



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH, DOCUMENT

Evaluation of the Working Wales Service: final report (executive summary)

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of Working Wales.

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Introduction and background

Working Wales, delivered by Careers Wales, is a Welsh Government-funded service designed to provide streamlined and efficient employability support that is responsive to an individual's needs.

Introduced in 2019, the service acts as a free gateway into tailored employment support that is available to anyone aged 16 or above and living in Wales. In addition to providing direct impartial careers support and guidance, Working Wales careers advisers can identify an individual's needs and refer them to other suitable services and programmes, given their extensive knowledge of local and national support offers. As a result, the Working Wales service is able to extend the reach of careers support services into communities and to help people across a wider range of needs and labour market positions.

The service enables individuals through a needs-based assessment to talk to accredited careers advisers about employment and skills, their aims and aspirations, and any challenges that they face in obtaining and maintaining work, education or training or advancing their career.

Career advice and guidance are provided by qualified or Level 6 Diploma-holding careers advisers, ensuring adherence to the UK Register of Career Development Professionals standards.

Employability support is delivered by Working Wales employability coaches, assisting customers with job searches, applications, and interview preparation.

Overview of the scope and parameters of the evaluation

Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill in 2019 to explore the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of Working Wales. In the initial stages of the evaluation, a

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theory of change and evaluation framework were developed along with customer case studies, detailed in the [Evaluation of the Working Wales Service: Report 1](#). Report 1 covered delivery by Working Wales between April 2019 and December 2020 including its response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This was followed by an [evaluation summary paper](#), the first in a series detailing findings from service delivery. A Rural and Urban Paper, a Refugee and Migrant Paper and this Strategic Paper (the final report) are from the final stage of the evaluation primarily covering its operation between 2021 and 2023.

Methodology

The evaluation adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of programme-level monitoring data with qualitative interviews and surveys with Working Wales management and delivery staff, internal and external stakeholders and customers. Stakeholders were Careers Wales staff, and individuals employed outside of Careers Wales but working with the Working Wales service. The evaluation also draws on relevant literature and policy documents to contextualise the service and its delivery model.

Findings

Customer Profile and Service Reach

Between February 2019 and March 2023, Working Wales worked with 95,164 individuals through 120,730 episodes across Wales. In most cases customer engagement is broadly reflective of population sizes across local authorities.

Analysis of Working Wales monitoring information shows that Working Wales customers aged 25–49 were consistently the largest age cohort who accessed Working Wales support for all years of delivery (39 per cent; 47,076/120,708

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episodes). Whilst 2023 data are currently still being collected, it is assumed that the 18–24 age bracket will remain lower than in previous years due to the ability of young people to self-refer to JGW+ (as of May 2022).

The ethnic profile of Working Wales customers closely aligns with the overall ethnic profile of Wales. Overall, 92 per cent of customers identified as White, consistent with the 2021 Census data for the Welsh population (where 93.8 per cent identified as White).

Male customers constitute just under 60 per cent of the total customers engaged in Working Wales, although rates of unemployment are slightly higher for males, rates of economic inactivity are higher for females. This suggests that males are overrepresented within the sample.

Demographic assessments of the profile of Working Wales customers suggest that disabled people are underrepresented, although staff and stakeholder interviews identified only a few cases of challenges engaging disabled people.

Delivery Model

The Working Wales delivery model was perceived by staff as consistent and effective across all regions and local authorities. Each regional team is based in Careers Wales offices within each local authority, with Working Wales services also available at co-location sites and pop-up sites.

Working with co-location partners was described by staff and stakeholders as adding value to the Working Wales service. The use of pop-up sites was seen as effective when meeting a specific need, such as mass redundancies or at refugee and migrant welcome centres. The ability of Working Wales to respond quickly, as part of a multi-agency response, to unforeseen events demonstrates the added value of the Working Wales model.

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Staff were positive about the adaptability of the Working Wales approach, reporting that the flexibility of the model has enabled them to use their local knowledge and networks to best position the Working Wales offer for local people. Staff also suggested that changes to the Working Wales delivery model associated with COVID-19, including opportunities for remote and digital interaction with customers, demonstrated the service's ability to be flexible and has had a positive long-term impact on the delivery model.

In some cases, stakeholders reported that regional differences in the Working Wales service can result in the availability of the offer varying across Wales. This was commonly due to resource pressures as well as variation in how different regional teams prioritised their caseloads.

Staff reported encountering challenges when engaging specific groups. For example, young people, especially those who have left formal education, pose difficulties in re-engagement. Stakeholders described vulnerable young people and those NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) as particularly challenging to engage as they do not typically engage with Working Wales outreach and are more socially isolated than other groups. While Working Wales does not have a responsibility to support young people NEET, exploring specialist youth support in local areas may enhance outreach efforts for young people who have disengaged for education or other support.

Almost three quarters of surveyed customers reported that Working Wales was able to meet their support needs 'to a great extent' due to the effective careers advice and guidance they were provided with. This confirms that Working Wales tailored support successfully supports customers with a range of need.

Understanding of the service model and future potential

Staff and stakeholders were positive about Working Wales and generally felt that Working Wales is, or is becoming, an effective entry point for employability

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support across Wales, with a recognised brand, knowledgeable staff and effective collaboration methods that encourage information sharing.

Working Wales provides careers guidance through qualified careers advisers. It is the only service across Wales that can provide such guidance directly to individuals in work^[footnote 1]. The impartiality and quality of the careers guidance on offer was commonly identified as a key strength of the Working Wales service.

Stakeholders reported that working with Working Wales is effective because the programme's staff are 'transparent' and 'willing to learn', ensuring that partners feel as though they are working with Working Wales (rather than alongside it). Overall, this effective co-working and information sharing is perceived to be encouraging a more coherent and less complicated overview of employability support across Wales. It is, however, also recommended that greater information sharing by Working Wales with partners, with regard to local Working Wales referral processes, would alleviate partner concerns surrounding competition.

Conclusion

The evaluation found that Working Wales is an effective gateway for employability support across Wales due to clear and effective lines of communication between Working Wales staff and other partners. Where the 'one-team approach' is perceived to be working well by staff and stakeholders, this is largely due to the effective collaboration with partners.

Working Wales staff are commonly perceived to be sitting in a unique and advantageous position which benefits customers and demonstrates the efficacy of the Working Wales approach. Careers advisers can offer high-quality and impartial careers guidance, and employability coaches can offer employability

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support which directly responds to the needs of the individual customer.

Some partner stakeholders expressed concerns surrounding Working Wales employability support duplicating other service offers, however, the evaluation cannot verify whether Working Wales support does duplicate other service offers. Duplication of services is a common concern in employability support due to the wide range of providers and funding sources, particularly UK Government funding.

Reflecting on which Working Wales delivery models are working well, staff and stakeholders were positive about their ability to offer outreach and work with partners with expertise in engaging target groups.

Reflecting on the 'blended'^[footnote 2] Working Wales support offer, staff and stakeholders praised the increased opportunity for customers to engage with Working Wales remotely. Overall, remote support was perceived to be most effective when preceded by face-to-face support, allowing customers and staff to establish a trusting relationship in person before engaging remotely.

Working Wales staff contribute valuable expertise and local knowledge to the service. However, there is a risk that decisions are made without current, full and extensive knowledge of local services and needs. Insight and intelligence are available from Careers Wales on the performance of the Working Wales service and how well it aligns with national and local needs. Improved communication based on this intelligence between local teams, Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs), and the Welsh Government would aid mutual understanding and ensure that Working Wales is an inclusive service for those in need.

Recommendations

As a result of the programme-level evaluation, the following recommendations

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have been identified to aid and improve future delivery of Working Wales:

Recommendation 1

To gain a better understanding of why some areas and customers are overrepresented or underrepresented, future provision should look to develop systematic processes in which Careers Wales shares this contextual information with regional Working Wales teams. This will ensure that there is greater internal dialogue regarding performance and engagement.

Recommendation 2

Additional or existing resource should be allocated to annual or biannual strategic sessions to inform and decide on local approaches, including processes for selecting co-location and pop-up sites, that will fit with the universal offer. It is anticipated that this will be informed by Careers Wales intelligence and insight on service reach, new and emerging support offers and local, regional and national labour market information. The sessions should be scheduled between regional and national Working Wales teams, RSPs, and Welsh Government representatives. This will ensure that outreach and co-location decision making is informed by demand, local needs, and the wider support offer.

Recommendation 3

Requirements for Level 6 accredited careers advisers should be retained for future provision. Level 6 accredited careers guidance ensures that Working Wales customers receive high-quality and impartial support. As the only service across Wales that offers this accredited support, sustaining this aspect of the Working Wales model will ensure that the additional value of the service is

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preserved.

Recommendation 4

Where feasible, a blended Working Wales support offer should be retained to allow for service efficiencies. Whilst remote support may be the only viable option for some customers due to the distance or inaccessibility of Working Wales sites, customers and staff benefit from a hybrid approach.

Recommendation 5

To ensure that the service is being delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible, additional information and guidance regarding the Working Wales remit should be developed to be shared with internal Careers Wales staff and external partner staff. This will encourage a more defined understanding of what Working Wales can offer, as well as reducing the burden on delivery staff to inform new partners and/or new partner staff. Please note that this recommendation is based on views articulated by staff and stakeholders that engaged with this evaluation. This may not be generalisable across all Working Wales staff and stakeholders.

Recommendation 6

Future delivery should consider if and how additional resource or altered ways of working could support regional teams to enhance their local offer and their social media campaigns. This would enable regional teams to undertake more local marketing campaigns. Any additional local social media strategies should be in line with local needs identified between regional teams, RSPs, and in response to Careers Wales data.^[footnote 3]

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Recommendation 7

Whilst current Working Wales outreach appears to be effective for older age groups, greater engagement with specialist youth support in local areas may be required in order to better target young people who have disengaged from education and/or alternative support. Specialist youth support may include local organisations and charities or organisations that have support offers nationally e.g. Llamau.

Recommendation 8

Employability support available should be reviewed at national and local levels to ascertain demand and duplication risk to inform regional teams and stakeholders on the 'live' employability support offer across Wales. This support offer could be considered in strategic meetings between Working Wales, the Welsh Government, and RSPs, informed by Careers Wales intelligence and insight.^[footnote 4]

Recommendation 9

To ensure that there is a consistent and accurate understanding of the universal and local Working Wales offer, the Welsh Government and local authorities should look to develop and share additional consistent messaging across departments and national programmes to encourage greater buy-in. It is acknowledged that the employability support landscape across Wales can appear to be 'fragmented' and changeable due to the range of support on offer through both longer-term and short-term funds. Working Wales should act as an 'anchor', mapping out existing local and national support and disseminating this information to key partners.

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Footnotes

[1] Please note that to provide careers guidance, advisers need to have a Level 6 qualification.

[2] Blended support refers to a combination of in-person and remote support.

[3] Please note that strategic meetings referenced here are the same meetings proposed in Recommendation 2.

[4] Please note that strategic meetings referenced here are the same meetings proposed in Recommendation 2.

Contact details

Report authors: Anna Burgess, Andy Parkinson, Oliver Allies, Paula Gallagher, Jakob Abekhon and Endaf Griffiths (Wavehill)

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

For further information please contact:

Sean Homer

Email: kasemployabilityandskillsresearch@gov.wales

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