Mid Programme Review of the Employability Skills Programme
Mid Programme Review of the Employability Skills Pilot Programme.

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

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### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym/Key word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Community Rehabilitation Company - responsible for the management of low and medium-risk offenders who have been sentenced to serve their order in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSCS</td>
<td>Construction Skills Certification Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBS</td>
<td>Disclosure and Barring Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOC</td>
<td>Essential Skills for Offenders in the Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>Employability Skills Pilot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMPPS</td>
<td>Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), an agency of the Ministry of Justice; replaced the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in 2017;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCP</td>
<td>Job Centre Plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Job Seekers Allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Management Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPS</td>
<td>National Probation Service - a statutory criminal justice service that supervises high-risk offenders released into the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEST</td>
<td>Wales Essential Skills Toolkit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WG</td>
<td>Welsh Government</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

Introduction

The Employability Skills Programme (the Programme) is a Welsh Government initiative to support unemployed adults to get a job and stay in work. This report presents the findings from an independent evaluation of the design and implementation of the Programme undertaken by Arad Research.

The Employability Skills Programme

The ESP is a voluntary programme that targets unemployed adults who have a reasonable chance of being ready for employment within six months. It is delivered by four main training providers who offer participants work preparation training, essential skills if required, and a work placement or employer-specific training. Almost all of the 3273 participants to date have been referred to the Programme by Jobcentre Plus (JCP). There is also another route into the Programme for offenders in the community who are referred by the National Probation Service (NPS) and the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC).

Delivery Approaches

The formative evaluation of the ESP pilot outlined that the delivery approaches adopted across the four main providers differed. The findings of the mid-term evaluation demonstrate that differences in the delivery approaches across these providers remain.

Two of the four providers continue to adopt a relatively standard delivery approach, whereby all the ESP participants follow a similar training and support path. The other two main providers offer a more tailored delivery approach, adjusting the provision around the specific needs of individuals.

However, the extent to which programme delivery approaches differ across the four main providers appears to have narrowed during the period leading from the pilot phase to the mid-term stage. The two providers who initially offered the more standardised approach have now introduced more flexibility, while the two providers offering the relatively tailored provision have introduced more standardised approaches to their delivery including more centre-based training to larger groups as opposed to small groups or individuals. These delivery adjustments appear to have been made in response to the needs of participants as well as the need to ensure that the programme delivery remains commercially viable.
Referral and assessment process

Almost all referrals to the main element of the Programme (i.e. the in-house training support and potential work experience placement) are made by JCP work coaches who consider the process to be working well. Some referral challenges have however been encountered including the time commitments required to maintain contact with more training providers when more than one provider is delivering the Programme in their area. However, the number of individuals referred to the Programme which training providers considered to be unsuitable was reported to be lower during the midpoint of the Programme compared to the pilot phase.

Essential / Employment Skills for Offenders in the Community (ESOC) strand

Referrals to the ESOC strand are made by probation officers working for NPS (supervising high-risk offenders) or CRC (for low and medium-risk offenders). These referrals were very slow to establish. However, training providers, NPS and CRC have since started to work closer together in order to get offenders in the community on to the Programme. This process has taken time to embed, and at the time of writing, only a small number of individuals within this cohort had been referred onto the Programme.

Delivery of support

Following initial meetings with the provider and an essential skills level assessment using the WEST (Wales Essential Skills Toolkit) participants were provided with an employability plan detailing the training support and employment route that they would follow. Although many participants interviewed did not recall receiving a written employability plan, the majority noted that the training provider listened and responded to what they wanted to get out of the Programme, and at least attempted to tailor provision around needs where possible.

Most ESP participants received centre-based training focussing on CV and cover letter writing, essential skills training, online job searching and interview techniques. Many participants noted that this training enabled them to gain confidence in their own abilities and / or empowered them to apply for jobs that they previously would not have considered. Others noted that attending the training centre on a regular basis gave them a sense of purpose and got them used to a work routine.

A minority of participants were of the view that the training focussed on areas that they didn’t need support with. These views were expressed mainly by participants who had
already gained a level 3 qualifications or above. More than one in six (15%) of 2017 / 18 ESP participants had a level 3 qualification or above even though the ESP is not intended for individuals who have qualifications above level 2. Individuals are referred to the Programme at the discretion of the job centre work coaches. Participants who were already qualified to level 3 or above may not have required the centre based essential skills support available through the support. However, the evaluation findings do not indicate that participants with higher qualifications should be excluded from the ESP. Instead they indicate the need for delivery approaches to be sufficiently flexible in order to match the specific needs of individuals.

**Work placements**

The Programme is intended to provide all participants with either a work placement or employer-specific training opportunity. These work placements are designed to provide participants with between 120 and 240 hours of real workplace experience with a local employer, voluntary or community organisation.

Only a third of the participants interviewed had completed a work placement; another third had completed the Programme without having been on a placement and the final third had not yet been on a placement. Many participants interviewed had not taken up a placement because they had secured employment through other means and had left the Programme early. However, others had not taken up a work placement because suitable work placement opportunities had not become available to them. This limited the potential employment outcomes that could be achieved and also interrupted the progression flow of these participants through the Programme.

Most of the participants interviewed, who had been offered a work placement, noted that the experience they gained from this, matched the kind of work they were looking for and provided them with the skills and experience they needed to secure a job in the future. However, for a smaller number of participants interviewed, the placement did not match the kind of work they wanted.

Most employers interviewed were also of the view that the work placements were beneficial as it enabled them to understand the participants’ capabilities before potentially employing them. However, fewer than expected employers offered participants a job opportunity at the end of the placement. as there wasn’t a job available for them. The monitoring data for the Programme records that only 6 percent of
participants were employed by their work placement employer at the end of the Programme.

**Employer-specific element**

ESP participants can also be referred to the employer-specific element of the Programme, if such opportunities are available. This element of the Programme offers participants training which is tailored specifically to the recruitment needs of an employer. These are typically larger employers who are looking to fill several vacancies at any given time. In return the employer is required to offer all ESP participants who attend these training sessions a job interview.

To date, only one main and one subcontracted training provider have chosen to deliver employer-specific training – which has been delivered to just over 13 percent of the participants (430). The training providers interviewed noted that although employer specific training generally generated more employment outcomes than the other ESP delivery elements, it was difficult to deliver the training and support required in a commercially viable way. Employers and job centre representatives noted that the employer specific training worked well as the training linked directly to current job opportunities.

The ESP appears to work best, in relation to achieving employment outcomes, when linked to good quality work placement opportunities. However, not all ESP participants get the opportunity to access a work placement; those who don’t, usually remain unemployed at the end of the Programme.

**Commercial viability**

The commercial viability of delivering the ESP remains a challenge for most providers. Ensuring a sufficient number, and a steady throughput of participants also appears to be a necessity to ensure that ESP delivery is commercially viable. As a result, an uneven geographical distribution of the Programme delivery has occurred, with provision focussed towards the relatively highly populated urban areas where referral rates are highest, and less towards the relatively sparsely populated rural areas.

**Impact and outcomes of the Programme**

The Programme has a target of supporting 55 percent of participants into employment. To date, employment outcomes have fallen short of this target with just over 1 in 4 participants (27 percent) who took part in the work-placement route of ESP recording a
positive employment or training outcome at the end of the Programme. Most of these employment outcomes were taken with employers who had not participated in the work-placement element of the Programme. Only 8 percent of participants were recorded as having gained a positive job outcome at the workplace where they had undertaken their ESP work placement.

However, the employment outcome of many of the participants (30 percent) remains unknown as providers were unable to obtain details of their employment status. Although there are gaps in the monitoring data available, the data that is available strongly suggests that the employment outcome target set for each provider was not reached – the positive employment outcomes achieved across providers ranged from 25 percent to 31 percent, well below the 55 percent target. Marginally higher employment outcome rates per provider were recorded in north Wales compared to south Wales; although the number of participants enrolled onto the Programme were considerably higher in south Wales compared to north Wales.

Employment is not however, the only positive outcome for participants generated by the Programme. Even in cases where participants had not gained a job, many noted that they had gained softer outcomes such as developing skills and making contacts which will support them to gain employment in the future.

**Recommendations for future planning**

**Recommendation 1**: Standardised methods in terms of the content and timing of feedback between training providers and JCP need to be developed.

**Recommendation 2**: The delivery of the ESP needs to be further reviewed to encourage more even distribution across all geographical areas.

**Recommendation 3**: More work placement opportunities, especially those linked to actual work vacancies need to be supported within the Programme, through encouraging closer working relationships between the training providers, job centres and employer representative organisations.

**Recommendation 4**: Training providers should be incentivised to support participants through the Programme at a pace that best suits their individual needs.

**Recommendation 5**: Training providers should be further encouraged and incentivised to seek out more opportunities to deliver the employer specific element of the Programme where appropriate.
**Recommendation 6:** The expectations of the individual participants need to be managed to ensure that their employment plans meet their ambitions but are also realistic.

**Recommendation 7:** The final employment outcome of most of the ESP participants remains unknown. As such the monitoring process currently in place may need to be reviewed to consider alternative or additional ways of gaining programme exit feedback from a larger proportion of participants.

**Recommendation 8:** The uptake of offenders in the community to the Programme remains low. Consideration may be required to deliver some aspects of the ESP e.g. such as centre based essential skills and employability skills training to offenders at an earlier point - possibly before they leave the prison service to ensure that they are closer to the labour market on their release date.
1. **Introduction and Background**

1.1 This report presents the findings of a mid-programme review of the Employability Skills Programme (ESP), a Welsh Government programme to support unemployed adults to get a job and stay in work.

1.2 Arad Research was commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake an independent evaluation of the design and implementation of the Programme. This is the second evaluation of ESP and it follows a formative evaluation of the Programme’s pilot phase, which was undertaken in the Winter of 2016/2017 and published in August 2017\(^1\). This report presents the findings from the evaluation fieldwork undertaken between October 2017 and January 2018.

**Employability Skills Programme**

1.3 The ESP programme is aimed at supporting unemployed adults to get a job and stay in work by improving their employability skills. It specifically targets adults who have a reasonable chance of being ready for employment within six months. The Programme is delivered by four main training providers who offer work preparation training, essential skills if required, and a work placement or employer specific training to those referred to them by Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and others. A description of ESP, as presented in the formative report, is provided in annex 1 of this report. Since that formative report, there have been a number of programme developments. These developments are summarised below.

1.4 The number of participants has significantly increased since the formative evaluation. At the time of carrying out the fieldwork for this mid-programme review, ESP had been running for over a year and therefore, a larger pool of participants was available to be contacted for the evaluation fieldwork.

1.5 The essential skills for offenders in the community (ESOC) strand of ESP had changed since the pilot phase of the Programme. During the pilot phase, offenders could only be referred to the essential skills support strand, however, this was changed to enable offenders to access all aspects of the Programme.

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1.6 Since the formative evaluation of the pilot phase, training providers have refined their delivery approaches. Although at the time of carrying out the fieldwork for the mid-programme review there were still variations in delivery approaches across the four training providers, as had been reported in the formative evaluation, all had moved closer in approach, with two of the four having moved towards a slightly more tailored delivery approach while another had introduced more standardised practices. Section 3 provides more details relating to these delivery approaches and the reasons for the changes.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

1.7 The aim of the evaluation is to provide a mid-term assessment of the design and implementation of the ESP to inform future decision-making around activities to increase employability and skills, including the development of the new, Welsh Government adult employability programme.

1.8 This mid programme evaluation followed on from the formative evaluation of the pilot phase of ESP. It aimed to collect more views of participants and to identify any changes in programme delivery since the pilot phase. The specific objectives were to evaluate the assessment and referral process; the delivery model; provision, and employer engagement.

Report structure

1.9 The remainder of this report is structured as followed:

- Methodology;
- Delivery models and provision;
- Referral and assessment process;
- Provision;
- Impact and outcomes of the Programme;
- Commercial viability;
- Conclusions and recommendations.
2. Method

2.1 This chapter outlines the research methods used for the evaluation. These methods involved the following:

- Semi-structured interviews with representative of the four main training providers and five of their subcontractors;
- Semi-structured interviews with Welsh Government officials, DWP (one interview), JCP advisers (five interviews) and stakeholders involved in the offender strand of the Programme (three interviews);
- Participant interviews – interviews were conducted with 92 unemployed adults who had participated in the Programme;
- Employer interviews – eight employers were interviewed.

Interviews with training providers and subcontractors

2.2 A mix of telephone and face to face interviews were undertaken with directors and operation managers of the four training providers. These interviews explored any changes in the delivery of ESP since the evaluation of the pilot phase of the Programme. The main successes and challenges of the Programme were also explored as well as any lessons for the future.

2.3 Five subcontractors were also interviewed, with similar themes explored. A sixth subcontractor was approached for an interview, but initial discussions revealed that they had withdrawn from the contract before starting to deliver.

Interviews with Welsh Government officials, the DWP and JCP advisers

2.4 Interviews were held with the Welsh Government officials responsible for managing the ESP contract.

2.5 An interview took place with a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) partnership manager who then put the evaluation team in touch with job advisers from all JCP districts, resulting in interviews with five JCP staff – four advisers and one district manager. These interviews covered the referral process and the links with the training providers.
Interviews with stakeholders involved in the offender strand

2.6 An interview took place with a commissioning manager at Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service in Wales (HMPPS) who then put the evaluation team in touch with managers in the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) resulting in one interview from each of the two services. These interviews covered the referral process and the links with the training providers.

Participant interviews

2.7 A sample of 92 participants took part in a telephone interview. These participants were randomly selected, from the database of all the 1,758 individuals who had participated in ESP by November 2017 and stratified according to the four main training providers. The individuals who took part in an interview opted to do so in reply to a request by text or ‘phone message and may not therefore be representative of the whole population.

2.8 Of the 92 participants interviewed, 78 had completed the Programme or left early and 14 were still participating in the Programme at the time of the interview. Of the 14 participants who were still undertaking the Programme, one had only just started, seven were a few weeks into the Programme, two were mid-way through and four had nearly completed the Programme. The interview questions covered the following themes:

- **Referral and assessment process**: source of referral; information received at the referral stage (e.g. whether it was clear that the Programme was not mandatory) time taken between referral and assessment, and commencement of support.

- **Centre based training**: views and experiences on each element (essential skills training, work preparation training and accredited vocational skills training) were explored individually according to participant involvement in the Programme. For example:
  - Relevance of the training in relation to skills needs.
  - Views on delivery of training in relation to quality, duration location etc.
Extent to which the Employability Plan matched their specific needs and preferences.

- **Work placement**: the extent to which the placement:
  - was relevant to their employment route preferences;
  - enabled participants to gain the skills and experience they needed;
  - included some form of on the job training;
  - led to a job interview / possible employment outcome.

- **Job specific training** (if applicable):
  - Whether this led to a permanent job.
  - Whether this route to employment (if achieved) could have been gained without the support of ESP.

- **Gaining sustained employment** (if applicable):
  - Whether the participant gained employment at the end of the support.
  - The level and value of in-work coaching.

**Employer interviews**

2.9 The evaluation team received information on those employers who have supported work placements. Of these, 28 had provided email addresses and had consented to participation in the evaluation: all of these were approached by email and then by phone to invite them to take part in a telephone interview. This resulted in eight telephone interviews.

2.10 These interviews aimed to establish employers’ relationship with the ESP training providers, their views of the work placement and in-work support and the benefits to being involved in the Programme as an employer.
3. **Delivery models and provision**

3.1 In this section, we briefly review the initial delivery approaches adopted across the four main providers during the pilot phase of the Programme and discuss how these have changed over the last 12 months as the Programme became more established. This section also considers key lessons emerging from the delivery approaches which could inform the design of the future programme.

**Delivery Models**

3.2 Each of the four commissioned providers operate in different geographical areas across Wales. Two operated across South Wales while the other two operated across North Wales.

3.3 The evaluation report of the pilot phase of ESP detailed the referral and progression route of ESP participants during the Programme’s first few months. The outline delivery model, produced by the Welsh Government as a guide to support the four commissioned training providers to plan their own delivery approaches, remains the same. This is summarised in figure 3.0 below.
3.4 The delivery approaches adopted by the four main providers continue to follow the basic structure of that model. Some delivery changes have been introduced however, and these are summarised in the remainder of this section.

3.5 In most cases, referrals to the Programme across all providers, continue to come directly through the job centres. Offenders in the community can also be referred to the Programme via the National Probation Service (NPS) and the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). At the pilot phase no referrals had been made and the numbers remain low at this mid-programme point. During the pilot phase, offenders could only be referred to the essential skills support element of ESP. However, this has now been changed to enable offenders to access all aspects of the Programme offer. Despite this change, the number of participants starting on ESP from this cohort remains low, although an increase in focus on this group of individuals by the training providers and the probation staff did lead to some referrals and a handful of starts during the latter stages of 2017 (see also section 4.14).
Variations in the delivery approaches across the four main providers remain. Two of the four continue to provide a relatively standard delivery approach, whereby all participants follow a similar training and support pathway. The other two offer a more tailored approach, adjusting the support provision around the specific needs of individuals. However, the range of delivery approaches adopted across the four providers has narrowed. The two providers who initially offered a standardised delivery approach have now introduced more flexibility, while the two providers offering the relatively tailored provision have introduced some standardised delivery practices into their ESP provision. These delivery adjustments appear to have been made in response to the needs of participants as well as the need to ensure that the Programme delivery remains commercially viable.

The sections that follow provide a diagrammatical illustration of the delivery approaches adopted by each of the four main providers during the pilot phase followed by a description of how these approaches have changed in the period following the pilot phase leading to the mid-programme delivery phase. As with the formative evaluation report, individual providers are not named, instead they are referred to as training provider 1, 2, 3 and 4.
### Table 3.1: Number of participants per provider (September 2016 to March 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Participation in Strand 1 ESP (Main Stream of the Programme)</th>
<th>Participation in Strand 2 ESP (In work support)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>% of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training provider 1</td>
<td>1408</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training provider 2</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training provider 3</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training provider 4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,843</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Wales</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Wales</td>
<td>2,407</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Welsh Government monitoring data, received April 2018.

3.8 Almost half (49.5%) of the 2,843 individuals who participated in the ESP between September 2016 and March 2018 were supported by training provider 1. On the other hand, only 3% of the participants were supported by Training Provider 4. The majority of ESP provision was also delivered across south Wales (85%) compared to 15% delivered across north Wales.

3.9 Just over 12% of those who participated in the main stream of the Programme went on to receive in work support (support or coaching provided by the training provider to participants during the first three months after they have secured sustained employment as part of the Programme – see also Section 5 paragraph 5.51). The relatively low proportion of participants who receive in work support reflects the relatively low proportion of participants who gained a positive employment as a result of the ESP.
3.10 During the pilot phase, provider 1 delivered the Programme using a relatively standardised approach. Potential participants referred to the Programme via this provider all received centre-based training – usually up to 12 weeks – before being allocated to a work placement. At the mid programme delivery point, however the approach had changed slightly, with the provider now offering participants more flexibility in relation to the length and focus of the centre-based training they receive. The centre-based training now also includes more options such as open access sessions where the participants can drop in when they want, which, in the view of the training provider, delivers training that reflects and responds to the needs and circumstances of individual participants.

3.11 Training provider 1 continues to perform well in relation to Welsh Government participation targets, although delivering the Programme in rural areas remains
challenging. The main delivery challenge reported by them is gaining access to a sufficient number of individual participants and employers, particularly in the more sparsely populated rural areas – see also commercial viability section.

3.12 The formative evaluation report largely associated training provider 1’s success in achieving participation numbers with the good relationships they had developed with the local job centres who refer individuals to the Programme. Our mid programme review findings indicate that this continues to be the case. Further to this, the relationship between training provider 1 and local job centres appears to have improved over the last year resulting in job centres referring more suitable candidates to the Programme.

3.13 Training provider 1 noted that the number of individuals referred who are considered unsuitable for the Programme, and subsequently have to be referred back to the job centre, is now down to 20 percent - compared to 50 percent during the pilot phase. The training provider reported that this was due to the job centre advisers now having a better understanding of ESP therefore referring more suitable individuals. Training provider 1, as with most of the other providers, has also invested time to work alongside job centres to support their efforts in raising awareness of the Programme amongst potential participants, and supporting advisers to identify suitable candidates.

3.14 Training provider 1, as with the other three main providers, has focussed mainly on recruiting participants through the mainstream route i.e. unemployed individuals on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Universal Credit (UC) who are referred to the ESP directly from the job centre. However, since the summer of 2017, training provider 1 has focussed more time and resources on recruiting individuals through the Offenders in the Community strand. However, at this stage the number of participants recruited through this stream remain relatively low.
3.15 The evaluation of the pilot phase of ESP noted that a ‘key difference in the delivery approach adopted by training provider 2, compared to the other training providers, was the additional time and resources they committed to supporting the initial referral process’. A representative of the training provider would spend a morning or an afternoon each week at individual job centres, meeting potential ESP participants to inform them of the Programme and assess their eligibility and suitability. Training provider 2 adopted this approach to limit what they considered to be the potential risk of receiving unsuitable referrals from the job centres.

3.16 Training provider 2 continues to support the initial referral and recruitment process in this way. However, representatives of provider 2 noted that the rate of referrals from job centres slowed during the second half of 2017. They
associated this with fact that many job centre advisers making those referrals were away from their usual jobs while they received training to roll out the delivery of Universal Credit and that this had had a short-term knock-on effect on the number of individuals referred to the Programme.

3.17 Training provider 2 also noted that not only did the number of referrals to the Programme fall in the second half of 2017, but that a smaller proportion of these referrals were considered suitable for the Programme. They attributed this to the fact that many of the more suitable candidates had already been referred to the Programme earlier in the year. As a result, a higher proportion of those referred to the Programme during the second half of the year appeared to have more challenging employment barriers to overcome, often requiring support over a longer period than what could be offered through the ESP. This differs from the referral experiences noted by training provider 1 who noted an increase in the suitability of individuals referred to them.

3.18 Alongside these differences, there were also some similarities in the delivery experiences of training provider 1 and 2. As with training provider 1, the number of referrals received by training provider 2 from the ESOC strand of the Programme increased towards the later stages of 2017. Although, also in line with training provider 1, the overall number of offenders recruited by training provider 2 remains relatively low at this stage.

3.19 Training provider 2 has also now taken on some additional participants through a new arrangement whereby they are also operating as a subcontractor to training provider 4. Training provider 4 has found it more challenging than the other three providers to meet their planned delivery targets – see paragraph sections 3.26 – 3.28.
During the pilot stage of the Programme, training provider 3’s delivery approach was to recruit individuals on to the Programme with a view to support them into a work placement as soon as possible. Training provider 3 only delivered centre-based training to participants who required essential skills or other specific type of training. This approach differed from that adopted by training providers 1 and 2 who adopted a more standardised approach to the delivery of ESP (see above).

Training provider 3 incurred initial contractual challenges with some of their subcontractors during the pilot phase of the Programme, which delayed their initial delivery progress. These challenges were further compounded by senior staff changes within the training provider organisation which led to delays in...
making some key decisions associated with the delivery of the ESP. In addition to this, some of its subcontractors pulled out of their initial delivery agreements (reportedly due to commercial viability reasons) which created additional delivery setbacks.

3.22 Despite these delivery disruptions, training provider 3 continued to deliver the Programme in a relatively flexible manner. Representatives of the provider noted that if participants demonstrated that they were ready for work at the point of recruitment, then the provider would aim to get them into a work placement or even directly into paid employment as soon as possible. However, training provider 3 also noted that they have had to look carefully at the commercial viability of supporting participants in this way, as progressing participants straight to employment doesn’t enable the provider to draw down any funding for the delivery of training. Training provider 3 noted a potential trade-off, or balance that was required at times, between delivering what was best for the participant, and ensuring commercial viability for the training provider organisation.

3.23 Training provider 3 noted that they still strive to deliver tailored support aimed at the specific needs of participants. However, they also learnt from the pilot phase that it was not cost effective or viable for them to deliver this training on a one to one basis or even to very small groups of individuals. To ensure that the delivery remained commercially viable, the provider continues to tailor the centre-based training support according to specific needs, however, the training is now delivered in group sessions aimed at between 10 and 12 participants who receive at least 16 hours of training a week.

3.24 The reasons for providing more centre-based training for participants were not only based on cost effectiveness and commercial viability. One of training provider 3’s subcontractors noted that all of their participants now receive eight weeks of centre-based training whereas before, during the pilot phase, they could go on to a work placement immediately after induction. The subcontractor noted that this training period allowed participants time to settle into the Programme and gain the confidence required to go on placement and that this in turn, in their view, reduced dropout rates and allowed the trainer time to consider their suitability for various placements before committing participants to them.
3.25 Training provider 3 noted they had put a number of individuals through the employer specific element of ESP, working in association with companies wishing to recruit. In their experience, a higher proportion of these participants ended up in employment compared to participants enrolled onto other elements of the Programme. This may not be surprising as the training provided through the employer specific element is tailored specifically to the needs of individual workplaces in response to a need to fill vacancies.

Training Provider 4

Figure 3.4 – Overview of training provider 4’s delivery model during pilot phase

3.26 During the pilot phase of the ESP, training provider 4’s delivery model focussed on delivering bespoke support that matched the training needs and employment preferences of individual participants. However, by adopting this tailored or ‘different’ delivery approach, training provider 4 found it much more challenging to promote and market their support ‘offer’ to job centres. As a result, training
provider 4 received very few referrals from the job centres during the pilot phase.

3.27 At the mid programme point, the situation remains similar. Training provider 4 continues to find it difficult to recruit individuals on to the Programme. Training provider 4 was of the view that they may have underestimated what would be required to deliver the Programme in the geographical area. Training provider 2 delivers the Programme in the same area as training provider 4 but has a long-established close working relationship with local job centres having delivered previous programmes in the area, whereas training provider 4 does not. Job centre representatives tend to refer their clients to programmes and training providers with whom they are most familiar, and as such training provider 2 tends to receive the most referrals from local job centres.

3.28 Training provider 4 also noted, as did training provider 2, that referral rates had been affected by job centre advisers not always being available to refer individuals to the Programme as they were drawn away from their day jobs to attend Universal Credit rollout training.

3.29 The low referral and take-up rate experienced by training provider 4 made it difficult for them to deliver the Programme in a financially viable way. Training provider 4 even considered withdrawing from their Welsh Government contract to deliver the ESP. However, it was decided in discussion with the Welsh Government, that instead of withdrawing from the contract, training provider 4 would subcontract some of their target allocation of participants, including all of their offender in the community participation targets, to training provider 2.

3.30 During the pilot phase training provider 4 had recruited some participants from the Lift programme onto the ESP. However, they no longer focus on this referral strand as, in their opinion, most of those referred to them from the Lift programme had not yet reached the point where they were within six-months of the labour market, which is a suitability requirement for the Programme.

3.31 Training provider 4 noted that, despite the delivery challenges they have faced and the low participation rates they have achieved, they would not change their delivery approach as, in their opinion, this is how the ESP should be delivered. However, they did acknowledge that it was very difficult to deliver one to one or bespoke training and support in a cost-effective way through the Programme.
Training provider 4 were also of the view that they would have achieved higher referral and participation rates had they been operating in another geographical area where they had closer working connections with local job centres.

3.32 Interviews were held with a sub-contractor of the training provider whose experience differed somewhat. The subcontractor is focused on a particular sector and is finding that they are getting the referrals and even requests to deliver from further afield. To date they had run two courses with two separate intakes, and they reported that the course was liked by the sector, by employers, advisers and participants, and that the job outcome rate was close to the average for the Programme. They are not likely to run further courses or accept more referrals, however, as they have reached the conclusion that it is not commercially viable for them as a training company. As a subcontractor they have found that the rate they receive ‘barely covers the costs’; they have also found that they are referred a challenging cohort who need additional support (e.g. mental health needs, alcohol misuse); dealing with job centres is time-consuming and that delivering in a rural area means that there are extra transport costs.

**Overview of Delivery Approaches**

3.33 During the pilot phase evaluation, the range of delivery approaches adopted by the four main providers, from standardised through to tailored approaches, was illustrated by the figure below.

**Figure 3.5 – Overview of delivery approaches during the pilot phase**

3.34 The figure above illustrates the differences between the relatively standardised approach adopted by training provider 1, during the pilot phase, and the more tailored approach adopted by training provider 4. Differences in the delivery approaches across the four main providers remain. However, the range in the
different approaches adopted appears to have narrowed in the period leading from the pilot phase to the mid programme delivery point. During that time, training provider 1 introduced more flexibility into their delivery approach and training provider 3, and to some extent training provider 4, placed more emphasis on delivering centre based training to larger groups as opposed to small groups or individuals.

3.35 The main differences in the delivery performance of each training provider during the pilot phase, was the rate at which they enrolled participants onto the Programme. Training provider 1, for example, recruited more participants onto the Programme during the pilot phase than training provider 4. This remains the case, as does the apparent trade-off between providing tailored delivery approaches and the referral and participation rates gained in the process.

3.36 All providers noted that they had reached the conclusion that in order to ensure the delivery of ESP is commercially viable, the centre-based training needs to be delivered to groups as opposed to individuals. The challenge with this delivery approach, however, is that the training needs of individuals within the group are likely to differ. As such, training tutors are faced with either delivering the same training to the whole group (accepting that areas of the training may be more suitable to some compared to others at any given time) or providing support to individuals within a group setting. This appears to have worked well in some situations but not so well in others, with some participants noting that they did not think that the training was relevant to their needs (see also section 5).

3.37 Training providers were generally in agreement that provision that focussed around the needs of specific sectors or individual employers was easier to deliver in a group environment as most aspects of this training was relevant to almost all the participants. Employer specific training also appeared to lead to more employment outcomes (see section 6).

3.38 To enable providers to deliver training and support in a group setting, they need to recruit a sufficient number of participants, and doing so within a relatively short timeframe to avoid delaying the start of the training delivery. The ability of training providers to do this is affected by referral rates which in turn can be affected by geographical location. Providers reported that fewer potential participants can be found in more sparsely populated rural areas. Furthermore,
even if participants can be recruited from rural areas it is often difficult to match these up with suitable work placements with the relatively few employers that operate in the area.

3.39 Providers noted that it is not always cost effective for them to spend time and resources focussing on recruiting and delivering training in geographical areas where the number of participants is likely to be low. Providers therefore tend to focus delivery in areas where they are most likely to recruit a higher number of participants during a relatively short timeframe. As a result, the Programme is not being delivered equally across all geographical areas in Wales. This was confirmed by some job centre representatives consulted, who noted that opportunities to refer their customers on to the Programme varied across areas in Wales.
4. Referral and assessment process

4.1 Eligible participants are referred on to the main element of ESP by their JCP work coach who checks and confirms that the individuals have little current or ‘relevant’ work experience but will be work-focused and have a reasonable chance of being ready for employment within six months. Careers Wales and Lift brokers may identify some of their clients who could benefit from ESP and they will work with the local JCP to make the referral, but in practice almost all referrals are made by the JCP only.

4.2 Training providers, job centre staff and participants were asked about their views on the referral process and the remainder of this section sets out a summary of those views on referrals to the main element before summarising the referral process and views on the essential skills for offenders in the community (ESOC) strand.

Referrals to the main element of ESP

4.3 Almost all the main element referrals are made by JCP advisers (the advisers) to the training provider or providers serving their area. The links between the JCP and providers built on established relationships (this has been discussed in detail in the pilot report). Job centre advisers were usually introduced to ESP via a visit to their office from the training provider, or from a colleague cascading information received during such a visit.

4.4 Job centre advisers tend to meet with claimants every fortnight and during those meetings may refer to ESP if suitable. The JCP advisers interviewed for this evaluation were clear with regards who would suit ESP and refer ‘those who lack motivation or have lots of motivation but are not getting anywhere’. Advisers noted however that the JCP tend to have more ‘difficult’ customers these days and that ESP is not suitable for those with significant basic skills needs or mental health needs, nor is ESP a suitable route for the ‘easier’ customers, who can be supported by the advisers themselves without needing to refer to a programme.

2 ibid
4.5 The exact referral arrangement between the JCP and training providers varies although there are two main routes – either a booking sheet for forthcoming sessions with the training provider is set up on the JCP office system and the booking made on that system during the advice session, or the adviser phones the training provider to make a booking, again during the advice session with the customer.

4.6 Most JCP offices can refer to two training providers. No advice has been issued on how to choose between providers, and advisers may choose based on which training provider has the next visit to the job centre, which one has the sector expertise, contacts or location best suited to the customer, or typically, the training provider with whom the adviser is most familiar.

4.7 The first meeting with the training provider often takes place at the JCP office and from then on, the delivery of ESP rests with the training provider who will in turn review potential candidates’ attitude towards work and their potential to go into employment. Some of those referred will be deemed not suitable for the Programme and a range of 10-40 percent was mentioned in training provider interviews. (See also 3.10 3.14 and sections 5.2-5.12).

4.8 The referral process from JCP to the training providers works smoothly according to the JCP advisers, although there are a few challenges from their perspective. Keeping in touch and up to date with two separate training providers can be time-consuming, and all advisers would appreciate more regular and standardised feedback on what happens next to those who get referred. Since ESP is not a DWP programme no information on numbers, progress or outcomes is recorded by them; the only information comes anecdotally from the customers or from ad-hoc feedback from the providers. Advisers felt that as a result they did not have ‘the bigger picture’ to either fully explain the programme to customers nor know whether it was worthwhile option. Many explained that once they had requested more feedback, its quality and regularity had improved, but a more standardised approach would still be welcome.

4.9 Participants were asked whether they were made aware that the programme was voluntary and almost two thirds (54 of 92) answered yes. A significant minority (25 of the 92) said that it wasn’t voluntary while the others did not know.
From the interviews it seems that many often assumed that it was compulsory. There may be a couple of reasons for this: firstly, advisers may not have explicitly pointed out to participants that it was a voluntary programme, the other is that under Universal Credit agreements claimants are obliged to take up programme offers made by the job centre or they will be in breach of their agreement. See also section 3.13 above discussing Universal Credit.

‘As far as I understood it was compulsory but when I arrived, they said it was voluntary’ [ESP participant].

‘It was supposed to be voluntary, but nobody likes to say ‘no’ to anything with the job centre because you’re not sure’ [ESP participant].

4.10 Training providers reported that most customers understood that it was a voluntary programme.

4.11 Upon referral, most of the respondents were given a verbal explanation only of what the programme was about, and the description tended to be brief, such as being told that ‘the course could help with my CV and covering letters’ or ‘could help me gain some skills needed to get a job and possibly find a job’, or ‘there would be a chance of getting a placement which could help get a job in the future’.

4.12 Opinions varied across the five JCP advisers interviewed as to the usefulness of ESP to them; a couple of the job advisers very much welcomed the addition of ESP as a much-needed route for their customers, one classed it as ‘nice to have’ rather than essential and another two believed that they had enough other provision locally to which they could refer.

4.13 Advisers reported that they want consistency from programmes, but that ESP is not wholly consistent from their perspective. After a slow start in some areas, staff turnover has further affected what and how much is delivered in centre-based provision in some areas, leading to participant dissatisfaction and early leaving, according to the advisers. A couple of the advisers believed that only a few of their clients were moving on to the work placement part of the programme and that this contributed to an uncertainty of whether to refer or not. Furthermore, one adviser reported that their only training provider had asked for no more referrals for the remainder of the financial year (as at January 2018).
while another adviser explained that they had reached their maximum referrals but had not known at the outset that there was a cap on places in their area.

**Essential / Employment Skills for Offenders in the Community (ESOC)**

4.14 Referrals to the ESOC strand of the ESP were very slow to establish, mainly due to training providers focussing most of their attention on establishing main element referral links with local Job Centres. Once the main element referral processes were established, the training providers and the teams supporting offenders (NPS and CRC) were encouraged to work together in order to refer offenders in the community on to the Programme. This process has taken time to embed and at the time of writing, only a small number of individuals within this cohort had been registered onto the Programme, and none were available for consultation as part of this evaluation. As a result, this report doesn’t contain any views expressed by ESOC participants. The remainder of this chapter is therefore based on feedback provided by training providers and those who refer offenders to them.

4.15 Referrals to the ESOC strand are made by probation officers working for NPS (supervising high-risk offenders) or CRC (for low and medium-risk offenders). As with the JCP, the NPS and CRC managers only refer the most motivated individuals, although they note that most of the individuals need more support and are further back from being work ready. There was reportedly a spike in referrals immediately after the training providers visited to re-launch the ESP but that the referrals had since slowed.

4.16 The NPS and CRC managers noted that many of the offenders they refer to the Programme, are not accustomed to attending training activities and events that are delivered over several hours a day. As a result, they often find it difficult to adjust to the time requirements associated with this level of learning. This, in the view of the managers, often leads to many of the referred offenders, dropping out of the Programme early, sometimes before starting or in the early days.

4.17 No formal links have been established between the CRC, NPS and the job centres where the offender strand participants sign on. Job centre representatives noted that better communication would be welcomed. Referrals to ESOC can be made directly through CRC/NPS. However, direct referrals of this nature in the absence of effective communication with agencies associated
with other referral routes can lead to some confusion. To illustrate this, one representative referred to an example where an individual was referred to the Programme by both a Job Centre and the CRC. Managers also noted that they would like programmes such as ESP to be targeted towards offenders before they leave the prison system.
5. **Provision**

5.1 This section presents views gathered from ESP participants, employers and training providers, relating to different areas of the training and support provided through the ESP. The topics covered are:

- First meetings with training provider;
- Centre based provision;
- Work placements;
- Employer specific element of the Programme;
- In-work support provision;
- Welsh language provision.

**First meetings with training provider**

5.2 Following the initial referral to the Programme by the adviser at the job centre, participants typically attend an introductory meeting with the training provider. In some cases, this is a one-to-one meeting and in others it is a group meeting. Some of these meetings take place at the site where the training provider is located, although in several cases to date, the meeting had taken place in the job centre.

5.3 These initial meetings provide the opportunity for participants to discuss with the training provider details relating to:

- What the Programme is about;
- The areas that participants are interested in gaining employment in;
- Participants’ skills, including their strengths and weaknesses;
- What support participants feel they needed to enable them to get a job;
- The nature of work placement opportunities that may be available through the Programme;

5.4 Participants interviewed for this evaluation were asked what aspects of the ESP attracted them to take part. The opportunity to get a job and the opportunity to gain work experience were the most important factors identified while gaining a certificate or training in essential skills were the least important factors. It should be noted, however, that the Programme as delivered is focussed more on delivering training than it does on ensuring work experience opportunities for all participants (See Section 5.23 onwards).
5.5 During the early meetings, all ESP participants are required to undergo an essential skills assessment using the WEST (Wales Essential Skills Toolkit). Most participants interviewed could recall undertaking this test and most understood that the reason for the test was to identify what, if any, additional essential skills support they required. There were some participants, however, who noted that they did not understand how the test was relevant to them and considered the focus on essential skills, during the initial test and the centre-based training, to be unnecessary or ‘beneath them’. These tended to be participants who had previously gained a level 3 qualification or above (see also section Centre Based Provision section below).

5.6 The monitoring data outlines that most of the ESP element 1 participants (62 percent) had not gained a level 2 qualification, and a third (33 percent) did not have any qualifications at all. However, the remaining 38 percent did have at least a level 2 qualification and 15 percent had a level 3 qualification or higher.

5.7 The ESP participation criteria outlines that those who have a level 2 qualification shouldn’t normally be referred to the Programme unless the adviser believes it to be of particular benefit. As such, participants with higher level qualifications may not have been referred on to the Programme. However, both job centre representatives and training providers interviewed saw a value in referring some higher qualified participants and while these participants may not have required essential skills support, the work confidence and practical experience elements was needed to support them back into employment. As such, these findings do not indicate that participants with higher qualifications should be excluded from the ESP but rather indicate the need for delivery approaches that match the specific needs of individual participants – a key element of ESP’s design and intended delivery approach. However, as noted in section 7 below, providers claim that it is difficult to achieve this level of tailoring while also ensuring that the delivery is commercially viable.

5.8 Most participants interviewed (71 out of 88) noted that they did feel that the training provider listened and responded to what they wanted to out of the Programme, suggesting that providers were making an effort to tailor provision around needs where possible. Furthermore, 30 of the participants interviewed noted that they had asked the training provider for specific support and most had
received this support which varied from help with CV writing and filling in application forms to courses such as first aid, food hygiene and working at heights.

“They [training provider] helped me with my application forms, as I would get stuck on one question and instead of filling it in honestly, I used to feel that I would have to fill it with jargon in order to get the job.” [ESP participant]

Employability Plan

5.9 During the early sessions, providers are required to produce an employability plan for each ESP participant. The plan should outline what, if any, centre-based training each individual will receive, as well as information relating to each individual’s path towards a high-quality work placement or employer specific training.

5.10 Two in three of the participants interviewed noted that they recalled receiving an employability plan from the provider. Approximately one in ten claimed that they had not received an employability plan while the remaining quarter were not sure.

“They came up with a written plan on a form which pointed out that we were going to focus on CV, cover letter writing and interview skills.” [ESP participant]

5.11 All the providers interviewed noted that they produced an employability plan for all participants, and monitoring data for the first nine months of the ESP delivery confirms that all participants on the Programme received an employability plan. However, the participant interview findings suggest that in many cases the participant couldn’t recall receiving a plan.

“Everyone would just turn up and didn’t really know what the plan was.” [ESP participant]

Centre-Based Provision

5.12 Most of the participants interviewed (78 of the 92) said they took part in centre-based training and another two were not sure. For the 12 who hadn’t taken part in any centre-based training, this was either because they went straight to a
work placement, found employment before they started the training, left the ESP programme early for another reason or they were advised that they did not need any training.

5.13 The centre-based training received by most of those interviewed included CV and cover letter writing guidance, essential skills training, online job searching and interview technique support. A few also participated in more specific training such as Health and Safety, Food Hygiene, First Aid and Manual Handling.

5.14 The amount of time participants spent undertaking centre-based training varied from a couple of days to three months. This seems to have been largely influenced by the delivery approach adopted by individual training providers (see section 3 above). However, the length of time of the centre-based training was, in a number of cases, also influenced by the training needs of individual participants.

5.15 The majority of the participants thought that the amount of time they spent at the centre was about right (47 of the 68 who expressed a view). However, just under a quarter (15) said that too much time was spent on centre-based training; most of these (9 out of the 15) were participants of training provider 1, whose delivery approach usually includes 12 weeks of centre-based training as standard. It should be noted however, that the largest proportion (40 percent) of the interview sample was also made up of respondents who were training provider 1 participants. This sample proportion reflects the fact that training provider 1 also recruited the largest proportion of all ESP participants.

5.16 Participants interviewed were asked to rate the training they received in relation to its relevance, quality and location. The majority rated all three of these elements of the training as either very good, good or OK. Responses to this question are summarised in figure 5.1 below.
5.17 Of the 72 participants interviewed, who expressed further views on the centre-based training, most rated their overall view of the training to be either very good (30), good (18) or OK (14). Of the 77 participants who indicated whether the training matched their needs, most (56) noted that it either completely or partly matched what they felt they needed to get a job.

5.18 Many participants interviewed referred to gaining confidence in their own ability from the training experience. This had empowered some participants to apply for jobs that they previously may not have had the confidence to consider while others noted that attending the training centre on a regular basis gave them a sense of purpose and got them used to a work routine.

"Attending the training centre gets you into the mindset of work – having to be somewhere from 9-5, for example, and teaches you to be reliable."
(ESP participant)

5.19 Centre-based training facilitators across all the training providers appeared to play a key role in delivering the positive experiences noted above.

"our mentor [training facilitator] was amazing. There were six of us there and she made the time for each of us." (ESP participant)

"the trainer really engaged the room and put everyone at ease." (ESP participant)
“The trainers are very understanding and easy to talk to. The tutor is like a friend. They understand what it is like to be out of work.” (ESP participant)

5.20 A minority of participants reported a more negative experience, with 14 out of 72 interviewees rating the relevance of the training as poor or very poor, and seven out of 74 rating the centre-based training overall as poor or very poor. The main reasons for this low opinion was that participants thought that the training focussed too much on areas that they didn’t need support with. Some of these participants held qualifications up to university degree level, and therefore didn’t need support to develop their essential skills or improve their online job application techniques. Others were hoping to gain specific industry focussed training and qualifications from the Programme and therefore felt that the training was too generic for their needs.

“It was soul destroying, humiliating and degrading. They need to think about levels of help people need. I have qualifications and I had to do a basic English test when I have been teaching English for years.” [ESP participant]

5.21 The group settings within which the training was delivered may have limited the ability of providers to deliver training that matches the specific needs of all participants. The funding structure of ESP also incentivises training providers to deliver centre-based training to all participants, regardless of need (see also section 7 ‘Commercial Viability of ESP).

5.22 However, given that the majority of participants found the centre-based training to be of good quality and relevant to their employability needs, suggests that the Programme is well suited for those who lack some confidence, or who need some additional essential skills and / or general job searching and application support. On the other hand, the training delivered to groups does not appear to serve those who already have good literacy, numeracy and job searching skills and may reflect a need to further review the needs and suitability of participants at the start.

5.23 In some cases, the centre-based training also appears to serve as a means by which training providers can maintain good contact with participants while suitable work placement opportunities are found for them. Again, this can serve a useful purpose in many cases but could potentially be discouraging for some
participants if the training is not relevant or the period of time between being recruited onto the Programme and directed onto a suitable work placement is relatively long.

**Work placements**

5.24 A high-quality work placement should be delivered as part of the ESP, which is to provide experience of a real workplace with a local employer, voluntary or community organisation which matches the individual’s needs. This is expected to last between 120-240 hours over the maximum six-month programme duration.

5.25 Of the 92 participants interviewed, a third (31) had completed a work placement; a further four were undertaking their placement at the time of the interview and three were planning to start their placement soon after the interview. Just over a third (33) noted that they had now left the Programme without having had the opportunity to do a work placement. Some of these noted that it was the lack of work placement opportunities that prompted them to leave. The remaining 29 survey respondents noted that although, at the time of the survey, they were still on the Programme they had not yet been on a placement and did not know when, or even if, they would be starting one.

5.26 Most of those who had left the Programme without taking up a placement (20 out of the 33) had done so because they had secured employment through other means and therefore left the Programme early. This was a positive outcome for these participants even if the outcome wasn’t directly influenced by the Programme itself. However, for the remaining 13 out of the 33, a key reason why they had left the ESP before undertaking a work placement was simply due to a lack of suitable placement opportunities being available at that time.

5.27 For those who had been offered a placement, the duration of time they spent within the workplace varied from a few days to three months. However, on average, participants interviewed undertook their placement for two to four weeks, working between two and five days per week – typically for four or five hours a day.
Most of the participants (22 out of 31 who had taken up a work placement) were of the opinion that the role to which they had been assigned matched the kind of work they were looking for and matched their expectations of the Programme. Most of these participants (18 out of 31) also noted that the placement matched what they had discussed during their initial meeting with the training provider.

Most of the work placements taken up by participants interviewed were within the retail sector, although other sectors included manufacturing, care, arts, hospitality and the public sector. Many of the roles associated with these placements were based around customer service tasks, although some participants took on tasks that included warehouse duties, administration, IT and accounts.

A small number of the participants who had taken up a placement (5 out of 31), felt that the workplace they had been allocated to, did not match the kind of work or job they wanted to do. A few of these participants had expressed an interest in working in settings where, according to training providers, it was often difficult to find employers who were prepared to take anyone on as a placement. These included childcare settings, where the employer would be required to arrange a DBS check for each placement, and construction sites, where participants undertaking a placement would require a CSCS card. If placements could not be found for participants in their preferred sector or setting, the training providers did try to arrange alternative opportunities where possible even if it didn’t match the participants preferences.

Most participants, who had been on a work placement however, noted that it had provided them with positive experiences. Most rated their placement as either good (17 out of 31) or excellent (8 out of 31). Participants particularly welcomed the chance the placement provided for them to find out more about specific jobs and to gain work experience that they could include on their CV. Most (17 out of 31) also said that they had gained skills and experience during their placement that they needed to secure a job in the future.

“The placement was a clerical trainee at a GP surgery. I really enjoyed it. I had to work on a computer, which I’d never done before – but I learned to use it as part of the job” (ESP participant)
“I didn’t have any customer service experience before, and it helped me with counting money, and built my skills up. They gave me more responsibilities which made me like working there even more.” [ESP participant]

5.32 Almost a third (11 out of 31) of those interviewed who had taken up a placement noted that it had included training that was specific to the tasks they were given which in turn would enable them to access more job opportunities in the future. This suggests that undertaking a placement increased participants confidence to apply for jobs that they may have previously felt they lacked the skills or experience to consider.

5.33 Employers interviewed believed that the work placements gave the participants an opportunity to understand what it is like working in a particular sector. As one employer explained, the placement helps participants to “make the decision as to whether working in this environment is the sort of thing they would want to apply for.”

5.34 Taking on a placement also benefits the employer by enabling them to understand the participants’ capabilities before potentially employing them as a member of staff.

“It’s an opportunity for us to get to know people. And if we’ve got any vacancies, and they [placements] were really good, they’ve got a foot in the door, why wouldn’t we consider them for those vacancies, as opposed to external people.” [ESP employer]

5.35 Generally, employers, and most ESP participants who had taken up a work placements opportunity, were of the view that this aspect of the Programme worked well. However, the potential benefits of this area of the Programme were limited in some cases by a lack of work placement opportunities available.

5.36 Several participants interviewed noted that a suitable work placement could not be found for them. In some cases, this may have been due to the unrealistic expectations held by some participants. One provider noted an example of a participant who wanted to work in childcare even though they had a recent criminal record which would prevent them from working in this area.
However, in other cases, it would appear that the training providers simply could not find a suitable work placement for their participants. Even when placements were found they were sometimes located in areas where participants could not easily reach given the transport options available to them. In other cases, placement opportunities identified were not considered suitable for the participants, either in terms of their employment route preferences or nature of the work (e.g. a placement that required heavy lifting for participants with health concerns).

Many participants interviewed noted that they waited for a considerable amount of time for a placement to become available, a few of these were told to try and find their own work placement. Some of these participants noted that they turned up at the training centre on a regular basis hoping to gain a placement, but nothing became available. One participant noted that this had been frustrating as not only did a work placement not materialise, but the time spent attending the training centre waiting for one, could have been used to search for another job.

In a number of cases participants gained other, non-ESP related, employment before being allocated a work placement; others finished the Programme and returned to being unemployed having not been on a work placement (see also paragraph 5.26). This outlines a lack of flow through the Programme for some of the participants who are recruited and receive centre based training but don’t progress any further due to a lack of work placement opportunities.

Even where work placement opportunities were available, they were not always linked to a vacancy or employment opportunity and some of the employers explained that the main reason why participants were not taken on as employees following their placement, was that there simply wasn’t a job available for them.

As a result, the conversion rate from placement to paid employment amongst participants interviewed was less than 50 percent. Further details related to job outcomes for the Programme are discussed in section 6.
Employer-specific element

5.42 Adults referred to ESP may be offered the opportunity to participate in the employer specific element of the Programme. Within this element, the training provider delivers training and support which is tailored specifically to the recruitment needs of an individual employer. These are typically larger employers who are looking to fill several employment posts as part of a targeted recruitment drive and the Programme is typically two to three weeks duration covering both training and work placement.

5.43 Training provider 3 and one subcontracted training provider have chosen to deliver employer-specific training. The sub-contractor noted that they scan the local labour market to see which companies are recruiting. They will then contact these employers and offer them a recruitment training programme tailored to meet the job description requirements of the vacancies they have available. In return the employer is required to offer all ESP participants who attend these training sessions, a job interview. If the employer agrees, the training provider notifies the local job centre and encourages them to refer candidates who are specifically interested in the jobs on offer.

5.44 Employers interviewed, who had been involved in this element of ESP, believed that the process worked well. One employer noted that they had taken on most of the individuals who had been trained to meet their needs through this element of the ESP.

“Those who had been trained through the Programme appeared far more confident, able and job ready compared to job applicants who had not received the training”. [employer participating in the employer specific element of ESP]

5.45 Job centre representatives were also very positive about this strand of the ESP noting that because it was linked to specific job opportunities, it was relatively easy to explain and promote the opportunity it offered to potential participants. The advisers also liked its short duration with many of the participants moving quickly to a job.
Only a few of the sample of ESP participants interviewed had come through the employer specific strand of the Programme and as such it is not possible to draw firm conclusions from the views they expressed. However, those who were interviewed were positive about this strand of the Programme especially as it involved a close link to the employer from the outset, offered a quick turnaround from initial recruitment to training, interview and potential employment.

Training providers on the other hand were less enthusiastic and were of the view that although employer specific training generally generated more employment outcomes than the other ESP strands, it was difficult to deliver what was required in a commercially viable way. The main reason for this was that the training provided was often delivered over a relatively brief time period, thus limiting the amount of related funding that could be drawn down from the Programme.

In a similar vein to the employer-specific programme, some of the subcontracting providers delivered training aimed specifically at individual sectors. For example, Abertawe and Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU) are sub-contracted to deliver training and support funded through ESP that is targeted at supporting individuals into administrative jobs within the health board. While the industry-focused training is similar to the employer specific training, the industry focussed training offers relatively standardised training that meets the ongoing recognised needs of a sector as opposed to specific and immediate recruitment needs of a single employer.

Some of the sub-contracting providers, who specifically deliver sector focussed ESP provision, noted that almost all their participants get a work placement, and in their view the conversion rate from placement to employment also appears to be higher than for those recruited onto the Programme’s main strand.

The main success factor of the employer-specific strand, and the appeal for JCP and participants, is the clear and strong links between the provider and the employer which are already established before individual participants are recruited on to the Programme. As a result, participants recruited onto this strand have a clear and short pathway from training to potential employment that is introduced to them from the start. This clarity and pace of progression through the Programme is not always available to participants of the main ESP. This
appears mainly to be due to the fact that in most cases, a link between the participant and a potential employer is only arranged after the individuals have been recruited on to the Programme.

**In-work support**

5.51 When an ESP participant secures sustained employment as part of the Programme, the training provider offers them in-work support or coaching for the first three months. This is to provide continuity of contact and to help participants overcome any barriers they may face in sustaining the employment they gained. Training providers noted that participants usually find the first 4 weeks of in-work support particularly beneficial, as is this is the period during which they make the transition between receiving unemployment benefits and earning their first pay cheque.

5.52 Of the 41 participants interviewed who had secured employment following the ESP programme, 23 said that they had received in-work support as part of the Programme. The remaining 18 had not received any support for a number of reasons: some individuals found employment independently of the Programme and as such didn’t consider it necessary to maintain contact with the training provider; training providers noted that a small number of participants refused the in-work support offered. One participant explained that their employer did not allow them to have contact with the training provider and therefore couldn’t access the in-work support available.

5.53 The participants interviewed who had received in-work support generally reported positive views of the support they had received, with 5 rating it as excellent, 13 as good, two as okay and only one rating it as poor. The participants didn’t tend to identify the contact as ‘support’ or ‘coaching’ (the terms used in the ESP documents) but rather a more informal keeping in touch. The in-work support was delivered mainly workplace visits, for at least the first contact, or phone calls from the training provider to check that everything was going well. Many participants noted that they welcomed the ‘reassurance’ of having someone ‘looking out for you’ that the in-work support provided.
"It's nice to know that someone has your back if there was something you couldn't raise with your manager. It's reassurance...It's good to have that extra support, especially if it's your first job, so that you can offload any issue to someone neutral". [ESP participant]

However, not all the participants interviewed provided positive feedback relating to the in work support they had received. A few were of the view that the support didn’t amount to much more than an administrative exercise which only focussed on ‘filling in forms and recording attendance’.

However, these views were in the minority and most participants who had received in-work support welcomed and appreciated it. The training providers were also very positive about the in-work support as it gave them the opportunity to keep in touch with both the participants and with the employer, with view to offering further training or to take part in other programmes and to liaise with the employer to arrange future ESP placements.

## Welsh language

Amongst all ESP participants, fewer than 7 percent (168) noted that they could understand Welsh. Surveyed participants were asked if they were given the option to take part in the ESP programme through the medium of Welsh. Out of the 88 participants who responded to this question, 24 said they were given this option and 36 said they were not. The remaining 28 participants said they were not sure if they were given this option. Almost all participants chose to undertake the Programme through the medium of English. However, one participant who did choose to undertake the Programme through the medium of Welsh provided the following feedback:

“Yes, I did the Programme in Welsh. This worked fine as the lady from [training provider] spoke Welsh, so we could do everything in Welsh from the start.” [ESP participant]

Training providers informed the evaluation team that they did have the capacity to deliver in Welsh (with tutors usually shared with other programmes they deliver) and that the option to take part in Welsh is offered at induction. However, they also noted that hardly any participants take up the offer to participate in the Programme in Welsh. Training provider 1, for example,
reported that they were aware of first-language Welsh speakers on their Programme who had chosen to do the training in English, as is the case in other Programmes delivered by the training provider. A subcontractor added that participants ‘can do it’ [participate in the Programme in Welsh] but there is hardly any demand for it. They also went on to explain that the courses they deliver are naturally bilingual with the assessor speaking in Welsh with the Welsh-speaking participants but that they then want to ‘do their assessments in English’. This wasn’t thought to be an issue in the interviews with JCP, while it was ‘high on the agenda’ of the NPS serving north Wales who noted that they had sought assurances from their training provider that any delivery could be in English or Welsh.
6. **Impact and outcomes of Programme**

6.1 ESP’s main performance measure set for the training providers is the 55% of participants into employment target. To date, employment outcomes have fallen short of this target.

6.2 Only 8 percent, of all element 1 ESP participants, were recorded as having gained a full or part time job with the employer with whom they had undertaken their work experience. It should be noted however, that this figure does not include outcomes gained by employer specific participants. This data is not available at this stage; however, the survey findings suggest that a higher proportion of participants in employer specific training element of ESP would have gained employment with the employer with whom they had received the work experience / training.

6.3 A further 18 percent of element 1 participants were recorded as having gained employment with another employer following their participation on the Programme. Almost 27 percent of the element 1 ESP participants therefore recorded a positive employment outcome as a direct or indirect result of the Programme. On the other hand, a larger proportion (42 percent) were recorded as having remained unemployed following the Programme.

6.4 However, the employment outcome of almost a third of element 1 ESP participants (30 percent) remains unknown as the providers were unable to maintain contact with them and / or the participant did not provide details of their employment status in the final forms submitted at the end of the Programme. Although it is not possible to draw firm conclusions relating to the post ESP destination of these participants, it is reasonable to assume that in the majority of cases, they did not gain employment within the workplace where they undertook their work experience. As such the monitoring data strongly suggests that the employment outcome target set for each provider were not reached.

6.5 A key reason for this appears to be a lack of work placement opportunities, especially work placements that are linked to actual employment opportunities, which have been experienced in some cases.

6.6 Among the sample of 92 participants interviewed for this evaluation report, 72 had completed the Programme, of whom 13 had gained a job at the place where
they did their work placement or job specific training, one gained an apprenticeship and two took on another placement through Jobs Growth Wales (JGW). A further 28 interview respondents noted that they also had gained employment since the participating in ESP, but that these jobs were not directly associated with support or work placements they had gained through the Programme.

6.7 At the time of our interviews, 28 participants were not in employment; of whom 12 said that they had gone on to do something else – mainly volunteering work. The proportion of our interview sample who had gained employment during their time or shortly after their time on the Programme is slightly above the employment outcome target rate (i.e. 44 out of 72 (61%)). However, as noted above, 28 of these employment outcomes were not considered by the participants interviewed to be directly associated with the ESP.

6.8 Those who had gained employment (or JGW placements) were asked whether, in their view, they could have gained the job without the support of the Programme. Almost half (18 of the 38 who expressed a view on this) were of the opinion that they would not have got the job without the support of ESP. These included some participants who had gained employment not directly linked to work placements arranged through the Programme.

“Even though I found the job myself, they [the training provider] helped me with my CV and to prepare for the job interview. I don't think I'd have been considered for the job if it wasn't for this support”. [ESP participant]

“Even though I didn't get the job I'm doing now directly through the Programme - I feel that the support I had, improved my CV and confidence etc which in turn helped me to get the job” [ESP participant]

6.9 Just over a third (13) of interviewees who had gained employment during, or shortly after completing the ESP, were of the view that they would have gained the work even without the support of the Programme – the remaining seven were not sure. For some, the timing of the Programme delivery coincided with a job offer that they also received, and it should be noted that all participants are required to carry on with job searches while waiting to start ESP as well as during the time while they are participating in any training courses or work experience delivered through the Programme. Other participants may already
have been close to the labour market at the time of their referral and therefore needed very little support to gain a job – arguably these individuals may not have been suitable, and therefore should not have been referred to the Programme.

6.10 A minority of participants were of the view that the Programme had offered them very little support and noted that they found a job during the time they were waiting for the training provider to find them a suitable work placement. This may be due to participants’ failing to associate the ESP support with their ability to get a job, however, a lack of work placements and employment opportunities emerging from the Programme did prompt some participants to find job opportunities independently of the support they received.

“[The ESP] didn't help that much really, there wasn't any jobs around and no placement opportunities either, so I just kept looking for jobs myself”.

[ESP participant]

6.11 As noted elsewhere in this report, the general view amongst those interviewed, was that the employer specific element and the sector focussed delivery of the ESP generated a higher rate of employment outcomes than the mainstream element of the Programme. Training providers were of the view that this was largely because employers are more directly involved in the employer specific and sector focussed activities of the Programme. The work placement opportunities available through these activities are also linked to actual employment opportunities – this is not always the case with the mainstream delivery activities of the Programme.

6.12 Two of the providers noted that it was difficult, at times, to record the employment outcome of some participants. Providers are required to gather evidence from participants, in the form of a payslip, four weeks after they start work, to demonstrate that they are working 16 hours a week or more. One provider noted that some participants are reluctant to provide the evidence required. Another noted that some employers offer participants a job opportunity after they have completed a placement; however, the job vacancy may not be available for a few months after the placement, and the participant's time on the Programme, has come to an end. As a result, they cannot be recorded as an
ESP employment outcome even though the job opportunity they gained was
directly linked to the Programme support they received.

6.13 Employment is not the only positive participant outcome generated by the
Programme. Even in cases where participants had not gained a job at the end of
the Programme, many noted that they had gained softer outcomes such as
developing their ICT skills, gaining work experience, good contacts,
strengthening their CV’s and improving their job interview skills. All of these are
likely to improve the chances for these participants to gain employment in the
future.

6.14 The participants interviewed often referred to the increased confidence they had
gained in the process. Confidence which, in their opinion, had empowered them
to consider a wider range of employment options than they otherwise would
have done.

6.15 Almost a fifth (18) of all the participants interviewed noted that they had gained
an additional qualification or accreditation as part of the centre-based training
they had received. These included certificates in food hygiene, first aid, health
and safety and manual handling. Some also gained industry specific certification
through the Programme including a level 2 care work qualification.

6.16 Among those who did not gain employment through the Programme, about half
noted that they didn’t think, or weren’t sure, if the ESP training provider could
have done anymore to help them get a job.

“I think [the training provider] did as much as they could to match me up
with a job - but the opportunities that suited me and my abilities just weren’t
there”. [ESP participant who did not get a job]

[The ESP] “was helpful - there's only so much anyone can do to help you
find work” (ESP participant who did not get a job)

6.17 Among those who thought the ESP could have done more to support them into
employment, the most common area where they felt that more support could
have been provided, was the availability of work placements. (See also 5.23-40)
“[The training provider] helped a lot, but I was never offered a placement through the Programme as there wasn't anything available at that time”.

(ESP participant who did not get a job)

“I was hoping for more suitable work placement linked to a real job opportunity - this didn't happen.” (ESP participant who did not get a job).
7. **Commercial viability**

7.1 During the pilot stage of the ESP, training providers voiced some concerns about the commercial viability of delivering the Programme. Some of these concerns related to the initial upfront investment costs, such as recruiting staff, that was required before delivery of the Programme and therefore access to any funding, could begin. Providers subcontracted by one of the four main providers to deliver the Programme, also voiced some additional commercial viability concerns during the pilot stage. As part of their subcontracting agreement, a proportion (up to 20 percent) of the funding allocated to them to deliver the Programme was retained by the main contract holder to cover management costs. This placed limitations on the revenue value generated by the delivery of the Programme for these subcontractors.

7.2 During the mid-programme stage, many of the short term set up costs were no longer a concern as staffing structures were already in place. However, other upfront costs such as marketing, recruiting, and the time spent on supporting individuals to undertake the WEST continued as ongoing requirements to enable providers to recruit individuals on to the Programme and the costs associated with these activities do not generate any direct return. Some providers noted that up to 50 percent of the individuals referred to them did not proceed past first meeting or two. They either dropped out or were found to be unsuitable, yet all these individuals incurred costs before fundable support had been provided, so did not generated any return which placed further strains on the commercial viability of the Programme. Training providers also noted that some participants who were under the impression that the Programme was compulsory, dropped out once they realised that their participation was voluntary.

7.3 These early dropout rates prompted some of the providers to take a more direct approach in supporting job centres with the initial referral process – often visiting job centres on a regular basis to meet potential participants. Although this approach had a positive influence on ensuring that a higher proportion of the referred candidates were suitable for the Programme, the time and costs of spending time at each job centre added further pressure on the commercial viability of its delivery.
7.4 A general consensus across all of the main providers and most of the subcontractors was that the commercial viability of delivering the ESP was very 'tight.' Some providers noted that they relied on the income they generated from delivering other training programmes to support the costs of delivering the ESP.

“The amount of money is tiny We just about break-even but that’s because I run a very tight ship. We’re not making money on it. If there are no referrals or if they [participants] decide to not turn up, then you can’t claim a payment but still have to pay the tutor”. (ESP subcontractor)

7.5 A few of the subcontractors, who had initially been engaged to deliver the Programme, had pulled out of their agreements with the main provider in the period leading up to mid-programme delivery point. They did this as they did not consider it a commercially viable option to continue. One subcontractor, who was still under contract to deliver training and support aimed specifically at the care sector, noted that they too would no longer be delivering the Programme from now on for the same reason. This is despite the fact that the training and support provided by this subcontractor was highly valued by the ESP participants and the employers they had recruited.

7.6 One subcontractor, however, was of the view that delivering the ESP was commercially viable, although they did acknowledge that to ensure this it is important to recruit participants who are committed to taking part in the Programme as well as ensuring that there is steady throughput of participants.

“A lot of it is getting the right people in at the start. If you try and start with a group of 12 people and by week 2 only 4 or 5 of them are turning up every day, well of course the commercial viability sinks because you’re not going to get the job outcome payments, you’re not getting paid for them attending the centre either because they’re not there”. [ESP subcontractor]

7.7 Two of the training providers changed their delivery approach during the period leading up to the mid-programme delivery stage in direct response to the commercial viability challenges they faced. Initially both these providers intended to deliver tailored support to participants, including some one-to-one, based on their specific individual needs. However, they concluded that they could only make the Programme cost effective if it was delivered to groups of between 10 and 12 participants (see section 3 above).
Providers also outlined that the commercial viability of the ESP was dependent on receiving a sufficient and steady rate of suitable referrals to the Programme. The rate at which potential participants are referred to the Programme is largely dependent on the working relationship providers have with local job centres (see also section 3.24). The number of referrals received is also dependent on the number of potential participants that are available in any given geographical area. It is more challenging, in sparsely populated rural areas, to recruit the critical mass of participants required to make the Programme commercially viable. As such providers have focussed primarily on delivering the ESP in the more populated areas of Wales resulting in an uneven geographical coverage of the Programme’s delivery.

The findings of the ESP pilot stage evaluation noted that although the Programme emphasises access to employment as its primary objective, the balance of the funding arrangements available are weighted more heavily towards supporting pre-employment training and support. This remains the case as does the apparent trade-off between the relatively high commercial value of supporting participants who require more centre based training support and the lower commercial value of supporting participants into sustainable employment with relatively little support.

“The issue is that we [training providers] sometimes have to forfeit the centre-based hours and funding in order to work with the participant’s best interests in mind. If the participant is ready for work earlier, they should be free to get work and the training provider shouldn’t have to feel like they need to hold on to them to get their funding.” [ESP training provider].
8. Conclusions and recommendations

Delivery approaches

8.1 The number of individuals participating in, and supported by, the ESP increased during the period leading from the Pilot to the mid-programme delivery stage. At the time of writing, a total of 3,273 individuals have participated in the Programme which is encouraging given the relatively slow delivery start but remains below the 4,000-participant target initially set.

8.2 There remain some differences in the delivery approaches adopted by the four main training providers, as identified during the pilot phase. However, the range in the differences between delivery approaches appears to have narrowed since the pilot phase. One of the providers, who previously offered a standardised delivery approach, now incorporates more flexibility into the provision. Conversely two other providers, who previously offered a more tailored approach, now incorporate standardised practices into their provision including the delivery of group training support sessions.

8.3 Participation rates across these four providers also differ, as they did during the pilot phase, with most of the provision being delivered by the two providers identified as delivering a more standardised approach. It should be noted that these two providers did have a higher allocation of participants, and as such were expected to deliver the Programme to more individuals. However, there are also a few other possible reasons why participation rates across providers differed. One is that work coaches within job centres may have been more familiar with the standardised approach offered by these two providers and were therefore more confident to refer individuals to them. These two providers were also well established within the geographies that they operated in and therefore better known to those who referred individuals to them. In addition to this, these two providers did not experience the same personnel changes that one of the other providers did, and therefore didn’t experience the same interruptions to the delivery process.

Referral routes

8.4 Most of the referrals to the ESP (96%) continue to come through the main strand of the Programme, via job centres. The number of participants being referred to
the Programme through the Offenders in the Community strand did increase during the latter stages of 2017 after more concerted efforts by all parties to increase referrals, however the number of participants recruited onto the Programme from the offenders in the community strand, remain relatively small. Very little evidence is available of any activity focussed specifically towards recruiting Lift participants.

**Commercial viability**

8.5 The commercial viability of delivering the ESP remains a challenge for most providers. Some providers have changed their delivery approach in response to this by delivering more group provision as opposed to one-to-one support which they initially provided. Ensuring a sufficient number, and a steady throughput of participants also appears to be necessity to ensure that ESP delivery is commercially viable. As a result, an uneven geographical distribution of the Programme delivery has occurred, with provision focussed on the relatively highly populated urban areas where referral rates are highest, and less towards the relatively sparsely populated rural areas.

8.6 The commercial viability and employment outcome achievements of the ESP are also influenced by the suitability of the individuals referred to the Programme. Some individuals referred to the Programme are highly qualified individuals with good work experience. These require very little support and therefore relatively little funding can be drawn down to deliver the Programme to them. On the other hand, some participants referred to the Programme need longer term support which is often beyond the scope of what can be provided through the ESP. Supporting these participants towards an employment outcome can therefore be challenging within the six-month delivery timeframe available.
Employment outcomes

8.7 The Programme has an employment outcome target of 55 percent for all participants, set for all the providers. From the outset this has been considered ambitious. The employment outcome of almost a third of participants (30%) remains unknown, either because they did not maintain contact with the provider after completing the programme or they did not provide the information necessary in the forms they submitted to the provider at the end. However, the data that is available indicates that the Programme is underachieving against the employment outcome targets set. The actual employment outcomes recorded only reach half way towards the targets set – i.e. 27 per cent achieved as opposed to 55 per cent target. A key reason for this appears to be a lack of suitable work placement opportunities, particularly work placements that are linked to specific employment opportunities.

Work placement opportunities

8.8 The ESP appears to work best, in relation to achieving employment outcomes, when linked to good quality work placement opportunities. As such employer specific and sector focussed provision appears to generate more employment outcomes than those achieved through the main ESP strand. However, not all ESP participants get the opportunity to access a work placement – some participants complete the Programme and remain unemployed having not had the chance to access a work placement.

8.9 The lack of good quality work placement opportunities available in some cases, not only limits the potential employment outcomes that can be achieved, but also interrupts the progression flow of the participants through the Programme. In cases where work placements cannot be found, participants often find themselves held up within the centre-based training delivery of the Programme and not being able to progress any further. This can lead to discouragement and / or early drop out from the Programme.

Encouraging employer engagement

8.10 The importance of Employers’ participation in the ESP to enable work placement opportunities to become available and employment outcomes to be achieved is accepted as a given. Employers interviewed, who have participated in the
Programme to date, generally expressed very positive views of their experience. This is especially the case for employers associated with employer specific strand of the Programme and therefore gain the opportunity to access training tailored specifically to their workplace at no cost.

8.11 However, a couple of training providers noted that some employers are reluctant to participate and consider offering a participant a work placement to be a potential risk to their business as opposed to an opportunity to widen their recruitment approach. Other employers adopt a more altruistic approach to participating in the Programme offering participants a work placement to ‘help out’ even though the placement is not linked to any job opportunities they can offer.

**Recommendations for future Planning**

The principle of an Employability Skills Programme is welcomed by job centre advisers and employers and received positive feedback from the participants interviewed. The following recommendations can be considered for the future delivery of the Programme:

**Recommendation 1:** Standardised methods in terms of the content and timing of feedback between training providers and JCP need to be developed. The evaluation fieldwork identified that there were close working relationships between JCP and training providers but that the actual information shared between them on the progress of participants was sporadic and didn’t enable the JCP to have a complete picture of the Programme and its outcomes. If future programmes are to be reliant on job centres, then there is a need to support better integration between JCP and providers.

**Recommendation 2:** The delivery of the ESP needs to be further reviewed to encourage more even distribution across all geographical areas. Consideration should be given to encouraging greater delivery and take up of the Programme in rural areas (while also considering the associated increased delivery costs in these areas) as well as areas with lower numbers of potential work placements.

**Recommendation 3:** More work placement opportunities, especially those linked to actual work vacancies need to be supported within the Programme. Setting up timely and suitable work placements has been a challenge for training
providers and this has placed some limitations on the number of employment outcomes achieved and the pace at which some participants have been able to progress through the Programme. The ESP design should encourage training providers towards earlier engagement with a wider range of employers. The Programme could also possibly benefit from encouraging closer working relationships between the training providers, job centres and employer representative organisations in order to gain access and promote the Programme to wider pool of employers.

**Recommendation 4:** Training providers should be incentivised to support participants through the Programme at a pace that best suits their individual needs. Some participants took longer than possibly required to progress through the Programme. In some cases, this was due to a lack of work placement opportunities, which is linked to recommendation 3, while in others it was because the current funding arrangements incentivise providers to offer centre-based training more than they encourage reaching employment outcomes.

**Recommendation 5:** Training providers should be encouraged and incentivised to seek out more opportunities to deliver the employer specific strand of the Programme where appropriate. The employer-specific strand of the ESP was well received by participating employers and led to a number of employment outcomes for participating individuals. However, it is not always commercially viable for providers to deliver this strand of the Programme. This should be reviewed further to ensure that all strands of the Programme are delivered in a way that best serves the participants.

**Recommendation 6:** The expectations of the individual participants need to be managed to ensure that their employment plans meet their ambitions but are also realistic. Some participants found it difficult to find the work placement opportunities that they hoped for. In some cases, this was due to a lack of work placement opportunities. In others it was because their ambitions for work placements and employment were not within their current reach. The employability plans developed by the training providers should therefore reflect these longer-term employment ambitions within the context of what is possible in the shorter term.
**Recommendation 7:** The final employment outcome of most of the ESP participants remains unknown. As such the monitoring process currently in place may need to be reviewed to consider alternative or additional ways of gaining Programme exit feedback from a larger proportion of participants.

**Recommendation 8:** The uptake of offenders in the community to the Programme remains low. Consideration may be required to deliver some aspects of the ESP such as centre based essential skills and employability skills training to offenders at an earlier point - possibly before they leave the prison service - to ensure that they are closer to the labour market on their release date.
Annex A: Employability Skills Pilot Description

In the summer of 2016, the Welsh Government issued an invitation to tender to work-based learning providers to deliver the ESP from September 2016 until 31st March 2018, with a 9-month run down period to December 2018 and an option to extend the agreement for a further 12 months.

The Programme is aimed at supporting unemployed adults to get a job and stay in work by improving their employability skills. It specifically targets adults who have a reasonable chance of being ready for employment within six months. The Programme is delivered by four main training providers who offer work preparation training, essential skills if required\(^3\), and a work placement or employer specific training to those referred to them by Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and others.

**Eligibility and referral routes**

The Programme is aimed at adults aged 18 or over and who are unemployed and registered with JCP. Eligible participants must be able to complete the Programme before being eligible for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Work or new Work and Health Programme\(^4\) and have not achieved a full level 2 qualification or equivalent. Participants will have little current (past three months) or ‘relevant’ work experience but will be work focused and have a reasonable chance of being ready for employment within six months. The eligibility is checked and confirmed by the JCP adviser who make the referral to the training provider. Careers Wales may also identify individuals and refer, subject to a letter from JCP confirming eligibility. Lift\(^5\) brokers may identify some of their clients who could benefit from ESP and they will work with the local JCP to make the referral.

**Employability plan**

One of first actions, following a referral to the Programme, is the preparation of an employability plan. This is undertaken by the provider for each individual participant. The plan is agreed by both the individual participant and the provider. It outlines what, if any,  

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\(^3\) Essential skills Wales qualifications are Communication; Application of Number; Information Communication and Technology (ICT).

\(^4\) The referral point varies according to age and type of benefit claimed, for example the referral point is 12 months into their claim for those aged 25+ and claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and 9 months for those aged 18-24 and claiming JSA.

\(^5\) Lift Programme provides opportunities for people from workless households. It is being delivered in 9 areas and Lift brokers in each area work with individuals or families to overcome barriers to work.
centre-based training each individual will receive, including the nature and duration of the training. It also includes information relating to each individual’s path towards a high-quality work placement or employer specific training. The plan takes into account the results of an essential skills diagnostic assessment undertaken with each participant using the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST)\(^6\). It also considers the prior learning and employment history of the participant as well as their future employment aspirations and outlines the expected duration of the Programme and employment objectives. All individuals (other than offenders in the community – see below) will have a high-quality work placement or employer specific training included as part of their employability plan.

**Work preparation training**

Providers have the flexibility to deliver elements of the Programme as they consider best. As a result, work preparation training can either take place before the commencement of a work placement or alongside it. This element of training might include CV writing, interview preparation and job searching techniques and is usually centre-based.

**Essential Skills**

The delivery of the essential skills training is tailored around the results of the WEST assessment which is undertaken by the provider with each participant. The training supports participants to gain Essential Skills Wales qualifications up to and including level 2 where needed.

**Employer Specific Training**

Providers can deliver bespoke activities in partnership with employers or a sector which is actively seeking to recruit individuals. The employer specific training is a relatively short Programme and can be delivered flexibly up to a maximum of eight weeks.

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\(^6\) *Wales Essential Skills Toolkit*
Work Placement

All participants should be offered a placement of ‘meaningful work activities’ as part of the Programme. The placement should match the individual’s needs and employment interests as well as match actual vacancies or areas of emerging demand. Each placement should include a real job interview (or employer feedback when this is not feasible). Placements are expected to last for 120-240 hours and take place during the six-month period of the Programme delivery.

In-work coaching

Following a work placement, and if the individual secures sustained employment, the providers may offer monthly in-work coaching for the first three months. The purpose of this coaching is to provide continuity of contact and to help participants overcome any barriers to sustaining employment.

Essential skills for offenders in the community (ESOC)\(^7\)

Offenders in the community are eligible for the essential skills element of the Programme only and are referred to the providers by the National Probation Service or the Wales Community Rehabilitation Company, who also check eligibility.

Funding and allocations

Over the contract period ESP aims to support up to 4,000 adults. The total value of the Programme, until March 2018, is just over £8 million. Regional allocations have been set for the programme starts (see Figure A.1). Updated figures are provided in figure A.2 for the regional allocations 2018/19.

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\(^7\) During 2017 / 18 the ESOC strand of the ESP was changed to enable offenders in the community to access the full programme not just the essentials skills training. This strand was renamed Employment Skills for Offenders in the Community – thus changing the name but retaining the acronym ESOC.
### Figure A.1: Regional Allocations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total Starts (including Lift but not ESOC)</th>
<th>Essential Skills for Offenders in the Community (ESOC)</th>
<th>Lift</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Wales</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West and Mid Wales</td>
<td>1,080</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Wales and Valleys</td>
<td>1,980</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,600</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Welsh Government MI

### Figure A.2: Regional Allocations for 2018/19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total starts</th>
<th>Employability Skills for Offenders in the Community (ESOC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Wales</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West and Mid Wales</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Wales and Valleys</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1800</strong></td>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Welsh Government MI

Note: regional allocations for Lift participants were included in the Total starts allocation only during 2018/19.