preferred it to systems they had previously used. Staff praised the training they had received regarding CEMP, although there were reported incidents when amendments to the CEMP files had not been saved by staff, which resulted in the amendments having to be done again.

6.8.   All digital copies of the participants files are now being archived, which means they are being kept separately, which frees up space within the CEMP system. Unfortunately, CEMP cannot be used for other future operations, because it is not a licenced product (it was built from scratch for ESF projects) meaning there are issues around licensing its use. This means that for future projects another monitoring system will be needed but there is potential to learn from some of the strengths of the CEMP system.

6.9.   Although all beneficiary areas used CEMP for monitoring and there are standard forms issued for monitoring and reporting[170], there is flexibility within the assessment process and associated paperwork; for example, MCC staff highlighted how they successfully streamlined the paperwork for the project. This included combining referral and enrolment forms into one and reducing to it two A4 pages. Moreover, a

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[169] I.e., access to participants' database (within chosen timeline), performance data, summary of characteristics of participants, CCT evidence, guidance documents, minutes from meetings, health check data and quarterly claim documents.
[170] Such as templates for the quarterly progress reports, indicator and financial summaries and delivery profile variance.

full list of courses available through the project (as part of the action planning process) is made available with this form, so staff members have everything thing they need in one place when they discuss options with participants. The combined referral and enrolment form is uploaded to CEMP and covers all the compliance needs for the project. Staff stated that having less paperwork, and what paperwork they had was clear and easy to administer, had facilitated their work with participants, in terms of gaining outcomes. Furthermore, despite the 'streamlining' of information, MCC administration data was deemed by the central team as amongst the most robust (e.g. the quality of data they produced into the progress reports), showing it is possible to both cut administration and sustain quality of data. Although the other areas had not adopted this streamlined system, overall, staff were satisfied with how the administrative systems worked in their beneficiary areas.

> Commented [HH(-W34]: What do you mean by strongest?
>
> Commented [RB35R34]: Good point, amended

6.10. As outlined in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) although the project had anticipated using the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST) to assess participants' literacy and oracy skills, this had not proved feasible and staff reported it had only sometimes been used in CCC. The actual use of the tool depends on the pre-course entry requirement, and it is only relevant to some courses accessed by the project, such as the teaching assistant courses. Moreover, it took a long time to complete and the lack of face to face time due to COVID-19 made it even more burdensome to complete.

6.11. As reported in section 5, MCC and CCC staff felt that there were outcomes achieved that should have been considered by the central project team as contributing to the results for the project (i.e. job search and completion of modules). Furthermore, MCC staff reflected that the project would benefit from other outcomes being measured and reported centrally, preferably around indicators of soft skills and well-being. The interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) had recommended that MCC consider using the bespoke STAR assessment tool, as this was already being used to some extent in NCC and CCC. However, this had not been adopted and the assessment used in NCC focused on key skills[171] rather than well-being. Notwithstanding this, MCC had made 'notes' on participants' well-being and therefore, like NCC, had data which they

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[171] Mainly quantitative data on key skills, such as managing money, work experience, applying for jobs, CV and interview skills.

could analyse and utilise to assess outcomes in their own areas. Furthermore, MCC are in the process of creating a monitoring tool for a well-being project they are developing, which they could also use in other future projects similar to Skills@Work.

Strengths and weaknesses of project management

Management by the central team

6.12. Feedback regarding the management of project by the central team was positive overall. This included feedback that the central team:
- provided good guidance and responded in a timely fashion to information requests;
- organised the regular data 'health checks' well; and
- supported mangers well, for example, within the managerial quarterly meetings that were held.

6.13. Staff described a good working relationship between the lead managers. Because they also worked on other projects, such as Journey2Work or Inspire2Work, they had regular communication and had built up an effective relationship. Staff felt they could be 'open and candid' with each other in terms of what each area could realistically achieve, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.14. Notwithstanding good working relationships, the project failed to act on gaps in delivery, such as the recording of LGBTQ participants (see section 7). There was no evidence of direct initiatives taken in these areas, despite being highlighted in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021).

6.15. As outlined in the interim report (ibid.), staff described how the project's central team devolved managerial responsibility to each beneficiary area and this had continued throughout the project's lifetime. This was said to have had advantages in providing flexibility for each of the beneficiaries to deliver in the area 'they know'. However, there were reported disadvantages, for example:
- as reported in section five there was limited collaboration in terms of delivery; for example, popular online courses could have potentially been delivered collaboratively throughout the project instead of being commissioned separately.

There were also examples of good practice in certain beneficiary areas, which the whole project may have benefitted from adopting, such as simplifying their administrative systems (see para 6.8); and

- as outlined below, initially MCC had struggled with the project when it was managed by their Adult Community Learning department (discussed further in para 6.16). It was stated that the central team should have more directly challenged the performance of MCC during this period, for example, by highlighting to them how it could be managed more effectively and insisting on structural changes.

Management by beneficiary areas

6.16. Frontline staff were very positive regarding how they were managed and overall, staff felt they were well trained and supported; for example, staff reported:

'I've got great support from management; they prepare me well for the role. I have never had experience of the mentoring role and I progressed a lot, thanks to them. I've never had a better manager than him and he has the answers for every question I ask and very approachable.'

'All extra support that we have needed as staff has been met and we have had extra guidance from Newport [central team] when we needed it.'

6.17. Initially in MCC, the project was managed by the Adult and Community Learning department and during this period staff reported that the management was unable to dedicate the time needed to manage it effectively; for example, ten months into the project it had engaged only 17 participants and the staffing, marketing and financial processes were reported to be either inconsistent or 'not fit for purpose'. The project was then transferred to the Employment and Skills department in April 2020 and although the management of the project had improved, it took up until December 2020 for MCC to be in a place to fulfil the needs of the project by, for example, recruiting a Training and Administrative Officer. While it is to the credit of MCC that it was able to considerably improve the performance of the project through management restructuring, for future initiatives greater scrutiny needs to be given to the initial management structures of such projects.

6.18. In Newport, as outlined in section 4, a neighbourhood hub model similar to CCC's
was adopted. This resulted in referral and support systems which were more
geographically spread (prior to this, the project was focused on the centre of
Newport). Staff reported that while this 'made sense of paper' it was a considerable
change to the way the project worked and resulted in a less coordinated approach.
As the interim report outlined, it was felt that over time various 'teething issues' would
be overcome (Bowen et al., 2021), however, this had not materialised.
Notwithstanding this, staff described how this re-structuring was beyond the control
of their project manager (the decision was made on a higher level within the local
authority) and that their manager had taken steps to alleviate the impact of the
change, such as allowing staff to relocate to the central location of the library for part
of the working week. Moreover, it is possible that the re-structuring process will help
future initiatives once it becomes more embedded, due to the potentially improved
geographic coverage it offers and the fact that staff felt it works well in Cardiff, which
shares a similar demographic to Newport.

6.19. These challenges contributed to the difficulties NCC and MCC had in achieving
targets. Therefore, as outlined in the introduction, NCC and MCC[172] reprofiled their
targets as they struggled to engage as many participants as anticipated, which had a
knock-on effect on project expenditure and outcomes. In contrast, CCC was
described by staff as being somewhat better organised in their expenditure and in
organising initiatives to try and improve outcomes and did not reprofile its targets[173].
There were also no reported weaknesses in terms of how CCC was managed.

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[172] The agreed reprofiling numbers for MCC had not been made available in time for this report.
[173] Notwithstanding that so far, CCC had not met its engagement targets in terms of the engagement of
women without qualifications and other results amongst women. Reasons for this are reported in sections 4
and 5.

7. Cross Cutting Themes

Introduction

7.1. This section assesses the project's activities concerning the Cross Cutting Themes (CCT) and the associated Case Level Indicators. The CCT include:

- Equal Opportunities, Gender Mainstreaming (this includes the Welsh language in Wales)[174];
- Sustainable Development[175]; and
- Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion[176].

7.2. The Case Level Indicators include:

- developing CCT champions
- equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, including measures relating to:
  - Female participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)
  - occupational segregation activity
  - Positive action measure for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups
  - Positive action measure for disabled people
  - Activity supporting speakers of the Welsh language
  - childcare provision
- sustainable development, including:
  - developing an e-code
  - resource efficiency measures
  - travel plan and sustainable transport
- tackling poverty and social exclusion, including measures relating to:

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[174] "Actions appropriate for this priority could include: New approaches which enable organisations to innovate and work together in, a region to ensure public services are accessible and equitable to all, Support for activity which builds the capacity and capability of the workforce, Actions to ensure that new regional ways of working as they are put in place promote equality of opportunity for staff and inclusive work places, Taking opportunities to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language within new regional ways of working, in service delivery and developing capacity" (WG, 2019 p.4).
[175] "Actions appropriate for this priority could include: Encouraging sustainable transport solutions, Promoting resource efficiency, including energy efficiency and waste management (including recycling) in the delivery and implementation of operations, Supporting the sharing of resources and use of local supply chains" (p.3). (WG, 2019 p.3).
[176] "Actions appropriate to this priority could include: Upskilling and reskilling staff members to help them benefit from new ways of working" (WG, 2019 p.4).

Commented [RB36]: Nigel: Please list the CCTs: Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming (inc. Welsh language), Sustainable Development and Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion.

P&W: Good point added

Commented [RB37]: Nigel: Both should read 'Positive action measures…' and should read 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic' throughout the report.

Commented [RB38R37]: Thanks, amended

Commented [RB39R37]: We added LGBTQ as an indicator due to NCC business plan and thought it would made sense to treat in a similar way to the indicators - but obviously technically it is not.

- mentoring/advocacy activities
- activity supporting CCT indicators (in Priorities / Objectives where the indicators are not present)
- Positive action measures - Other (barrier fund)

7.3. It is important to remember that there are no formal targets for the CCT and related Project Level Indicators. Nevertheless, there is an expectation for related activities to be delivered. Moreover, one of the aims of the evaluation is to:

'Examine if there were any significant variations in different demographic groups or supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, disabled and LGBTQ people in achieving these outcomes' (p.3).

Given this, we report on available data upon demographic groups in this section as they provide contextual information for some of the Case Level Indicators listed above (para 7.1).

7.4. In addition, an estimation of the project's impact on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is set out in table 7.1.

7.5. The data discussed in this section is drawn from an analyses of project data (such as outcomes for different groups of participants), two rounds of fieldwork and the desk based literature review.

Overview

7.6. A strength of the project has been that a considerable proportion of participants engaged are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (34 per cent in total) and results for women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups have been particularly strong. The project has been most active in terms of resource efficiency, travel and sustainable travel indicators. Although the number of disabled people engaged by the project was low, support for these people was reported to be strong and results amongst disabled participants were better than the project average. Nevertheless, despite efforts, the project struggled to gain much interest amongst women to pursue STEM options, or for men and or women to pursue non-traditional job roles.

Commented [RB40]: Nigel: This isn't correct as several case level indicator have not yet been claimed as achieved / no information provided to-date

Commented [RB41R40]: Thanks deleted. Having reflected on the sentence it suggests there are targets to be met, so best leave it out as it may mis-represent the situation.

Moreover, although not a case level indicator, the project aimed to record progress amongst LGBTQ participants (see para 7.3) and this had not done.

7.7. As documented in the progress reports, MCC reported on more activities related to the themes and Case Level Indicators than the other beneficiary areas.

CCT champions

7.8. As stated in the project business plan it was intended that the Central Lead Team Manager at NCC would take on the role of CCT champion for the project, and this has been the case throughout the project. The champion works closely with the project coordinator at NCC who helps with delivering and reporting on the themes. Moreover, all operational managers report on these themes within their progress reports.

Equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming (including the Welsh Language)

Women and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

7.9. As reported in section 4, the project had struggled to engage women and reasons for this are also discussed in section 4 (para 4.49). Results of men and women were similar, with 45 per cent of women achieving improved labour market positions upon leaving, compared with 44 per cent of men.

7.10. Staff from all beneficiary areas provided examples of women being supported to access STEM based courses and participants were provided with options to pursue these courses (see appendix 7). Examples included women who wanted to go into construction roles and the project provided training for Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards. It was also reported that when the project was not able to directly fund training, for example, for higher level qualifications in 'construction site management' for a small number of participants the project had signposted these participants to local colleges that offered PLAs for funding in this field. Moreover, as reported in the interim report the project has worked with another organisations to host an event highlighting women in construction, to show participants how they can access construction training (Bowen et al., 2021). Despite

this activity, staff reported that interest from women who wanted to do STEM courses was low throughout the project's lifetime.

Activity to tackle occupational segregation

7.11.   Staff reported how they informed participants regarding the range of career options, including roles not traditionally associated with a particular gender; for example, as stated by a staff member:

'We promote all training to let customers know that because of their gender or race they don't need to just go for certain types of jobs.'

7.12.   Staff reported some interest from participants in non-traditional roles, although again this interest was limited. There were examples provided of women who had done SIA training for security roles and women who had been supported in their interest in obtaining an HGV licence.

7.13.   As reported in the interim report, there have also been examples of men who had done training in courses which women traditionally dominate, such as hairdressing, beauty, and airline cabin crew (Bowen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in line with the findings from the literature review, these examples were very rare.

7.14.   Staff reported that realistically the cultural change needed to change attitudes towards job roles and gender was beyond the capacity of the project and the focus of the project on meeting the aspirations of the client resulted in the vast majority wanting to pursue traditional roles in accordance with their gender. This is supported by the findings in the literature review (see section 3).

Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups

7.15.   The engagement data that showed that the project engaged a high proportion of participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in two of the three beneficiary areas; specifically:
- in Cardiff, over half (52 per cent) of participants were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, even though they only make up around 20 per cent of the area's population (StatsWales, 2021); and

- in Newport, around a third (34 per cent) of participants were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, even though they only make up 13 per cent of the area's population (StatsWales, 2021).

7.16. In contrast, the proportion of participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups engaged in Monmouthshire reflected the rate within the local authority (around 3 per cent) (ibid.) meaning that, while they were not under-represented, MCC did not, as the other two areas, engage a disproportionate number of participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

7.17. The key reason highlighted by staff for the high proportion of participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups recruited in Cardiff and Newport was the project's presence and activity in areas where there were substantial Black, Asian and minority ethnic populations; this included the Grangetown hub, Butetown hub and Star hub in Cardiff[177] and the Central hub in Newport. This illustrates one of the benefits of the hub model used by Newport and Cardiff. Participants interviewed for the evaluation also reported that the high proportion of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups situated in these hubs contributed to the welcoming atmosphere of the project. Staff and participants (interviewed for the evaluation) added that word of mouth within these communities had been effective. This was illustrated by the influx of taxi drivers looking to obtain HGV licences, the majority of whom were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups with social links to those who been supported by the project.

7.18. The results for participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups were similar to results for those from the white British or Welsh group (around 45 per cent), indicating the projects 'offer' was effective for different groups. Furthermore, women who were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups had better results, with half achieving an improved labour market situation compared to 44 per cent of white British or Welsh women achieving an improved labour market situation.

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[177] The University of Manchester (2013) Geography of Diversity in Cardiff.

7.19. In terms of support, as reported in the interim report, a few participants have been helped to access English lessons to improve their fluency (the vast majority were fluent in English) and food events had been held that helped participants from diverse backgrounds to socialise. (Bowen et al., 2021). In addition, some staff reported being able to speak other languages such as Polish, which they had used on occasion to support participants.

Disabled people

7.20. A small proportion of participants (4 per cent compared to an estimated 15 per cent[178] of all working adults in the UK) had a disability, and staff said this mainly included those with a mental health or learning disability. Staff were confident that they catered to the needs of those with a disability and this is supported by the results that showed that over half (53 per cent) of disabled participants improved their labour market position, compared to 44 per cent of participants who were not disabled, although this statistic should be treated with caution, given the small number of disabled participants (n=37). Examples of support included courses offered on a 'one to one' basis (when feasible), offering practical advice on how to access GP and mental health services and providing emotional support to participants; as stated by a staff member:

'If the foundations for that person [disabled participant] are not secure then they are not going to progress on the project, that's why we make sure they have the support they need.'

7.21. Mental health has been shown to contribute the most to increases in reported disability (DWP, 2021). Partners also reported an increase in mental health issues in recent years, especially amongst men, who had previously been less inclined to speak of their issues, as compared to women. Nevertheless, there was no evidence of any targeted approaches to recruiting disabled people for the project who, as stated above, represented a low proportion of participants.

Welsh language provision

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[178] Based on the estimation there are 29.5 million working adults in the UK (ONS, 2021a) and 4.4 million disabled people who are working in the UK (ONS, 2021b).

7.22. There had been no reported demand for Welsh language provision and only 2 per cent of participants reported being able to speak Welsh. All regions were able to cater for Welsh language provision (if requested) and worked in accordance with Welsh Language Standards expected in the public sector in Wales (Welsh Language Commissioner, 2015), including the production of bilingual promotional material.

7.23. As outlined in the interim report (Bowen et al., 2021) in Monmouthshire there were examples where some participants requested to learn Welsh and this had been supplied through their Adult and Community Learning provision. Moreover, incidental use of Welsh, such as saying 'bore da' and 'diolch' was encouraged amongst staff.

Childcare provision

7.24. During the assessment process, staff reported that they gave the option for childcare provision when needed and depending on their circumstances, participants were offered to be referred to other projects such as the PaCE project. The number who accessed childcare support through this project was low and mainly included administrative support (helping to organise) in increasing the hours of childcare that participants were already accessing. As reported by participants and staff, this was because participants were already in work and hence were generally accessing childcare provision with which they were satisfied. Moreover, the growth in e-learning provision meant courses were more flexible and participants found it easier to arrange their learning around caring duties.

Support for people at risk

7.25. MCC works closely with care leavers and young people who are not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) through the MCC Keeping in Touch Group, who work with Youth Offending services and support care leavers through the Corporate Parenting Network in Monmouthshire. In addition, MCC worked with ex-offenders through the probation service and prison work coaches at JCP and led the COMPASS project for young homeless people (Bowen et al., 2021)

> **Box 7.1 Aina's story: well-being support to obtain employment***
> Aina (not her real name) was looking to improve her job prospects as she currently worked in a job with few hours and low pay. However, she found it hard to

concentrate on completing a qualification that she needed, as she was extremely worried about her family who were living in another country which was at war. The mentor kept in regular contact with her, offering social support and it was agreed until she was in a more stable mental condition, she would complete a quicker and easier qualification, which would help her employment. In the meantime, the mentor also helped her contact the correct public authorities which were able to provide her with updates about her family. This eased her mind and she was able to complete the relevant qualifications and successfully gain a permanent contract in the public sector, that had longer hours, better pay and job security.

Some facts have been altered or generalised to protect the identity of the participant.

Sustainable development

The project's eco-code, resource efficiency, travel and sustainable travel

> **Commented [RB42]: Nigel:** Not accurate, we've not received this and it hasn't been claimed as achieved either.
>
> **Commented [RB43R42]:** Good point, sorry it was a mistake on our part. We deleted this and added that it has not been done below.

7.26. As previously highlighted (Bowen et al., 2021) the COVID-19 restrictions had prompted developments in resource efficiencies and reducing travel; these included:

- development of online training provision; and
- increasing support via phone, text and online platforms.

7.27. This resulted in staff and participants not having to travel so much, which saved on resources and time; as staff commented:

"I used to spend at least six to seven hours commuting during the working week. Now this time is spent helping others on phone or online.'

'Inevitably people don't always turn up to appointments and if you arrange to meet them and they didn't turn up it would have wasted a lot of work time, now if they don't answer an arranged phone call then the impact is far less detrimental.'

'In the past had to have a certain number of people attend to run a course and sometimes at the last minute participants pull out, but we still have to pay same amount and make a loss. Now if this happens, I just revoke the licence and the money for those who don't access it goes back in the pot.'

7.28. Although there were discussions prior to the COVID -19 pandemic regarding developing more online provision (such as e-learning licences), feedback indicated that it was unlikely that these would have been developed without the pandemic's influence. Encouragingly, staff highlighted how these online provisions were likely to be sustained and used by the beneficiary areas in the future.

7.29. The hub delivery model used in Cardiff and adopted in Newport during the project's lifetime meant that participants could access the project within local areas. As reported by participants, it was often within walking distance or one 'bus ride' away. NCC bus tokens were also distributed to access public transport. Moreover, an increasing amount of these buses are driven by an electric battery in Newport and Cardiff.

7.30. Staff reported on sustainable travel plans within their beneficiary areas, such as:

- funding public transport to access training in CCC and NCC;
- the bike scheme in CCC which provided access and encouraged use of bikes amongst staff; and
- staff hot desking in MCC to facilitate the balance of working at home and attending the office when needed.

7.31. Staff reported how they minimised the use of paper and ink, and recycled materials in line with the policies of their local authorities. Moreover, as highlighted in section 6, there was a drive in MCC to reduce the level of administration and associated use of resources. However, despite this, the project had not developed an eco-code.

Local supply chain development

7.32. Staff reported that local training providers, such as SFM training, ACT Training and local colleges, were mainly used to deliver courses. Nevertheless, there were examples of training providers from further afield being used when there was a lack of viable local options.

Tackling poverty and social exclusion

7.33. As anticipated by the project business plan, the results achieved by the project (essential skills, accredited qualifications, job search skills) had contributed to many[179] participants improving their employment situation either through working longer hours in a similar job role or improved employment in terms of earnings, steady working hours and job security (e.g. full-time contract) and/or conditions (e.g. paid annual leave).

7.34. More specifically, staff and participants reported that through the project support (also see section 5) there were many examples of participants:

- with moderate English language skills gaining more confidence and skills in their English language;
- gaining improved awareness of how the market worked (from accessing funding to training[180] to applying for jobs[181]);
- improving 'interview' and 'soft' skills;
- improving general confidence levels; and
- having an improved sense of well-being and less isolation.

Other activities

7.35. The project had used the barriers fund to help with travel costs of participants, such as covering the costs of taxis and public transport to access training, especially after COVID-19 lockdown restrictions eased.

7.36. Lower-level needs (such as higher than usual levels of anxiety) were addressed via comforting phone calls and, when restrictions relaxed, via face to face meetings. Staff highlighted that they were surprised by the levels of emotional support that some participants needed, especially as the project was targeting people who were already in employment. Participants were signposted to external services for specialised needs, such as NCC referring women to the NHS Activate Your Life course that helps people overcome mental health issues and MCC participants to MIND and Community Partnership Teams.

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[179] Exact number is not available.
[180] For example, some assumed they had to attend a university on a regular basis to gain a qualification which was not practical for them due to their work and caring commitments.
[181] For example, some assumed they needed certain qualifications for certain roles when in fact they did not and were able to apply for these jobs.

Commented [RB44]: Nigel: [regarding Peer support]This isn't a CCT case level indicator - we could ask for it to be included and could then be claimed

Commented [RB45R44]: Good point, I've transferred the most significant bit (mental health) under other activities - hope this is ok

Commented [RB46]: Nigel: Can you include some examples of the support provided by the barrier fund?

Commented [RB47R46]: Added, but we have very limited data on this.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)

7.37.   Table 7.1 below provides an indication of the project's contribution to the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015).

Table 7.1. Showing the relative contribution of the project to the seven well-being goals from the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) (Key: Green = strong, Amber = medium, Red = weak contribution)

Well-being goals	Key contributions
1. A prosperous Wales	- The project contributes to creating a skilled and well-educated population, able to find 'decent work' - Improving qualifications levels amongst participants is likely to increase productivity.
2. A resilient Wales	- The project's contribution to maintaining and enhancing a biodiverse natural environment has been minimal, although sustainable development activities of the project are likely to have made a small contribution to this.
3. A healthier Wales	- Increasing participants' skills and the quality of their employment can make important contributions to physical and mental health and well-being (What Works Wellbeing, 2017a). - The project helped participants' well-being during COVID-19 lockdowns
4. A more equal Wales	- The project helps people fulfil their potential, including people from minority ethnic groups and disabled people, who are at a higher risk of poverty and/or social exclusion (JRF, 2020) and more broadly, people of all ethnicities 'stuck' in poor work.
5. A Wales of cohesive communities	- By improving participants' employment and reducing poverty and social exclusion, the project makes an indirect contribution to creating safer and more viable communities and promoting community cohesion.
6. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	- The project's contribution to a society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts and sports and

	recreation is limited, although incidental Welsh is encouraged amongst some staff and there is bilingual promotion of the project and a bilingual offer of support if requested
5. A globally responsible Wales	- The project's commitment to considering the impact of decisions upon global well-being is minimal, beyond the commitment to environmental sustainability (discussed above). However, this is not a major focus of the project

8. Sustainability of the project

Introduction

8.1.   The project finishes in December 2022 and no more participants will be engaged after September 2022. Moreover, other ESF funded projects such as Journey2Work, which the beneficiaries also deliver together, will come to end by 2023. This section therefore explores the rationale and options for sustaining provision and learning from this project in the future.

8.2.   <mark>The data discussed in this section is drawn from two rounds of fieldwork and the desk based literature review.</mark>

Rationale for future provision

8.3.   Despite its weaknesses, and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project has so far helped 833 people gain qualifications. In doing so it has highlighted both employment and skills needs which were either unmet before the project and those needs which the project was unable to meet, and which the beneficiaries should aim to address in the future (see sections 4 and 5); these include:

- the gap in the market in terms of (i) support to help people escape 'in-work poverty' and (ii) progression options (through further training and skills) for participants who have achieved employment through other projects but want to improve their employment situation;
- demand for support for learning beyond level 2 for those in work, but who cannot access it through their employer or through PLAs; and
- demand from employers to work in partnership with the public sector to access training support.

8.4.   Moreover, during the delivery of this project and other ESF projects, the three beneficiaries have improved elements of their delivery and established a strong partnership which future initiatives could build upon.

Strategic fit with Welsh Government policies

8.5.   The Skills@Work model also fits well with the Welsh Government's recent
        Employability and Skills Plan (Welsh Government, 2022) that outlines the aims of:

- **tackling economic inequality,** including 'targeting those under-represented in
  the labour market, those in and out of work with long term health conditions, to
  find work and progress in employment' (p.13);

- **fair work for all,** including actions to 'support and encourage employers to
  create high quality employment, improve the offer to workers, champion fair
  employment practices, ensure the social value of investment and encourage the
  public sector to embed the priorities in workforce planning' (p.13); and

- **learning for life,** including actions to 'ensure educational inequalities narrow and
  standards rise, participation in the skills system is widened for disabled people
  and Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, whilst tackling low qualifications
  and increasing the mobility of workers' (p.13).

8.6.   More specifically, and relevant to Skills@Work, the plan sets out future actions to:

- '[19] improve involvement and funding of ethnic minority organisations to
  continually improve communication and awareness of support' (p.27). Given the
  Skills@Work project's success in engaging and supporting people from Black,
  Asian and minority ethnic groups (see section 7) the Welsh Government should
  be working with partners, such as Cardiff and Newport local authorities and their
  hub systems, on implementing this objective;

- '[30] continue to foster closer working relationships with local authorities to co-
  design a placed-based approach to economic development' (p.35);

- '[43] strengthen the role of the four Regional Skills Partnerships to broaden their
  influence and scope particularly with the public bodies and local authorities'
  (p.50)

- '[45] expand Personal Learning Accounts to support workers to upskill or reskill
  to access a wider range of job opportunities with higher pay' (p.50). The project
  has played its part in referring and raising awareness of these accounts (see
  section 4) and a future project could consider doing the same;

- '[48] review adult education and lifelong learning to increase the number of
  adults learning in Wales by improving quality and access to skills based, formal,
  and informal adult learning and support progression for learners' (p.51);

- '[49] Explore opportunities for financial and non-financial incentives to encourage wider participation in learning, and to encourage more people to stay in Wales or return to Wales to work after study' (p.51).

Steps taken in terms of future projects

8.7. Torfaen have successfully bid for the Community Renewal Fund pilot which provides an entry opportunity into the UK shared prosperity fund on behalf of the Cardiff Capital Region which includes Cardiff, Monmouthshire and Newport. The pilot is entitled Connect, Engage, Listen and Transform (CELT) and it aims to enhance the employability and skills offer in the region by developing the triage system to access all employment and skills services within local authorities. It also provides additional well-being and support resources (Monmouthshire, 2021). In MCC, similar to Skills@Work, re-training and upskilling is part of their future vision for their Employment and Skills service and therefore if the pilot resulted in successful access to the Shared Prosperity Fund it is likely to help sustain elements of the project for the future.

8.8. Options to tender for the Shared Prosperity Fund and other funding opportunities were being explored by NCC, although nothing firm had been established yet as there were still many factors to consider. Notwithstanding this, it was noted that it is likely there will be some form of an employment support bid (similar to Journey2Work) with an upskilling element added on to employment support which could provide greater scope.

8.9. If funding applications are unsuccessful, consideration could be given to the beneficiaries funding (i.e. core funding) a similar project through, for example, pooling resources and collaboration. Although staff commented that it was likely there will be less funding (in real terms) for local authorities in the foreseeable future, such an intervention would be likely to be on a considerably smaller scale. On the positive side, as highlighted in section 5, there could be ways to reduce costs, such as offering support to the many participants who only needed administrative assistance to access courses, developing IT access to such courses (e.g. an app) and sharing the costs with employers.

8.10. As highlighted by partners, future projects could collaborate with other public sector initiatives such as the NHS Step into Work programme (currently based in Betsi Cadwaladr) which may expand to other health boards.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

Performance in relation to engagements[182]

9.1. The project is on target in terms of the engagement of men and women who have a qualification[183]. The project is also on target in terms of the engagement of men without a qualification[184], however, it is considerably below target in terms of the engagement of women without a qualification.

9.2. In assessing performance, it is important to bear in mind that before the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020) the project was on target in terms of the engagement of participants (including women), and the pandemic created substantial challenges for the project. Moreover, both before and after the pandemic, engagements have differed between beneficiary areas with, for example, MCC over-performing in terms of engaging men and women with qualifications and CCC considerably over-performing in terms of engaging men without qualifications.

Strengths, weaknesses and barriers in terms of engagements

9.3. Two factors supported engagements across the three beneficiary areas:

- as local authorities, beneficiaries delivered employment support projects such as Journey2Work, CfW+ and Inspire2Work, which meant many participants from these projects could readily access Skills@Work, if and when they wanted to improve their employment situation; and
- all beneficiaries had some success in engagements, most notably before the COVID-19 pandemic, using traditional promotional methods such as flyers, posters and attendance at events such as career fairs.

    In addition, all beneficiary areas referred people to other projects and opportunities, such as PLAs, to access higher level qualifications.

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[182] In terms of achievement of engagement and outcome targets, the project allows a 15 per cent variation. Therefore, if the engagements levels are within 85 per cent to 115 per cent of the target, then they are deemed to have been met.
[183] For the purposes of the project this is defined as having qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education.
[184] For the purposes of the project this is defined as having no formal qualifications.

9.4. Other methods used to engage participants on the project varied in effectiveness in different beneficiary areas, depending on their individual strengths and weaknesses and external factors in those areas (discussed further below).

9.5. CCC was successful in recruiting participants. This reflected a number of factors including: their established network of neighbourhood hubs throughout the authority, which had a good geographic spread across the city and had high footfall; their centralised into work advice service (which included many employment support projects) and website, which many people accessed; referrals from JCP, which had increased in recent months; and through word of mouth recommendations, which were strong amongst Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, which accounted for around half of all their participants. In addition, CCC responded well to the market, for example by offering support towards gaining HGV licences, which many taxi drivers in the area were showing an interest in pursuing.

9.6. After a slow start due to issues with the initial management structure, which was successfully amended, engagements in Monmouthshire improved considerably. MCC established strong referral links with JCP, which accounted for most of their referrals. This was facilitated by MCC streamlining their referral systems. After the impact of COVID-19 the project developed their online marketing, which improved considerably during the project's lifetime. The project had also benefitted from word of mouth recommendations and referrals from families and friends.

9.7. Engagements in Newport started strong, but gradually faltered. They were hampered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the process of establishing a neighbourhood hub system which disrupted the centralised delivery model that staff were used to (based in the city centre) and which took more time than anticipated to embed effectively. In addition, social media marketing was restricted throughout the county (to ensure all posts are appropriate), resulting in less effective online marketing (although still active). Notwithstanding this, NCC engagements amongst those with qualifications were not far from the target (around 75 per cent of the target for both men and women). However overall, NCC had not performed as well as the other two beneficiary areas.

The impact of COVID-19

9.8. As outlined above, there was a decline in engagement rates after the COVID-19 pandemic[185]. Staff reflected that Skills@Work was hit more than other ESF projects they delivered, as it was comparatively new and had less time to establish itself and build up a 'buffer' of engagements to 'ride the storm', as a project manager put it. Many reasons why the COVID-19 pandemic had such a negative impact were shared; they included:

- training providers becoming either inactive or less active, meaning the project could not offer courses to participants and when courses re-opened there were longer waiting lists;
- the time needed to develop online provision;
- practical difficulties with assessment as face to face contact was limited;
- potential participants, and particularly women, experiencing additional demands upon their time, as, for example, their children were not in school, meaning that they were less likely to engage; and
- difficulties the project staff experienced in planning ahead and the lack of continuity, due to the 'stop start' nature of government restrictions.

9.9. Overall, staff, participants and partners felt the project had responded well to the pandemic; for example, they cited the development of their online offer and providing emotional support to participants who needed it. However, some staff and partners indicated that, as large public organisations (in the context of Wales), beneficiaries' speed and flexibility to respond was restricted by tight protocols and guidelines. Some staff and partners felt smaller third sector bodies had 'greater freedom' to respond within communities during the pandemic.

Engagements of women

9.10. The project as a whole struggled to recruit as many women as men. Even though engagement levels were stronger before the COVID-19 pandemic, there is still a good chance that the project would not have been on target in terms of engaging

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[185] Most notably in Cardiff and Newport. There was less of an impact in Monmouthshire as managerial structural changes had improved the performance of MCC during this period and they were starting from a lower baseline (i.e. they were not performing well before the pandemic).

women with no qualifications, even if the pandemic had not happened. This is difficult to assess though, as it is likely that engagement levels would have been somewhat higher because, as outlined above, the COVID-19 pandemic placed greater time pressures on women (and is likely to have had a greater impact upon their capability and motivation to join the project). It is also notable that projects performance in terms of the engagement of women improved considerably towards the later stages of the project and further exploring why this was the case will be important in informing future projects.

9.11. Project staff observed that other ESF projects delivered in the area, such as Journey2Work and Inspire2Achieve had also struggled to recruit women. Although no definitive reason was presented for this, staff did report that it had been easier to deliver courses which were more popular amongst men, such as courses around security[186]. Moreover, many participants were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (especially in Cardiff and Newport) and most of these tended to be men (75 per cent of participants from this group were male). This reflects a national trend, with a large gap in employment for men and women from some (but not all) minority ethnic groups.

9.12. The male and female disparity could also be due to differences in the referral routes used by the beneficiaries. In Monmouthshire, where more women were engaged, staff reported that this was due to JCP referring more women than men and, to a lesser degree, engagement via online social groups (whose members were predominately women). As previously stated, CCC and NCC were less reliant on the JCP for referrals, although there is also likely to be local differences between JCPs and who they refer.

9.13. Notwithstanding the contextual issues described above, which hampered the project, the gender disparity in engagements was a weakness of the project.

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[186] As stated in section 7 on Cross Cutting Themes the project aimed to promote non-traditional roles but overall, participants still showed an interest in traditional roles based on gender.

Engagements of people with no qualifications

9.14. Apart from CCC, the project struggled to recruit as many participants with no qualifications as expected. Staff from MCC reported that they felt they had over-estimated the demand amongst this cohort, especially when considering the relatively low proportion of people who had no qualifications in the county. There was no specific feedback collected on why NCC struggled with this cohort, other than general barriers and recruitment issues already highlighted above.

Performance in relation to results

9.15. Overall, the project struggled to meet its targets for results. The project is on target in terms of results for men without qualifications, however, it is not on target for women without qualifications and for men and women with qualifications.

9.16. In assessing performance, it is important to bear in mind that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was on target in terms of results for men with qualifications but had always struggled with results amongst women. Moreover, results amongst the beneficiaries differed. MCC are over target for results amongst men and women with qualifications and CCC are over target in terms of results for men without qualifications.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

9.17. It is reasonable to assume that the project would currently have been on target in terms of results for men with qualifications, were it not for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, given that it is currently only 6 percentage points below its target (achieving 79 per cent of its target). Indeed, with the recent easing of restrictions there is a good chance that the project will meet this target before it ends (for men with qualifications). However, this is unlikely to be the case amongst women participants (both those with and without qualifications), given the extent of the deficit.

9.18. In part the failure to achieve targets, particularly for women, reflects weakness in engagements, but this has been compounded by the lower than anticipated conversion rate from engagements to results; for example, as reported, engagement of men with qualifications is on target (at 92 per cent) but the project was still under

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target in terms of results amongst this cohort. Whilst undoubtably COVID-19 stifled the conversion rates, most notably due to restrictions to training provision and the lack of face to face support, even before the pandemic the conversion rates were not as high as expected. Given this, future projects should be more realistic regarding the expected conversion rate from engagement to results.

9.19. Feedback from staff and participants indicated that many participants had situational and motivational barriers, most notably not having enough 'time' to complete courses due to, for example, having caring responsibilities whilst also being in full-time employment. Motivation could sometimes be lacking as there was no 'urgency' amongst some participants to improve their situation; they saw this as a more long-term goal they could re-visit (bearing in mind they were already in employment). There was also an indication that not completing was more common and easier for those on online courses, compared to those on face to face or blended courses, due to the lower levels of social contact involved.

9.20. Despite this, all participants (interviewed for the evaluation) were universally positive about the support with which they were provided, and the project should be commended for this; they described how frontline staff provided:

- easy access to courses which they would not have been able to afford (absent support from the project) and/or did not know were available;
- useful practical support with employability skills such as interview skills, help with CVs, job applications and job searches;
- emotional support, such as being available on the phone (during the COVID-19 pandemic) to discuss personal concerns; and
- support to develop basic skills around literacy and oracy.

9.21. Participants described the positive impact that the project had upon their lives, most notably in terms of their confidence and other soft skills, knowledge of the job market and training provision and improved employment (more stable work, better pay, longer hours, more interesting work). To a lesser extent, the project had successfully supported participants who were struggling with low level mental health issues (such as anxiety) and basic skills deficiencies, to gain skills and improve their employment situations. There were also examples of participants passing on the benefits of the

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projects to members of their family, such as participants encouraging their children to commit to education and training.

9.22. In contrast though, some staff reported that many participants did not need much support to gain the outcome they were looking for; for example, it was reported that many just needed the funding and access to the course that they desired in order to gain the qualification. Providing this kind of support was, in essence, an administrative task which did not require any added mentoring type skills. This suggests the potential for a different type of model, which may help beneficiaries adjust to what are expected to be real terms cuts in local authority budgets in the future. Catering for this cohort of participants who only need limited support could be feasible on a lower budget and those who needed greater support could be referred to projects that cater for this (if available).

Project management

9.23. Staff echoed the positive feedback from participants interviewed for the evaluation. They reported that the project was effective and made a real difference to participants' lives. Although overall, staff felt the project was well-managed (discussed below) there was an indication that the performance of the project would have benefitted from a whole project-based approach to areas of delivery, such as beneficiaries sharing training providers for popular courses and more project staff working outside the traditional working week to support participants.

Assessment and monitoring processes

9.24. Overall, participants praised the assessment process, describing it as informal (in a positive sense) and efficient and none of the participants interviewed could highlight any ways the process could be improved. Assessment tools such as Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST) to measure literacy and oracy skills and a customised STAR assessment that collected data on key skills around employment[187] were used on the project. However, use was lower than originally planned, mainly due to staff's judgement that participants did not need the assessment because their basic skills

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[187] Such as managing money, work experience, applying for jobs, CV and interview skills.

were 'good enough' and the COVID-19 pandemic limiting face to face contact, which made it difficult to use the tools properly.

9.25. All staff were complimentary of the Community Evaluation and Monitoring Project (CEMP)[188] system, describing it as user friendly and providing a useful 'one stop shop' for monitoring information. Staff who had experience of working on previous ESF projects preferred it to systems they had previously used. Despite this, CEMP cannot be used for other future operations because it is not a licenced product (it was built from scratch for the ESF projects) meaning there are issues around licencing its use. Nevertheless, future projects could learn from the strengths of the CEMP system.

9.26. The assessment and monitoring process in all beneficiary areas followed a similar pattern, however there were differences which future projects could learn from. In Cardiff, participants were expected to complete an accredited course before having access to bespoke courses and support, which helped to demonstrate participants' commitment to the project and ensure they gained a valuable qualification. In Monmouthshire, the paperwork was successfully streamlined (e.g. combining referral and enrolment forms into one) which saved time and resources.

Operational management

9.27. Staff were broadly positive regarding the management of the project. In terms of management from the central team, it was reported to have provided good guidance, responded well to queries, data health checks were well organised and the operational managers themselves felt well supported. Overall, a devolved approach was taken to the management of the project, with beneficiary areas responsible for managing their own areas. On the one hand this provided freedom to respond to local issues within their authorities but there was evidence of issues and gaps which were not addressed. This included MCC's underperformance in the first 15 months of the project, which may have benefitted from a stronger challenge from the central team.

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[188] I.e., An online platform to access to participants' database (within chosen timeline), performance data, summary of characteristics of participants, CCT evidence, guidance documents, minutes from meetings, health check data and quarterly claim documents.

9.28. Frontline staff were very positive regarding how they were managed, and overall staff felt they were well trained and supported. Management were also very complimentary of the skills and dedication of the frontline staff and this was supported by comments from participants interviewed for the study. Although there had been issues with the implementation of the neighbourhood model in NCC, this re-structuring was beyond the control of their project manager[189]; the system had been shown to work in CCC and the manager had taken steps to alleviate the impact of the change. As mentioned above, MCC was initially managed by Adult and Community Learning department which was reported to have insufficient time to manage it effectively. In response, action was taken by MCC and the project was transferred to the Employment and Skills department which resulted in a step change and improved performance. There were no reported weaknesses in terms of how CCC was managed.

The Cross Cutting Themes

9.29. The project undertook many activities to address the Cross Cutting Themes. A key strength of the project was the high proportion (compared to the wider population) of participants engaged from minority ethnic groups and while the project struggled to recruit women it is also notable that women from minority ethnic groups achieved better results than those who were not. The neighbourhood hubs system in Cardiff and Newport covered areas where there were high populations of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and participants reported that the high proportion of people from minority ethnic groups situated around these hubs contributed to the welcoming atmosphere of the project. In addition, the project had some frontline staff that could speak other languages and word of mouth recommendations and referrals amongst this cohort encouraged participation.

9.30. Resource efficiency, travel and sustainable travel are the indicators in which the project reported most activities, such as funding to access public transport for participants and staff hot desking to minimise travel.

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[189] The decision was made on a higher level within the local authority.

9.31. Despite the proportion of disabled people engaged being low (compared to the working age population) results amongst disabled participants were better than the project average.

9.32. Efforts were made to promote non-traditional job roles amongst women and men and for women to pursue STEM courses; however, bar a few examples, the project struggled to make an impact in this area. The broader failure to recruit women will also have contributed to this.

The gap in the market for employment support and future opportunities

9.33. The evidence gathered for this evaluation, including the literature reviewed, evidence of project effectiveness and interviews with staff, partners and participants, identifies a clear need for an in-work support project like Skills@Work; for example:

- staff, partners and participants reported on the high levels of in-work poverty, and this is supported by the wider literature reviewed for this evaluation; and
- staff and partners also reported on more demanding recruitment processes by employers, which meant people who were looking for new employment opportunities (as many of the participants were) needed training and support (such as help with interview skills).

9.34. The evidence from interviews with staff, partners and participants also identifies a gap in the market for an 'up-skilling' project such as Skills@Work, with no direct competition from other initiatives.

9.35. Looking to the future, staff interviewed for this evaluation highlighted that (in their view) such a project would prove even more popular if it:

- catered for people who needed qualifications above level 2;
- worked in direct partnership with employers to provide training to staff (although this would risk subsidising training which employers might be expected to pay for themselves); and
- provided funding for more expensive courses (e.g. courses which cost over £500).

9.36. The intervention offered by the project and its successes (discussed below) fit well with the Welsh Government's Employability and Skills Plan (Welsh Government, 2022) in terms of its future action to improve involvement and funding towards Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, closer partnership working between local authorities, improving quality and access to skills and promoting wider participation in learning.

Recommendations

9.37. In line with the findings of this report, all recommendations listed below should be considered by the beneficiaries.

Recommendation 1. Explore funding and collaborative models to deliver a similar project in the future, including:

- **Identifying lessons learned** from Community Renewal Fund pilot (CELT)[190] that provides an entry opportunity into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- **Collaborating on accessing funding streams** (such as the Shared Prosperity Fund) to deliver a similar project model in the future.
- **Adding the 'upskilling' element of the project** (and consider lessons learned, see recommendation 2) to future bids for planned employment support-based interventions[191].
- **Considering developing a lower cost upskilling model** that targets people with low level support needs (only needing administrative support to access courses) and that operates on more of a brokerage than support model. While cheaper and potentially more affordable, this model would limit the number and range of potential beneficiaries. Even if this is not possible, beneficiaries should continue to refer people who want to upskill (for example, through local authority community hubs) to external services such as PLAs and strengthen relationships with local colleges that deliver such training.

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[190]This pilot aims to enhance the employability and skills offer in the Cardiff Capital Region (this is one of the project's beneficiaries) by developing the triage system to access all employment and skills services within local authorities. This provides an entry opportunity into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
[191]191 For example, beneficiaries were considering a bid for an employment support type intervention similar to Journey2Work.

- **Exploring the feasibility of gaining funding for a project that could cater for more expensive courses** (in addition to the ones covered in this project).
- **Working in partnership with employers, public sector (e.g. NHS) and the third sector to deliver a training programme** for employees in need of upskilling.

Recommendation 2: Future beneficiary projects should consider lessons learned (including good practice) in this project, including:
- **greater scrutiny when forecasting expected recruitment levels** and subsequent conversion rates into outcomes given, for example, local demographics, qualification rates amongst local populations, performance of similar projects, established referral routes and management capacity/structures.
- **Building on the strengths identified on this project,** such as establishing an effective database like CEMP; streamlining administrative systems, offering blended learning provision (online and face to face) and requiring participants to complete standard accredited courses before offering wider options of courses (in order to test their commitment).
- **Planning how to address weaknesses identified on this project**, such as the failure to develop initiatives to engage women and enable participants to overcome barriers that depressed the conversion rate of engagements to outcomes.

Recommendation 3: sharing good practice around engagement and support for participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups with partners and other local authorities and projects in Wales.

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Appendix 1. Research questions

Evaluation research questions in relation to the core areas of management and implementation, delivery of operation, outcomes and impact of the operation, and contribution to cross cutting themes:

Management and implementation
- To what extent has the operation implemented the aims, objectives and practices set out in the business plan?
- How well has the operation been managed in meeting the targets and satisfying ESF requirements?
- How are the monitoring systems being used to help manage the operation?

Delivery of operation
- What barriers exist which prevent participants increasing their skill levels?
- What support was provided across the regional operation to address participant needs? Who provided this support and was it appropriate to meet the needs of the provisions?
- How is the regional operation progressing against approved targets? Were there any differences in results and practices between different populations? What are the reasons for this?
- To what extent have other regional and national programmes targeting those in the workforce with no or low skills affected the operation's ability to recruit and support participants?

Outcomes and impact of the operation
- To what extent did the regional operation succeed in supporting participants to increase skill levels, sustain employment and increase earnings potential?
- How effective were the different interventions at supporting participants to increase skill levels, sustain employment and increase earnings potential? Were some forms of support more effective? What are the reasons for any variation in performance?
- is it possible to assess whether these interventions represent value for money against the option of doing nothing for these participants?

- to what extent were those participants who were unable to progress able to benefit from the support provided by the operation?
- Are there any appreciable differences between those who received the intervention and those who did not in terms of their engagement, progress towards increasing skill levels, sustaining employment and increasing earning potential (dependent upon identification of comparator group)?

Contribution to Cross Cutting Themes (case level indicators)

- Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming:
- Positive action measures – women
- Positive action measures – Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups
- Positive action measures – disabled people
- Positive action measures – other (transport/clothing costs)
- Occupational segregation activity
- Female participation in STEM
- Activity supporting speakers of the Welsh language
- Childcare provision
- Sustainable Development:
- Develop an Eco Code
- Resource efficiency measures
- Develop an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives

- Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion:
- Mentoring/advocacy activity
- General:
- Developing / engaging CCT champions
- Activity supporting CCT indicators in priorities / objectives where the indicators are not present

- What contribution has been made in addressing the CCTs agreed with WEFO?
- How has the operation performed against the delivery of CCT aims, objectives and commitments, as well as CCT related indicators, including what worked well/what did not work, problems identified and how these were addressed?

- How effective has the operation been in responding to the needs and challenges of supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic, disabled and LGBTQ people?
- How, and to what extent, has the operation provided opportunities for participants to develop skills and access opportunities that challenge stereotypical employment opportunities?
- How, and to what extent, has the operation provided opportunities for participants to develop and use their Welsh language skills in the workplace?
- How has the operation contributed to the goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act?

Achievements and sustainability

- What good practice and innovative interventions did the Skills@Work operation deliver to support those in the workforce with no or low skills to increase their skill level, sustain employment and increase earnings potential?
- Many participants derived significant benefit from Skills@Work but were not able to achieve one of the indicators. Were these benefits adequately recorded and how should they be recognised as a contribution towards the success of the operation?
- How did the support provided by Skills@Work compare with that provided by other regional and national programmes targeting those in the workforce with no or low skills?
- How should any future support for those in the workforce with no or low skills be delivered post December 2022 and how should it be funded?

Appendix 2. Project data used for the evaluation

Table 7. Relevant data recorded on key project plans and documents.

Type of data relevant to the evaluation		Business Plan Re-evaluation	Project guidance docs	Quarterly reports	Progress data (outcomes)	Participants' characteristics (engagements)*	Case studies	Evidence on Cross Cutting Themes
Context and how the project plans to work and is monitored	Aims and objectives	√	√					
	How the project works (including logic model)	√	√					
	Planned outputs /outcomes	√	√					
	Policies	√	√					
	Background research the project drew upon	√						
	Contribution to other initiatives	√						
	Monitoring and evaluation plans	√	√					
	Risk management (including risk register)	√	√					
	SWOT analysis	√						
	Finance plan and cost benefit analyses	√						
	Outputs and outcomes			√	√			

Performance and impact data	Participants' characteristics in relation to CCT						√		√
	Effectiveness of operations			√	√	√	√		
	Good practice			√				√	√
	CCT activities			√	√	√			√
Future planning	Long term sustainability plans	√							

The CEMP database provides up-to-date data on number and characteristics (e.g. Black Asian and minority ethnic, gender, age) of participants.

Appendix 3. Skills@Work plain language information sheet and privacy notice

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in the evaluation of Skills@Work. Before you decide whether to take part or not, please read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you.

What is the evaluation?

The evaluation aims to understand how Skills@Work operates, how effective it has been and to help inform any improvements that could be made. It started in January 2021 and is due to end in June 2022.

Who is funding and undertaking the evaluation?

This evaluation is being undertaken by People and Work, a voluntary sector organisation based in Cardiff, and has been commissioned by Newport City Council who lead and manage Skills@Work. The project itself is funded by the European Social Fund. The lead researcher is Dr Duncan Holtom, Head of Research at People and Work.

Why have I been chosen?

We are keen to talk to you because you are involved in and have experience of Skills@Work; for example, because you are involved on planning or delivering the project or because you have been supported by the project.

Do I have to take part?

No. It will not cause you any harm should you choose not to participate, and you can withdraw your consent at any stage.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to take part, you will be contacted by a member of the People and Work evaluation team who will discuss how you can take part. This would usually involve arranging to interview you at a time that is convenient for you. Due to COVID-19 this would usually be by phone or video call (e.g. Zoom or MS Teams). The interview is likely to last around 30-40 minutes.

How will the information I provide be used?

We will need your name and contact details, such as phone number, so that we can contact you (this 'personal information' will be covered by the General Data Protection Regulation). We will also collect information about your experiences and views. Any information you provide may be shared and discussed with other members of the research team. Reports will be submitted to Newport City Council and they could potentially be published by Newport City Council and/or the Welsh European Funding Office.

This information is being collected and used with your agreement (your consent). This is the legal basis on which we will collect and use your information. If you choose not to, we will not collect or use your information.

Will my contribution to this study be kept confidential?

Yes. All information which you provide will be kept anonymous (subject to legal requirements, such as a requirement to share information to safeguard and protect vulnerable children and adults). Reports will not identify you or your organisation.

All data, such as notes from interviews, will be stored securely and kept for no more than three months after the end of the review before being destroyed.

Are there are any risks if I take part?

No specific risks associated with participation in the study have been identified.

How can I find out more information?

If you would like more information about the evaluation, please contact Duncan Holtom: email Duncan.Holtom@peopleandwork.org.uk - tel: 029 2048 8536.

If you have any questions for Newport City Council, who commissioned and fund this study, you can contact Andrew Smailes – email: Andrew.Smailes@newport.gov.uk.

What rights do I have?

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) covers the collection and use of 'personal data', such as your name and contact details (personal data includes 'any information relating to an identifiable person who can be directly or indirectly identified by reference to an identifier'). The GDPR gives you the following rights in relation to the personal data you provide as part of this research:

• the right of access (the right to request a copy of your own data);
• the right of rectification (the right to correct incorrect information);
• the right to object to or restrict processing (or use) of your data;
• the right to erasure (to have your personal data destroyed/deleted); and
• the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's office.

For more information on how your information is used, how we maintain the security of your information, and how you can exercise your rights in relation to the information we hold on you, please contact our data protection officer Ann Churcher at: Admin@peopleandwork.org.uk

If you would like to make a complaint about the way we have used your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's office at: casework@ico.org.uk - tel: 029 2067 8400 or 0303 123 1113.

Thank you.

Appendix 4. Skills@Work interview schedule for managers and engagement and support officers[192] (project staff)

Introduction

Have you received and understood the Plain Language Information Sheet and Privacy Notice, explaining your rights under the General Data Protection Regulation (GPDR)? Do you have any questions? Are you happy to continue with the interview? If you don't want to answer a question or choose not to continue the interview at any point, that's fine.

Moreover, as this schedule covers stakeholders in different roles, some questions may not be as relevant to your role, please just let me know when this the case and I'll move on to the next question.

Thank you.

Interviewees' aide-mémoire

Interviews are vital to help us understand what the project did, and to identify 'what works and for whom…how interventions work and why they work'; *and also how the project could be improved, given the context for the project. Interviewers should therefore encourage interviewees to:*

- *talk through each stage of their work (**what** they do, **how** they do it, **who** they do it with and also, where relevant, **when** they do it); and*
- *encourage them to reflect on **how well the project works** (or not) i.e. does their work for the project generate the intended changes/outcomes for different groups of participants/SMEs? And also **why they work** (or not) given the **context** for the project, and **how they could be improved**?*
- *as the final round of interviews, focus in particular upon what has been **learnt**.*

The questions in the schedule should help guide you in this but are not intended as a script and you should use your best judgment to decide which questions to ask and which to omit, given the purpose of the interview (outlined above).

Context

1. **Has your role changed since we spoke during the first phase? If yes, please describe how it has changed? [if new staff member] Can you please briefly describe your role within the project?**

2. **Since we last spoke (Spring 2021) or within the last year has there been any significant changes in the context which the project operates in? [if yes] what impact have they had upon the project and how has the project responded? e.g.**
   - Changes in employment/ growth in job vacancies in certain sectors
   - Changes in terms of the impact of COVID-19 (fewer restrictions)
   - Changes in Welsh Government or DWP (JCP) policy

The project: engagement and assessment

3. **What's worked and what didn't work so well in terms of recruitment (engagements)?**

   - *How well has the local authority met its recruitment targets?*
   - *How has the project responded to areas in which it has previously struggled (i.e. participants with no qualification, women, disabled people)?*
   - *How is the project marketed / promoted? How well is the project marketed / promoted?*
   - *How has the relationship with partners been maintained? And have new partnerships been formed in the last year?*
   - *How does the project work with employers (within the remit of the project)? Has this changed over time?*

- *Has COVID-19 continued to have an impact on recruitment? And how has this been managed?*
- *Does the project face any 'competition' from other projects?*
- *Are there any other barriers to recruitment? And if yes, how has the project tried to overcome these barriers?*

4. **What's worked and what didn't work so well in terms of registering and assessing participants?**
   - *Have the needs and aspirations participants changed much over the last year?*
   - *Have the ways participants are registered and assessed changed much over the last year?*
   - *Are benefits such as 'soft skills' or other outcomes beyond the expected core outcomes been recorded? If yes, how?*
   - *With the benefit of hindsight, would you do anything differently, if you were starting again?*
   - *What are the key lessons you have learnt?*

The project: support and outcomes

5. **What worked well and what didn't work so well in terms of supporting participants to gain qualifications and relevant skills?**

   - *Has the training programmes integrated and raised awareness of sustainable development?*
   - *How effective are staff at addressing participants' needs and aspirations?*
   - *Is the training and support enough?*
   - *Do staff have the time and skills needed?*
   - *Has COVID-19 continued to have an impact on support and outcomes? If yes, how?*
   - *With the benefit of hindsight, would you do anything differently, if you were starting again?*
   - *What are the key lessons you have learnt?*

6. **How successfully has project activities led to outcomes[193] for participants? Has it improved since we last spoke or in the last year? Have there been any unexpected outcomes? Challenges?**

   - *The project has struggled to convert engagements into outcomes (with exception of Monmouthshire County Councill (MCC). What do you think has caused this? Has this been addressed? If yes, how? In MCC (if conversion rates remain high) what do you think has helped?*
   - *Is there evidence or examples of participants who were unable to gain outcomes but had gained something from the experience (e.g. soft skills)?*
   - *If relevant, how does the project compare with other similar projects you have worked on?*

7. **[If not answered] Is there any emerging evidence that the outcomes have led to other or longer-term outcomes? If yes, why do you think it worked? If no, why not?**

8. **[if not answered] Do you have suggestions (even if not currently needed) on how support and / or outcomes could be improved?**

Management of the operation

9. **How well do you feel the programme has been managed? [central team and / or within local authority, e.g. operational managers, depending on interviewee].**

   - *What has worked well? What has not worked well?*
   - *How well have the local authorities worked with each other?*
   - *[If not answered already] How well has the operation been managed in meeting the targets and satisfying ESF requirements?*

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[193] E.g. Qualification gained upon leaving, improved labour market situation upon leaving (e.g. another/additional job, improve career and earning potential), entering education/training upon leaving, work relevant certification upon leaving, training in maths, STEM and increase in hours worked upon leaving.

- *Planning around COVID-19?*
- *Any suggestions for improvements in terms of how things are managed?*
- **How effectively has data been collected and used to monitor and manage the project?**
- **How are the monitoring systems being used to help manage the operation?**

Reflections and lessons learned

10. **Are there examples of good practice or innovation that you think are important? Why?**
    - What does this mean for future operations in this area?
    - How did the support provided by Skills@Work compare with that provided by other regional and national programmes targeting those in the workforce with no or low skills?

11. **Do you think there is a need for interventions (like Skills@Work) to support those in the workforce with no or low skills to increase their skill level, sustain employment & increase earnings such as project in the future? [If yes] why?**
    - [If yes] How could and should a future project build upon the strengths and lessons learned from Skills@Work?
    - what funding options are available for such a project?

12. **Do you think the project offers good value for money? If yes, why?**
    - *How cost efficient has the process been? Could it be improved?*
    - *Is the project likely to generate savings for other public services? How and why? (e.g. decrease universal credit take up)*

Cross Cutting Themes and the Well-being of Future Generations Act

13. **Can you please describe how the project activities relate or contribute to the Cross Cutting Theme (CCT) case level indicators listed below.**

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- **Occupational Segregation**
  - Have participants been provided opportunities to develop skills and access opportunities that challenge stereotypical employment opportunities?
- **Female participation into STEM** *e.g. training and supporting women into jobs in services such as IT and other science based professions.*
- **Women** *e.g staff training, help women access health/social services and public services, marketing material targeting women.*
- **Childcare provision** *e.g. facilitate access to convenient child care (free or affordable).*
- **Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups**
  - how effective has project been in responding to the needs and challenges of supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups?
- **Disabled people**
  - how effective has project been in responding to the needs and challenges of supporting disabled people?
- **LGBTQ**
  - how effective has project been in responding to the needs and challenges of supporting LGBTQ people?
- **Activities supporting speakers of the Welsh language (participants and staff)**
  - has the project provided opportunities for participants to develop and use their Welsh language skills in the workplace?
- **Mentoring / advocacy activity** *e.g. extra mentoring activities (beyond the core offer from the project) such as mentoring accessed via third sector like MIND and public services such as the NHS and project staff doing 'extra' mentoring.*
- **Development of an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives** *e.g. that encourages walking, biking to work and creating a list of public transport options for staff.*
- **Resource efficiency measures** *e.g. activities to improve energy efficiency, re-use, recycle and good waste management.*

- **Developing / engaging CCT champions** *i.e. beyond the designated CCT champion for the whole project, such as those that cover specific themes or related areas (e.g. Sustainability champion and LGBTQ champion).*
- **Develop an Eco-code** [only ask if not noted e.g. via progress reports].
- **Other activities** *e.g. Barriers Fund such as transport / clothing costs.*
- **Activity supporting CCT indicators (in Priorities / Objectives where the indicators aren't present)**

14. **What contribution does the project make to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act goals?**

   The 7 Goals:
   - **A prosperous Wales:** contributes to an innovative and prosperous low carbon society
   - **A resilient Wales:** contributes to enhancing biodiversity and the natural environment
   - **A healthier Wales:** contributes towards improving people's mental and physical health
   - **A more equal Wales:** contributes to helping people fulfil their potential regardless of their background or circumstance
   - **A Wales of cohesive communities**: contributes to active, viable, safe and well-connected communities
   - **A globally responsible Wales:** economic, social, environmental and cultural improvements that makes a positive contribution to global wellbeing
   - **Vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language:** promote and protects culture heritage and the Welsh language.

Close

15. **Is there anything else that we have not talked about that you think is important?**

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16. Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix 5. Skills@Work interview schedule for participants[194]

Introduction

Have you received and understood the Information sheet and Privacy Notice? Do you have any questions? Are you happy to continue with the interview? Do you have any questions? If you don't want to answer a question or choose not to continue the interview at any point, that's fine.

Thank you

Note:

- Ensure participant is sent or given a 20-pound e-voucher at the end of the interview.

Interviewees' aide-mémoire

Interviews are vital to help us understand what the project did, and to identify 'what works and for whom…how interventions work and why they work'; *and also how the project could be improved, given the context for the project. Interviewers should therefore encourage interviewees to:*

- *talk through each stage of their experience (****what*** *they do,* ***how*** *they do it,* ***who*** *they do it with and also, where relevant,* ***when*** *they do it); and*
- *encourage them to reflect on* ***how well the project works*** *(or not) i.e. did the project help them achieve their aspiration? And also* ***why it works*** *(or not) given the* ***context*** *of their situation, and* ***how it could be improved****?*

The questions in the schedule should help guide you in this but are not intended as a script and you should use your best judgment to decide which questions to ask and which to omit, given the purpose of the interview (outlined above).

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[194] Note: this interview schedule has already been used to interview some participants.

Engagement and barriers

1. **Can you please tell me how you first heard about or got in contact with Skills@Work (In-Work support project)?** E.g.
   - Word of mouth / friend of family
   - Job centre
   - Your employer
   - Local event
   - Traditional publicity and marketing materials including leaflets, flyers, newsletters from Skills@Work
   - Local authority hub or service e.g. adult community learning venues, libraries, leisure centres.
   - Triage (or person they met first from the project)
   - Social media advert (Facebook, twitter)
   - Charity / community-based orgs
   - Other project/ services such as Careers Wales, Flying Start, Communities for Work, PacE

2. **Do you think enough people know about the project? What's good about the way it is promoted? Is there anything that could be improved in terms of how its promoted?**

3. **Why did you join the project and what help did you want from the project?** E.g.
   - Unhappy in current employment [if so - explore why?]
   - Wanted top progress (better job, better pay, conditions etc)
   - Recommendation from…service, friend etc
   - Impact of COVID -19 upon your job or your job opportunities

   What help did you want E.g.
   - Support with essential skills

- Qualifications
- Carer's advice, hep with job search?

4. **[if not answered by Q3] What did you hope to achieve, or change?** E.g.
   - higher hourly rate (pay)
   - more working hours
   - work towards being self-employed (note: not official outcome)
   - stable employment
   - Secure a vacancy that requires higher competences, skills/qualifications, entailing more responsibility

5. **What do you think has been making it hard or stopping you achieve your employment/career ambitions or goals?** E.g.
   - Lack or wrong type of skills
   - Lack of career advice / knowledge
   - Local job market
   - Caring or other responsibilities
   - Financial constraints
   - Link with employers
   - Social networks
   - 'Got stuck in a rut'
   - Difficult to travel
   - Access issues (i.e. difficult for them to enter building)
   - Issues associated with their culture, ethnicity, or gender.
   - COVID

Assessment, support and outcomes

6. **Could you please talk about the first contact and the first things you did with the project [focus on assessment and planning]?**
   - *Did you do a WEST test? (Wales Essential Skills Test), if yes how was it?*

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- *STAR tool or other tool to measure soft skills?*
- *How were you assessed?*
- *Did you develop an action plan?*
- *Roughly, how many times have you met*
- *Roughly, how long do spend with the triage*
- *What did you do?*
- *What was good about it? Was anything not so good?*
- *What impact did COVID 19 have upon the support?*
- *Based upon your experience, is there anything you think the project could improve or do differently?*

7. **What happened next? Can you please tell me 'step by step' what happened, what support you were offered and given [focus on support]?**
   - *Were told about training you had not considered before?*
   - *Was he/or she available at evenings and weekends (flexible provision)?*
   - *What was good about it? Was anything not so good?*
   - *What impact did COVID 19 have upon the support?*

8. **Do you think the project was good at promoting sustainability? For example, did it encourage you to use public transport, recycle or think about ethical or environmental issues when buying things?**

9. **Do you think the project was good at ensuring that everyone could access the programme? For example, do you think it was good at removing barriers that might stop some groups of people, like people who are disabled, people from a Black Asian or Minority Ethnic background, or women or men with caring responsibilities, from taking part in the programme?**

10. **Do you think the Welsh language was promoted well by the project?**
    Were you offered the choice of whether to participate in Welsh or English?

If you can speak Welsh were you offered provision through Welsh?

11. **Based upon your experience, is there anything you think the project could improve or do differently?**

12. **[If relevant] How does the support you've had from Skills@Work differ from support you've had from other services?**
    E.g.
    - ReACT, Job Centre, PaCE, Communities for Work, Active Inclusion

13. **What difference do you think has the project made to you?**
    What sort of skills have you gained? For example, do you feel more confident? Why? Do you feel better at working with others? [teamwork, communication] do you feel better able to cope with challenges and difficulties [resilience]?

    Have you gained any qualifications? [if yes, what?]
    Have you don't any training?   [if yes, what?]

    Have you changed or moved jobs? [if yes, what's the new job/role]
    Is the new job better? Why?
    Is there anything else you've got from the project? E.g.
    - Support to access to public services
    - Is your mental or physical health any better?

14. [If for example, they have got a better job or gained qualifications or skills] **Do you think you would have achieved these (above) without the project?**
    If yes, how? And would it had taken longer? If no, why not?

15. **If you hadn't been on the project, what do you think you would you be doing now?**

Close

16. **Is there anything else that we have not talked about that you think is important?**

Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for your time

Appendix 6. Skills@Work draft interview schedule for partners

Introduction

Have you received and understood the Plain Language Information Sheet and Privacy Notice? Do you have any questions? Are you happy to continue with the interview? If you don't want to answer a question or choose not to continue the interview at any point, that's fine.

Thank you.

Interviewees' aide-mémoire

Interviews are vital to help us understand what the project did, and to identify 'what works and for whom…how interventions work and why they work'; *and also how the project could be improved, given the context for the project. Interviewers should therefore encourage interviewees to:*

- *talk through each stage of their work (***what** *they do,* **how** *they do it,* **who** *they do it with and also, where relevant,* **when** *they do it); and*
- *encourage them to reflect on* **how well the project works** *(or not) i.e. does their work for the project generate the intended changes/outcomes for different groups of participants/SMEs? And also* **why they work** *(or not) given the* **context** *for the project, and* **how they could be improved***?*
- *As the final round of interviews, focus in particular upon what has been* **learnt***.*

The questions in the schedule should help guide you in this but are not intended as a script and you should use your best judgment to decide which questions to ask and which to omit, given the purpose of the interview (outlined above).

Background and context

1. **Can you please describe your relationship with or links to the project?**

   - *Did you have a partnership with Newport, Cardiff or Monmouthshire councils before Skills@Work began? If yes, what sort of partnership?*
   - *Do you refer participants? How do you refer them?*
   - *Do you offer training to participants? How does this work?*

2. **Can you please tell me what you think are the most important aspects of the context for the project and how they have shaped the project?**

   - *How much of a problem is lack of qualification and / or skills in the workplace?*
   - *What stops or hinders people from improving their qualifications and skills?*
   - *Are there any other projects or services in Newport, Cardiff or Monmouthshire that focus upon providing qualification and skills for people who are employed or self-employed?*
   - Changes in employment/ growth in job vacancies in certain sectors
   - Changes in terms of the impact of COVID-19 (fewer restrictions)
   - Changes in Welsh Government or DWP (JCP) policy

The project: referral partners

3. **Can you please describe how the referral process works? Who do you refer to Skills@Work and why? Are there any particular strengths or challenges in relation to referral that you would like to highlight?**

   - *What areas (geographically) do you cover?*
   - *Do you check the eligibility of participants for the project? If yes, how?*

- *What is your relationship with the project frontline delivery staff? And project management?*
- *Is the project marketed well?*
- *Does Skills@Work have a good reputation?*
- *In terms of recruitment is the project (S@W) well- managed?*
- *Does the project face any 'competition' from other projects?*
- *What impact has COVID-19 had upon referrals to the project?*
- *How diverse is recruitment (e.g. participants with no qualifications, disabled, Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and women)?*
- *Is the referral process offered and/or delivered in Welsh/English?*
- *Do you have any ideas or suggestions on how the referral process can be improved?*

4. **[If not answered] Any ideas on how the project could recruit more participant with no qualification, women or disabled people)?**

Project: training partners

5. **Can you please describe how the training process works? Are there any particular strengths or challenges associated with the training the project offers?**
    - *How did you become a training provider for the project (procured)?*
    - *What training do you offer? (explore content, duration, volume of training, levels etc.)*
    - *How do the people you work with benefit from the training?*
    - *In terms of training is the project (S@W) well- managed?*
    - *Do you cover STEM subjects?*

- *How diverse are the people from the project you train (e.g. participants with no qualifications, disabled, over 50s, women and Black, Asian and Ethnic groups)?*
- *Are people from the project in non-traditional roles? e.g. women in STEM training and men in care type work.*
- *Is the training offered and/or delivered in Welsh/English?*
- *Do you have any ideas or suggestions on how the training can be improved?*

6. **[if not already answered] What outcomes do participants achieve from the training?**
    - *Do you have any feedback you can share from people you've trained?*
    - *How does the training help the participants?*
    - *Have there been any unexpected outcomes?*

7. **To what extent were those participants who were <u>unable</u> to progress in their training are able to benefit from the support you provided? How and why did they benefit?**

CCT

8. **Can you please describe how your project activities relate or contribute to the Cross Cutting Theme (CCT) case level indicators listed below.**

- **Occupational Segregation**
    - Have participants been provided opportunities to develop skills and access opportunities that challenge stereotypical employment opportunities?
- **Female participation into STEM** *e.g. training and supporting women into jobs in services such as IT and other science based professions*.
- **Women** *e.g staff training, help women access health/social services and public services, marketing material targeting women.*

- **Childcare provision** *e.g. facilitate access to convenient child care (free or affordable).*
- **Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups**
  - how effective has project been in responding to the needs and challenges of supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups?
- **Disabled people**
  - how effective has project been in responding to the needs and challenges of supporting disabled people?
- **LGBTQ**
  - how effective has project been in responding to the needs and challenges of supporting LGBTQ people?
- **Activities supporting speakers of the Welsh language (participants and staff)**
  - has the project provided opportunities for participants to develop and use their Welsh language skills in the workplace?
- **Mentoring / advocacy activity** e.*g. extra mentoring activities (beyond the core offer from the project) such as mentoring accessed via third sector like MIND and public services such as the NHS and project staff doing 'extra' mentoring.*
- **Development of an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives** *e.g. that encourages walking, biking to work and creating a list of public transport options for staff.*
- **Resource efficiency measures** *e.g. activities to improve energy efficiency, re-use, recycle and good waste management.*
- **Developing / engaging CCT champions** *i.e. beyond the designated CCT champion for the whole project, such as those that cover specific themes or related areas (e.g. Sustainability champion and LGBTQ champion).*
- **Develop an Eco-code** [only ask if not noted e.g. via progress reports].
- **Other activities** *e.g. Barriers Fund such as transport / clothing costs.*
- **Activity supporting CCT indicators (in Priorities / Objectives where the indicators aren't present)**

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9. **What contribution has your project activities made to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act goals?**

   The 7 Goals:
   - **A prosperous Wales:** contributes to an innovative and prosperous low carbon society
   - **A resilient Wales:** contributes to enhancing biodiversity and the natural environment
   - **A healthier Wales:** contributes towards improving people's mental and physical health
   - **A more equal Wales:** contributes to helping people fulfil their potential regardless of their background or circumstance
   - **A Wales of cohesive communities**: contributes to active, viable, safe and well-connected communities
   - **A globally responsible Wales:** economic, social, environmental and cultural improvements that makes a positive contribution to global wellbeing
   - **Vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language:** promote and protects culture heritage and the Welsh language.

Close

10. **[if not covered] Could Skills@Work be improved in any way?**

11. **Is there anything else that we have not talked about that you think is important?**

Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for your time.

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Appendix 7. Other case studies[195]

> **Box 1. Example of support improving well-being.**
>
> Denise (not her real name) is in her 50s and was told about Skills@Work when she got into debt and mentioned that she was unhappy in her current job. Denise said that she had always wanted to do better than the jobs she had so far. Denise had two mentors from two different employment support agencies. Initially she completed a non-accredited debt management course, but then her Skills@ Work mentor and the other employment support mentor agreed to fund an accredited debt management course for her. Denise is currently completing the accredited course whilst also volunteering with an advice agency. Denise says that her Skills@Work mentor really pushed and encouraged her to 'do better and do an accredited course...and he gave me the confidence to apply for the volunteer position at the advice agency.' She concludes: 'this is the luckiest break I have ever had…I am in my 50s and I never thought I could do this …I feel like I have been given a lifeline. Now I don't feel depressed and downhearted anymore...I feel I can do better now.'

> **Box 2. Example of support improving earnings**
>
> Robert (not his real name) was working for an agency on a zero hour contract and was given work irregularly. He works on the railways and Skills@Work paid for him to do training courses which means he can get more work and better paid work, with the possibility of a permanent job in the future. Consequently, his hourly rate has approximately doubled from £8 an hour to £15 an hour and £17.60 at the weekend. Robert says: 'I am still working at the agency – it is hard to get a job with Network Rail – I am happy with the agency for now, I am getting a lot of work.' He says he could not have progressed to this without Skills@Work. 'I couldn't do it myself as I couldn't afford the price of

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[195] From the interim evaluation of Skills@Work (Bowen et al., 2021)

the training. I have to pay rent and I have my child and even with working there was never enough money, so Skills@Work has helped there.'

Box 4. Example of support improving employment.

Ethan (not his real name) had experienced a traumatic life which contributed to him struggling with mental health issues and the loss of his job. A partner organisation had supported him which resulted in him getting five hours a week in a cleaning job. Although he was grateful for this, he wanted to get a job which was more sustainable and with longer working hours. The partner referred him to Skills@Work who found out he had previous experience as a security guard although he had not obtained a SIA licence which employers now required. Skills@Work therefore paid for the SIA licence course and the partner covered the daily travelling costs to the course. He passed the course and applied for a full-time security job with a reputable company and got the job. He commented on how this had 'eased the tensions in his life' knowing he could earn a living wage within a stable workplace.

Box 5. Example of a woman doing a STEM course*

Mary (not her real name) had left school without any qualifications and felt that education and training was not for her. She therefore looked for work and successfully found employment as a cleaner. After doing this work for two years she started to feel like she wanted to work in a different sector and felt that she had perhaps been let down by her educational experiences, which had limited her career options. She contacted Skills@Work after hearing about the project from a friend. Following her assessment, she expressed an interest in working in construction and in line with this completed an Emergency First Aid and CSCS Supervisor card through the project. She was then referred to Personal Learning Accounts where she was able to access a Construction Site Management qualification. Following this she gained stable employment in her field of study.

Some facts have been changed to protect the identity of the participant.

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