Skills Gateway for Adults
Mid-Programme Evaluation

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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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<td>CIAG</td>
<td>Careers Information, Advice and Guidance</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Customer Struggle</td>
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<td>ESAP</td>
<td>Employment and Skills Action Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESF</td>
<td>European Social Fund</td>
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<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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<td>ISG</td>
<td>Individual Skills Gateway</td>
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<td>IO</td>
<td>Insight Outreach (Client Information Database)</td>
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<td>SGfA</td>
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<td>WEST</td>
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1. **Introduction/Background**

1.1 In July 2014, the Welsh Government outlined the strategic approach to the delivery of employment and skills support for individuals; part of this approach included the development of the Skills Gateway for Adults (SGfA).

1.2 The SGfA offered an inclusive service for adults who need careers information support and advice on how to improve their skills and employability or get back into work and for businesses looking to upskill their workforce.

1.3 The SGfA incorporated a single access point for individuals seeking skills support in Wales. It was intended to identify the needs of an individual and provide advice and guidance on how to access the appropriate support to meet those needs.

1.4 Available via the Careers Wales portal, the SGfA provided an online, telephone or face-to-face service for those individuals seeking to access employment and skills support.

1.5 The service overview\(^1\) outlines the intended elements of delivery as part of the SGfA, covering five key areas which will be described below:

- Engagement
- Assessment
- Guidance
- Referral
- Tracking and supporting.

**Scope and aims of the Evaluation**

1.6 The overarching evaluation aim was to establish the effectiveness and efficiency of the SGfA in facilitating access to employment and skills support for individuals. This included identifying lessons to support the development and improvement of the service as well as similar activities in the future. The

\(^1\) Welsh Government, 2017, ISG Operational Agreement
evaluation had a series of objectives summarised, from the research specification, as follows:

- To determine levels of awareness regarding the SGfA amongst different groups and quantify the extent to which it is used as a first route for all individuals wishing to access skills and employment support in Wales (whatever their location or needs).

- To explore the effectiveness of SGfA in terms of clients either securing employment or moving closer to employment.

- To understand the effectiveness of the call centre service by considering: practical / logistical factors (such as ease of getting through to someone, speed of answering, phone manner and approach); and factors relating to content (the consistency of advice and suggestions provided for ‘next steps’ or follow-up).

- To measure adviser and client satisfaction (e.g. speed of response, service expectations).

- To consider the consistency and comprehensiveness of the brokerage function for accessing skills and employment support (at a local, regional and national level).

- To explore how useful individuals have found the assessment of skills and job readiness as a basis for enabling more effective brokerage and action planning.

- To provide a functionality analysis and user test of the Skills Gateway pages of the Careers Wales website, considering: ability to find the Skills Gateway pages on the Careers Wales website; ease of navigation; appropriateness of style and content for different user types; user response; perceived effectiveness; and suggestions for improvement.

- To consider the effectiveness of the Employment Routes Tool.

- To review the equality of opportunity provided, including services to Welsh Language users.
To assess value for money.

1.7 While the research for this evaluation included the observation of interactions between SGfA delivery staff and clients, the evaluation team did not engage directly with clients. It was anticipated that data from the European Social Fund Leavers Survey would be used to measure awareness and effectiveness of the SGfA service from the client perspective, however this data was not available within the expected timescales. Thus it is acknowledged that there are limitations in the ability of this report to explore the client perspective as set forth in the evaluation aims.

The structure of this report

1.8 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** outlines the methodological approach applied to this evaluation.

- **Section 3** provides a brief overview of the SGfA programme, revisiting the context, aims, objectives, theory of change (how the programme will deliver against the aims and objectives) and programme delivery.

- **Section 4** assesses the performance of the SGfA against data provided in the quarterly reporting as well as other monitoring and evaluation information.

- **Section 5** explores the key elements of SGfA through the perspective of the Careers Wales staff involved in all stages of its implementation, management, delivery, and administration, who were invited to participate in an online survey.

- **Section 6** provides an overview of the programme delivery from the perspective of a sample of front line delivery staff with whom the evaluation team conducted in-depth interviews.

- **Section 7** reports on the results of observations conducted by the evaluation team in a sample of centres across Wales, focussing
particularly on staff-client interactions and assessing the journey through the assessment, guidance, and referral processes.

- **Section 8** presents an analysis of client interactions with the SGfA website, focussing particularly on determining the ease of use of the SGfA website and identifying any areas where clients may have encountered issues using the site.

- **Section 9** presents a summary of the key findings from this evaluation and makes evidence-based recommendations linked to those findings.
2. **Methodological Approach**

2.1 The methodological approach used by the evaluation team was specifically designed to deliver against the overarching aims of the evaluation.

**Review of documentation and management data**

2.2 The review of documentation and management data was undertaken using the Operational Agreement (March 2017) and Careers Wales Management Information (2015-2017) covered by the Individual Skills Gateway (ISG) quarterly claim forms. These resources were used to review progress against targets over the two-year period.

**Stakeholders**

2.3 Interviews/dialogue with ten programme leads, senior programme officials and stakeholders.

**Online survey of Careers Wales staff**

2.4 Careers Wales provided the evaluation team with a list of 143 programme staff and relevant contact details. Staff were informed in advance that their professional contact information was being used for the purposes of the evaluation and that participation in the survey was discretionary.

2.5 Of the sample of 143 staff, 20 had already been selected for individual interviews (see below). Email invitations were sent out to the remaining 123 eligible individuals, and email reminders were sent seven, 14, and 21 days after survey launch. The survey was closed after 28 days. In total, we received 76 completed responses (none in the Welsh language), a response rate of 62 per cent.\(^2\)

2.6 The survey combined closed responses (e.g. “Extremely effective” “Very effective” “Somewhat effective” “Slightly effective” “Not at all effective”) with open ended comment boxes (e.g. “Please explain your answer”). The survey instrument is presented in Annex A of this report.

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\(^2\) Given the relatively small size of the survey, we report all figures as raw numbers rather than percentages to retain clarity. Graphs are provided for easy visualisation of relative frequencies.
**In-depth interviews with front line delivery staff**

2.7 In order to better understand the implementation and delivery of SGfA from the perspective of the Careers Wales staff involved in it, the evaluation team undertook a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a sample of 20 delivery staff.

2.8 Careers Wales were asked to randomly select staff for interviews. Careers Wales then contacted these individuals in order to obtain permission to share contact details with Wavehill and York Consulting.

2.9 Interviews were undertaken with 20 Careers Wales front line staff, including 12 Careers Advisers and eight Employability Coaches, with geographical representation across Wales.

2.10 The staff interviewed worked in five centres in North Wales, eight centres in South-East Wales, and seven in South-West Wales.

**Careers Wales Centres observations**

2.11 The evaluation team arranged to conduct observations of staff – client interactions and the SGfA delivery process.

2.12 Thirty sessions were observed in six venues across Wales. Of those six venues, we selected five Careers Wales centres and one Jobcentre Plus;

- Abergavenny
- Bargoed
- Cardiff
- Neath
- Pwllheli
- Canton (Jobcentre Plus).

2.13 In five of those observational settings (Abergavenny, Bargoed, Canton, Neath, and Pwllheli) we observed individual one to one assessment and diagnostic interviews, while in the sixth location (Cardiff) we observed a group session involving approximately 20 people. The individual sessions were conducted by Careers Advisers, while the group session was led by an Employability Coach. Five observations were conducted either in Welsh or bilingually in the Pwllheli centre.
Observers were asked to fill out two forms. The first gathered metadata relating to the observational setting for each interview (private office, open plan space, time of day, length of interview, etc.) and the specifics of the interactions between client and adviser. For the latter, we wanted to know about the client (socio-demographic characteristics as well as employability history), the structure of the interview, the use of specific assessment tools, what kind of guidance was given during the session, and what the specific outcomes were. We also asked our observers to give us a general assessment of how engaged the client seemed, as well as their general body language.

The second form was a short questionnaire that we asked our observers to complete with the client following the termination of the interview. The two principal questions that we wanted to have answered were, “What were you looking for when you came into the session today?”, and “Do you feel that you found what you were looking for?”. Questions were phrased so as to avoid the perception that we were asking clients to rate the adviser or the Careers Wales staff.

In the event, the settings and the kinds of dynamics within the centres rendered the second form difficult to administer, primarily due to the lack of a confidential environment, and it was determined that it was more effective to try to engage clients in a more informal manner post-interview if possible. The evaluation team were able to do so in many but not all cases.

Finally, there were several scheduled interviews that were cancelled and the overall number of sessions observed (including the group session) was 23. Although this is slightly lower than the target that had been set, the observations were of high quality and yielded consistently rich data.

Monitoring of SGfA website usage

The monitoring of web usage for a four-week sample of clients was accomplished in conjunction with the Careers Wales Information technology team and SessionCam. SessionCam is a widely used enhanced web analytics tool that enables web hosts to not only monitor traffic in bulk but also to analyse individual usage sessions. SessionCam captures a ‘video’
(dynamic screenshot) of each usage, which can then be replayed and studied for insights into client behaviour. In addition, SessionCam allows web hosts to generate a ‘heatmap’ for each page usage, which displays the weight and frequency of mouse movements and clicks.

2.19 The software was reviewed for fitness for purpose by the evaluation team, the Careers Wales IT team, and the Careers Wales programme management team. Privacy and data protection concerns were addressed by obscuring all personal information fields entered by clients, for example name, date of birth, postcode/other geolocator, etc. Thus, all sessions remained anonymous to the evaluation team/Careers Wales technical team and no personal information was either revealed or retained.  

2.20 The four-week monitoring period enabled the capture of 2,050 individual sessions with 3,050 page impressions, an average of approximately 1.5 page views per user. 

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3 From the user (i.e. the evaluation team) perspective, all personal data field entries appeared as ‘xxx’- each actual character typed was represented by an x during the recording and playback.

4 We note that these figures do not control for the possibility of repeat/return users.
3. **Skills Gateway for Adults (SGfA)**

**Service overview**

3.1 This section covers the context, aims, objectives, theory of change (how the programme will deliver against the aims and objectives) and programme delivery.

**Context**

3.2 In July 2014, the Welsh Government published the Skills Implementation Plan\(^5\) which outlined the strategic approach to the delivery of employment and skills support for individuals; part of this approach included the development of the SGfA.

3.3 The Skills Gateway was formally launched by the Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology on 15th January 2015. The SGfA project enabled Careers Wales to provide face-to-face support to all adults over the age of 25. During 2016-17, the scope of the SGfA expanded to include support for individuals aged 18-24.

3.4 The SGfA provides for a “single engagement, assessment and referral service for individuals and employers wishing to access skills support”.\(^6\) It is available via Careers Wales and provides an online, telephone or face-to-face service for those individuals seeking to access employment and skills support.

3.5 There are clear links to wider economic development with an expectation that the service will stimulate demand for employment and skills support by providing the flexibility to develop responses based upon local and regional needs. This has been achieved through working with regional consortia at local levels and through strong joint working in order to capitalise on regional labour market opportunities.

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\(^6\) **Welsh Government, 2014 Policy Statement on Skills**
3.6 This service development links in well in terms of labour market theory, the potential effects of good Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) can be thought of at the individual, organisational and societal levels. At the individual level, benefits can result from people being better able to manage their choices. At the organisational level, benefits can relate to education and training providers if learners make choices in line with their needs and aspirations. Employers benefit if career guidance results in a supply of job applicants whose talents and motivations match their requirements. Finally, benefits result at a societal level if there is greater efficiency in the allocation of human resources, e.g. greater motivation; reduced drop-out; improved matching between labour supply and demand; workforce up-skilling; and fewer mismatches between job/learning choices.

3.7 Use of the internet is recognised as helping to maximise the flow, availability and efficiency of CIAG. International research has confirmed this increasing role, and value, played by internet-based careers search in recent years. Linked to the continued development of resources and functionality on the Careers Wales Online website, a wide range of support has been made available to improve career decision-making.

Aims

3.8 The aims of the service include:

- Providing a service that is consistent across all regions of Wales, whilst considering the ‘regional’ differences of provision availability and employer demand.
- Providing high quality, impartial careers information, advice and guidance to support an individual’s transition into the labour market.
- Raising awareness of and support access to employment and training opportunities.

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8 Welsh Government, 2017, ISG Operational Agreement
• **Assisting unemployed adults** aged 18 and older back into work by providing professional advice and guidance on the training and employment opportunities available.

• **Equipping individuals with the skills they need** to make decisions and manage their careers throughout their lives.

• **Engaging with partners and partner organisations** such as training providers, employers, Jobcentre Plus and the Regional Skills Partnership with a view to better understanding the skills and employment opportunities available to individuals.

*Objectives*

3.9 The objectives⁹ of the programme support the aims and describe the ways in which the programme will support individuals. They include:

• **Exploring an individual’s skills levels, qualification attainment and career ambitions** in order to support them to make realistic decisions regarding training and employment.

• **Considering local and national labour market information** whilst advising individuals on the necessary access or progression routes into employment.

• **Adopting an ‘honest broker’ role** when referring individuals to skills training or employability provision.

• **Supporting individuals with applications** for education, training or employment opportunities.

• **Providing bespoke, on-going support to individuals** through a face-to-face service or the most appropriate engagement method for them.

• **Presenting accessible information online** regarding the latest employment and skills support opportunities.

• **Providing information, advice and guidance through a face-to-face service** where applicable.

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⁹ Welsh Government, 2017, ISG Operational Agreement
• Working with the Welsh Government sponsorship team to establish Operational Agreements, Service Level Agreements and Remit Letters. These contractual arrangements outline Careers Wales’ commitments to Welsh Government programmes.

• Maintaining and developing the Employment Routes bespoke tool in line with the original specification and any needs as identified by user testing groups.

Service delivery

3.10 There are five elements\(^\text{10}\) to the SGfA: engagement, assessment, guidance, referral, and tracking and supporting. A brief description of delivery under each heading is outlined below:

• Engagement
  o All Wales service
  o Support for clients ages 18+, unemployed (economically inactive, those furthest from the labour market and those requiring general skills support)
  o Menu of engagement services: web, telephone, face-to-face.

• Assessment
  o One-to-one guidance interview
  o Development of a client profile, e.g. interests, previous skills, goals
  o Screening assessment: Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST) profiler
  o Skills Gaps identified including barriers to training or employment
  o Level of on-going support identified
  o Employment and Skills action plan created.

• Guidance
  o Start of Level 1 or Level 2 or bespoke support as required
  o Bespoke support, designed in accordance with the needs of the client
  o Advice and guidance underpinned by accurate and real time labour market information

\(^{10}\) Welsh Government, 2017, ISG Operational Agreement
- Impartial advice and guidance
- Employability support and training, e.g. Skills to Succeed online learning modules, mock interviews, CV completion, job application techniques.

- Referral
  - Referral to the most appropriate skills, employability and employment provision – Employment Routes
  - Welsh Government and European Social Fund (ESF) funded programmes, non-funded regional and local programmes, private specialist training
  - Referral to alternative support services (if applicable)
  - Training application assistance.

- Tracking and Supporting
  - Recording all interactions as part of the client profile
  - Tracking all detail regarding the client's referral to training, work or other support services
  - Post-training support and further employability discussions
  - Monitoring progress.

3.11 The process through which Careers Advisers reach the point of referral covers a variety of elements, including: exploring career interests; vocational skills profiling; assessing career management competencies; undertaking essential skills screening (Wales Essential Skills Tool profiler); reviewing indicators of motivation and career/labour market readiness; assessing potential barriers to progression, including motivation, confidence and resilience; reaching a general agreement regarding the level of on-going support required; mediated use of the Employment Routes bespoke tool (where applicable); the creation of an Employment and Skills Action Plan; and a guidance interview to determine the appropriate level of support to be provided to the individual.
Employment Routes bespoke tool

The Employment Routes bespoke tool\textsuperscript{11} is an online tool that provides individuals and advisers with the means to identify employability provision available in Wales, tailored in accordance with an individual's personal circumstances, as described on the website:

“Employment Routes is a directory of the programmes across Wales that can support you to increase your skills and employment opportunities”\textsuperscript{12}

Upon completion of several simple questions, a bespoke route is created which can be used to facilitate further information, advice and guidance discussions:

The key questions are: postcode, date of birth, gender, employment status, whether recently made redundant, highest qualification level, sector of interest, whether undertaking education/training, interest in starting a business, and any special personal circumstances (such as having a disability).

Employment and Skills Action Plan (ESAP)

An ESAP is discussed and agreed with the individual, detailing the level of on-going support required to achieve the identified goals. It includes analysis of: career choice (relevant to local, regional and national labour markets); career management skills; skills gaps; barriers to training and employment; service support requirements; the level of follow-on career coaching support required; and suitable learning opportunities based on the results of the Employment Routes bespoke tool.

The ESAP also documents actions required by the individual, by Careers Wales and by other partners, e.g. Jobcentre Plus. On-going engagement and coaching with the individual will continue in accordance with the level of support identified during the initial guidance interview.

\textsuperscript{11} \url{www.careerswales.com/en/skills-gateway/employment-routes/}
\textsuperscript{12} \url{http://www.careerswales.com/en/skills-gateway/employment-routes/}
Employment Routes

Back to Skills Gateway

Want to gain more skills? Looking for help to find work? Keen to progress to a better job?

Find out what support you might be eligible for in Wales. Employment Routes is a directory of the programmes across Wales that can support you to increase your skills and employment opportunities.

How it works

1. Answer a few simple questions so we can tailor the options to you
2. View the results and decide which programmes interest you
3. Contact Careers Wales or the programme directly for further information
4. Read more about how you can develop your skills and progress in your job

*Please note that this directory is a summary of the eligibility and support available. For full details and to check your individual eligibility please contact the provider or telephone us at Careers Wales on 0800 028 4844.

The information you provide below will only be used to identify suitable programmes which you may be eligible for whilst you are on this website. The information you provide will not be stored for future use. If you wish to discuss your options further with a Careers Adviser you will be asked to provide your contact details at the end of this process. For further details on how your information is processed and shared please refer to our privacy section.

Complete our quick 3 step form to see the programmes that might suit you
Theory of Change

3.12 A theory of change model helps in understanding how the key elements of a programme are intended to operate in order to achieve the overall goals. Reviewing the aims, objectives and delivery methods allows us to set out the theory of how the service will result in the outputs and outcomes and, therefore, where we should focus the evaluation.

3.13 The model in Figure 3.1 summarises the following:

- Service aims
- Planning activities necessary to support delivery
- Activities involved in delivering the service
- Expected outputs from the service
- Expected outcomes from the service
- Impacts that the service is intended to generate.

3.14 The theory of change suggests that a key area to evaluate in terms of its anticipated impact on the success of the programme is the strength of the relationship established by Careers Wales advisers with service users, plus the support that the advisers are able to provide through this relationship. Ultimately the combination of the Careers Wales Action Plan and use of the website/helpline should lead to increased applications (for jobs and further learning) and interviews. The key expected outcomes are increased individual motivation and self-confidence, which should increase the likelihood of an individual improving their labour market position.

3.15 The results of better careers decision-making should be:

- Greater efficiencies for employers in terms of numbers of interviews required, costs of recruitment, increased retentions rates (as individuals make better career decisions)
- Increased skills and productivity in the economy
- Reduced unemployment, better job satisfaction and a sustained job for individuals.
3.16 Therefore, the evaluation focused on understanding the perspectives of stakeholders, delivery staff and service users. The aim was to understand whether the service achieved the desired outcomes through its implementation.
Figure 3.1: Theory of Change

Objectives
- Pan-Wales service; ‘regional’ differences
- High quality impartial CIAG
- Support access to employment and training
- Assist 18+ unemployed into work
- Develop skills to make career decisions
- Engage partner organisations to understand opportunities available to individuals

Planning
- Consult stakeholders and partners
- Understand national skills priorities and labour market context
- Rationalise offer and adapt to local context
- Marketing
- Helpline
- Online platform and content

Activities
- Engage with clients
- Assess proximity to labour market
- Guidance/enhancement of employability and decision-making
- Referral
- Tracking and support

Outputs
- Plans created
- Helpline calls
- Access website
- Applications completed
- Interviews attended

Outcomes
- Individual is motivated and inspired
- Individual enters learning, job, self-employment
- Increased employability through improved knowledge
- Better career choices
- Individual is closer to labour market
- Improved labour market progression

Impacts
- Increased employability skills in general
- Improved job applications
- Reduced cost of recruitment
- Higher retention levels
- Higher skills economy
- Increased productivity in the workplace
- Sustained job/career
4. **Review of documentation and management data**

4.1 In order to understand the performance of the service, this section reviews data collected through Careers Wales’ monitoring of performance information between 2015-16 and 2016-17. This covers outputs (total clients supported, employment and skills plans, face-to-face interactions and group sessions), outcomes (referrals onwards to skills provision, clients entering skills provision, clients entering employment and clients producing CVs) and referrals into the service (from Jobcentre Plus and self-referrals).

**Outputs**

4.2 Progress was strong on the key outputs which all improved year-on-year since 2015-16 and were higher than targets. The volume of clients supported almost doubled from 8,249 in 2015-16 to 15,757 in 2016-17, a figure well above the target of 11,700.\(^{13}\) Similarly, face-to-face interactions almost doubled over the two-year period from 14,214 to 27,163, also well above target. The number of employment and skills plans created increased by 63 per cent from 5,457 to 8,868, while the number of group sessions increased by 67 per cent from 571 to 953, also well above the target of 560.

**Figure 4.1: Service outputs against targets 2015/16-2016/17**

![Service outputs graph]

Source: Careers Wales Management Information System 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Note: E&S=Employment and Skills; F2F=face-to-face

\(^{13}\) Targets from Operational Agreement, March 2017
4.3 These strong performance figures were believed to be linked to a number of factors, including a maturing of the service, greater user/stakeholder awareness leading to increased referrals, extended eligibility of the service to age 18 and increased marketing.

4.4 At the regional level\textsuperscript{14}, the following points were identified between 2015-16 and 2016-17:

- The increase in clients supported was greatest in West Wales (103 per cent) compared with North Wales (69 per cent)
- Face-to-face interactions were broadly reflective of the proportions of clients supported by region; they grew at a slightly greater rate in South Central Wales (123 per cent) and West Wales (110 per cent) compared to South East Wales (65 per cent) and North Wales (68 per cent)
- Group sessions fell by 51 per cent in North Wales while increasing in all other areas, with a 137 per cent increase in South Central Wales.

4.5 An important indicator measured between 2015-16 and 2016-17 related to the source of referrals into the SGfA. In 2015-16 over half of the referrals (52 per cent) were self-referrals, with 45 per cent coming from Jobcentre Plus. By 2016-17 the balance of referrals had changed, with a greater proportion (49 per cent) coming from Jobcentre Plus and a smaller proportion (47 per cent) coming in the form of self-referrals. This change in balance was mainly due to increased awareness of the service in Jobcentre Plus.

\textsuperscript{14} Regions referred to are the four Careers Wales delivery regions: South East, South Central, North, and West Wales.
4.6 All regions increased the volumes delivered across all the key output indicators (Table 4.1), with an increased number of clients supported, Employment and Skills plans created and face-to-face interactions.

4.7 The main variations noted between 2015-16 and 2016-17 were:

- The largest increase in clients referred by Jobcentre Plus was South East Wales (176 per cent)
- The largest increase in self-referrals was North Wales (108 per cent).
Table 4.1: Service outputs by region 2016/17 and change since 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Outputs</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>South East</th>
<th>South Central</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referrals by Jobcentre Plus. (number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>1,406</td>
<td>2,130</td>
<td>2,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals by Jobcentre Plus. (percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>162%</td>
<td>176%</td>
<td>126%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals other (number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals other (percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>336%</td>
<td>200%</td>
<td>195%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-referral (number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>1,440</td>
<td>2,070</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>1,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-referral (percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>108%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>105%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients supported (number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>3,012</td>
<td>4,007</td>
<td>3,781</td>
<td>4,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients supported (percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>103%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E &amp; S plans created (number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>1,992</td>
<td>2,122</td>
<td>2,060</td>
<td>2,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E &amp; S plans created (percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face interactions (number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>5,322</td>
<td>7,376</td>
<td>6,654</td>
<td>7,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face interactions (percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>110%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>123%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.8 Evidence from quarterly progress reports (covering January 2015 to December 2015) indicated a range of successful practices and examples of formative decision-making to improve the performance of the service and achieve the levels of success described earlier:
- Partnership engagement was an effective method of helping to generate referrals across all regions, especially with community organisations. An example of community organisation linkages is Swansea Careers Centre working with Gingerbread, a single parent family organisation, to offer one-to-one interviews and group sessions [Sept 2015].
- Co-location with partners (especially Jobcentre Plus and colleges) was an effective method of helping to generate referrals across all regions.
- All regions have developed links with Communities for Work including briefings between staff members and co-location.
- A need for more face-to-face support was identified in North Wales as clients lacked basic ICT skills necessary to use online support [Sept 2015]; this related specifically to clients aged 25+ “needing significant support to develop employability skills e.g. basic skills, mentoring support, digital skills”.  
- Pop up careers fairs held in Cardiff (South Central Wales), in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, helped target clients [Sept 2015]. 85 clients aged 25+ attended this event; the success of this targeted good practice example was planned to be replicated for future events aimed at different groups, for example, lone parents.
- Careers Adviser update sessions in all regions have helped around paperwork and recording data [Sept 2015]. “This session involved an update on paperwork and recording on our Insight Outreach (IO) data base as well as a session on the completion of timesheets.”  

Outcomes

4.9 The rise in client numbers from 2015-16 to 2016-17 was reflected in the outcomes figures. There was a four-fold increase in referrals to skills provision (rising from 838 to 3,764 across the two years). The proportion of all clients supported who were referred to skills provision rose from 10 per cent in 2015-16 to 24 per cent in 2016-17.

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15 ISG Quarterly claim form Q3
16 ISG Quarterly claim form Q3
4.10 The volume of clients entering skills provision also increased; the ratio of those entering skills provision compared to those referred increased from 1:6 to 1:4.

4.11 Clients entering employment rose to 3,483, resulting in over a fifth (22 per cent) of all clients supported entering employment in 2016-17 compared with 15 per cent in 2015-16. The proportion of all clients producing a CV rose from 20 per cent of all clients in 2015-16 to 27 per cent by 2016-17.

4.12 Referral to a partner organisation was not monitored in 2015-16, although 1,149 clients were referred to a partner organisation in 2016-17.

4.13 All regions increased the volumes delivered across all the key outcome indicators compared to 2015-16. In 2016-17 there were more referrals to skills provision, more clients entering skills provision, more clients entering employment and more clients producing a CV across the regions.

4.14 At the regional level, the following points were identified between 2015-16 and 2016-17:

- The largest increases in referrals to skills provision, clients entering skills provision and clients entering employment were for South East Wales; however, the area had the lowest rates for these indicators in both years.
- The largest increase in clients producing a CV was in West Wales.
Table 4.2: Service outcomes by region 2016/17 and change since 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>South East</th>
<th>South Central</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referrals to skills provision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>1,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals to skills provision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>341%</td>
<td>289%</td>
<td>734%</td>
<td>306%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients entering skills provision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients entering skills provision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>339%</td>
<td>342%</td>
<td>2429%</td>
<td>1779%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients entering employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients entering employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>140%</td>
<td>199%</td>
<td>215%</td>
<td>164%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients producing a CV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(number, 2016/17)</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>1,372</td>
<td>1,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients producing a CV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(percentage change on 2015/16)</td>
<td>226%</td>
<td>241%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>186%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Programme Cost

4.15 At a total programme expenditure of £2,598,810.00, the cost of SGfA per beneficiary was £164.93. The cost per client referred into provision is £659.72.

4.16 No comparable programmes against which to benchmark this data were found.
5. Front line staff survey

5.1 As part of the fieldwork for this evaluation, a survey of Careers Wales delivery staff who are involved in the management and delivery of the programme was undertaken. The objective of the survey was to understand the perspective of delivery staff regarding each element of delivery (engagement, assessment, guidance, referral and tracking and supporting) and their assessment of the tools used in that delivery.

5.2 The survey was sent to all Careers Wales staff identified as involved in the management and delivery of SGfA with the exception of those selected for an in-depth interview. Some of those responding to the survey may also have been involved in its implementation and administration.

5.3 All quotes in the following section are taken from online survey responses and are reported verbatim (unedited).

Profile of staff surveyed

5.4 Of the staff surveyed, exactly half (38/76) work as Careers Advisers at Careers Wales, with the second largest group constituting Employability Coaches (21/76). We also had responses from a substantial group of administrators and managers, as well as two Employability Coaches working on the telephone helpline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Careers Adviser</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability Coach</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability Coach - CW (telephone helpline)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager / administrator</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = 76
Although there was a slight concentration of survey responses from South East Wales, there was a relatively even geographical distribution in responses across Wales; of the 76 responses, nine were from the Cardiff area and six from Newport, with an additional 17 from Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, and Merthyr Tydfil. Only one local authority area (Vale of Glamorgan) had no responses.

Engagement with SGfA

We asked survey respondents to tell us which of the five stages of programme support they have been involved in (multiple responses allowed), and the data is shown in table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: Which of the stages of programme support have you been involved in?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement (bringing in clients through engagement services: web, telephone, face-to-face)</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (one-to-one guidance interview; development of client profiles; screening assessment through WEST; assessing skills gaps and requirement for on-going support; Employment and Skills Action Plan)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance (bespoke support; advice and guidance; employability support and training)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral (referral to appropriate employability and training providers, programmes and services; assistance with training application)</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking and supporting (recording interactions for client profiles; tracking referral to other support services; post-training support; monitoring progress)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base=76
5.7 It is notable that the staff sampled have, on average, been involved in 3.7 of the five programme stages (278/76). Each of the stages of support have engaged approximately two-thirds of the survey respondents on average, the lowest being Guidance (44/76) and the most frequent being Tracking and supporting (58/76). It is noteworthy that a sizeable majority (50/76) see themselves as involved in the engagement phase. This signified the commitment of the Careers Wales staff to not being simply ‘passive recipients’ of clients who have ‘walked through the door’ (or the internet portal or picked up the phone), but as being actively involved in client engagement.

5.8 This observation is amplified by the analysis of the 21 ‘other’ responses to the survey question. Some of these responses were generated by those in management and administration who highlighted programme administrative activities (‘management of Careers Advisers/Employability Coaches’ is a representative response). We encountered a number of examples of outreach work undertaken in the context of SGfA beyond the strict definition of the five programme elements being undertaken by either Careers Advisers or Employability Coaches that would most probably count as proactive engagement; one Employability Coach mentioned visiting Jobs Centres Plus and schools and a Careers Adviser mentioned visiting firms where there are redundancies planned or underway. A few Careers Advisers mentioned attendance at Skills Fairs, and one cited making presentations on ‘the local labour market, skills gaps, etc.’

**Awareness of SGfA and marketing**

5.9 The evaluation team wanted to understand the perceptions of levels of awareness regarding SGfA among three important stakeholder groups – clients, Careers Wales staff, and partner organisations. We note that these responses represent the perceptions of the staff interviewed about the awareness levels of SGfA among other groups and should thus be interpreted with caution.
The data show a fairly clear pattern. Careers Wales staff feel that they themselves understand SGfA well, with only one respondent expressing a slightly negative view. On balance, the survey respondents also feel that practitioners in partner organisations also have a fairly good understanding of SGfA although not as high as that of the Careers Wales staff involved in delivery. However, that changes a little when asked about their perception of potential clients’ understanding of SGfA; for the majority of the survey respondents (45/76), potential clients have a weak understanding of the programme.

It is hard to make judgements about whether this perceived level of awareness among potential clients is healthy or of concern (bearing in mind that in an ideal world all potential clients would have perfect information about available training and job support programmes). It is also important to temper any comment with the caution that these are perceptions of awareness as reported by Careers Wales staff, who will inevitably see themselves – with reason – as being more informed about SGfA than others. For a full judgement on levels of awareness among potential clients, more research would be required including detailed analysis of the ESF leavers survey results.
5.12 The pattern that emerges from the explanatory comments for this question is that Careers Wales staff believe either that (a) clients typically have very low levels of information about SGfA – even after referral from a partner organisation – or that (b) they have some awareness about SGfA, but that their information is either incorrect or incomplete. As was pointed out by some staff, this is not a problem unique to SGfA; in general, potential clients for job support schemes are less concerned about names or brands and more concerned about getting some form of effective support during labour market transitions, progressions, or disruptions,

“I find the question difficult to answer - people who call in for help have often not heard of SfGA - they simply call in for help - and I don't think it is important whether they know that the label we use for this help/how we draw down our funding is ‘SfGA’ [sic]”.

5.13 We asked survey respondents to give us insights into how effective they consider the marketing of SGfA has been. Again, we must be careful in the interpretation of this question as these were the perceptions of Careers Wales staff involved in SGfA, who cannot be considered a target audience for the marketing campaigns conducted for the programme.

Figure 5.2: How effective has the marketing of SGfA been?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all effective</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly effective</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately effective</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely effective</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = 74
5.14 Overall, only a very small minority (5/74) indicated that they did not feel that the marketing for SGfA has been effective, although as noted above, the Careers Wales staff were not the intended targets of marketing campaigns, while the majority (67/74) hold the opinion to different degrees that the marketing has been effective.

5.15 Looking at the qualitative responses to the follow-up, where Careers Wales respondents were asked to explain their view of how effective the marketing of SGfA has been, there are a range of responses ranging from those who are not very aware of what marketing has taken place to those who have some fairly strong views on the subject. Representative of the first group are comments that clearly show that Careers Wales staff were not the targets of the marketing campaigns, such as,

“I don’t know enough about Careers Wales’ marketing arm to know how effective it’s been. Apart from some information on our website and a few leaflets in the shop I have not seen or heard it being promoted in the media”.

5.16 Among the latter group – those with fairly strong views – there is also a split in the data. One clear group suggests that in their opinion there has not been enough marketing. Comments such as “It’s not visible to all” or “Careers Wales staff know about it – not convinced the public does!” indicate a certain scepticism regarding the adequacy of the marketing of SGfA to the broader public. Some sceptical comments suggest that there is the perception that most clients come through routes other than direct marketing, for example,

“I am not familiar with anyone who has approached Careers Wales based on the advertising for this. Clients approach us for independent careers advice and guidance and also employability support because they know we provide this, but they do not mention Skills Gateway at any point”.

5.17 Many point to other partners and agencies as being the primary conduit for referrals to SGfA (and thus client engagement),

“There are very few clients (none that I have personally booked in or case loaded) that have come to us because of an advertisement they have heard or seen, most are referred by agencies (who have often been specifically made aware) and other clients hear about Careers Wales by word of mouth but no direct reference to any project or contract”.

34
5.18 It is important to note that referral from a partner is an important driver for recruitment into SGfA, and advisers would be aware of the referral but may not have been aware of whether marketing for SGfA played a role in those clients engaging with partner organisations in the first place.

5.19 On the other hand, there were many front-line staff who acknowledge that marketing has had an effect on driving traffic to SGfA, albeit balanced with the perspective that referrals still constitute a major engagement route,

“Marketing at certain points in the year has certainly increased referrals during the marketing period, but the majority of the referrals that I see tend to come from other agency referrals and word of mouth - from clients happy with the service provided who have told friends and family to pop in to see us”.

5.20 On the other hand, some have specific observations about the perceived effectiveness of marketing. There seems to be a fairly good level of awareness regarding knowledge about the different forms of marketing (“Have been advertised on radio and many posters advertising SGfA and also an SGfA presence at events”, “aware of radio adverts”, “I have occasionally seen flyers and adverts for SGfA, I think through the promotion of SGfA on social media has been good”), however there were some suggestions for other avenues. Those included,

- More specific materials explaining what is on offer, especially the link between SGfA and Careers Wales
- More advertising at local practitioners/training centres
- Advertisements on TV loops in GP surgeries, Post Offices, etc.
- Leaflets in libraries and cafes
- Targeted marketing for school teachers and college lecturers

5.21 Overall, the balance of comments seems to suggest that there is a shared sense that:

- Marketing is important (few comments suggest that marketing is seen as unimportant)
- Whether they are effective or not (a few comments are sceptical, the majority are positive), the social media campaigns have a high level of recognition among the Careers Wales staff as a proportion of all informed comments about marketing.
Engagement

5.22 Overall, Careers Wales staff with direct experience of it feel that the engagement process has been either extremely or very effective. Further research is necessary to understand the effectiveness of marketing from the client perspective.

**Figure 5.3: How effective has the process been in engaging with clients who can be appropriately served by SGfA?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness Level</th>
<th>Face-to-face</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Web</th>
<th>Overall Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely effective</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately effective</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly effective</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all effective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = 46

5.23 The majority (36/46) clearly feel that the engagement process as a whole is either extremely or very effective. There are some nuances observed relating to the mode of engagement; face-to-face is seen as being most effective (37/46), followed by telephone (20/46) and then web (9/46). Only one response was recorded as suggesting that any of the engagement modes (in this case, telephone) was not effective. Qualitative comments indicate that those staff involved in the engagement process see a real value in face-to-face interactions that permit clients to really understand the range of services and the offer from SGfA (as opposed to other job support programmes),

---

17 Question asked only of staff who have been involved in the engagement process (n=46)
“There’s no better way to engage with clients than face to face. Web contact is limited when explaining the importance of SGfA. Clients have limited ITC [sic] skills... Telephone often requires additional face-to-face engagement to SHOW [emphasis in the original] clients how to navigate web site”.

5.24 Some respondents suggested that potential clients may not be comfortable with technology, which might limit the effectiveness of the computer as an engagement tool; others mentioned their feeling that, while the telephone is important, it doesn’t permit the same level of human interaction and engagement that can put clients at ease and make them feel comfortable in what might otherwise be a stressful situation.

5.25 However, what is clearly evident in the responses received is that the unique service provision of SGfA, i.e. a suite of engagement routes, is valued and seen as important by the staff. Although the effectiveness of one route versus another can be debated, there seems to be a general acknowledgment that offering all three increases the scope and reach of SGfA among prospective and new clients,

“In all offices I have worked since this project started clients have always been offered the most suitable form of service to them- mainly face-to-face appointment are made but for possibly additional questions that clients may have or for those that are not ready to engage when they call in initially to an office they are made aware of telephone and web services”.

“Those who are deemed appropriate for SGfA are best served by face-to-face, though some web help (particularly e-mails) is of great support. Being promoted within Careers Wales is a blended service of digital and face-to-face but it is too early to know the full extent of this effectiveness. It would be helpful for clients, especially the infirm and those in remote areas to be able to access our service through apps and/or social media channels. Indeed, unemployment (and financial poverty) is a major barrier for some people to access the service in-house within our centres and outreach services. With those able to engage, the process allows clients to be supported to the full limits of our, and our partners’ capabilities. However, to restrict new SGfA project joiners to those accessing face-to-face interviews only is narrow minded, especially in an age of developing and promoting a blended digital/personal service”.
Assessment

5.26 The evaluation team asked respondents to identify how they undertake the process of identifying barriers to employment and/or identify skills and training needs. We will describe our observations of the assessment and referral process in section 7 below, but a general pattern has emerged from the open-ended responses to this probe.

5.27 It is clear that those involved in assessment and referral feel that it is important to begin by getting an overall sense of the clients’ needs and general aspirations for the engagement with SGfA. This process can begin before the potential client walks through the door,

“… we discuss with each other the client and what level of support is needed and discuss the barriers the client is facing and what level of support is required to help the customer progress”.

“Information from partners on barriers, visual barriers e.g. hygiene issues, drug or alcohol. Most of it comes from the client themselves when they have guidance or see me for the first conversation - people are generally quite open about their issues e.g. health, addictions, lack of employment experience etc”.

5.28 Respondents made reference to the need to establish personal and trusting relationships with clients prior to engaging in formal assessment,

“By building a relationship of trust with the client and agreeing ground rules, making the client aware of data protection and confidentiality. Through advice and guidance, listening, questioning, probing, challenging and agreeing next steps and following up on actions and movement”.

“I identify barriers through the guidance process, which includes listening to the client’s story in a non-judgmental and empathetic manner; sharing my analysis of their situation, with the client in an honest but sensitive manner and then seeking an agreement with the client, a SMART way forward that takes into account any issues that have come to light”.

“For some clients motivational interviewing (MI) and Solution Focused (SF) techniques are required prior to identifying training/work experience needs and referring them to the relevant agency”.

The importance of being able to use appropriate interviewing techniques and skills (empathy, understanding of background and context) is apparent in many of the comments, e.g.

“There are a series of important phases to adhere to when conducting interviews e.g. using scaling tools/open questions to see through the presenting barriers. Trying to enable clients through questions and summarising answers to self-identify where things have gone wrong and understand the underlying causes. There are personal barriers which prevent clients from even beginning to contemplate their skills/training deficits and so enabling clients to address barriers such as limited motivation, un-realistic time scales to achieve goals, un-realistic grasp of how hard it can be to be successful. Not to mention the complicated life styles and socio/economic barriers”.

Overall, the way that this initial diagnostic process unfolds prior to the deployment of formal assessment tools is perhaps best summed up as being,

“Through guidance and exploration and the client telling their story”.

Following this initial process, most staff told us that they use a suite of formal assessment tools, the most commonly cited being the WEST and the Job Matching Quiz. Some staff referred to conducting a Skills Health Check as part of the diagnostic process. Many of the comments stress the role that the Careers Wales staff plays in helping the clients to navigate the tools and to use the technology appropriately and effectively. When asked how effective they rated this process of identification of barriers and diagnostics, 42 out of 48 respondents who had self-identified as being involved in this phase of SGfA delivery stated that they found the process to be either extremely or very effective. Clearly, from the perspective of the delivery staff, the initial process of guidance and diagnostics is working very well.

“I feel this is a very effective method because I adhere to the guidance model and employ tools and techniques to carefully and sensitively help clients to identify any barriers which may prevent them from securing employment. Clients are never led or processed. My aim is always to empower them to identify barriers so that they feel they have control. I have seen that this results in clients being more likely to follow through on agreed actions e.g. attending a meeting with a support organisation or enquiring about a course”. 
5.32 We asked respondents to tell us about their perceptions of the effectiveness of two of the primary formal assessment\(^\text{18}\) tools in use for the SGfA programme – WEST and the ESAP - and the responses are shown below.

**Figure 5.4: How effective are the following tools in your client assessment work?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Extremely Effective</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Moderately Effective</th>
<th>Slightly Effective</th>
<th>Not at all effective</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WEST Profiler</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESAP</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = 50

5.33 While both tools receive positive support from Careers Wales staff who routinely use them, it is apparent that the ESAP has a slightly more favourable rating (31/50 either extremely or very effective) compared to the WEST profiler (15/50). Only four respondents rate the tools as not at all effective (all for the WEST profiler).

5.34 Analysing the qualitative responses, it is clear that Careers Wales staff see the role of the two tools as being very different; WEST is useful for assessing basic numeracy and literacy skills as well as knowledge of and skills levels with IT, while the ESAP identifies actions and plots them against expectations (in this regard, WEST is not seen as applicable to all users of the SGfA services). Comments reveal the critical role that WEST can play,

“*The WEST test is an extremely effective tool to use with clients as often they apply for jobs which requires a certain level of literacy and numeracy. Over the past few years there has been a far higher percentage of clients who have not sat GCSE’s or received a low grade. With using the WEST Tool [sic] it gives the client an understanding of what level they are currently at*

\(^{18}\) The Employment Routes tool is perceived by the staff that we engaged with as primarily a referral tool and will be discussed in the referral section below.
and we can then support them in progressing to the next level using local provision to help them progress”.

5.35 The few comments that serve as a counterpoint to the generally favourable rating of WEST include insights such as,

“I do not feel that a blanket approach to the administering of the WEST profiler is the best use of the adviser’s or client’s time. Although digital literacy is a skill needed for most workplaces and indeed in order to secure a job as most positions are advertised online, it is not something which I see as essential to a guidance interview. I can see the merits of it for those clients who are considering careers where IT is extensively used, e.g. office roles, and for those who are worried about their skills (of which I have very few) but I do not feel it adds any value to my client assessment work”.

5.36 One potentially valuable caution came from one respondent (who gave WEST a favourable rating), who observed that,

“WEST can turn out to be a negative experience for some clients although it provides a reference point for clients. This can result in the client realising how limited they really are and should be used with caution and at the optimum time or not at all”.

5.37 It was also reported by one respondent that WEST can give quite widely varying results when taken at different times by the same client; this respondent indicated that they had tried this among the office staff, and that “The same person taking the profiler at different times often receives an inconsistent result, with large discrepancies”. We have no data other than this single observation, but it would be worth following up to ensure that WEST is delivering stable and consistent evaluations across respondents.

5.38 The ESAP is a core part of the delivery of SGfA and clearly valued by the majority of delivery staff. Their role in the process was summarised thus,

“The Employment Skills Plan [sic] I believe is an effective tool, for the clients as it a moving forward plan of what they need to do to achieve their goals having had a careers interview. It outlines what they need to do to move forward. By having a document which outlines what was discussed at the careers interview can then be referred to at a later stage. Often clients need [sic] small achievable steps to help them achieve their aspirations”.
Respondents make a clear distinction between WEST and the ESAP in that WEST focuses more upon the identification of skills and employability barriers, whereas the ESAP relates to progression and identifying routes forward. This accounts for some of the reluctance of the staff to fully embrace WEST out of fear that the identification of barriers has the effect of creating negativity and pessimism among respondents who may already be feeling overwhelmed by the challenges of the labour market. Thus,

“An ESAP is very effective as a Tool that the client can see what their present situation is, what barriers they have and how they can move forward”.

“The Employment and Skills Action Plan is a useful aid in showcasing to the clients where they are in their journey and to outline the steps needed to get where they want to be”.

Some of the comments made suggestions for the ESAP; one respondent commented that the ESAP takes a long time to fill out, and that they frequently do not have the time to complete it during the interview – and then may not have time to return to it afterwards because of work pressure. Another commented that the ESAP should not include so much focus on labour market history (echoing the point about potentially reinforcing a sense of failure and pessimism among clients); instead, it should retain the forward looking and positive elements.

Regardless of their ratings of the specific tools, the survey provides evidence that staff (47/50) overwhelmingly agree with the statement that “the assessment of skills and job readiness is a necessary basis for enabling more effective brokerage and action planning”. In the eyes of the delivery staff it is clear that the delivery model for SGfA is a success and staff feel confident that the processes that they are being asked to follow are producing the required results during the diagnostic and assessment stage.

“This is vital, when working with clients as part of the SGfA as without this, clients are applying for opportunities that they are not suited too and does not give them long-term employment. As client’s [sic] often apply for the same industry time after time without understanding that they are not suited to that type of work, but often it is the only thing they have experience in. An example is that we see a lot of clients who work within the Call Centre Sector Industry who employ a high percentage of staff in Cardiff. We see people
who have worked in all different contact centres (First source, Admiral, Tesco, Conduit, British Gas and Admiral) and constantly loose [sic] their jobs due to the fact they’d not have the necessary skills for the post. But despite losing their jobs, they still continually keep applying for the same work within the industry”.

5.42 Overall, the blend of face-to-face interviewing and the application of formal diagnostic and assessment tools is seen as being especially important in charting a course for clients,

“It's the real world and clients benefit from a reality check as to where they are in the greater career scheme of things. This needs to be introduced at an appropriate pace and with empathy. There are occasions when clients are in denial or avoiding engaging in the world of work and a more full-on approach is appropriate”.

5.43 Perceptions of each of the three elements of support in the diagnostic and assessment phases of SGfA are shown in Figure 5.5 below.

**Figure 5.5: How effective are the following elements of support in helping clients?**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of Support</th>
<th>Extremely effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Moderately effective</th>
<th>Slightly effective</th>
<th>Not at all effective</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills to Succeed online learning modules</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online information about employment and skills support opportunities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face guidance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
Again, this data shows that the services that are being provided through SGfA are rated as effective by the majority of the survey participants; the only elements of support that met with a significant degree of scepticism in terms of its overall effectiveness are the Skills to Succeed online learning modules. Qualitative comments provide some hints as to why the Skills to Succeed modules might be seen as less effective than the other elements of support.

The biggest reservation expressed about Skills to Succeed, in terms of the number of mentions in the responses, is the perception that Skills to Succeed, while not mandatory, is aimed at a younger (16-24-year-old) audience and is not really fit for purpose when assessing adults.

“Skills to Succeed I feel is aimed at 16 to 20-year-olds, not convinced is appropriate for adults”.

“Skills to succeed is effective but it’s not for everyone; some of the modules are geared towards younger people and this can put some SGfA clients off”.

Among those who still rated the tool as effective, there is recognition that its uses should be more appropriately geared towards this demographic group of potential or actual clients.

“Skills to Succeed has proved effective, however, feedback has been received that some of the modules are very young person focussed”.

Once again, opinion diverges about potential remedies for the perceived unsuitability for the ‘prime worker’ demographic reached by SGfA. On the one hand, there was the suggestion that Skills to Succeed could be ‘recast’ in a more targeted form for an older workforce group,

“Skills to Succeed appears to be targeted towards school leavers and is often not best suited to adult clients. The look of the programme is cheap, and it does not present well to clients, but also the structure and content could be much more effectively presented and adapted to our clients”.

Those expressing the most (but strongly held) negative views suggest that Skills to Succeed is of rather limited use in the context of SGfA,

“Skills to Succeed is a programme for 16-24-year olds, yet clients even aged 20 and 21 have expressed how childish many elements of the online learning resource is to use [sic]. Techniques used in the past have worked for many
years, with statistical proof that it attains positive progression, though how an online module can beat this system is beyond me. Skills to Succeed is completely unsuitable to people with a strong professional or academic background and, whilst some will see its uses, clients' responses have range from sheer bewilderment to complete incredulity that such a basic, childish and somewhat condescending software is being used in a modern and digital age.”

5.49 Several respondents – whether they ultimately rated the Skills to Succeed modules as effective or not – did point to what they perceive as the length and complexity of the modules. For instance, one respondent noted, 

“I find the online learning modules on the Skills to Succeed website to be quite wordy and appear off putting to people or they get so far and then leave them without completion”.

5.50 We note that Skills to Succeed is not mandatory for SGfA and was developed independently. However, the responses on the part of Careers Wales delivery staff surveyed indicate that it has been widely used in the context of SGfA. It is therefore a paradox that it elicited the negative mentions by those staff cited above, and we would recommend that Careers Wales review the guidance for the use of Skills to Succeed online modules in the context of SGfA programme delivery and/or update them for an older age group.

Guidance

5.51 We asked survey respondents about other employability elements that are routinely used in the guidance phase of SGfA, such as mock interviews, CV preparation/completion, and job application techniques, and these all received very positive mentions from our respondents (indeed, none of the cohort responding to this question rated any of these aspects as only slightly or not at all effective). We note that these are in many ways the most personalised components of the SGfA and that the delivery staff are not unbiased observers.

5.52 Indeed, the long and thoughtful qualitative follow-ups to this question show that many of the Careers Wales staff involved in programme delivery on the front line see these elements as the lynch-pin to achieving positive outcomes (which, as we will discuss below, can be defined as moving the client closer to the labour market
or closer to successful labour market progression). This point is exemplified by one respondent,

“I have found the mock interviews and interview technique sessions I run with clients to be very effective as I tailor them to their individual needs based on their experience. Feedback is always positive during the sessions and in follow-ups I carry out with clients. Clients explain that they noticed improvements with their performance which have either led to employment or moved them closer to securing employment in subsequent interviews. Most of the clients I see either do not have a CV or require a lot of support improving an existing one. The help we provide enables them to apply for jobs digitally thus improving their job opportunities as most jobs are advertised online. In my interviews I involve clients within the process of identifying skills, qualities and experience relevant to the jobs they are going for so that their [sic] CV is tailored accordingly thus improving its effectiveness”.

5.53 While this is a particularly expansive comment, it does encapsulate many of the themes that run throughout the responses received. First, it is clear that these elements are very much in the control of the staff member (i.e. they are not being ‘dictated to’ by the outcome of a computer programme, but they can be an important input in shaping the delivery of the employability element). The word tailor is significant in this regard and conveys the sense that the staff member is an empowered agent in the process of support delivery. Second, the comment highlights the idea that feedback improves performance – again, not something that typically comes through the application of computer based diagnostic and assessment tools. Third, in an interactive environment the feedback and improvement may be critical to building client self-efficacy – other comments made similar mentions, but it is instructive in the quote above that clients are willing to explain to the advisers that they have noticed their own improvements. Finally, there is the sentiment embedded in this quotation, but reflected in many others, that there is a tangible output of these elements, i.e. a CV, a mock or real application, or some other product.

5.54 A second important picture to emerge from the set of responses about guidance is the perceived importance of keeping abreast of local and labour market information. We specifically asked respondents to explain how they ensure that the advice and
guidance they provide about skills and training align with the skills needs of recruiting employers. Out of the 46 responses received, 35 mentioned the importance of keeping abreast of labour market information in providing targeted guidance and support to clients,

“Labour market information is crucial to any guidance interviews. We have comprehensive labour market information both local and national on-line, excellent networking with local Jobcentre Plus staff providing all job information, local employer forums and networks”.

5.55 In terms of where labour market information is being sourced, a variety of conduits were cited in the responses to the question, including:

- The Careers Wales website
- Other staff experts at Careers Wales’ offices and centres
- Partner organisations (especially Jobcentre Plus)
- Local employers
- Local and regional events, such as employability and skills fairs
- The Chartered Institute website
- The media and other statistical information
- Other Welsh Government job support programmes (ReAct specifically cited)

5.56 Access to accurate and up to date labour market information is clearly prized by Careers Wales staff involved in the delivery of SGfA and the evaluation team recognise this as an important component of the continuing professional development (CPD) for a capable and informed delivery staff.

Referral out from SGfA

5.57 Survey participants involved in the referral process from SGfA were asked to tell us how effective they perceive the process to be, and specifically how effective they would rate the Employment Routes bespoke tool.
Figure 5.6: How effective are referral processes from SfGA overall, and specifically the Employment Routes bespoke tool?

The data reflects the now established pattern detected in the responses to previous questions. With regards to the overall effectiveness of referrals, respondents predominantly (33/52) see the overall process as being extremely or very effective. Those levels of support drop a little when specific reference is made to the Employment Routes bespoke tool (19/51), where there are a sizeable number (22/51) who see it as only moderately or slightly effective.

We analysed the qualitative responses in the survey data to see if we could uncover any themes in the (generally positive) reactions to the Employment Routes tool. Many of those who rated the tool as highly or very effective had some suggestions and comments about how the tool might be improved, in their view.

Among the positive responses, two areas of concern have been expressed in the comments. One set of reservations expressed was about the complexity of the tool and the second related to the validity, reliability, and suitability of the data that lies behind the tool. With regards to the former (complexity), it was summarised by one survey participant who clearly sees it as having a role,

“Whilst the employment routes tool is useful it relies on a degree of IT literacy and access which will automatically limit it”.

Base = 52

5.58
5.59
5.60
Another response also referenced the complexity of navigating the tool,

“Employment Routes provided an understanding of what is out there, though can be quite a comprehensive tool to navigate through”.

Given that many of the delivery staff see part of their role in SGfA as helping clients navigate the online tools, this perception of complexity should be considered carefully.

With regards to the data underlying the Employment Routes bespoke tool, we did find multiple instances where respondents felt that the information contained in it is either out of date, unreliable, or not granular enough to be well adapted to the local context. For example, referring to the granularity of information, one comment was,

“Employment Routes is too general - local information is more useful”.

Some felt that the information contained in the tool was either out of date or not as comprehensive in its coverage as it should be,

“The employment routes tool can be hit and miss, as information can date, or courses can be intermittent. Also, client needs can be complex and criteria for referral can't always be met by the client”.

Again,

“I refer to partner organisations a lot, but not usually via the Employment Routes bespoke tool. This is because local services change and vary so much, and the Employment Routes does not reflect this very effectively”.

In discussions with SGfA programme managers at Careers Wales, the staff who oversee the deployment and maintenance of the tool have clearly been diligent about keeping the tool up to date and as accurate as possible (bearing in mind that any informational tool by definition lags behind real world developments that it reflects or reports). Thus, it is possible that the perceptions on the part of field delivery staff may be just that (more perception than reality). However, even if this is the case, it is important that this perceptual gap be reduced for the tool to be used more frequently and more effectively. While we see a clear role and use for the tool, one of the findings of this report is that the tool should be reviewed for consistency and accuracy, but at the same time, there should be regular communication with Careers Wales delivery staff about the exact parameters of the tool.

Patterns of referrals are reflected in the data shown in figure 5.7 below.
Almost all of those responding to this item (50/53) have frequent experience of referring to other national programmes such as ReAct or Jobs Growth Wales. Less common are referrals to private specialist training or to training through third sector organisations, although there are very few staff who have no experience of referrals to either (4/53 and 3/53 respectively). We wanted to determine what the drivers of the patterns reported above are, and thus asked how familiar advisers (i.e. those responding to this survey item) are about other employability programmes.

**Figure 5.7: How often do you refer clients to the following types of alternative support services?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>National programmes (such as ReAct or Jobs Growth Wales)</th>
<th>Regional and local programmes</th>
<th>Private specialist training</th>
<th>Training through 3rd sector organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = 54

**5.67** Almost all of those responding to this item (50/53) have frequent experience of referring to other national programmes such as ReAct or Jobs Growth Wales. Less common are referrals to private specialist training or to training through third sector organisations, although there are very few staff who have no experience of referrals to either (4/53 and 3/53 respectively). We wanted to determine what the drivers of the patterns reported above are, and thus asked how familiar advisers (i.e. those responding to this survey item) are about other employability programmes.

**Figure 5.8: How well informed are advisers regarding other programmes?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Type</th>
<th>Very good understanding</th>
<th>Fairly good understanding</th>
<th>Little understanding</th>
<th>No understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National programmes (such as ReAct or Jobs Growth Wales)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional and local programmes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private specialist training</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training through 3rd sector organisations</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = 53
5.68 The data points to a correlation between referral patterns and understanding of other employability programmes. While it is completely understandable that Careers Wales delivery staff have a good understanding of national programmes such as ReAct and Jobs Growth Wales, since many of them have worked or currently work on those programmes (and almost as good an understanding of regional and local programmes), it is also a testament to the CPD and training provided by Careers Wales, which was referenced in many responses. Thus,

“Advisers receive regular updates on National Programmes during Team Meetings and ad hoc through email as required when updates occur. Regional and Local programmes and Third Sector organisations are invited to Team Meetings and also Advisers and Team Managers meet with partner organisations ad hoc to discuss support available for clients”.

5.69 Many respondents emphasised the internal sharing of information among Careers Wales centre teams, and indeed the responses reflect a strong sense of communication and teamwork in local offices. Whether formally or informally, staff appear to be doing a good job of transmitting experience and information within employability teams.

5.70 Nonetheless, local private training organisations and third sector organisations, and their training offers, continue to be less well understood by delivery staff, and it is one of the recommendations of the evaluation team that future programme delivery efforts could address this finding and develop routes to obtaining such information about the local training landscape to Careers Wales staff involved in SGfA (and other employability programmes given the observed overlaps with ReAct). As one survey respondent put it succinctly,

“I would benefit from having the time to research support available to clients in more detail and also to network”.

5.71 Overall, a significant majority (44/49) of those answering this question feel that the referrals into training are either extremely or very effective.
Tracking and monitoring

5.72 In interviews with SGfA programme management staff, it was felt that there is a possibility that the evaluation would find that the tracking and monitoring of a client’s post-engagement diagnostic and assessment might be the most problematic element of the programme, primarily as a consequence of the difficulties of maintaining contact with a shifting client population. The general process of tracking and monitoring was summarised as follows,

“When I take a client on SGfA, they are added to my caseload on IO [the Careers Wales Client Information Database], they are then followed up through our tier system, once I have completed advice and guidance I will move them for further support from an employability coach if that is needed. They will then work with them until no further support is required. If no further support is required after working with me I refer to an employability coach where a one-month check is made to look at progress, outcomes etc. and if no further support required they are made a completer [sic]”.

5.73 The tools available to staff include an on-going support option in the Careers Wales database, as well as other ad hoc on-going case loading tools. The general tools for maintaining contact with those that have been through the process include:

- Regular phone and email contact (texts were mentioned by one staff member)
- Scheduled weekly or fortnightly meetings
- Constant review and progress update of caseload files, tagging participants for updates in databases
- Contact with partner/referral organisations
- Open door policy for recent referees

5.74 The respondents to the survey repeatedly emphasised how important it is not to place the entire onus on clients to determine next meetings/follow-ups and highlighted the shared perception that clients may lack either the skills or motivation to be proactive. It was clearly felt by the majority of respondents that multiple routes to follow-up are necessary,

“Face-to-face appointments, telephoned and text regularly to check on progress - email is also used to keep in touch with clients. Clients are contacted over a period of weeks using the above processes and they are offered further support if no contact made they are taken off case load”.
One of the issues identified in tracking and follow-up involved the general motivation levels of the clients themselves, with one survey participant telling us that,

“Clients can receive a phone call, text or e-mail but it is ultimately down to them to decide to respond”.

There was some feedback regarding the difficulties that some clients in rural areas face in terms of accessing the Careers Wales centres and the challenges that multiple visits may cause; it was mentioned that follow-up takes place over the phone in these instances to avoid placing an undue burden on participants.

Overall, it appears that the concerns as to how tracking and progress monitoring can be achieved that were expressed to us by the Careers Wales programme management staff are shared, in a positive and capability building way, by front line delivery staff. Precisely because it is arguably the hardest phase of the SGfA delivery to implement, staff appear to pay special attention to keeping informed about the post-engagement/interview/referral progress of clients served by SGfA. Again, we find strong evidence of good management practices, teamwork and individual initiative in ensuring that this phase of SGfA is delivered effectively,

“We have a very clear structure for receiving and tracking clients in the SGfA process. Clients are placed on a SGfA register [sic] on our database and assigned to a main Adviser, however this can be changed. The client’s progress is recorded at every step. The team are targeted to contact clients on a regular basis and the Team Manager oversees that this is being achieved. Thus, we are always targeted to see clients move forward in a certain timescale. Finally, once Clients are moved forward in to a positive outcome we are expected to keep in touch and make a contact with the client after one month to ensure they are happy”.

There is some variability regarding how long the tracking extends for, i.e. after the client successfully moves into training and/or employment. In some cases, we were told in the survey responses that tracking effectively ceases after this occurs (“…we follow up until they have secured a positive outcome”), although there may be an occasional/periodic follow-up by telephone or by email. In other cases, it appears that tracking may continue after a move into training and/or employment, and the predominant period cited was for four weeks/one-month after such an outcome has been recorded.
“When clients start engaging in their opportunities and achieve positive outcomes, their status is changed on our IO database to record this. I still keep in touch through text and email for the first month of a client’s engagement to check that they have settled in and sustaining their training or partner support, before recording a completion from the ISG project on our IO database”.

“After clients have left SGfA either to go into training, voluntary work or employment, I contact them a month after usually by text to find out if they are still engaged and how things are going and again to offer my support if they need any further help”.

5.79 We should note, however, that this apparent discrepancy may be a result of differing interpretations of the survey question wording (“Please outline how you track client progress during and after SGfA”); some advisers may have interpreted ‘post SGfA’ as meaning after one month of successful training or employment, whereas others may have interpreted it as being the transition moment itself.

5.80 Overall, acknowledging the complexities of systematic tracking and monitoring of those who have received initial support from SGfA, the staff that we contacted through the survey seem to have a strong sense that these multiple routes are effective.

Figure 5.9: How effective is the method you’ve just described in terms of tracking client progress during and after SGfA support?

![Bar chart showing effectiveness of tracking client progress during and after SGfA support.]

Base = 56
Comparing the ‘during’ and ‘post’ SGfA responses, it is clear that there is a drop off in the rating of the effectiveness of tracking and monitoring by Careers Wales staff (we would find it surprising if this were not the case). However, it is noteworthy that despite the challenges of tracking and monitoring this set of clients, which formed a large part of the qualitative follow-up to this question, the majority of staff feel that the options available are effective; once again, we would reiterate that this is in no small part attributable to the processes that have been put in place by the Careers Wales programme management staff informed by the experience of post-support client monitoring with other programmes. Overall, the process was neatly summarised in one response,

“I think they are self explanatory and certainly difficult to condense into a short sentence or two but done correctly they are essential attributes of our guidance model”.

Strengths and weaknesses of SGfA

We asked respondents to report on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the outcomes of SGfA. In the first instance, we asked them to tell us whether they feel that SGfA has accelerated labour market entry or progression.19

Figure 5.10: In your view, roughly what proportion of the clients with whom you have had contact (via SGfA) have either entered or progressed in the labour market since that contact sooner than they would otherwise have done without support from SGfA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76-100%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base = 52

19 Given that we have established the effectiveness of tracking and monitoring post-support, the evaluation team concluded that CW staff are very well placed to independently observe the timing of labour market transitions for clients.
5.83 The majority of the survey respondents to this question (31/52) placed that proportion at 51-75 per cent, i.e. the majority of clients served through SGfA have achieved labour market transition faster than if they had not received support. While these are obviously estimates, although based on a high degree of experience and tracking and monitoring data, they attest to the esteem in which Careers Wales staff hold the programme.

5.84 As a validation measure for this question we used a follow-up question asking respondents to estimate how many of those undergoing successful labour market transition might have done so regardless of the support that they received through SGfA, which allows us to distinguish between elements of the support that may have accelerated labour market progression and those which may have caused it.

**Figure 5.11: Roughly, what proportion of the individuals that you have supported into employment (via SGfA) would have found employment regardless of the support they received from SGfA?**

![Bar chart showing responses to the question.]

**Base = 50**

5.85 We were careful to ask the question in its reverse form to reduce the possibility of 'survey straight lining' (i.e. simply clicking the same response category as the previous question). Out of the 50 individual responses to this question, 46 estimated the proportion of those who would have achieved labour market transition without support from SGfA at 50 per cent or less. Thus, we conclude that programme additionality includes an *accelerant* effect on 50 per cent of clients or more and a *determinant* effect upon an equal number, acknowledging that we cannot disentangle the possible overlap between the two.
To conclude, we elicited responses from survey participants about what they feel is going well with SGfA versus what they feel could be improved. Respondents were clearly enthusiastic in their support for the programme and specific areas that were cited numerous times include:

- Working with partner and referral organisations (especially Jobcentre Plus.)
- Being able to tailor the guidance and support to individual needs
- Elements such as CV building and mock job interviews
- Case loading
- Deployment of online tools (WEST, ESAP, etc.)
- Teamwork.

The value of the programme was summed up in one response, "Some of the clients we work with are far from the labour market, I think the clarification and encouragement we provide helps them to move a step closer - through taking a course, starting some voluntary work or just being clearer about what is possible in the future. I think it is very important to offer people who are out of work/working part-time the chance to talk to someone impartial about their options - and to be offered on-going encouragement and practical support to help them move forward. I think it's always been hard to measure the effects of guidance - and I think a client moving into any type of provision - whether joining a crochet group in a local café, volunteering with the West Wales Wildlife Trust or joining a community choir is a step forward”.

One of the strongest themes running through the qualitative data is not what is said but what lies behind it; the comments reflect a very high degree of self-efficacy on the part of the Careers Wales advisers. The word ‘I’, attached to verbs such as ‘am’ or ‘can’, appears in a positive direction over 200 times in the comments, and the tonality reflects the high degree of empowerment and job satisfaction that SGfA provides for Careers Wales front line and management/administrative staff. Although this cannot be reduced to a single comment, the sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction achieved through participation in the delivery of SGfA can be seen in the following,

“I think that the client values the support that I give. I am a dedicated Careers Adviser and I get a buzz from seeing clients progress and achieve their outcomes. I think that clients on the whole appreciate the support that we as
When prompted to report their perceptions of what is not working particularly well in SGfA, the responses were shorter (1,420 total words compared to 2,082 for the ‘what is working well’ comments), and, of those, many were actually positive comments such as “No - it works well all around”, “I don’t feel that there are any areas where the SGfA service is not working”, or “It all seems to be working really well in our centre.” For those comments that highlighted aspects of SGfA that staff feel could work better, the main themes that stood out were:

- Quantity and quality of referrals from partners (mainly Jobcentre Plus)
- Bureaucracy and paperwork/form filling
- The digital tools (especially WEST, the ESAP, and Skills to Succeed)
- Marketing.

One (positive) nuance that was introduced in the comments about marketing concerned not so much knowledge and awareness of SGfA but the sentiment that the successes being achieved by SGfA are not as well-known as they should be outside of Careers Wales,

“I firmly believe Careers Wales delivers a high-quality service. However, the marketplace is crowded with other support organisations that claim to deliver similar support. This can be confusing for clients and partners. The purpose of SGfA needs to be clearly understood by partners”.

With regard to the referrals from Jobcentre Plus and other partners, the comments are divided into two groups; the first commented on the overall lack of numbers of referrals, whereas the second group – the larger group – commented on the lack of quality of those referrals. There is a perception that clients coming through the Jobcentre Plus engagement route may either lack motivation or may be there because they feel they have to,

“Sometimes I feel a minority of clients feel pressured to attend or are attending against their will by Jobcentre Plus and can initially have feelings of anxiety or worry they will be sanctioned which can have an effect on how well they engage in the first interaction”.

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20 Are there areas where you feel the SGfA service is not working particularly well?
21 The word “No” begins eight of the comments received.
5.92 In addition, some comments suggest that there is a concern that Jobcentre Plus /other partner organisations are referring the hardest cases and maybe those individuals who might not be well adapted to the SGfA offer bearing in mind that SGfA is not targeted specifically at those furthest from the labour market. For example, some comments suggested that there are non-skills related issues that are colouring referrals,

“The referrals we receive from Jobcentre Plus are nearly all long-term sick so progress with this type of client can be slow as most are not anywhere near ready for work”.

“Unfortunately, some referrals from the Jobcentre are very far away from the job market due to years of abuse, mental health issues and a long history of not working, ESOL needs. These clients do present a lot of on-going issues [sic] and can be very hard to help into work or training - unless they are ready, a lot are not”.

5.93 While there is no easy solution to this problem – one that is endemic across many employability services – it is perhaps worthy of clarification between programme managers at Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus /other partner organisations given the prevalence of comments which reference this issue.

5.94 Finally, there were a small number of comments (4/71) that referred to bureaucratic processes (although we have already noted above that there were comments in the questions on each of the phases of delivery that also indicated that some staff may feel that they struggle to fill out the required forms).

5.95 The evaluation team is aware that during our discussions with programme managers that the management team was mindful of the need to ensure the data capture process was as light touch as possible; however, a balance has to be struck with the IO, caseload, and tracking and monitoring aspects of SGfA that ultimately contribute to making the programme successful. We will return to this in the recommendations at the end of this report, but for now we make the observation that it is something that should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.
6. **Front line staff interviews**

6.1 The interviews undertaken with Careers Wales front line staff aimed to get an insight into SGfA operations from the perspective of the programme leads and programme officials and to triangulate the survey results discussed in the previous section. The key areas explored included:

- The interviewees’ role in delivering the SGfA service
- Awareness of the SGfA among partner organisations and clients
- Reviewing the stages of support from Engagement, Assessment, Guidance, Referral, Tracking and Support
- Perceptions of SGfA in terms of clients securing employment and moving closer to employment.

6.2 Most of the findings from these semi-structured, one to one interviews mirrored the general findings from the front-line staff survey. Triangulation between the two datasets provides confidence in the robustness of the results. Interviews were balanced across the regions of Wales and included 12 Careers Advisers and eight Employability Coaches.

**The Role**

6.3 The interviews revealed the perception of a clear distinction between the roles of Careers Advisers and Employability Coaches, although there are some centres where some overlap was encountered. In general, Careers Advisers and Employability Coaches report that they work together to provide support to adults through the SGfA.

6.4 During our interviews, staff reported that their understanding of the role of Careers Advisers is to provide Information, Advice and Guidance to eligible adults based on an initial careers interview where they establish what stage a client is at and where they aspire to get to. Careers Advisers also work to identify and address skills gaps, barriers and aspirations to move clients towards the labour market.

6.5 From our interviews, staff reported that their understanding of the role of Employability Coaches is to offer one to one and group work around employability, which may include the running of ‘job clubs’. Employability Coaches may also focus on supporting with CV development, interview skills, registering on job sites and
searching and applying for jobs, equipping clients with the skills they need to enter the labour market.

6.6 Interviewees told us that the roles of the Careers Advisers and Employability Coaches may overlap. In some centres, it was reported that employability skills support exclusively sits with Employability Coaches, whilst in others, Careers Advisers have some involvement.

6.7 The methods of working between Employability Coaches and Careers Advisers differed between centres. In some cases, Employability Coaches are the first point of contact for clients, and they may then refer to Careers Advisers for more in-depth information advice and guidance. In other centres, Careers Advisers will refer clients on to Employability Coaches for more in-depth employment support.

**Engagement with SGfA**

6.8 The existing referral process worked well from the perspective of the interview sample, echoing the findings from the staff survey discussed above. The majority of referrals come from the Jobcentre Plus or via self-referral. Fewer referrals come through other partners; this may relate to earlier comments relating to promotion of the SGfA to these organisations.

6.9 In terms of the Jobcentre Plus, the relationship was viewed as solid or “seamless”, with very few exceptions - a couple of Advisers felt that the relationship was inconsistent between jobcentres. The communication was thought to be good, with many Careers Advisers undertaking outreach work based in Jobcentre Plus offices. In their view, this relationship promoted valid and effective referrals to the SGfA.

6.10 However, according to our interviewees, there were certain challenges in terms of how some clients are referred to the SGfA from Jobcentre Plus, which can affect engagement. Clients may have believed that they were mandated by Jobcentre Plus to attend appoints with the SGfA, but once they had a good understanding of the support on offer they felt more comfortable.

6.11 Generally, the Careers Wales staff interviewed think that the menu of engagement services was effective, and the blended approach was appropriate for the range of people seen by the SGfA. However, we were told that the initial face-to-face contact with clients is particularly important in developing trust and rapport with the front-line staff member.
6.12 From our interviews, we gained the understanding that follow-up with clients usually takes place over the phone or via text, and clients respond well to this.

6.13 In the interviews we were told that the web-service provides instant help and is becoming increasingly popular; this provides some clients with all the help they need, but for others, they can be directed through this channel to a face-to-face meeting. Some Careers Advisers noted that the web-service is not available in some parts of rural Wales due to patchy coverage, and that many individuals are not digitally literate so would not be able to use this service.

Awareness of SGfA and Marketing

6.14 In the in-depth interviews, we asked staff to give us their perceptions regarding the awareness of the SGfA brand among potential clients and referees, bearing in mind that the staff interviewed are themselves not the targets of SGfA marketing campaigns.

6.15 Our interviews revealed that across the front-line staff, there is a perception that amongst potential clients the SGfA brand is not always well-recognised and clients only become aware of the service after approaching a Careers Wales adviser.

6.16 On the other hand, Careers Wales is a well-recognised brand, although understanding of who is eligible for Careers Wales support is inconsistent. There is a growing awareness of the support available through Careers Wales to adults driven by the front-line staff who are working to “rebuild our reputation with adults”. Careers Advisers recognised this as a challenging process.

“A few years ago, we didn’t see adults – it’s been an uphill struggle to make people aware we will see them again – we’ve had to do a lot of awareness-raising”. Careers Adviser

“I think there is a perception that Careers Wales is for young people. It used to be an all age service, then it changed, now it’s been reintroduced. We’re still trying to establish our offer with clients”. Careers Adviser

6.17 Several of our interviewees told us that in their perception adults are gradually returning to Careers Wales for the support they can provide but are not actively seeking the SGfA. It was reported to us by some interviewees that there were some clients who have been aware of the SGfA but are misinformed about crucial aspects, believing that “the programme is about selling training courses” and that it may “be detrimental to benefit payments”.

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Awareness amongst non-Careers Wales practitioners is better than amongst clients as Careers Wales staff invest a lot of time in networking.

“We have communication sessions, which we invite partners to – they give a synopsis of their service and we do the same”. Careers Adviser

The general perception of our sample was that the service is better known amongst Jobcentre Plus staff than other partners due to the close relationship between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. However, it was reported that partners, like clients, do not necessarily see the SGfA as a separate service to Careers Wales and will refer clients to Careers Wales for adult guidance. We were told that some referrers may specify that clients are being referred to the SGfA, but this is not common.

We found that the individual perceptions of staff interviewed sometimes placed less emphasis on the marketing campaigns conducted by Careers Wales, with interviewees informing us that they have driven marketing on the front line through networking with partners and the use of leaflets and posters. The evaluators were told by some interviewees that they did not feel that marketing support exists at a higher level and recognise that there may be financial constraints. This contradicts the stress on marketing in the programme and management documentation reviewed by the evaluation team, as well as in our engagement with senior Careers Wales staff, where we encountered strong support for marketing.

We would recommend that this gap between perception and reality be addressed. There is a need to further engage delivery staff in the marketing of SGfA and the evaluation of the success of that marketing.

There was agreement amongst the front-line staff interviewed that there is no value in the SGfA sitting as a separate entity to Careers Wales and that many clients view the SGfA as embedded within the Careers Wales offer of support.

“I would have preferred the SGfA to be embedded within Careers Wales – it sits well with the ReAct project”. Careers Adviser

“The branding makes it look separate, but I think it should be a part of us. It helps people to know where to go”. Employability Coach

“It would take more marketing to see it as its own entity”. Employability Coach
Assessment

6.23 From the perspective of the Careers Wales staff, the assessment process is very much client-led and usually begins with a careers interview with a Careers Adviser, who will assess need through a process of discussion and may utilise the range of tools available. Employability Coaches appear to have mixed exposure to the tools. According to our interviewees, the process is effective at identifying skills gaps; the initial assessment is a very “fluid” and “inclusive” process, utilising a “holistic” and “person-centred approach”.

“Those at a higher level may want it to be a scientific process, but the emotion and uniqueness of each individual makes this impossible”. Careers Adviser

6.24 We found that the Job Matching Quiz is a popular tool for both Careers Advisers and Employability Coaches who use it to encourage clients to consider a broader range of employment options related to their skills. Staff highlighted this as a particularly valuable tool to promote self-awareness and one which supports further discussion and guidance.

6.25 The WEST has been particularly useful in identifying digital literacy skills and staff see the value in it. It allows staff to present feedback in a more structured way and for clients to understand at what level they are at in terms of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. However, some clients can be resistant to the tool, so it is down to the staff member to ‘sell’ the tool to them. Some staff frame it as something which clients will be asked to do during interviews anyway, while others encourage people to do it in order to refer them to further support, offering the reassurance that, whatever the outcome, help is there. Some Careers Advisers highlighted that they will only use the WEST if an individual is considering work-based learning. Another noted that it is more of a “tester tool” which will be repeated at college or with a training provider and therefore has limited value.

6.26 Skills to Succeed is another tool used as part of the assessment process, although advisers generally only use a couple of modules. As we have already reported from the staff survey, many Advisers worry that the majority of modules are not appropriate for adults and can come across as “patronising”. Concerns were raised around mandating advisers to use this tool and the impact it could have on their relationships with clients.
“I find it quite patronising. Two or three modules are good”. Careers Adviser

“Using it with people can make them question my credibility”. Careers Adviser

6.27 Although there is value in the online tools, we were told by several interviewees that many of the clients coming through the SGfA are not digitally literate and may initially find the process frightening. Careers Advisers and Employability Coaches reported that they have to be careful and considerate of when to incorporate the tools into the support model.

6.28 While the ESAP is valued by staff, some told us that they think that it is time-consuming to complete. Staff can share the Plan with other staff internally or with partner staff such as those at Jobcentre Plus. The background information included in the Plan on the client can be helpful to these individuals. The actions on the plan are important to all parties, summarising the discussion and next steps, providing something to focus on at follow-up and acting as a benchmark.

Guidance

6.29 Staff appeared to be passionate about the support they offer to adults and felt strongly that they support clients through their entire transition to the labour market through SGfA. Staff believed that the relationships they built through networking are valuable to adults coming through the SGfA. Careers Advisers told us that they value the opportunity to refer to Employability Coaches, who can set up mock interviews for clients.

6.30 It emerged from our interviews that delivery staff feel there is value even for clients who disengage with SGfA before entering the labour market. Because of the way that the support is sequentially structured, even those who do not follow the process all the way through may leave with an improved CV and relevant skills provided that they were fully engaged in the earlier stages.

6.31 The long-term unemployed are a particularly challenging client group for staff to work with as they often have multiple barriers to overcome and there is a need to take “smaller steps” to help build their skills. The outcomes for these clients are less immediate, but the SGfA allows for longer-term support, which is essential to this client group. There was recognition that some clients referred by Jobcentre Plus are just “playing the game” and will not engage with the support, regardless of what’s on offer.
6.32 Other client groups identified to us in the interviews as requiring additional support include those whose first language is not English, who may be highly skilled but lack English requirements and cannot be referred due to limited English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, and those experiencing mental health difficulties.

6.33 Indeed, the observation that those reporting mental health issues require additional support corroborates the findings from the staff survey and clearly represents an area of difficulty for programme delivery from the perspective of front line delivery staff.

6.34 Some of our interviewees told us that the Employment Routes Bespoke Tool can be unreliable and has room for improvement. Specifically, several Careers Advisers noted that they had had results of programmes and providers who were supposed to be operating in the local area, but were not, reflecting comments also received in the survey. They also noted that there were often requirements with the providers that were not identified on completion of the tool and that time-bound programmes are not included. A general sentiment was that staff feel that they had a good knowledge of what is available to them in their local area and so may be less likely to use the tool where it conflicts with their sense of the local employment and training landscape.

6.35 Labour market information is an integral part of the service, and staff feel that they have a good understanding of both local and national labour market information. There is national labour market information provided on the Careers Wales website and the relationship with the Jobcentre Plus promotes effective sharing of labour market information. Moreover, the Business Education Adviser Service (BEAS) was highlighted as particularly useful in keeping staff up to date with labour market information and staff undertake regular job searches and keep up to date with local opportunities and redundancies. In the Careers Wales West region, spotlight publications are produced. In some centres, they have developed their connections with employers, which has been effective at improving outcomes for clients. Labour market information is shared with clients on a one to one basis, as well as through social media and mail merges.
6.36 Staff that we interviewed across Wales as a whole feel well-equipped to deal with Welsh-language preferences and reported that a first language Welsh speaker would receive the same service as someone who wanted to communicate in English. In the observational sessions that we conducted for this evaluation (see Section 7 below) we were able to corroborate this through our own fieldwork.

**Referral Out from SGfA**

6.37 Staff seemed to be aware of a range of providers that they can refer to, depending on need, and this is an effective process. To the evaluation team conducting the interviews, staff appeared to be fairly well-informed about Welsh Government and ESF programmes, local and regional programmes, and private specialist training. We were informed that information is passed to staff via management, bulletins and newsletters. Some information may, in the words of one interviewee, “slip through the cracks”. Referrals to alternative support services appear to be common, particularly in relation to mental health support. Staff may also refer to Pace, a client’s GP, Remploy or housing associations.

6.38 Interviewees told us that they believe clients consider SGfA staff to be “honest brokers” due to the impartial nature of the service.

> “We are not working for anyone but them. We are not stopping their money”. Careers Adviser

6.39 From the perspective of front line staff, clients are provided with a range of options and have the opportunity to decide on what they feel most comfortable with. They see this as refreshing for clients who may have been involved with Jobcentre Plus, as it is a different approach. The client is in control of the outcomes: “it is driven by them”.

**Tracking and monitoring**

6.40 It was emphasised to us through our interviews that the understanding of client outcomes relies on feedback from the clients themselves; this is ad-hoc and qualitative in nature. Generally, staff told us that they do not find that feedback from clients is difficult to obtain as they have built a good relationship with the client during the support period.
6.41 We were told that feedback about SGfA is usually positive from clients. However, from the perspective of interviewees (and mirroring the evidence found in the staff survey) there is a lack of standardised tracking in place and this makes quantifying outcomes difficult. Staff will also obtain feedback from the partners that they have referred to. Clients are kept on the case load of their Careers Adviser until they are in a stable placement or no longer need support; this ensures that clients do not feel “passed on”.

6.42 IO is an efficient recording system, which allows staff to manage their caseload effectively. Staff value being able to text and email clients with appointment reminders through IO. Staff also value the introduction of the workflow, which has made the process of recording easier and less open to errors. Staff recognise that IO is under on-going improvement, which they value.

**Strengths and weaknesses of SGfA**

6.43 Overall, the SGfA service is valued by staff, who in turn believe that it is valued by clients. In particular, the relationship with Jobcentre Plus and partnerships with other providers, the impartial nature of the SGfA, the blended approach to engagement, the joint working between Employability Coaches and Careers Advisers, and the opportunity to do more in-depth, tailored, long term work with adults, incorporating the use of online tools, have worked well.

6.44 Staff offered the following suggestions in the interview sessions in terms of improving the SGfA:

- Improvement of the Employment Routes tool to improve its accuracy at a local level and to include time-bound programmes
- Opportunity to see a more diverse client base to include adults in work full-time
- Revision of the ESAP to be more client-centred
- Development of the Skills to Succeed Online modules to make them more appropriate for adults
- Review and development of the marketing and branding of the SGfA
- Improvement in tracking outcomes
- Development of relationships with employers, including employer visits and sector-specific events
- Development of understanding regarding mental health and support availability across the staff team.
7. Careers Wales centres observations

7.1 A third element of the fieldwork undertaken by the evaluation team was the observation of face-to-face advising sessions in a number of Careers Wales centres and other venues, in order to triangulate findings from the survey of staff and in-depth interviews. Observational methods were used to provide neutral, unbiased data against which to measure and corroborate the perceptions of the Careers Wales staff that have been reported in the previous two sections. The observation sessions provide a powerful assessment of the external validity of the data gathered by the evaluation team, and also provide rich contextual material against which to understand both the positive praise for SGfA and any concerns expressed regarding the marketing, implementation and delivery of SGfA.

Structure of sessions

7.2 The observation team recorded a high degree of uniformity across the sessions. With the exception of the group session, all one to one interviews were held in a private office space.22 The group session was held in a large open area in the building in which it was located, with participants being free to join or leave at will.

7.3 Sessions followed a near identical structure which can be broken down into four phases:

- Introductions and familiarisation
- Exploration of career goals/labour market progression aspirations/CV preparation
- Formal assessment and diagnostics, including use of WEST/online tools
- Outcomes, including discussion of ESAP and follow-ups.

Introductions and familiarisation

7.4 The observation team noted that many clients initially seemed quite nervous. In the informal exit interviews that we were able to complete, several clients noted that they did not know what to expect from SGfA. A common theme was that they had been referred through Jobcentre Plus, and most admitted after the interview that they were unaware that the process was ‘non-mandatory’; for example, one male client said that he was under the impression that he would lose his benefits if he did not attend the session with Careers Wales. However, once the interactions

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22 In one instance, the meeting was moved to a larger meeting room than the private office to accommodate the observation team, although the Careers Adviser said that it is normally held in the private office.
proceeded between adviser and client and it became apparent that this was neither mandatory nor linked in any way to benefits assessment, clients tended to become noticeably more relaxed and less guarded.

7.5 Typically, Advisers would begin the sessions by explaining the overall goals of SGfA and then the steps that they would go through in the interview session. There were two cases where mental health issues on the part of the client were raised at the very beginning of the interview, and the advisers said that they would talk about those issues in the context of the assessment but that the intention was not to pry. It was also common for advisers to give clients a piece of paper to write notes on and to be able to think of questions that they might wish to ask later.

7.6 In cases where clients already had a CV prepared, the adviser would typically ask to review that at the beginning of the session and would use that as a basis for exploration and discussion. In cases where no CV had been prepared, advisers would ask clients about their employment history and labour market experiences, thus establishing an informal CV. Having reviewed the CV, advisers would suggest tweaks, while in cases where these was no CV prepared we observed advisers suggesting that the preparation of a CV would be the next step. In many cases, the conversation about the CV was highly detailed and clients tended to open up about the experiences that were reflected in them. For example, M___, a man in his 40s with a background in computer science who attributed his current labour market struggles to his mental health condition, discussed one particular job he had held more than a decade ago and to which he attributed the start of his problems; the Careers Adviser suggested that one of the important things was to avoid putting him back into a similar role through SGfA.

**Exploration of career and labour market progression goals**

7.7 We witnessed many clients being unable to clearly articulate what they felt their goals were for entry into the labour market or labour market progression, and this was an area where Careers Advisers used a great deal of experience and skill to assess what clients can and cannot see themselves doing. In several cases, we witnessed clients becoming visibly distressed when describing their labour market struggles. For example, in one case, N_____, a worker in the hotel business who had recently lost her position after four years, broke down in tears when describing the current situation, she and her partner and their child are experiencing, especially when talking about their lack of food. In this instance, as in other examples, the
adviser was able to give practical advice that lies outside the strict remit of SGfA (the possibility of going to local food banks to help feed the family), and also to engage with other Careers Wales centre staff to provide advice about issues with jobs benefits claims. We note that this is a strength of SGfA in that it resides within an organisational structure such as Careers Wales where there are knowledgeable staff who can be engaged in topics that relate to labour market barriers, which are not strictly part of the formal SGfA process.

7.8 Not all cases that we observed concerned clients with high barriers to employability or labour market progression. For example, P___ was made redundant in February 2017 and has extensive work experience in the food sales sector. He is the holder of a degree in Business and his wife is a GP. P___ explained that he has become the primary carer for their two children as his wife works very long hours, and he is now looking for a job, preferably part-time, that will ‘fit his lifestyle better’. He was seeking a job that would maintain his foot on the employment and career ladder and that might allow him to return to the labour market full-time at a later date but would for now permit him to maintain his role as primary care giver in the family. His motivation for engaging with SGfA was, however, very similar to that of other clients; he described it as “ticking a box” in order to safeguard the benefits that he is currently receiving.

7.9 In many instances, advisers asked the clients what their expectations were for the visit on that particular day and it was notable that many did not have a precise idea beyond the notion that they were supposed to go and get help as part of the benefit process (see above). Many clients suggested that their goal was to gain further education or skills qualifications, and these discussions were quite prevalent throughout the sessions that we observed. Careers Advisers showed themselves to be very familiar with the Further and Higher Education offers in their areas, including familiarity with specific courses and degree qualifications. At this point, advisers would then often offer to help build a CV (for those who did not already have one) or to tweak an existing one in order to reflect these labour market goals. In some cases, advisers pointed clients towards online CV building tools such as the Skills to Succeed Academy tool. In the case of P___, the adviser pointed out that his CV lacked objectives and was very ‘busy’, and that there was a lot of tidying up that could be done to it. He agreed to tidy it up and to email it back to the adviser for review in a follow-up.
Formal assessment and diagnostics

7.10 Careers advisers made extensive use of the IO database. This was usually populated using the Supplementary Information Forms that advisers asked clients to fill out. One tool that was commonly used by advisers but which we had not asked about in either the survey or the semi-structured interviews was variations on mind maps. In some cases, the mind maps were more formal (in at least two instances, advisers showed the clients mind maps online and explained how to use such software), while in other cases they were more informal, for instance diagrams sketched on a piece of paper. Maps would typically contain at least three elements: the client's past (including the pathway to the interview with SGfA), the interview and assessment itself (engagement with SGfA), and the future, mapped as a set of inter-related goals encompassing both labour market aspirations and broader individual, family and community benefits. We observed that many clients responded very positively to this process and seemed genuinely grateful for the opportunity to contextualise their current labour market situation.

7.11 We also observed advisers making extensive and systematic use of WEST. While clients seemed comfortable with using the tool in general, the advisers did help them through the process in many instances. We did not observe any negative reactions to the tool and in some cases, clients seemed pleased with the overall assessment of their skills levels achieved through the tool. In the sessions that we observed, advisers also made extensive use of the Jobs Quiz; again, this seemed to provoke quite positive reactions from clients and to provide some genuinely unexpected points for discussion with careers advisers. In many instances, the results of the Jobs Quiz initiated a discussion about potentially opening a business or moving into self-employment, and advisers also provided a lot of background knowledge and advice about this possibility.

Outputs

7.12 The session outputs could be typically classified into three non-mutually exclusive categories:

- Providing clarity and focus regarding clients' labour market aspirations
- Providing guidance about routes into (self) employment or labour market progression
- Providing an action map for the future, including follow-ups and an ESAP.
7.13 In terms of the clarification of labour market aspirations, we have noted that many clients – even those with higher skills levels and more experience – often seemed to lack a clear idea of why they were there or what they expected to get out of the process. In several cases, clients realised that they had either forgotten or omitted previous labour market experiences in databases and paperwork that they had completed prior to the engagement with SGfA and in some cases they appeared to think that previous experiences in the labour market might not matter or might be irrelevant to their job search. We noted that many clients were pleased to have these discussions with advisers, and subsequently they felt that they had a much better understanding of their situation and prospects.

7.14 The guidance about routes into employment of labour market progression is one of the core elements of SGfA and was clearly reflected in the sessions that we observed. As we have already suggested, in many cases that guidance considered factors beyond employability skills and experience, such as domestic situation and mental health issues. When asked after the sessions, advisers told us that they see guidance as being one of the strongest elements of SGfA, and that they feel that the tools available through SGfA empower them to help clients visualise labour market entry or progression in ways they have not yet experienced.

7.15 The action map for the future followed a common pattern; a copy of the ESAP that would be typed up and sent to the client later, and a set of action points prior to the next contact with SGfA (e.g. revising a CV, exploring skills and qualifications courses). There was a high degree of uniformity (as noted from the staff survey and interviews) in the way that follow-up was discussed, most typically a meeting or telephone contact arranged for two weeks ahead.

Other

7.16 Advisers told us that their typical client is unemployed and has no formal qualifications, and consequently we observed a few sessions that were atypical as clients had formal qualifications and a high level of labour market experience. Nonetheless, even in those cases, we observed a clear value added to the client from engagement with SGfA, and we saw many clients who appeared to leave with a greater sense of purpose than they had held prior to the commencement of the interview. For example, M____, an 18-year-old male with no formal qualifications and limited work experience in the motor trade, and who had been expelled from school, told us afterwards that he felt that he got what he wanted from the session.
and that he felt more positive about his employment prospects following the support. In his case, he discussed the potential for careers in the construction trade with the adviser and this appeared to open up a new line of thinking for him.

7.17 Advisers are sometimes familiar with their clients from previous interactions through other programmes (such as Jobs Growth Wales) or through interactions with other members of the employment support teams in the Careers Wales office. As noted, we observed the teamwork that lies behind SGfA in action in several instances and were able to record the positive interventions of non-SGfA staff to help advise and support clients. We note this as one of the positive and strong elements of SGfA implementation and delivery.
8. **Website monitoring/customer journey**

8.1 The final element of the fieldwork for this evaluation consisted of the monitoring of client usage of the website (http://www.careerswales.com/en/skills-gateway/; http://www.careerswales.com/cy/porth-sgiliau/) over a period of four weeks. This element of the fieldwork allowed the evaluation team to (a) further triangulate the findings reported in the previous three sections using an additional source of observed data and (b) provide a validation for the web analytics that have been discussed previously and which were gathered as part of the programme monitoring and evaluation data capture.

**Customer struggle**

8.2 The software allowed the evaluation team to discern whether there were any page errors recorded during this time. Across all 2,050 uses and 3,050 page views, no errors were detected by the monitoring, attesting to the robustness of the SGfA web platform.

8.3 The core metric generated by SessionCam is what is known as ‘Customer Struggle’ (CS). Each page usage is ranked on a scale between 0-5, with 0 indicating that the user has experienced no difficulty at all navigating the web page and a score of 5 indicates that the page is almost impossible for the user to navigate. The algorithm that lies behind the CS score combines time, mouse movement, clicks, and page navigation (including forward/backwards/refresh).

8.4 Using the CS, it is possible to identify (a) individual pages that have high CS scores, (b) individual sessions with high CS scores which are termed ‘key journeys’, and (c) moments of high CS within an individual client journey. We treat all three below.

**Page CS scores**

8.5 The CS scores for the 31 pages on the SGfA website that were accessed during the monitoring period are shown in Table 8.1 In this table, rank refers to the rank order of CS – from highest to lowest – and impressions refers to the number of times a page was included in the computation of the CS score (thus, for example, the “employment routes” English Language page was assigned a CS score of 1.5 – the highest for any individual page – based on 276 instances recorded in the scoring algorithm).
Table 8.1: CS score for individual pages, SGfA website (September 12th-October 12th 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Impressions</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>Page name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td><a href="https://www.careerswales.com/en/skills-gateway/employment-routes/">https://www.careerswales.com/en/skills-gateway/employment-routes/</a></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>103</td>
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<td>79</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>923</td>
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<td>536</td>
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<td>76</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td><a href="https://www.careerswales.com/cy/porth-sgiliau/llwybrau-cyflogaeth/">https://www.careerswales.com/cy/porth-sgiliau/llwybrau-cyflogaeth/</a></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td><a href="https://www.careerswales.com/en/skills-gateway/i-turned-my-life-around-and-now-i-m-starting-my-own-business/">https://www.careerswales.com/en/skills-gateway/i-turned-my-life-around-and-now-i-m-starting-my-own-business/</a></td>
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<td>0.2</td>
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<td>Rank</td>
<td>Impressions</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Page names</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0.1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.6 The usage statistics reported above show that in general the CS scores are low, reflecting the fact that the majority of clients seem to be able to navigate the website without much difficulty.

8.7 The one page with a CS score above 1.0 – generally considered to be the threshold at which further examination of the data is warranted – is the *Employment Routes*
We examined the data in more detail by looking at the CS scores for each individual user (client).

When we examined individual client scores for this page, the highest was 2.2 (indicating a concerning level of struggle) and three clients had scores above 2. Of these clients, one spent 22m 24s on the page, the other two spent 13m 0s each.

The evaluation team reviewed the recordings of a sample of pages with higher CS scores, and three areas of common struggle were identified:

- In some cases, clients appeared reluctant to enter postcodes and then did not succeed in entering a local authority area; we hypothesise that in some instances, clients may be unaware of the formal name of their local authority area
- Once search results were posted, some clients with high CS spent a lot of time reading (and apparently re-reading) them; the pattern of mouse clicks indicate that some clients may have a hard time reading the content of the search results as presented
- Some clients returned to the personal details section and reviewed their data entry after each posting of search results; in some cases, this appeared to be a misunderstanding about the properties of page navigation as it is not necessary to re-enter personal details in order to repost or refresh the search results.

**Key journeys**

Key journeys are defined as those which exhibit either a high overall CS score or in which specific patterns of CS are identified. Using the metrics integrated into the SessionCam software platform, the evaluation team identified 204 key journeys which were all associated with the same Employment Routes web page.

Upon investigation, these 204 key journeys had a conversion rate of 24 per cent (49/204). The conversion rate is defined as those who finish the session, meaning that 155 clients identified through the analysis of this page did not finish the session. However, when a sample of these key journeys was reviewed by the evaluation team, it was determined that the principal reason for non-conversion was that clients left the computer/input console without closing the page.

We were able to cross-reference this finding against the observations gathered in the Careers Wales offices. As part of the data capture from this exercise, our observation team noted the usage of online tools; typically, advisers would set
clients up in front of a computer terminal, would explain how to use the specific tools, and would then leave the client to browse the website (including the main SGfA webpage). Where necessary, the advisers would provide assistance with navigation and data entry.

8.13 The team noted in several instances and recorded in their field notes (see above) that the clients would then leave the terminal to discuss the results with the advisers, often leaving the webpage open and idle. We believe that in-office usage in Careers Wales or Jobcentre Plus settings may account for the bulk of the non-conversion, i.e. the 155 clients who did not finish the session.

**Moments of high CS**

8.14 The evaluation team reviewed the session recording for moments of high CS identified. Eight of the moments reviewed were associated with the *Employment Routes* page discussed above, while ten were associated with the top page (*Skills Gateway*). In these individual session reviews, we noted identical phenomena to that discussed above, namely *inactivity* and *inappropriate page navigation/refresh techniques*. It is impossible for us to fully establish the causality of pages taking a long time to navigate; it is possible, for example, that it may be because there is a large amount of text to read rather than any inherent difficulty in web page navigation. However, it is clear that the *Employment Routes* page (the one with the highest CS score) seemed to present greater challenges to users, as evidenced by the movement of the mouse cursor and the pattern of clicks, than the *Employment Routes Results* page on which the search results are presented. In general, the CS scores are low by industry standards and well within acceptable levels for all but the *Employment Routes* page.

8.15 The other area of individual moments of CS concerns the capture of personal data. For whatever reason, some clients are clearly reluctant to give postcode information, and seem unable or unwilling to locate themselves inside a local authority area. The geolocation provided two-third of the individual moments of CS associated with personal data capture.

**Overall**

8.16 Our review of the website monitoring data generated by the installation of SessionCam over a four-week period indicates that the SGfA website is overall easy to use and navigate from the perspective of clients. In general, the CS scores
are low by industry standards and well within acceptable levels for all but the Employment Routes page.

8.17 Where we did identify specific elements of struggle with usage, it was mostly due on the part of users to either the reticence to provide personal data or navigation inefficiencies in clicking between search results. Nonetheless, we believe that there is scope for reviewing these elements from the programme perspective and considering alternatives; for example, if clients do not wish to enter postcodes while using a Careers Wales/Jobcentre Plus computer, the local authority in which that centre is located could be used as the default in the local authority option, thus not requiring a mandatory data input.\(^{23}\) We would also recommend a review of the page navigation buttons to ensure that forward/backward/refresh options are clearly identified and labelled.

\(^{23}\) We understand that the client may be located in a local authority other than the one in which they attend the interview, but a short disclaimer could inform the client that search results will be returned for the area of the centre rather than the client’s residence if the client does not override the default.
9. **Conclusions and Recommendations**

**Summary of findings**

9.1 This evaluation has provided evidence that the SGfA is a service that is being well implemented and delivered.

9.2 The programme has a clear set of objectives that have been well-specified, and the theory of change that we have derived from the programme documentation is logically consistent.

9.3 The review of the programme documentation and monitoring and evaluation data provided shows that SGfA is delivering successfully against the output targets that have been established (exceeding all output targets).

9.4 Our review of the management data suggests that the balance between self-referrals and those from Jobcentre Plus in 2016-2017 has tilted slightly towards referrals from Jobcentre Plus (in comparison to the round of delivery in 2015-2016).

9.5 We noted that in North Wales there have been some questions about the ability of clients to access online support.

9.6 Our review of the programme monitoring and evaluation data also shows progression in outcomes; there has been an increase in referrals to skills provision over the previous year of delivery with the number of clients being referred rising from 1 in 10 to 1 in 4. We attribute at least some of this increase to ‘programme learning’ and higher levels of self-efficacy on the part of delivery staff.

9.7 The monitoring and evaluation data reviewed also shows that the outcomes of those referrals are increasingly positive, with the ratio of those entering skills provision rising from approximately 1 in 6 to 1 in 4. There was also a proportional increase in the number of clients helped to prepare a CV, rising from 20 per cent of all clients in 2015-16 to 27 per cent by 2016-17.

9.8 Our telephone and survey engagement with Careers Wales staff revealed that those involved in programme management, implementation and delivery are broadly satisfied with the programme and have a sense that SGfA is delivering well against its objectives.

9.9 Importantly, we noted that SGfA seems to enhance the self-efficacy among Careers Advisers and Employability Coaches, and we found tangible evidence that these key staff feel empowered due to the way that the elements and tools of SGfA
combine. We did note some issues around the online tools that have been deployed within SGfA, with some staff telling us that they feel that some of the tools – the Careers Wales Skills to Succeed learning module was the most often cited – might be less adapted for all clients in all situations. It was also evident that some of the data that lies behind the Employment Routes tool is perceived as being either too generic or out of date.

9.10 The observation of adviser/coach-client interactions was fruitful and triangulated the finding from the telephone and survey engagement with staff that face-to-face advising is a productive route with regard to assessing clients’ needs and determining referral possibilities. In the surveys and interviews, Careers Wales staff said that they felt the face-to-face sessions enable them to break down barriers to labour market progression support (mistrust, low self-esteem, lack of knowledge, etc.), and our field observations confirmed this portrayal. The limited engagement that we had with clients in the field setting also confirmed the positive role played by SGfA in labour market progression.

9.11 The monitoring of the SGfA website also demonstrated that, in general, the overall CS through the website is low. We did note some particular areas of CS, notably personal data entry (postcodes) and in the navigation of the Employment Routes webpage; with regards to the latter, this may be explained by the time clients took to read page instructions. Our view is that the web page is well designed and generally very clear.

Value for Money

9.12 We were unable to access ESF leavers survey data within the timescales required for this midterm evaluation, which we had intended to use as a wider evidence base to compare the level of outputs achieved by SGfA against other services and were thus reliant upon programme monitoring and evaluation data for reviewing outputs and outcomes.

9.13 That monitoring and evaluation data capture provides robust estimates of those referred to skills provision and those taking up skills provision, and we have reviewed those data in Section 2 above. The service continues to exceed targets in all areas – clients engaged, clients referred, clients into training or employment, and clients helped to produce CVs.
9.14 Within these data constraints, we were thus unable to conduct a formal quantitative assessment of the Value for Money of SGfA.

9.15 At a total programme expenditure of £2,598,810.00, the cost of SGfA per beneficiary was £164.93. The cost per client referred into provision is £659.72.

9.16 There are no comparable programmes against which we can benchmark this data, although we find the programme per se to be well managed and economical.

**Recommendations**

9.17 Based on the evidence gathered in this midterm evaluation, we make the following recommendations:

1. That SGfA be retained and built upon as an effective service for assisting clients with labour market entry, career progression, and education and training goals.

2. It is recommended that Careers Wales and the SGfA management team reflect on the possibility of tracking long-term outcomes of clients, particularly in terms of the necessary data capture.

3. Following recommendation 2, it is recommended that Careers Wales study the feasibility of enhancing post-referral/outcomes data capture via the IO system to enhance tracking and follow-up. We noted that there is variability in tracking and follow-up among staff and centres; in addition, we noted that some staff reporting that they felt that some of the tools currently at their disposal need enhancement. This should be reviewed by Careers Wales.

4. It is recommended that the digital tools used within the programme be reviewed for fitness for purpose, and particularly the Skills to Succeed modules. If Careers Wales and the SGfA programme management team opt to retain Skills to Succeed online learning modules, we recommend that enhanced guidance is issued to Careers Wales staff for their use/non-use (i.e. what are the profiles of clients who would be best served by using this tool? Least served? Are the modules sufficiently tailored to an older audience?).

5. It is recommended that Careers Wales further explore the gap between the regular maintenance and updating of the Employment Routes tool and the reported perceptions of front line delivery staff that it is not up-to-date. The
evaluation team recognise that Welsh Government and Careers Wales management have invested appropriate effort and resources into ensuring that the Employment Routes tool is fit for purpose, and our observations suggest that it is being used effectively. Nonetheless, the perception that it is not up-to-date is clearly widespread and we note that, if this perception persists, it could negatively impact the use of the tool in referral out of SGfA.

6. It is recommended that Careers Wales continue to enhance the training afforded to staff in dealing with the mental health issues that they may encounter. While we recognise the professionalism of Careers Wales staff in dealing with clients and the sensitivity with which we observed such issues being handled, it is an important finding of this evaluation that an increasing proportion of perceived barriers to labour market progression are being reported as stemming from mental health issues. Current guidance should be reviewed and where appropriate staff training and CPD should be provided, and it is our understanding that Careers Wales has already taken measures in this regard.

7. The website should be reviewed for the areas of CS identified in this report and, where appropriate, instructions for page navigation enhanced or clarified. Client feedback through pop-up tools, focus groups, or moderated user testing with structured feedback are potential avenues for generating such an evidence base.

8. Careers Wales should explore ways to further assist advisers in developing their essential networks which our report has identified as an important contextual element of SGfA delivery. It may be possible to enhance the opportunities available to Careers Advisors under CPD training to support them in networking activities.

9. Our report notes the importance of wider labour market information to CAs in making referral decisions and informing their advising strategies. We recommend that it be explored whether there are ways of enhancing the scope and content of labour market information that is available to Careers Advisers through SGfA.
Appendix 1

Staff survey

Skills Gateway

On behalf of the Welsh Government, Wavehill and York Consulting have been appointed to undertake an independent evaluation of SGfA. The aim of the evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the programme to date, evidencing impact and lessons learnt, and inform the focus of future delivery.

This survey aims to gain an insight from those involved in the delivery of the support provided by SGfA. This will include reviewing the different stages of support from Engagement, Assessment, Guidance, Referral, Tracking and Support. The survey will also explore awareness of the SGfA among partner organisations and clients and importantly the effectiveness of SGfA in terms of clients either securing employment or moving closer to employment.

The survey should take no longer than 10 - 15 minutes to complete.

Any comments that you make will be confidential and the information you provide will only be used for the purposes of this evaluation. Comments that you make will not be attributed to you unless we have your explicit permission to do so. It is also important to note that the team undertaking the evaluation does not work for the Welsh Government or any of the organisations that are involved in the delivery or funding of this project. This is an independent evaluation.

Thank you for taking part!

Please provide your…

- Name ____________________________________________
- Job Title _________________________________________