September 2017

Wales Ex Post Evaluation

Priority Review Paper

Modernising and improving the quality of our public services

ESF Convergence Priority 4
September 2017

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Modernising and improving the quality of our public services
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1 Introduction: Scope of Priority

Priority 4 of the European Social Fund (ESF) Convergence Operational Programme (OP) was explicitly a new departure for Welsh ESF Programmes in that, unlike previous Programmes and the other Priorities of the 2007 – 2013 ESF Programmes it was not ‘aimed at addressing the needs of particular groups of individuals to enable them to contribute to the economy of the region’ but was rather intended to ‘build the capacity of public administration and services in the region to ensure that they are properly equipped to play their role and better able to meet the needs of all their users, individuals, businesses and communities’. The Priority was developed in response to an opportunity presented in the ESF regulations for the 2007 – 2013 programmes which for the first time enabled support to be provided for ‘strengthening institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level’.

The formal objective for the Priority was simply ‘to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services in the region’.

The Priority comprised two separate themes:

Theme 1: Transforming public services through more effective collaborative working: this was intended to support changes in service design and delivery by encouraging collaborative working both within local authority boundaries (principally in the context of the emerging Local Service Boards) and across them, in line with the distinctive Welsh approach to public service reform, based on ‘voice, rather than choice’ set out in the then Welsh Government’s Making the Connections agenda.

Theme 2: Building the capacity of public service sectors to deliver higher quality services: this was intended to support learning interventions and networks which would address skills gaps in the public sector workforce and build capacity ‘among social partners and NGOs’ to contribute to public service re-design and

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1 Convergence OP p.156
3 Convergence OP p.156
4 Ibid., p.162
improvement. This theme also referred to the intention to identify relevant public service leadership and management innovation in a transnational context\textsuperscript{5}.

Priority 4 was always intended to be small in financial terms, with an initial allocation of just under €33 million, representing just under 4 percent of the total allocation to the OP\textsuperscript{6}. Of this, around 40 percent was expected to be spent on Theme 1 and 60 percent on Theme 2\textsuperscript{7}.

In all, seven projects were funded under the Priority, four under Theme 1 and three under Theme 2, with a financial split very close to that envisaged. The projects are shown in Table 1.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>ESF awarded (£million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All Wales Academy for Local Government</td>
<td>Skills for Justice</td>
<td>£0.435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gwynedd and Anglesey Learning Partnership</td>
<td>Cyngor Gwynedd Council</td>
<td>£0.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regional Learning Partnership, South West Wales</td>
<td>Carmarthenshire County Council</td>
<td>£0.882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery</td>
<td>Welsh Government, Department for Public Services and Performance</td>
<td>£7.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transforming Procurement through Home Grown Talent</td>
<td>Welsh Government, Value Wales Finance</td>
<td>£5.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Financial Leadership Network</td>
<td>Welsh Government,</td>
<td>£1.938</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{5} Convergence ESF OP, pp. 163-4
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 219
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p.164
As will be seen, each of the two themes was dominated, in financial terms, by one large Welsh Government-led project which, in terms of the final out-turn together, accounted together for over 70% of the total spend.  

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2 Intervention logic and the changing policy context

The programme logic model set out at Figure 2.1 provides a summary of the Priority as it emerges from a reading of the OP, the Strategic Framework and the ex ante evaluations. Inevitably this can only cover ‘headlines’ particularly in respect of actions.

While there is a logical flow between the analysis of needs, actions and intended impacts, the outputs and outcomes (which are the basis for the indicators adopted for the Priority) appear to be poorly related to these and in the case of the outcomes seem largely related to processes rather than actual changes or improvements in service delivery. It is not clear, for example, how achieving secondments between public sector organisations or signing collaboration agreements necessarily leads to improvements in public service delivery. This was noted by a number of project evaluations, most notably the over-arching evaluation of the LSB Development and Priority Delivery project (which, as noted above, accounted for almost half of the funding) and which funded a number of sub-projects, each of which used the indicator framework set out for the Priority as a whole:

‘There are a number of issues with the WEFO indicators that affect their usefulness. First, because the indicators are activities and outputs, it is not clear if and how they relate or contribute to the intended outcomes. Second, there are issues of defining and measuring the WEFO indicators. Third, the indicators are aggregated for ESF returns but meaning is lost without some exploration of performance in and between individual [sub-]projects. Fourth, it is important to not only focus upon the numbers. One [sub-]project may have delivered a large number of dissemination initiatives but the quantity of events may be less important and effective than a carefully designed single initiative in another [sub-]project… Finally, while the diversity of [sub-]projects produced a range of different outcomes, it was a lost opportunity for WEFO not to try and design some indicators that measured the more generic or high level outcomes using feedback from those affected by the projects’

---

Cardiff Business School, IFF Research and Shared Intelligence: Evaluation of the ESF Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project: Final Summative Report, pp. 4-5
Figure 2.1: Programme logic model

**Need/Market Failure**
- Delivery of public services in efficient and effective manner key to social and economic development
- Scope for building capacity of public administration and services above all through collaboration

**Priority Aim**
- To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services in the region

**Inputs & Activity**
- €33 million EU Convergence funding & £14m. p.a. WG funding
- Pilot joint working to improve local services
- Back office and technical (e.g. procurement) collaboration to achieve efficiencies
- Improve service accessibility through IT
- Sub-regional workforce development strategies
- Training and secondments to improve change management
- Strengthen third sector input

**Outputs**
- Initiatives to support LSB development
- Dissemination initiatives
- Participants in training
- Employers assisted
- Specialist training in sustainable development

**Outcomes**
- Collaborative agreements between public service bodies
- Organisational learning and development strategies
- Participants completing learning
- Sub-regional workforce development strategies
- Secondment placements
- Employers adopting ems and equalities strategies

**Impacts**
- Improvement in quality of public services
- Reduction in costs of public service delivery
- Increased citizen satisfaction with public services

**Externalities**
- Macro-economic conditions
- Public spending levels
- Third sector funding/capacity
- Structural changes to public services
While the *ex ante* evaluation did not comment specifically on the question of the indicators, the evaluators did question both the decision to divide the Priority into two Themes on the basis that capacity building was in reality a sub-set of transforming public services through collaboration\(^{10}\) and, also noted the lack of any data or discussion in the socio-economic analysis of issues around public service delivery\(^{11}\). It also questioned the logic of including the Priority in a Programme specifically focused on West Wales and the Valleys (WWV):

\[
\text{We recommended that] the fit of Priority 4 in the Programme, and in particular the appropriateness of building the capacity of the public service sector to deliver higher quality services should be considered. This appears to be more focused on a national issue of public service efficiency rather than specific action required in WWV}^{12}.
\]

The requirement to restrict interventions to the Convergence area clearly caused some initial problems to some projects, for example LIFT\(^ {13}\), but to some extent this was addressed during the lifetime of the Programme by the introduction of greater flexibility:

\[\text{Consideration was given during 2012 to introducing the flexibility of including non-Convergence based organisations and personnel within the scope of all Priority 4 projects to better reflect the benefits being brought into the Convergence region, and provide more coherent and seamless delivery. Following agreement with the European Commission and amendments to WEFO's project guidance and Welsh National Eligibility Rules, amendments to projects’ delivery plans to reflect this were completed in 2013}^{14}\]

While there was some doubt as to the ‘fit’ of Priority 4 with the broader OP, it is clear that, as set out in the OP\(^ {15}\), the actions envisaged under the Priority fitted well with

\[\text{\[^{10}\text{DTZ Ex ante Evaluation p.75}\]
\[\text{\[^{11}\text{Ibid., p. 16}\]
\[\text{\[^{12}\text{Ibid., p.30}\]
\[\text{\[^{13}\text{BRIC-work: Evaluation of the LIFT Programme: Summative Evaluation, p. 32}\]
\[\text{\[^{14}\text{AIR for the Convergence ESF OP, 2013 p. 103}\]
\[\text{\[^{15}\text{Convergence ESF OP, pp. 158 - 160}\]}
\]
the public service reform agenda being carried through by the Welsh Government at that time.

The AIRs do not include any references to the changing policy agenda in respect of this Priority, though in reality, there was a considerable development in the thinking of the Welsh Government over the lifetime of the Programme, notably:

- An increasing emphasis on the need for structural change, as well as collaboration, through a streamlining of partnerships, as set out in the Programme for Government, 2011 and ‘Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery’ in 2012 (with LSBs, originally seen as a co-ordinating mechanism, increasingly regarded as replacing thematic partnerships) and a much stronger emphasis on sub-regional collaboration e.g. in the Simpson Review, also published in 2011.

- The introduction from 2012 onwards of the concept of the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) as a core function of LSBs through ‘Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery’


- The development of the Well-Being of Future Generations Bill (and then Act) putting LSBs on a statutory basis\(^{16}\).

While to a large extent these developments represented an intensification of, rather than a divergence from, the policy drivers articulated in the key documents cited in the OP, notably Making the Connections’ Delivering Beyond Boundaries and thus did not fundamentally undermine the Programme logic of the Priority, they clearly informed the implementation of the Priority and the projects within it.

Moreover the AIRs do not refer to the very major contextual change for this Priority: the dramatic change from a period of relatively generous and growing public expenditure at the time when the OP was written to the reductions in public spending after the economic downturn and election of the coalition UK Government in 2010.

\(^{16}\) See LSB Support Officers Evaluation, pp.14 – 27 for a discussion of these issues
As we will see, the financial squeeze on public services was seen by project-level evaluations as a hugely important externality.

The AIRs did, however, record the somewhat slow progress in terms of committing funds under the Priority and as part of the changes to the OPs agreed by the PMC in 2011, the allocation of ESF to the Priority was reduced by some €5.27 million (around 16 percent) because:

‘WEFO believes it has achieved a small but varied portfolio of novel and innovative projects on the themes of collaboration and leadership and management training and given the strategic fit of projects within the pipeline, the balance of un-committed funding could be better used elsewhere within the Programme’\(^\text{17}\).

While there were associated changes to targets and indicators, changes to the text of the OP were minimal\(^\text{18}\).

Despite this virement, the Thematic Evaluations in 2012 reported concerns at the level of under-spend\(^\text{19}\) and the AIRs continued to report difficulties with committing funds, as well as under-spends in approved projects, and in the 2014 AIR it was noted that:

‘WEFO intends making a request to the Commission for a modification to transfer remaining unused funds in this priority to support expenditure under other priorities. This request will be made in 2015.’\(^\text{20}\)

Overall, it would appear that there was a good fit between the interventions envisaged by the OP and the broader policy agenda of the Welsh Government in respect of public service reform. However, it is somewhat less clear that they fitted well with the OP itself, given the question, raised by the \textit{ex ante} evaluators of the appropriateness of including these interventions within an ESF Programme focused only on one region in Wales and, arguably, the indirect nature of the link between

\(^{17}\) PMC (11) 182  
\(^{18}\) Ibid.  
\(^{19}\) Thematic Evaluations, Synthesis Report, p. 27  
\(^{20}\) AIR for the Convergence ESF OP, 2014, p.99
these interventions and the high-level goal of the OP (of creating ‘a high skill, knowledge driven economy, with full employment, a skilled, adaptable workforce and responsive businesses, at the cutting edge of sustainable development’\textsuperscript{21}). This was also reflected in the lack of reference to public service delivery and reform in the socio-economic analysis which underpinned the OP.

\textsuperscript{21} ESF WWV OP, p. 72
3 Funded projects: ‘fit’ with intervention logic

Overall, approved projects appear to fit reasonably well within the broad framework of activities set out by the OP and the Strategic Framework. However, it is clear that there was far from comprehensive coverage of all the indicative activities highlighted, although the 38 sub-projects (or ‘delivery projects’) within the over-arching LSB – ESF project\textsuperscript{22} did allow for a greater range of interventions than might appear simply from the list of funded projects. Even so, the projects appear to have represented a series of, in some cases fairly niche, interventions within a broad canvas of potential options. In around half of the different areas of indicative activities highlighted in the Strategic Framework there would appear to have been little, if any, action funded including:

In Theme 1

- Social partner-led collaborations to develop innovative approaches to improving access to services for hard-to-reach groups: no project or sub-projects appear to have been led by social partners (though a handful were led by third sector organisations)
- Implementing shared procurement systems and practices (though some elements of the Theme 2 project – Transforming Procurement – were relevant to this)
- Expanding and extending public access to public services through improved customer service information
- Developing the use of web-based and other media channels as a way of doing business with public service providers.

In Theme 2

- Establishing and implementing sub-regional public service workforce planning and development strategies (although it might be argued that the Gwynedd and Anglesey Learning Partnership project funded under Theme 1, may have fallen into this category)

\textsuperscript{22} Cardiff Business School, with IFF Research and Shared Intelligence: Evaluation of the ESF Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project: Final Summative Report, p. 17
• Improving the skills and competencies in policy and service delivery, including regeneration, environmental management, programme and project management, communications and customer service: none of these specific areas appear to have been covered, with skills development interventions focused rather on procurement, financial leadership and management and criminal justice
• Enhancing the skills of displaced staff and transferring their expertise to other areas of public service delivery
• Secondment programmes to promote skills transfer across public services (though some activity of this nature was funded through the Theme 1 LSB-ESF project)
• Developing opportunities for transnational networking: there were no examples of this.

This suggests that the original ‘menu’ of potential interventions was probably too broad and insufficiently well defined, while as some examples above suggest (and as identified by the ex ante evaluators), there would appear to have been some lack of clarity about the division between the two Themes. Certainly, the last project to be approved – the All Wales Academy for Local Government – which focused on developing an e-learning platform for local government employees would seem to have fitted better with Theme 2 rather than Theme 1 which funded it.
4 Targets and achievements

Figure 4.1 considers data from WEFO on the out-turns compared to targets for outputs, results and the budget and then provides some basic analysis of value for money, though this is of limited value given that the indicators are, as noted above, a relatively poor proxy for real outcomes.
**Figure 4.1: Analysis of Performance against targets and unit costs as at August 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Original Target</th>
<th>Revised Target</th>
<th>Cumulative Outturn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total participants (employed)</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>1,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female participants</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination initiatives</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers assisted or financially supported</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives to support Local Service Board Development</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects delivering specialist training in sustainable development</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative agreements between public service bodies</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-regional workforce planning and development strategies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational learning and development strategies</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants completing courses - Employed</td>
<td>6,750</td>
<td>6,750</td>
<td>1,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondment placements</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers adopting or improving equality and diversity strategies and monitoring systems</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers adopting or improving Environmental Management Systems</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Funding</td>
<td>£46,408,706</td>
<td>£32,155,567</td>
<td>£30,726,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESF</td>
<td>£23,561,401</td>
<td>£18,705,144</td>
<td>£18,233,008</td>
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<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost per participant (ESF only)</td>
<td>£3,141.50</td>
<td>£2,494.00</td>
<td>£13,740.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per employer (ESF only)</td>
<td>£392,690.00</td>
<td>£311,752.40</td>
<td>£125,744.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per participant completing courses (ESF only)</td>
<td>£3,490.60</td>
<td>£2,771.10</td>
<td>£15,504.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WEFO (August 2016)
Figure 4.1 reveals that there was a relatively minor underspend in terms of ESF compared with the revised budget – of around £0.5 million or 2.7 percent - and a larger one (around 23 percent) compared with the original budget. The underspend in total funding was larger, reflecting an increase in the intervention rate.

In terms of outputs and results, many of the targets were comfortably exceeded, particularly those most clearly related to processes, for example dissemination initiatives and collaborative agreements, where the total recorded of 217 was almost ten times the original target. Whether or not this was the original intention, project level evaluations make clear that these collaborative agreements were often ones concluded to take forward elements of the ESF-funded projects themselves, rather than an outcome, in the sense of a collaborative agreement relating to the period after the ESF funding\(^{23}\).

By contrast, the targets relating to individual participants, including the results indicator of secondments, were generally not met, with total participant numbers being less than 18 percent of the target and secondment placements being only 22 percent of the target. To some extent this reflects the extent to which many of the projects (notably the LSB - ESF project, which as noted accounted for more than 45 percent of the funding committed under the Priority) were focused not on individual training and progression but organisational and systemic change: since these organisational and indeed culture change outcomes fit well with the overall objective for the Priority and the intended impacts, this again serves principally to highlight the misalignment between the indicators chosen and the overall thrust of the Programme logic. Even so, the significant shortfall in terms of these indicators means that a crude consideration of value for money related to individual participants suggests that the Priority performed poorly.

By contrast, more employers were engaged than had been anticipated, though here the original implied target for cost per employer (at nearly £400k) was very high, reflecting the small number of large public sector employers expected to be engaged. On this measure, the final outturn was significantly better (though arguably

\(^{23}\) See for example ESF-LSB Evaluation, pp. 31-2
still high), with some 145 employers involved in the Priority, at an average cost of just over £125k each.

Performance was also poor against the results targets related to the cross-cutting themes, with no employers recorded as having adopted or improved Environmental Management Systems (against a target of 75 percent of all participating employers) and only a handful recorded as having adopted or improved equality and diversity strategies and monitoring systems (against a target of 50 percent of all participating employers).

The successive AIRs provide relatively little information as to the reasons for the under-performance of the Priority against the agreed indicators, except to refer to the difficulty in stimulating projects to come forward and subsequent delays in projects achieving and recording outputs: for example the 2012 AIR, noting the changes to eligibility rules agreed with the European Commission, reported that:

‘The impact of these changes has not yet filtered through to reported achievement against the Priority indicators. It is expected that in 2013 there will be a significant improvement in both forecasts and achievement and rolling towards the closure of the Programme in 2015’.24

However, in the 2014 AIR, there was no real explanation of the under-performance, with the report simply noting that:

‘Although not all the resources available in this priority have been committed, the seven approved projects have each pursued distinctive and worthwhile areas of activity consistent with the priority aim of improving the delivery of public services’.25

Reasons for under-performance given in project level evaluations are considered in Section 6.

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24 AIR 2012, p. 98
25 AIR 2014, p.99
Of course, it does need to be remembered that this was a small Priority, with its outputs and results (particularly those relating to the core Programme indicators of participants, participants achieving qualifications and participants achieving positive outcomes) always intended to represent only a small proportion of the overall outputs and results for the Programme as a whole of relatively marginal significance.
5 Cross cutting themes

Across the ESF Operational Programmes, four objectives were set for the equal opportunities viz:

1. Increasing the number of individuals who have multiple disadvantages accessing employment and self-employment.
2. Increasing the number of women, BME people and disabled people securing training and employment in higher paid and higher skilled sectors and self employment.
3. Challenging occupational segregation by increasing the number of women and men training or re-training in non-traditional areas, focusing on those areas where there are skill shortages.
4. Increasing the numbers of employers and training organisations to develop equality and diversity strategies, including monitoring systems and methods for feeding in improvements.26

The Cross-Cutting Themes Evaluation noted that reports to the PMC in January 2015 suggested none of the equal opportunities targets across the four ERDF and ESF Programmes were likely to be met27 and concluded that ‘vertical’ projects – ones which were specifically focused on cross-cutting themes issues – were succeeding much better in realising their cross-cutting theme objectives and their overall project objectives than ‘horizontal’ ones, where cross-cutting themes were not a core concern28, albeit that there was considerable buy-in to the worth of the themes29 and that performance in respect of the themes was generally improved compared since the 2000 – 2006 Programmes30. This last point echoed the findings of the earlier Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Implementation of the 2007 – 2013 Structural Funds31.

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27 CCT Evaluation, p. 28
28 Ibid., p.35
29 Ibid., p. 80
30 Ibid., p. 84
31 Process Evaluation, p. 61-2
Evaluation evidence in relation to Priority 4 suggests only limited success in addressing the equalities theme.

Overall, projects seem to have had a mixed record for supporting (and by extension improving the progression of) disadvantaged groups.

While the target for female participation was just exceeded (at 53 percent), it should be noted that the target of 52 percent was relatively modest given that women comprise a clear majority of the workforce within the public sector in Wales\textsuperscript{32}.

The 2014 AIR reported reasonable progress, given the proportion of BME people in the WWV population in terms of the proportion of BME people supported (3 percent)\textsuperscript{33} and this was borne out in some project evaluations, most notably in LIFT, where 9 percent of the participants were BME\textsuperscript{34}, though in the largest project in Theme 2, Transforming Procurement through Home Grown Talent (HGT), the proportion was only 1 percent\textsuperscript{35}.

By contrast, engagement with disabled workers was quite limited, at 4.5 percent according to the 2014 AIR\textsuperscript{36}, though LIFT again was reasonably successful at reaching this group, with 12 percent of participants being disabled\textsuperscript{37}. It was also the case that 12 percent of participants at the time of the 2014 AIR were over 55\textsuperscript{38}, while 30 percent of those undertaking training through the Transforming Procurement project were reported to be over 50\textsuperscript{39}.

Participants as a whole were, however, overwhelmingly well-qualified, with the AIR reporting that 74 percent had a tertiary level qualification\textsuperscript{40}.

This shows that around two-thirds of those employed in the public sector are women.
\textsuperscript{33} AIR 2014, p. 100
\textsuperscript{34} LIFT Evaluation, p.4
\textsuperscript{35} ICF Consulting Services: Final Evaluation of Transforming Procurement through Home-Grown Talent, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{36} AIR 2014, p. 100
\textsuperscript{37} LIFT Evaluation, p. 4
\textsuperscript{38} AIR 2014, p.100
\textsuperscript{39}Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 26
\textsuperscript{40} AIR 2014, p. 100
Project-level evaluations provided little or no evidence in respect of whether Priority 4 projects attempted or succeeded in challenging occupational segregation, although the Regional Learning Partnership (RLP) project did fund a sub-project to investigate the lack of women coming forward for Higher Apprenticeships.

In terms of support for equality and diversity strategies, as has already been seen, only a small minority of employers (8 percent) were recorded as having adopted or improved their equality and diversity strategies and monitoring systems. Evidence from the project-level evaluations suggests that the main reason for this was that pre-existing statutory requirements for public bodies in respect of equalities meant that such strategies were already in place and that participating employers therefore saw little need to go further. Thus, in the overall LSB ESF evaluation it was noted that project managers’ main concern was to establish the existence of appropriate policies rather than work with employers to review or improve them:

‘There was a significant amount of rhetoric about the cross-cutting themes in both the proposal for EU funding and in proposals for funding from delivery projects, but they have not played out as being significant themes…For most LSBs, this was simply ’business as usual’ and as they were already doing these things, there was little or no ’added value’

This was echoed in the Evaluation of the LSB Support Officers, where it was noted that engagement with the two cross-cutting themes was driven by local authorities’ own corporate policies rather than by the demands of the Convergence Programme. In the case of the RLP project, the original targets for employers adopting or improving both equalities and environmental sustainability strategies (mirroring those for the Priority as a whole) were dropped, in agreement with WEFO, as the project was not engaging directly with employers (despite the fact that the

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42 ESF-LSB Evaluation, p. 5
43 Evaluation of the LSB Support Officers, p.68
Partnership itself consisted of public sector employers). Here the evaluators concluded:

‘The process for setting targets for the cross-cutting themes appears to have undermined delivery of the wider cross-cutting objectives’

Turning to environmental sustainability, the project level evaluations provide little evidence with regard to this theme and as we have seen, monitoring data recorded no examples of employers adopting or improving environmental management systems as a result of engagement in the Programme, with the reasons being the same as for equalities strategies, namely the view that most public bodies had pre-existing and adequate policies and strategies promoting environmental sustainability. The RLP was, however, said to have assisted one of its partners, the University of Wales Trinity St. David, to roll out a Sustainable Skills Audit Tool which it had developed.

Where projects attempted specific action in response, in whole or in part to this cross-cutting theme, there appears to have been only limited success: thus, the Sustainability Working Group set up as part of the Finance Leadership Network project made little progress, while environmental sustainability workshops arranged as part of the LIFT Programme attracted only 12 individuals (out of 344 participants in all).

Otherwise, the only references in project-level evaluations to the environmental sustainability are efforts to reduce travel and the use of consumables.

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44 RLP Evaluation, p.B-4
45 Ibid., p. B-12
46 RLP Evaluation, p. B. 12
47 Old Bell 3 Ltd, Evaluation of the Finance Leadership Network, pp. 7-8
48 LIFT Evaluation, p.38
49 Ibid.
6  Evaluation evidence: common barriers and success factors

The project-level evaluations highlight a wide range of **barriers** which confronted projects, though many of these were relatively specific to individual projects. Underpinning a number of these was the fact that the Priority itself and indeed the type of interventions envisaged were new and atypical of ‘normal’ ESF interventions, and without (at a Priority level) clear and relevant indicators. At least five of the evaluations relating to four projects highlighted issues around project design which in part can be attributed to the inexperience of those involved in developing projects, both project sponsors and WEFO staff but which might also, in our view, reflect the issue highlighted by the *ex ante* evaluation of the appropriateness of using a WWV funding stream to fulfil an all-Wales public sector reform brief:

- In the case of the RLP, the evaluators pointed to a lack of clarity and consensus about the ‘**core function and purpose**’ of the Partnership and the project as a whole, which, while becoming less acute over time, was never fully resolved: even in the final wave of research, stakeholders gave a wide range of different views about what the project was fundamentally about.\(^{50}\)
- Delays and problems in taking forward LIFT were attributed to a lack of clarity and guidance from WEFO – and lack of experience of ESF of the project sponsors, Skills for Justice – about eligibility, in particular in relation to the inclusion of staff based outside the Convergence area\(^{51}\) and other factors including the potential liabilities of individual directors\(^{52}\)
- WEFO and project sponsors were said to have underestimated the lead times for the All Wales Academy project, resulting in a project which was originally intended to last two years being implemented in significantly less than a year.\(^{53}\)
- The WCVA’s Making the Connections project was seen by evaluators as being over-ambitious, given the scale of resources available and having taken insufficient regard in its design to work already underway in County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) to embed the third sector more fully in local service design.

\(^{50}\) RLP Evaluation, p. 18  
\(^{51}\) LIFT Evaluation, p. 32  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 19  
\(^{53}\) Stratagia, External Evaluation of the Project to Develop an All Wales Academy for Local Government Learning E-platform, p. 19
and delivery. While many of the problems it encountered were due to external factors, ‘the design of the project was flawed’;

- In the case of the sub-projects funded under the LSB ESF Project, many were said to lack a clear rationale or SMART objectives, with aims often overambitious or vague:

‘A large number of projects had difficulty designing and setting outcome measures for service users and/or the wider population. Very few indicators of financial outcomes or efficiencies were set by projects and even in projects where it was feasible to get user feedback on the impact of changes, there was not enough thought or investment of time in collecting data.’

At least three projects sponsors (Skills for Justice, the Welsh Government procurement team and Carmarthenshire Council in respect of the All Wales Academy) struggled with the specific requirements of ESF in respect of verification of expenditure and procurement.

The other factor identified by at least five of the evaluations was a lack of corporate ownership and buy in, particularly from senior management, to the ethos of collaborative working in general and the aims and objectives of projects or (in the case of the LSB ESF project), sub-projects more specifically. This seemed to be particularly true in the case of the attempts to develop stronger relationships between the statutory and third sector:

- A serious problem for the LIFT project was said to be the barriers to collaboration from the established cultures within organisations, particularly on the part of senior management.

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54 Old Bell 3 Ltd, Evaluation of the WCVA’s Making the Connections ESF Project, p.38
55 Ibid., p. 74
56 LSB ESF Evaluation, p.57
57 Ibid., p.8
58 LIFT Evaluation, p. 5
59 Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p.119
60 All Wales Academy Evaluation, p. 21
61 LIFT Evaluation, p. 24
• The main barrier identified to effective working by the LSB Support Officers was the insufficient corporate buy-in within many Local Authorities and other partners to the whole LSB process.

• This was also an issue in the case of the WCVA’s Making the Connections project, and the evaluation here also pointed to, at least in some cases, insufficient ownership of the project by CVC Chief Executives and the marginalisation of staff employed by the project.

• In the case of the Finance Leadership Network, lack of continuity in terms of the strategic leadership of the project, due to staff turnover, led to a perception that the Network was not a high priority.

• Finally, in the overarching evaluation of the LSB ESF project, many of the sub-projects were said to have suffered from a lack of buy-in from key staff, with differing organisational cultures identified by a survey of project managers as the most common barrier and with less than half agreeing that their LSB (nominally the ‘owner’ of the project) had been strongly supportive.

Staff turnover (linked to substantial changes happening in the public sector – see below) was another confounding factor identified in at least three evaluations (the Finance Leadership Network, the Regional Learning Partnership, and the LSB Support Officers).

Otherwise, the barriers which were identified to realising the aims and ambitions of individual projects were often rather specific. They included:

• Insufficient or inadequate marketing of the provision, particularly in respect of Theme 2 projects (LIFT and some strands of Transforming Procurement).

• Less demand for training than anticipated (Finance Leadership Network, Transforming Procurement).

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62 LSB Support Officers Evaluation, p. 73
63 WCVA MtC Evaluation, p. 63
64 FLN Evaluation, p. 7
65 LSB-ESF Evaluation, pp. 7-8
66 FLN Evaluation, p. 30
67 RLP Evaluation, p. 10
68 LSB Support Officers Evaluation, p. 35
69 LIFT Evaluation, p. 35
70 Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 13
• Limited opportunities to put new learning into practice owing to cultural resistance to change on the part of managers (Transforming Procurement\textsuperscript{73}, LIFT\textsuperscript{74})

• Difficulties in terms of participant retention in the case of Strand 3 of the Transforming Procurement project (the Trainee Procurement Executive Programme or TPEP) linked to the anxiety of participants to apply for, and take, permanent jobs as and when they became available\textsuperscript{75}, and in the case of LIFT linked to the heavy demands of the assignments at a time of severe pressure on the workforce\textsuperscript{76}.

Turning to success factors, the project level evaluations generally identified fewer of these.

The key success factor most often cited related to the quality and commitment of individual staff employed to project manage or deliver projects and sub-projects. Thus, the evaluation of the LSB Support Officers found that the success or otherwise of the project in different local authority areas was very dependent on the quality of the individual staff involved\textsuperscript{77}. Similarly, the evaluators of the overarching LSB-ESF project found that the success of sub-projects was often related to the ‘role, skills and capacity’ of the project manager\textsuperscript{78}. Evaluators of the All Wales Academy\textsuperscript{79}, Finance Leadership Network\textsuperscript{80} and the Regional Learning Partnership\textsuperscript{81} all attributed the effectiveness of project implementation to the skills and dedication of the project team or of key staff:

‘The importance of the commitment of key individuals cannot be underestimated’. (RLP)

\textsuperscript{71} FLN Evaluation, p. 8
\textsuperscript{72} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 118
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} LIFT Evaluation, p.5
\textsuperscript{75} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p.118
\textsuperscript{76} LIFT Evaluation, p.15 & p.25
\textsuperscript{77} LSB Support Officers Evaluation, p. 7
\textsuperscript{78} LSB ESF Evaluation, p. 5
\textsuperscript{79} All Wales Academy Evaluation, p. 4
\textsuperscript{80} FLN Evaluation, p. 10
\textsuperscript{81} RLP Evaluation, p. 9
The other success factor commonly cited was the existence and use of pre-existing networks or good collaborative relationships which projects or sub-projects could build on. This was seen in all three evaluations related to the LSB ESF project as a key differentiator between those areas where interventions had done well and those where they had struggled\(^82\). This perhaps simply highlights the fact that building a culture of partnership is a long-term process rather than a ‘quick win’.

Other success factors identified in the case of individual projects/evaluations were:

- The clear political support for the Transforming Procurement agenda\(^83\)
- In the case of a minority of the sub-projects within the overall LSB ESF project, good project design (with clear aims and objectives linked to SMART objectives and good use of evidence-based data); good leadership from senior managers; active engagement from staff at all levels across relevant partner organisations; and harnessing of service users experience\(^84\).

In terms of externalities, frequently cited factors included the impact of public spending cuts, reductions in staffing levels and reorganisation on both employers and on individual staff. This took a number of forms:

- Contributing to issues of project and management staff turnover, because of the prevalence of voluntary redundancy schemes and reductions in the establishment, particularly in the corporate centre of organisations as well as disrupting relationships within LSBs and other fora because of re-organisations and re-structuring within key partner organisations leading to changes of representation within partnerships (e.g. Finance Leadership Network\(^85\), LSB Support Officers\(^86\))
- Increasing workloads on individual staff leading to a reluctance to commit to sometimes onerous programmes of learning (LIFT\(^87\), Transforming Procurement\(^88\))

\(^{83}\) Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p.118  
\(^{84}\) LSB ESF Evaluation, p. 6  
\(^{85}\) FLN Evaluation, p. 30  
\(^{86}\) LSB Support Officers Evaluation, p. 35  
\(^{87}\) LIFT Evaluation, p. 40
• A tendency for organisations and local authorities in particular to turn inwards, in some cases focusing on ‘in-sourcing’ or taking services back in house as a way of avoiding or reducing redundancies (Making the Connections\textsuperscript{89}, Regional Learning Partnership\textsuperscript{90}, LIFT\textsuperscript{91})
• Consequential cuts to third sector organisations reducing their capacity to engage effectively in partnerships (Making the Connections\textsuperscript{92})
• Financial pressures driving mergers e.g. in Higher and Further Education (RLP\textsuperscript{93}).

While some stakeholders in some evaluations argued that a time of retrenchment was a good stimulus to finding new collaborative ways of working, a more prevalent view appeared to be that at a time of severe financial pressure, public sector organisations would become more defensive and less willing to take the risks involved in developing new collaborative approaches\textsuperscript{94}.

Lastly, in terms of sustainability and exit strategies, most of the evidence from project-level evaluations suggested that continued ring-fenced funding would be needed going forward – albeit with the recognition that changing ESF regulations meant that such funding would have to be drawn from domestic resources rather than the Structural Funds. Thus:

• The evaluation of the All Wales Academy noted that local government had agreed to fund the project for a further year but that there were major concerns over future sustainability\textsuperscript{95}
• In the case of the Finance Leadership Network, the evaluation recommended continued Welsh Government core funding to sustain the network\textsuperscript{96} while the

\textsuperscript{88} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p.86
\textsuperscript{89} MtC Evaluation, p. 5 and pp. 7-8
\textsuperscript{90} RLP Evaluation, p. 35
\textsuperscript{91} LIFT Evaluation, p. 40
\textsuperscript{92} MtC Evaluation, pp. 7-8
\textsuperscript{93} RLP Evaluation, p. 14
\textsuperscript{94} LSB Support Officers Evaluation, pp. 79-80
\textsuperscript{95} All Wales Academy Evaluation, p. 12 and p. 25
\textsuperscript{96} FLN Evaluation, p. 11
evaluators of Transforming Procurement argued that there was a strong case for a follow-on funded programme.\(^{97}\)

- The evaluation of the LSB Support Officers recommended continued ring-fenced funding from Welsh Government for the posts in the short to medium term.\(^{98}\)
- Similarly, while warning that the Regional Learning Partnership should not become a fixed part of the institutional architecture, the evaluators supported continued funding in the short-term.\(^{99}\)
- In the case of the Making the Connections funding for the voluntary sector, the evaluators recommended mainstreaming this through the core funding of the CVCs, though with specific requirements in regard to the workstream, while arguing that the limited gains made by the project were under threat:

> ‘While significant effort has been devoted by MtC officers to building up relationships between the CVC and the wider third sector on the one hand and the LSB and public sector organisations on the other, the sustainability of the relationship and network-building and other activities of MtC officers beyond the lifetime of the project must be questionable. LSB structures and personnel have been (and continue to be) in flux, and where good relationships have been established it is doubtful whether they will be sustained in the medium term.’\(^{100}\)

In the case of the over-arching LSB ESF evaluation, the evaluation noted that many of the sub-projects had done little to disseminate the learning from their projects or to embed it in mainstream practice, meaning that the legacy for them was uncertain. However, its survey of project managers suggested that while only 16 percent said that the entire project would be continued after the funding period, seven out of ten reported that some elements would be taken forward.\(^{101}\)

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\(^{97}\) Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 13

\(^{98}\) LSB Support Officers Evaluation, p. 7

\(^{99}\) RLP Evaluation, p. 21

\(^{100}\) MtC Evaluation, p. 6

\(^{101}\) LSB ESF Evaluation, p. 8
7 Evaluation evidence: impact

As already noted, Priority 4 represented a new direction in terms of the use of ESF funding, with ambitious but not easily measured intended impacts (improvement in the quality of public services, reduction in the costs of public service delivery and increased citizen satisfaction with public services) which, were only loosely related to the output and results indicators. Given this, it is clear that any sort of gross-to-net calculation would not be practical.

In respect of the last of these indicators, however, it is worth noting that evidence from the National Survey for Wales suggests that there has been little change in citizen satisfaction with key public services:

- Overall satisfaction with the Welsh Government, at an average score of 5.6 (out of 10) in 2014/15 was not significantly different than that found in 2012/13 and 2013/14\(^\text{102}\)
- Overall satisfaction with the NHS was 6.3, with no statistically significant change in the scores for each Local Health Board, with the exception of the Aneurin Bevan LHB where the average score increased from 6.2 in 2013/14 to 6.6 in 2014/15\(^\text{103}\). Of respondents who had used GP Services and hospital services, there were no significant changes in the proportion reporting themselves satisfied compared with 2012/13 and 2013/14\(^\text{104}\)
- The proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement that ‘my council provides high quality services’ fell from 57 percent in both 2012/13 and 2013/14 to 53 percent in 2014/15\(^\text{105}\).

Of course, it needs to be recognised that the impact of the projects funded by Priority 4 will take time to materialise, that figures for 2015/16 may be a more realistic guide to the post-intervention picture across Wales and that, since there is no viable counterfactual comparison, even where citizen satisfaction has fallen, there may have been a positive impact of the interventions in preventing an even sharper

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\(^{102}\) Welsh Government, National Survey for Wales 2014/15: Headline Results ((Revised) p.8

\(^{103}\) Ibid., p.20

\(^{104}\) Ibid., pp. 14-15

\(^{105}\) Ibid., p.12
decline, given the pressure on public expenditure. Nevertheless, these figures in themselves do not suggest any form of transformational improvement in citizen satisfaction over the period when most Priority 4 projects were delivering.

To a large extent, the view that the impact in terms of overall performance of public services of the Priority might be limited is echoed in the project-level evaluation evidence. Almost all the evaluations emphasise that identifying impact is difficult if not impossible.

In some cases, this was attributed largely to issues of timing or lack of resources, for example in the case of LIFT where the evaluators noted that ‘resources available for the LIFT evaluation have not been sufficient to enable the extensive, detailed and accurate research required to properly establish the impact made by LIFT in delivering against the three WEFO indicators’\textsuperscript{106} while the LSB Support Officers evaluation found that:

‘To a large extent, then it would appear too early to reach a conclusion as to whether these improvements to the ‘scaffolding’ will result in service improvements on the ground.’\textsuperscript{107}

In other project evaluations, methodological difficulties and the impossibility of disentangling the effects of the project from other externalities were also emphasised, for example in the case of the All Wales Academy, where evaluators noted that:

‘Since participation in the e-learning now available through the AWA is only just commencing, it is impossible to judge the long term effects of this activity in relation to transforming local authority training delivery, enabling flexible deployment of staff, supporting displaced employees into alternative jobs and improving the efficiency and quality of public services. Even if this is attempted in the future it will not be easy to evaluate since there will be inevitable problems with deadweight and attribution; i.e. there will be a need to demonstrate these impacts would not have happened

\textsuperscript{106} LIFT Evaluation, p. 27
\textsuperscript{107} LSB ESF Support Officers Evaluation, p. 72
anyway and assess the extent to which any such effects are due to the AWA rather than other factors.\footnote{108}

Similarly, the evaluators of the RLP project found (in the context of no real evidence that the performance of the region had improved significantly in terms of learning and skills) that:

‘The findings remain focused principally on ‘process’ rather than ‘impact’ outcomes. There is limited evidence that the outcomes generated by the RLP have yet to deliver benefits ‘on the ground’ for learners, or for wider regional economic performance. This was always going to be a challenge for the RLP, with the issues of attribution and tracing through the benefits of strategic activity to operation outputs and outcomes complex.’\footnote{109}

This evaluation also suggested that real impacts in terms of public service delivery might prove to be slight:

‘Very limited progress is reported in terms of expanding and extending the accessibility of learner services. These findings are consistent with the challenges in translating the process outcomes into benefits on the ground, and the on-going challenge for the RLP to influence substantively the operational management of partners as well as their overall strategic agenda’.\footnote{110}

Two other evaluations – both relating to the largest project, the LSB ESF project\footnote{111} – also suggested that not only might impact be difficult to trace but that any impact in terms of the actual delivery of public services might be quite limited.

Similarly, the MtC evaluation concluded that it was difficult to draw firm conclusions on impact given the lack of any realistic counterfactual, the fact that the changes sought were long-term and ‘far-reaching but subtle and were themselves likely to be influenced and affected by a wide range of external factors’ and the relatively modest

\footnote{108 All Wales Academy Evaluation, p. 13} \footnote{109 RLP Evaluation pp. 38-39} \footnote{110 Ibid., p. 41} \footnote{111 LSB ESF Support Officers Evaluation, pp. 5-6 and LSB ESF Evaluation, p. 9}
resources deployed, but judged that any contributions to achieving change in public services was likely to be very modest\textsuperscript{112}.

Most significantly, perhaps, the overall LSB – ESF evaluation concluded that:

\textit{‘Overall our summative evaluation concludes that it is mainly process outcomes (rather than service/citizen outcomes) that have been delivered. With a few notable exceptions, there is little evidence from most projects that improved processes have led to improved outcomes for the public’}\textsuperscript{113}.

Two evaluations do, however, suggest some positive impact in particular in relation to reducing the cost of public services.

While acknowledging the significant role of externalities, such as strong political support for improved procurement, the introduction of a National Procurement Service and the role of Value Wales\textsuperscript{114} and that any assessment of the counterfactual is largely subjective as \textit{‘it has not been possible to assess the additional impact of the HGT programme relative to a counterfactual / control group given that the programme has supported activities in local authority areas across Wales’}\textsuperscript{115}, the evaluation of Transforming Procurement nevertheless concludes that some elements of the project, notably the Trainee Procurement Executive Programme (TPEP) (which accounted for more than half of the total spend of the project) had:

\textit{‘Provided a high degree of additionality. Most of the trainees reported that they had not considered a career in procurement before applying to TPEP. The substantial training and development input would also be very difficult to replicate without the programme’}\textsuperscript{116}.

\textsuperscript{112} MtC Evaluation, pp. 55-7
\textsuperscript{113} LSB ESF Evaluation, p. 10
\textsuperscript{114} Transforming Procurement Evaluation p.41
\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p.22
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., pp. 87-8
Strand 4 of the Transforming Procurement project, which funded e-procurement pilot projects was also said to have led to financial savings, not least through the greater use of e-auctions\textsuperscript{117}.

Similarly, the evaluation of the Financial Leadership Network (though not attempting any gross-to-net calculation), used survey evidence to estimate that collaborative projects emerging from the project had led to savings of between £770k and £1.3 million\textsuperscript{118}, while also reporting that between a quarter and a half of survey respondents believed that their participation had led to public service delivery improvement (43 percent), non-financial savings in terms of more efficient use of staff and resources (34 percent) and financial savings (28 percent).

Although the project-level evaluations suggest only limited effectiveness of the interventions in bringing about the high-level impacts identified in the OP, they nevertheless provide evidence of a range of outcomes both for individuals and for public services.

Turning first to the outcomes of the ESF interventions for individuals, the evaluations of the three Theme 2 projects point to a range of positive outcomes.

All three reported that a majority of participants (55 percent in the case of the Finance Leadership Network\textsuperscript{119}, 61 percent in the case of the in-service training elements of Transforming Procurement\textsuperscript{120} and 82 percent in the case of LIFT\textsuperscript{121}) reported increased confidence in performing their roles. In addition, 46 percent of those Transforming Procurement participants felt participation had improved their productivity\textsuperscript{122}, while almost 60 percent of Finance Leadership Network participants thought it had improved their awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses as a manager\textsuperscript{123}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 8
  \item \textsuperscript{118} FLN Evaluation, pp. 58-9
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 56
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p.64
  \item \textsuperscript{121} LIFT Evaluation, p.19
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 64
  \item \textsuperscript{123} FLN Evaluation, p. 56
\end{itemize}
Related to these softer skills, a common theme was also of the value of networking and exchange with other professionals in similar roles, leading to the potential at least of learning from good practice and stimulating future collaboration. All but two of the 35 participants in the Financial Leadership Programme (the training strand of the Finance Leadership Network) rated the usefulness of such networking as four or five on a 1-5 scale\textsuperscript{124} and 57 percent of all FLN participants said that participation had led to good opportunities to network and learn from others\textsuperscript{125}.

Similarly, LIFT participants reported considerable satisfaction with the opportunity to network and share practice across agencies, and that this had led to greater willingness to work collaboratively\textsuperscript{126}. Overall:

\textit{‘There is overwhelming evidence that awareness of how other agencies work within the justice sector has increased as a result of the LIFT training programme’}\textsuperscript{127}.

In terms of individual progression, evidence is more limited, but 39 percent of those receiving training in Strand 2 of the Transforming Procurement project said that they had been able to expand their role as a result of participation\textsuperscript{128}. However, both in this project and the Finance Leadership Network, many participants reported difficulties in applying their learning: in the latter, a small majority of 52 percent felt they had been able to apply learning from the network back in the workplace\textsuperscript{129}, whereas in the former, only a minority reported that the training had influenced what they did in the workplace\textsuperscript{130}.

The most costly of the Transforming Procurement strands, the TPEP, supported potential new entrants to procurement by funding a traineeship involving paid placements in public sector organisations along with training. This was generally successful in providing positive employment outcomes for the participants, with 23 of

\textsuperscript{124} FLN Evaluation, p. 48  
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p.57  
\textsuperscript{126} LIFT Evaluation, p.4  
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p. 22  
\textsuperscript{128} Transforming Procurement, p. 6  
\textsuperscript{129} FLN Evaluation, p. 56  
\textsuperscript{130} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 66
24 who had left by the time of the final evaluation having secured full-time procurement roles, 15 of them in the public sector\textsuperscript{131}.

Only one of the projects, LIFT, specifically set targets in terms of qualifications. Despite quite high drop-out rates, the target was met, with a total of 218 participants receiving Level 3 or Level 5 ILM qualifications\textsuperscript{132}.

Turning to outcomes for public services, the most common positive outcome was an increase in the willingness to collaborate and knowledge transfer between different parts of the sector:

- The evaluation of the Finance Leadership Network pointed to improved collaborative working across the public sector, including not just sharing ideas but practical collaborative projects arising from the project\textsuperscript{133}
- Strand 1 of the Transforming Procurement was said to have improved the application of academic expertise to professional practice across Wales\textsuperscript{134}
- Building collaborative relationships across different organisations in the criminal justice field (in both the statutory and voluntary sectors) was seen as a ‘key positive outcome’ of the LIFT project, although translating these into actual collaboration was seen to be impeded by cultural resistance on the part of senior management in some organisations\textsuperscript{135}
- In at least some local authority areas, Making the Connections officers were said to have ‘succeeded in generating awareness and altering perceptions of counterparts in local authorities, and other public sector organisations, of the capacity of the third sector to contribute creatively to the design and delivery of public services\textsuperscript{136}'
- LSB Support Officers were similarly thought to have made a real contribution to improving the functioning of partnership working in most case-study LSBs, as well as in some areas having succeeded in putting in place a Single

\textsuperscript{131} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 7
\textsuperscript{132} LIFT Evaluation, p. 36
\textsuperscript{133} FLN Evaluation, p. 6 & p.10
\textsuperscript{134} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 39
\textsuperscript{135} LIFT Evaluation, p. 25 and p.28
\textsuperscript{136} MtC Evaluation, p. 6
Implementation Plan which was actually influencing key public sector organisations’ activities\textsuperscript{137}

- Similarly, while the evaluators of the Regional Learning Partnership expressed some concern that stakeholders continued to report significant problems of strategic co-ordination between partners even at the end of the project\textsuperscript{138}, they concluded that ‘the RLP has influenced partners/stakeholders in their level of partnership working with the public sector, and in defining the strategic priorities of organisations’\textsuperscript{139}. Indeed, the project was seen to have brought about strategic added value mostly by ‘bringing together key partners over the long-term, and providing a constructive forum for regional thinking and doing’\textsuperscript{140}

- Project managers of sub-projects funded by the LSB ESF project generally reported that levels of trust and information sharing between partners in the projects had increased, although ‘less than 50 percent reported more concrete outcomes in terms of developing new services or processes to combine operations or introducing shared accountability mechanisms’\textsuperscript{141}. Similarly, a meta-evaluation of sub-project evaluations concluded that the process of working with other organisations had helped to improve partnership working and collaborative capacity and that these ‘process outcomes’ were the most apparent successes of whole project\textsuperscript{142}.

Evaluations of the Finance Leadership Network and Transforming Procurement projects both suggested that individual learning had led at least in some instances to positive organisational change within their organisations. In all, 42 percent of Transforming Procurement Strand 2 participants said that participation had led to changes in contracting procedures, and 36 percent that it had enabled them to change supplier management procedures.\textsuperscript{143}. Over half of FLN participants reported that participation had led to improvements in the way their immediate team worked

\textsuperscript{137} LSB Support Officers Evaluation, p. 39, p. 45 & p.58
\textsuperscript{138} RLP Evaluation, pp. 18 - 19
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p.34
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 38
\textsuperscript{141} LSB ESF Evaluation, p. 7
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 58
\textsuperscript{143} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, p. 66
together and just under half that it had improved the way in which the whole Finance Department had worked\textsuperscript{144}.

\textsuperscript{144} FLN Evaluation, p. 58
8 Evaluation evidence: other outcomes and unintended consequences

Other reported outcomes for public services and the organisations delivering them included:

- The development through the All Wales Academy of a body of training materials available electronically for use by both local government and potentially other public service employees\textsuperscript{145}
- An enhancement of the status of procurement professionals and increased opportunities for SMEs to bid for public contracts, both of which might lead to better value in procuring public services\textsuperscript{146}
- Stronger embedding of a culture of citizen engagement in the work of the LSBs as a result of the Making the Connections project\textsuperscript{147}
- A more robust use of evidence in the formulation of policy, both through the Regional Learning Partnership project\textsuperscript{148} and through the work of the LSB Support Officers\textsuperscript{149}.

Perhaps reflecting the diverse and often subtle nature of the interventions, project-level evaluations do not really identify any unintended consequences, either positive or negative.

\textsuperscript{145} All Wales Academy Evaluation, p. 1
\textsuperscript{146} Transforming Procurement Evaluation, pp. 4-5 & p. 40
\textsuperscript{147} MtC Evaluation, p. 7
\textsuperscript{148} RLP Evaluation, p. 36
\textsuperscript{149} LSB Support Officers Evaluation, pp. 58-9
9 Availability and quality of project level evaluation evidence

In total, some eight project-level evaluations are available for review (all but two provided by WEFO) and these provide a broad coverage of the projects financed under the two Priorities. Three of these evaluations related to one large project, the Welsh Government ESF Local Service Board (LSB) Development and Priority Delivery Project: an umbrella evaluation by Cardiff University with IFF and Shared Intelligence, an evaluation of the LSB Support Officers (a resource funded in the Convergence area by the ESF project but in East Wales by Welsh Government) by Old Bell 3 and an evaluation of the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action’s (WCVA) Making the Connections project, also by Old Bell 3: this sub-project had originally been submitted to WEFO as a separate project by the WCVA but was subsequently incorporated into the overall Welsh Government-led LSB project.

The other five evaluations relate to five of the remaining six projects funded under this Priority. This was originally awarded £650k of ESF, representing less than 5 percent of all the ESF committed under the Priority. Coverage is thus good.

Old Bell 3 undertook three of the evaluations with five other contractors each being responsible for one of the remaining evaluations.

All of the reports were final or summative reports.

There is relatively little programme level evaluation which is relevant: the Priority was not included in the ESF Leavers’ Surveys and there is no specific Thematic Evaluation: the references in the Synthesis report are relatively slight, also, partly reflecting the low rate of spend (only 13 percent of the funding had been claimed by December 2012) but also reflecting the fact that this Priority had a relatively low level of financial allocation, accounting for only around 3 percent of all ESF available across the Convergence and RCE Programmes.

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150 The Final Summative Evaluation of the LSB Development and Priority Delivery Project and the Evaluation of the LSB Support Officers - these were both found on the WG Social Research webpages.
151 The WCVA Making the Connections project; the LSB Support Officers and the Finance Leadership Network
152 These were BRiC, Cardiff University, ICF, SQW and stratagia,
153 Thematic Evaluations Synthesis Report p.31
Assessing the quality of the project-level evaluation is made somewhat difficult by the nature of the interventions, which to a large extent focus on achieving cultural or behavioural change in order to improve public service delivery, thus making both survey evidence and an assessment of the counterfactual problematic. Of the six funded projects for which evaluations are available, two\(^\text{154}\) accounting for over 50 percent of the ESF allocated, were never intended to have direct participants/beneficiaries and a third\(^\text{155}\) was largely focused on developing content and had very few participants/learners by the time of the evaluation.

Allowing for this, generally, the quality of the project-level evaluation evidence is reasonably good, with three reports which we assess as strong, four as moderate and only one as weak: in this case, a significant reason for this was the fact that the project was implemented over a very short timeframe, right at the end of the Programme meaning there was little evaluative evidence to consider. All but two\(^\text{156}\) of the evaluations are based on elaborating a project logic model and most of the reports include a serious and reflective consideration of the limitations of the evidence and the difficulties of evaluating these sorts of interventions (including the complexity of disentangling the effects of the ESF projects from wider contextual developments).

Having said this, the evaluations as a whole are relatively weak in terms of the assessment of the counterfactual. There are no studies which attempt a robust CIE approach (though the Cardiff University evaluation of the ESF Development and Priority Delivery project does use survey evidence to compare views of ESF-funded and non-ESF funded collaborative projects) and in most cases, relatively little attention has been paid to probing stakeholders for their subjective views of the counterfactual: in three, research instruments do not seem to have covered this and in two others it is admitted that the assessment of the counterfactual is speculative and ‘anecdotal’\(^\text{157}\) or ‘impossible to achieve in any real way’\(^\text{158}\).

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\(^{154}\) The ESF LSB Development and Delivery Project (though this funded projects which did involve service delivery to individual citizens) and the South Wes Wales Regional Learning Project

\(^{155}\) The All Wales Academy for Local Government

\(^{156}\) All Wales Academy and Finance Leadership Network

\(^{157}\) South West Wales Regional Learning Partnership
There is also relatively little use of survey data – generally reflecting a lack of appropriate relevant populations to survey – and most of what is there relies on on-line surveys. In two cases\textsuperscript{159}, these appear to have had reasonably high response rates, albeit that a degree of respondent self-selection is likely, while in a third\textsuperscript{160} the overall proportion of respondents appears to be relatively modest (around 10 percent) although many were interviewed on several occasions, providing a longitudinal element. Three studies\textsuperscript{161} also used on-line surveys of stakeholders though in two of these the response rates and the low absolute numbers led to serious health warnings about the robustness of the data.

Against this, all three of the evaluations relating to the LSB Development and Priority Delivery Project make good use of case-studies with a significant degree of triangulation within them. All but two of all the evaluations make reasonably good use of triangulation between different data sources. Most make good use of management information and project documentation (though coverage is patchy with little consideration, for example, of financial outturns compared to plans) but in many cases there would appear to be relatively little relationship between the targets agreed with WEFO and the essence of the intervention. Core indicators (e.g. ‘collaborative agreements between public service bodies’) are ill-defined and seen as not particularly meaningful\textsuperscript{162}.

There is little evidence of research instruments being structured or worded in such a way as to lead to respondent bias (most of the reports do not provide research instruments in full), although in a minority of cases, reports appear to have been written in such a way as to unduly highlight the positive messages.

The evidence base for this priority is relatively good, given the somewhat complex nature of the interventions. It is difficult to identify any significant gaps which could be

\textsuperscript{158} Making the Connections
\textsuperscript{159} Transforming Procurement through Home Grown Talent and the FLN
\textsuperscript{160} LIFT
\textsuperscript{161} The overarching evaluation of the LSB Development and Priority Delivery Project, the WCVA Making the Connections evaluation and the evaluation of the SWW Regional Learning Partnership
\textsuperscript{162} See e.g. the Evaluation of the LSB Development and Priority Delivery Project for a discussion of this.
addressed by primary research at this stage, and this would, in any case, arguably be less of a priority given that this sort of intervention is no longer included in the 2014 – 2020 ESF Programmes.
10 Conclusions

Priority 4 is in many ways a ‘special case’ certainly amongst ESF Priorities: a new type of intervention in the 2007 – 2013 Programmes, and involving activity which is no longer eligible for ESF in 2014 – 2020, the overall objective of the Priority was not concerned with supporting individuals to develop skills and enter or progress in the labour market, or even with boosting competitiveness but with improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public services in Wales.

The evidence base for the Priority is reasonably extensive in its coverage but is largely to be found in individual project-level evaluations, with Programme-level evaluation and monitoring reports such as the AIRs focussing less on this Priority, perhaps understandably given its small financial scale.

Nevertheless, the evidence does suggest that the Priority has proved problematic, both in design and implementation.

Taking design first, questions raised at the time of the ex ante evaluation about the appropriateness of funding a set of interventions focused on realising a national programme of public service improvements through a WWV Programme and about the rationale for the division between the two Themes seem to have been borne out in practice: the boundary between the two Themes was blurred and doubts over eligibility of organisations based outside the Convergence area inhibited initial development and delivery of some projects.

The attempt to develop a programme logic model highlights the lack of logical flow between the analysis of the problem, the activities and the desired high-level impacts and the outputs and results identified in the OP.

There appears, from the documentary evidence (e.g. the AIRs), to have been little reflection on the implications for the Priority of the changes to the policy environment and – more significantly – the macro-economic situation, with the onset of severe downward pressure on public spending.
Given this background, projects and sub-projects have often suffered from problems of poor design and lack of clarity.

In terms of implementation, the Priority was under-spent and some of the ‘indicative activities’ highlighted in the Strategic Framework were not taken forward through funded projects. Performance against targets was patchy, and judged against relatively meaningless quantitative indicators, the efficiency of the interventions was not great. Again, programme-level documentation contains relatively little reflection on the reasons for this, but project-level evaluations suggest that poor project design, lack of buy-in from senior management and a range of negative effects stemming from cuts in public expenditure were largely responsible for projects struggling to deliver. Performance in respect of the cross-cutting themes was poor because public sector organisations were generally convinced that they already had adequate policies and strategies in place.

While projects undoubtedly delivered a range of both individual and organisational benefits to those participating, in terms of boosting individual confidence and skills and supporting networking which stimulated new approaches to solving problems, the evidence on balance suggests that there has been limited impact in terms of the three indicators within the OP, improvement in the quality of public services, reduction in the costs of public service delivery and increased citizen satisfaction with public services. Project-level evaluations tend to suggest that process outcomes – improved levels of trust and willingness to collaborate, greater awareness of what other organisations can offer in terms of shaping and delivering public services, greater understanding of how to run partnership projects – have been more visible than these sort of impacts.

Drawing lessons for the future is problematic, not least given the exclusion of these sorts of interventions from the current ESF Programmes. However, the experience of Priority 4 highlights:

- The importance of setting realistic goals and targets, particularly for innovative areas of activity and for ensuring that there is a clear programme logic which links activities, outputs, results and intended impacts
• The need for realism in terms of the range of interventions which can be funded from relatively less well-funded Priorities
• The importance of ensuring that even for relatively small Priorities, consideration is given to the impact of the changing policy and funding environment, and under-performance is examined and explained
• The need to ensure that projects put forward by large organisations have the clear and unambiguous support of senior management.