

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

29/2016

PUBLICATION DATE:

16/03/2016

Evaluation of Workplace Welsh: the Welsh Language Skills Management Diagnostic Tool

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Workplace Welsh is a part of the Enhancing Leadership and Management Skills (ELMS) Programme which was funded by the Welsh Government and the European Social Fund (ESF). Workplace Welsh contains two elements, the first of which is aimed at allowing employers to analyse which Welsh language skills are required by their workforce (a Management Diagnostic Tool). The second element of Workplace Welsh is intended to analyse the present Welsh language skills of employees and to focus on aspects that need improvement (the Skills Diagnostic Tool). Overall, Workplace Welsh aimed to work with a target of 100 employers.
- 1.2 Workplace Welsh was managed internally within the Welsh Government with aspects of the work being out-sourced to the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) and Fusion Workshop Ltd.
- 1.3 While the ELMS programme was withdrawn in 2014, Workplace Welsh continues to be available as a resource for employers in the public, private and voluntary third sectors in Wales to use free of charge.

2. The evaluation of Workplace Welsh

- 2.1 The objective is to provide a final, summative evaluation of Workplace Welsh building on earlier evidence gathered as part of the interim and update evaluations of the wider ELMS programme.
- 2.2 Old Bell 3 Ltd., in association with York Consulting LLP and IFF Research Ltd., were commissioned by the Welsh Government in May 2012 to undertake a long-term evaluation of the Enhancing Leadership and Management Skills in Wales (ELMS) Programme.
- 2.3 The methodology for this summative evaluation of Workplace Welsh has involved:
 - reviewing relevant policy, strategy and research documents to assess the strategic context within which Workplace Welsh was initially funded and

subsequently operates

- reviewing monitoring information and evaluative evidence supplied by the WJEC including the findings from two web surveys
- preparing semi-structured discussion guides for use in qualitative fieldwork with key stakeholders in the Workplace Welsh project, participating employers and employees
- undertaking qualitative interviews with nine stakeholders including Welsh Government, WJEC and WEFO officials
- undertaking qualitative fieldwork with five employers and 12 employees that utilised or participated in the Skills Diagnostic Tool.

3. Key findings

Research evidence, Policy and Legislative Context

- 3.1 The evaluation found that evidence from a number of research studies previously undertaken in Wales shows that most employers do not have formal methods in place for assessing the Welsh language skills of their workforce.
- 3.2 The Welsh Government's Welsh Medium Education Strategy (WMES) contains a clear policy commitment to develop an online method for assessing Welsh language skills within the workplace.
- 3.3 A number of the new Welsh Language Standards being introduced by the Welsh Language Commissioner require employers to undertake measures linked to workforce planning and training relating to the Welsh language.
- 3.4 Workplace Welsh and specifically the Skills Diagnostic Tool provides employers, that are subject to Welsh Language Standards, with an appropriate solution as part of wider workplace planning activities to help them attain and comply with these standards.
- 3.5 The policy linkages between promoting use of the Welsh language in the workplace and improving leadership and management skills (the main focus of the ELMS programme under which Workplace Welsh was funded) are somewhat vague.

Design and Implementation

- 3.6 The evaluation found that the WJEC and Fusion Workshop Ltd. worked well together and the end product, an on-line diagnostic with assessments for reading, writing, speaking and listening linked to Welsh for Adults level descriptors, matched closely the original aims for the Tool.
- 3.7 However, the Skills Management Tool did not turn out as planned. Rather than an interactive diagnostic tool, what was actually produced is a more passive and generic Workplace Planning Guide which takes the form of a PDF document published on the Workplace Welsh website. The Workplace Planning Guide also took a long time to develop and was only launched in January 2015 some four years after the original Skills Management Tool was conceived.

- 3.8 The evaluation also found that there was a lack of focus and strategy in terms of promoting Workplace Welsh and the Skills Diagnostic Tool to employers that might potentially want to use it.

Performance Targets and Expenditure

- 3.9 Workplace Welsh had a target of supporting 100 employers in Wales. There were 106 employers registered on the WJEC's database in January 2015. Employees at 75 of these employers had actually used the Skills Diagnostic Tool.
- 3.10 An internal evaluation by the WJEC shows that the majority of registered employers are located in the East Wales area, with most of those in Cardiff.
- 3.11 Most of the employers that registered to use the Skills Diagnostic Tool are public sector organisations. Most employers are from the Education sector, followed by Government or Local Government.
- 3.12 WJEC data showed a total of 943 registered employee users. However, not all of these will be individual employees as some employers created multiple accounts which distorts the data somewhat relating to the total number of employees that actually undertook assessments.
- 3.13 The majority (around 70 per cent) of employees registered on the Skills Diagnostic Tool database are women.
- 3.14 The original budget for Workplace Welsh was £688k. This represented one per cent of the total, original ELMS budget. As of March 2014, a total of £331k had been spent on Workplace Welsh representing 48 per cent of the original budget. The actual unit cost per employer supported by the Skills Diagnostic Tool was 36 per cent lower than implied on the basis of the original budget and targets which represents good value for money.

The User Perspective

- 3.15 Most employers were motivated to use the Skills Diagnostic Tool as part of wider workforce planning activities including skills audits. A lack of time or capacity has been the main barrier cited by registered employers that have not gone on to use the Skills Diagnostic Tool and its assessments.
- 3.16 The self-assessment element of the Skills Diagnostic Tool was appropriate and added value in terms of pitching the assessments at the correct level for participating employees. Some employees 'played it safe' so as not to over-play their Welsh language skills. However, the software was capable of adjusting the difficulty of assessments as employees undertook them.
- 3.17 The WJEC worked in a proactive way to promote Workplace Welsh and the Skills Diagnostic Tool and this work was instrumental in employers becoming aware of it.
- 3.18 Overall user feedback on the Skills Diagnostic Tool was positive though there were a small number of issues including the potential to highlight areas for improvement (for individual employees) when presenting their test results. Employees undertaking listening and speaking assessments were more likely to report technical issues and overall feedback was slightly less positive in relation to these two tests (as compared to reading and writing).

- 3.19 Employers and employees have been very impressed with the efficiency and consistency of the WJEC in marking and returning results. Overall, employers and staff have also been pleased with the way results have been presented. The fact that these have been linked to the Welsh for Adults levels has been particularly helpful.

Effects and Impacts

- 3.20 The Skills Diagnostic has proved to be a useful complementary tool for employers in their workforce planning activities, though not all have used it in this way. Some employers have used the results of the Skills Diagnostic Tool to make informed decisions about investing in Welsh language training and to consider/decide how the Welsh language is designated in vacant posts being advertised.
- 3.21 A key factor in the extent to which employers have used the results in terms of workforce planning is whether a sufficient proportion of staff participated. Most employers who used the Skills Diagnostic Tool felt that the results had provided them with a clearer picture of the Welsh language skills and capabilities of their workforce.
- 3.22 The Welsh Government did not monitor progression between employees completing the Skills Diagnostic Tool and going on to enrol on Welsh for Adults courses. This would have been a useful addition to the project and the qualitative research revealed a number of examples where progression to Welsh training had taken place with positive levels of attribution.
- 3.23 There is some evidence that the Skills Diagnostic Tool has led to positive effects on organisation culture including Welsh having a higher profile in the workplace and staff being proactively encouraged and supported in various informal ways by colleagues to use the language at work.

There is also evidence that the Skills Diagnostic Tool has led to some positive effects on individual participants. Participants reported a sense of confirmation or validation of their Welsh language skills level. It has also helped some employees justify their involvement in Welsh language training and helped them ensure they selected training at the most appropriate level for them.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 Based on the evidence gathered and analysed, the evaluation makes a series of four recommendations.
- 4.2 Recommendation 1. Having invested in the development of Workplace Welsh, the Welsh Government now needs to consider and decide how its value to employers and their employees in Wales can be maximised in the future.
- 4.3 Recommendation 2. In order to maximise the future value and use of Workplace Welsh, the Welsh Government will need to identify and allocate adequate resources to continue to promote, service and in due course, to potentially develop and upgrade the website and the Skills Diagnostic Tool. This investment would need to take into account likely future up-take to ensure that delivery resources are commensurate with demand and also to ensure that the quality and efficiency of assessments remains high. Without this on-going investment, the use of Workplace Welsh is likely to diminish rapidly and the various resources will effectively become

redundant. This would risk a key policy commitment in the Welsh Medium Education Strategy becoming neglected.

- 4.4 Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should develop a clear communications strategy with a view to engaging and committing key partners such as Welsh for Adults Centres, the Welsh Language Commissioner and other appropriate HR and language related professional networks to help promote awareness of Workplace Welsh. The communications strategy should also set out a more sophisticated approach to identifying and strategically targeting potential employers in the private and third sectors as well as those who will become subject to Welsh Language Standards in the near future.
- 4.5 Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should investigate whether a simple, low-cost mechanism can be put in place to monitor progression of registered users of the Skills Diagnostic Tool to Welsh for Adults courses so that this information can be analysed and used to help target resources effectively in the future.

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Full Research Report: Evaluation of Workplace Welsh: the Welsh Language Skills Management Diagnostic Tool

Available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-enhancing-leadership-management-skills-programme/?lang=en>

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

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