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The Evaluation of Skills Gateway for Business: Executive Summary

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The Evaluation of Skills Gateway for Business: Executive Summary

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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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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In Autumn 2017, Welsh Government commissioned Miller Research to undertake an evaluation of their skills advice and signposting service, Skills Gateway for Business (SGfB). SGfB offers advice and signposting to businesses in Wales through a microsite, embedded within the Business Wales website, that includes an online skills self-assessment, a helpline and regional, face-to-face support. The purpose of this report is to summarise the key findings from the review.

Evaluation Approach

- 1.2 The focus of the evaluation was to provide key lessons to support SGfB to better facilitate access to employment and skills support for businesses in Wales. To provide clear suggestions for future delivery the evaluation considered;

- The awareness and visibility of SGfB
- Employer satisfaction with the online, telephone and face-to-face services
- Functionality and perceptions of the SGfB microsite
- Use of the Skills Profile
- Comprehensiveness of the service at local, regional and national levels
- Effectiveness of the online, telephone and face-to-face services in supporting employers to act on the skills needs of their workforce
- The accessibility of the skills and employment support programmes
- The impact of SGfB on skills investment
- Value for money

- 1.3 The evaluation was structured according to the logic model and evaluation framework, developed following a desk-based review of all relevant service documentation in the scoping stage of the review. Data was gathered to assess performance against each area of the evaluation framework. Primary data was collected through;

- 20 moderated user observations with businesses which had not engaged with the SGfB service

- Eight qualitative interviews with wider stakeholders e.g. skills policy leads
- Four qualitative interviews with individuals involved in regional and helpline delivery
- An online survey of engaged businesses (24 responses)
- An online survey of non-engaged businesses (20 responses)

1.4 See paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.** within the main report for the limitation of the research methodology.

Logic Model and Evaluation Framework

1.5 A logic model and evaluation framework were developed by examining the findings of the desk-based review and scoping interviews. Learning from these was applied using a theory of change approach, to develop the required evaluation instruments to enable effective assessment of the outcomes and impacts of the SGfB service. The logic model framed the policy drivers and needs for the project and presented the chain of inputs, activities, outputs, interim outcomes and emerging (desired) impacts. The logic model and subsequent evaluation framework showed key dependencies in the chain and aimed to map out 'what happened' and 'why'. The evaluation framework applied the logic process and built a set of indicators and measures to link the observable outputs, outcomes and impacts to insightful data collection and assessment of the operation.

Key Findings

The awareness and visibility of SGfB

- 1.6 Of business representatives who had not engaged with SGfB in the past year, half were aware of its existence. Elements of the SGfB service, such as names of training providers, signposting to apprenticeships and funding information aligned with what the non-engaged audience expected of the service, from what they had seen advertised or deduced from the name.
- 1.7 Engaged businesses tended to have been referred to the service through a Business Wales adviser, through the Business Wales site/other service or following the use of a search engine.

- 1.8 During the moderated user observations, beneficiaries accessed the pages through several routes starting from the Business Wales homepage. Accessing the pages was easy, no matter which route the beneficiaries took.

Employer satisfaction and action following the online, telephone and face-to-face service

- 1.9 Survey respondents and beneficiaries from the moderated user observations were generally pleased with the support they received from SGfB. The general consensus amongst those consulted was that the helpline and website support were helpful, although they could benefit from more specialised or in-depth advice. Most survey respondents seemed to take action following the advice they received from a regional skills adviser. They felt the regional skills advisers increased their access to skills information and their awareness of skills opportunities.

Functionality and perception of the SGfB microsite

- 1.10 Feedback on the navigation within the SGfB pages varied. Most navigated the microsite using the toolbar, as it structured their journey through the site and contained a number of pages of interest. These included the 'Skills and Training Programmes' and the 'Support in your area' pages.
- 1.11 Beneficiaries generally thought the style and content of the SGfB pages was well presented, though a little text heavy, and well laid out. The language used was clear and written in a typically 'government' style. Beneficiaries felt there was more scope for infographics, videos and visualisations that were already included on the site, for example the bubbles on the 'Skills and Training Programmes' page.
- 1.12 In terms of the audience for the SGfB microsite, beneficiaries suggested all types of organisations, large or small, new or established, as the potential targets but never suggested that they were the target. Some suggested the site lacked sector specific or specialist training and support and felt they would have to contact the helpline or use the face to face service to receive adequate support.

Use of the Skills Profile

- 1.13 Beneficiaries generally found the Skills Profile easy to complete, with a small number of easy to resolve suggestions in terms of layout and structure of the self-assessment tool. The completion reports received were valued by most employers for independent use and were deemed potentially useful when planning their own staff training and development.
- 1.14 Stakeholders involved in delivery and management of the SGfB service were unsure of the true aim of the Skills Profile. They were unsure if it was to draw people into the support or if it was a diagnostic tool and were concerned it had 'digitised a conversation'.

The accessibility of the skills and employment support programmes

- 1.15 Some survey respondents and employers who had completed a client evaluation form following engagement with the regional face to face service, felt that the service had made them more aware of what was on offer, but that they found they were not eligible for support or it did not help them with their specific needs. A small number had accessed the recruitment-based skills and employment support programmes.

The impact of SGfB on skills investment

- 1.16 The SGfB team develops and offers a series of online courses on a range of organisational, learning and development topics through the Business Online Support Service (BOSS).

Value for money

- 1.17 It is unfeasible to provide an overall assessment of the value for money provided by SGfB. The SGfB team will be undertaking an internal value for money assessment.

Conclusions

- 1.18 **The SGfB service is clearly aligned with its policy drivers.** The service is **lean on cost** and offers an efficient yet extensive service to businesses in Wales. Most organisations found out about the service through Business Wales referrals as the service is not widely or frequently marketed.

Awareness and satisfaction of the service

- 1.19 **The SGfB service is not widely or frequently marketed currently.** The campaigns that have run have not been targeted to individuals' networks, regions or sectors. Once engaged with the service, typically **through Business Wales referral**, beneficiaries were **pleased with the quality and amount of information and advice given**, especially by the regional skills advisers. Though busier employers tended to find the **quantity of the information on the website daunting**.

Comprehensiveness of the service

- 1.20 **The advice provided by the regional skills advisers was deemed to be of a high quality.** Advisers offered advice on funded and paid for programmes, related to the employer's business needs.

Satisfaction and effectiveness of the Skills Profile

- 1.21 The Skills Profile, though **easy to complete and relatively short, could benefit from additional tailoring.** Users would prefer the Skills Profile to be more sector specific and of more relevance to their businesses. **The completion reports were met with mixed reviews**, some beneficiaries felt they would be useful to plan internal training and skills audits however others felt they were contradictory and gave incorrect advice. The **call-backs following completion of the Skills Profile often did not take place.**

Actionable advice and impact of skills investment

- 1.22 Despite undertaking a full 18 months of delivery, **few client evaluation forms have been completed.** Therefore, measuring the outcomes and impacts of service users who received support from the regional advisers is beyond the scope of this evaluation.
- 1.23 There is a further **difficulty in assessing longer term outcomes and impacts**, as they are very reliant on externalities due to the nature of the signposting service.

Recommendations

Awareness

- 1.24 We suggest a **review of the purpose of SGfB**. Those involved in delivery and management of the service may need to decide whether they **focus on either broad awareness-raising or deeper intervention with a smaller number of organisations**. **Raising awareness of the service and its capabilities amongst businesses is important**, and targeted and more frequent marketing would be beneficial.

Furthermore, **promotion and marketing of the different elements** of the service, in particular the phone and face to face engagements would benefit the service. **Clear messaging around the type of service SGfB** is offering (signposting, not funding or provision) is key to managing employer expectations.

Skills Profile use

- 1.25 **The Skills Profile needs to have one clear aim**, that of a promotional activity engaging employers in the service or to fully assess the needs of the employer. Following completion, the **procedure for call-backs needs to be improved**.

Website

- 1.26 **Introducing filtering or routing on the Skills Development page** of the website would make it easier for employers to find sector specific, funded courses available to them.

Evaluation

- 1.27 **Evaluation procedures need to be fully implemented across the skills enquiry co-ordinator, regional skills advisers and Skills Profile completions**. Mechanisms for wider evaluation, such as encrypted satisfaction surveys sent to beneficiaries within a few months of their engagement with the service, should be considered.