

# Evaluation of the Lift Programme - Final Evaluation Report

## Summary

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In March 2015, the Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill to undertake an evaluation of the Lift Programme. The Programme commenced in January 2014 in response to the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2013 and more specifically to the commitment to provide 5,000 training and employment opportunities for people in long-term workless households<sup>1</sup> by the end of 2017.
- 1.2 The Lift Programme operated in nine delivery areas based on 12 Communities First (CF) Clusters<sup>2</sup> across Wales with the areas selected for Lift intentionally diverse (in terms of scale, rurality and the nature of deprivation encountered). In each delivery area, small teams of Mentors were recruited to engage work-age adults living in long-term workless households. Eligible participants accessed the Programme voluntarily, with the Mentors assessing a participant's aspirations for employment, training or education and helping them to develop personal development (action) plans to structure their move towards work. Suitable training and employment opportunities were then identified to facilitate this move towards work.

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<sup>1</sup> A workless household is one in which no-one aged 16 or over is in employment. These members may be unemployed or inactive. Inactive members may be unavailable to work because of, for example, family commitments, retirement or study, or they may be unable to work through sickness or disability (ONS 2014)

<sup>2</sup> There are 52 Clusters in total covering the most deprived communities (10 per cent) in Wales.

- 1.3 Mentors identified training and employment opportunities at a local level. At a national level, Welsh Government departments, public bodies and others were invited to expand the pool of employment and training opportunities that may be suitable locally for long-term workless people; these included Local Health Boards, Registered Social Landlords, and opportunities within Education and Skills Programmes. These opportunities were known as Nationally Brokered Opportunities.

### **Scope and Aims of the Evaluation**

- 1.4 The evaluation has two overarching aims:
- (i) To assess how the programme has been set up in each of the nine delivery areas and how it is being operated; and
  - (ii) To provide an indication of its effectiveness in helping participants to find work or to undergo activities that significantly boost their job prospects.
- 1.5 The evaluation has been delivered over three phases, with the first phase focused on understanding the inherent logic model underpinning Lift. The second phase focused on the Programme's implementation; i.e. how the Programme has been set up in each area and what processes are being applied. The third phase focused on the effectiveness of the Programme in achieving its intended outcomes including an analysis of the costs and benefits accrued by the participants.

### **Approach**

- 1.6 The research involved:
- A review of the policy context within which the Lift programme was placed and a literature review that examined the efficacy of active labour market initiatives to assess whether the design of Lift had reflected on the existing evidence base of 'what works'.
  - A review of monitoring systems (as Lift delivery teams held the role of 'data controller') to identify what specific data was being captured, how it was being stored and to what extent the evidence base could enable the tracking of a participant's journey and outcome.
  - Interviews with the Programme Management team to explore progress, lessons learnt and the legacy of the Lift Programme.
  - Interviews with cluster managers and Lift Mentors at each phase to explore progress, lessons learnt and best practice arising from the delivery of the Lift Programme.

- A telephone survey of Lift participants who had first engaged with the programme during the previous six months (an initial interview). The survey of Lift participants was undertaken across three waves (table 2.1) with 381 initial interviews undertaken over the three waves<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2.1: Participant Survey Waves**

	May 2016 (Phase 1)	Dec 2016-Jan 2017 (Phase 2)	Jun-Jul 2017 (Phase 3)
Wave 1	Interview	Re-Interview	
Wave 2		Interview	Re-Interview
Wave 3			Interview

- Re-interviews were conducted with programme participants six months after the initial interview had been completed. Across the first two waves a total of 164 participants were re-interviewed, representing a response rate of 55 per cent.
- Telephone interviews were also undertaken during Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the evaluation with employers who had consciously appointed Lift participants to work experience placements or in paid roles within their organisation whilst three representatives of Jobcentre Plus were interviewed to gain their perspectives on the referral process to the Programme.
- Monitoring data gathered by each delivery area for participants who engaged with the Lift programme from January 2016 was analysed. Prior to this date, there were inconsistencies in the monitoring information gathered by delivery areas and therefore, cross programme analysis of this information was not possible on evidence gathered prior to January 2016.
- Impact analysis through an assessment of the counterfactual (what would have happened in the absence of Lift) was undertaken through the identification of a comparison group using a simple selection criteria based on labour market history variables and data from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS).

<sup>3</sup> Representing a response rate of 43 per cent from an eligible population of 892 participants who were contacted.

## 2. Key findings and Recommendations

### Rationale for the Programme

- 2.1 Although rates of unemployment in Wales have declined during the Programme period, the overarching figures mask an increase in the proportion and number of adults unemployed for in excess of five years. Over one third (36 per cent) of Lift Programme participants fall into this category and since January 2016 15 per cent of this cohort of Lift Programme participants have secured employment, illustrating the role that the Programme has played in engaging and supporting individuals often referred to as some of the hardest to reach and help.
- 2.2 The emphasis on provision, personalised to an individual's circumstances as illustrated in the Programme's Theory of Change<sup>4</sup>, would appear to be a key ingredient in its success, helping to tackle immediate issues yet also providing clear pathways towards employment.
- 2.3 The rationale for the Programme emphasised eligibility associated with individuals from households who have been workless for more than six months. Where this criterion has been stringently applied the evidence suggests it may have led to an inadvertent bias towards single person households.
- 2.4 The restrictions on geographical areas of eligibility for the Programme were based on sound assumptions, with CF Clusters viewed as providing the most appropriate platform through which to deliver the Programme. During its development, the tight restrictions on eligibility have been met with some frustration. It is therefore welcome that Communities for Work Plus will operate without geographical targeting.
- 2.5 Nationally brokered opportunities offered through Lift were reportedly held in high regard by Lift participants due to the perception that these may lead on to a career with that employer. The inability to track participants over the longer-term has restricted the ability to test both the sustainability and career trajectory of these routes to employment compared to those who have secured employment through local employers or against the comparison group. This would be a useful area to revisit in the future to compare impacts over the longer term.

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<sup>4</sup> See the main evaluation report: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-lift-programme/?lang=en> for the Lift Programme's Theory of Change

## Resources

- 2.6 The Lift Programme operated on a limited budget, illustrated by the fact that despite the intensity of support on offer it is still cheaper to run on a cost per participant basis than the Work Programme.<sup>5, 6</sup> In most delivery areas, the Programme made effective use of the platform offered by CF typically relying (to varying degrees) on Clusters for promotion, referral and engagement.
- 2.7 The model trialled across various locations, sought to test the influence of population and opportunity density on the Lift Programme. Whilst there was a greater abundance of opportunities in more densely populated areas (for both employment and training) any direct effect on delivery area performance has been limited; the Programme's flexibility has enabled delivery areas to pursue opportunities of relevance to their location as well as to the participant's needs.
- 2.8 The allocation of resources to a 'Barrier Fund' was highly valued by all Mentors, with its flexibility and ease of access enabling it to become a highly responsive tool that can react to barriers as they are identified.
- 2.9 The allocation of two Mentors (typically) per delivery area to the Programme provided high intensity support from a highly skilled, experienced team; however, it offered little resilience if one individual became unavailable. The planned move away from area-based interventions of this nature should lead to increased staffing resources, thus significantly reducing the exposure of a programme to the loss of delivery staff. While the quality of staff has been instrumental to the Programme's success, whether these staff can be found in larger number to fulfil a Wales-wide offer remains to be seen.
- 2.10 Delivery areas were designated as the data owners for evidence gathered through the Programme, which has limited any detailed tracking of participants through the Programme until the last phase of the evaluation. The data gathering process to enable tracking to be conducted was resource intensive for both delivery areas and the evaluators.

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<sup>5</sup> NAO (2014) The Work Programme, The National Audit Office.

<sup>6</sup> Although the Learning and Work Institute produced more recent analysis which estimated a cost per participant at £1,214, they expected this to rise further as the programme continued. See: Learning and Work Institute (2016) *Work Programme Statistics – Learning and Work Institute Analysis*, Learning and Work Institute

## Recommendations

- For future programmes, a funding formula for resource allocation should be applied that is reflective of target area need and proposed delivery targets.
- For future programmes, clear requirements for participant data should be agreed at an early stage and informed by previous impact evaluations.
- Future programmes should adopt consistent approaches to collecting and categorising information gathered.
- Future programmes should ensure that data gathered is uploaded onto a central database to enable a comparative assessment of the consistency and comprehensiveness of data gathered.
- Sufficient resource and preparation time needs to be provided to enable the development of detailed guidance on requirements and expectations of those involved in service delivery.

## Activities

- 2.11 The Lift Programme relied heavily upon referrals for its success with Jobcentre Plus remaining the most prominent referral source throughout the Programme. Regardless of referral route, individual rather than organisational relationships proved instrumental in the success of these pathways. Another factor aiding engagement was the location of the Lift offer. Delivery areas where facilities were based in prominent locations with high footfall, benefitted most from ad hoc engagement through drop-ins or self-referrals.
- 2.12 Effective integration with CF Clusters has varied and at times has caused confusion amongst external stakeholders as well as between Lift and Cluster staff.
- 2.13 The introduction of Communities for Work had a variable impact, in some areas it led to heightened competition for participants whilst in other delivery areas it acted as a useful complementary offer, benefitting both programmes.
- 2.14 Building trust early within the engagement process was seen as critical to a successful relationship with a participant. The association with the Cluster, the disassociation with mainstream service provision, the voluntary nature of engagement and the person-centred, informal approach adopted by mentors have all helped in this regard.
- 2.15 It was not uncommon for Lift participants to be supported for in excess of 12 months, with participants often constrained by multiple and complex barriers to employment. Effective integration with other localised provision, including that offered through the Cluster, enabled

wider support to be brokered if immediate priorities/barriers needed addressing prior to the delivery of Lift support.

- 2.16 The prominence of action planning within the Lift delivery model fluctuated from area to area and participant to participant and is further evidence of the flexibility of the model to enable the adoption of a person-centred approach that is reflective of a local situation. This has been made possible by the fact that the Programme was funded by the Welsh Government, thereby offering a greater degree of flexibility than that enjoyed by activity funded through the European Social Funds.
- 2.17 The number, range and distribution of nationally brokered opportunities increased as relationships between employers and local delivery teams became more established. In the final year they represented 10 per cent of all opportunities, illustrating the potential of cross-departmental collaboration on employment schemes.

### ***Recommendation***

- The pursuit of cross-departmental collaboration in the provision of employment-related opportunities should be retained in future employability schemes.

### **Results**

- 2.18 The Programme operated ahead of profile throughout and met its target of the provision of 5,000 opportunities several months earlier than forecast.
- 2.19 Almost one in three Lift participants secured an employment outcome, surpassing those achieved after 12 months of support within the Work Programme. One in six participants held below Level 2 qualifications and had been out of work for in excess of five years before securing employment, illustrating the success of the Programme in supporting these groups.
- 2.20 From a results perspective, the Programme has exceeded expectations. There is also evidence of 'distance travelled' towards employment amongst those participants who remain out of work with improvements in self-perceptions of the ability to hold down a job and across all indicators of well-being for those actively engaged in the Programme. The importance of these impacts on participants is widely recognised but difficult to quantify through Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA).
- 2.21 Resource pressures on Lift delivery teams have meant that post-employment support and tracking of Lift participants has been less structured than anticipated. Feedback from employers would suggest that this type of support would be welcome given the nature of barriers faced by this cohort.

## Recommendations

- Dedicated resources should be provided to support both participants and employers when participants secure a role in the workplace.
- For clear narratives associated with outputs and results (opportunities in this instance) to ensure there is clarity and consistency in the way these are interpreted and recorded.
- Additional indicators for monitoring programmes of this nature should be provided to help gather evidence of the broader role played by Mentors beyond employability support.
- Mechanisms should be put in place to enable the timely collection of participant data for primary fieldwork at key junctures within the client's journey through a programme of support.
- Future interview and re-interview approaches to tracking participants should be conducted over timeframes that align with the comparison group to aid the assessment of participant impact.
- Options for the longer-term tracking of participants post-programme exit should be explored, particularly where the likely sustainability of employment is perceived to be a key element of additionality derived from the support on offer.

### Impact and Value for Money

- 2.22 Assessing the value for money of the Lift Programme through cost effectiveness analysis leads to a cost per employment outcome of £3,744. This is at the lower end of the anticipated figures within the business plan and of employability schemes in general. Given the target group supported through the Programme, on the basis of this analysis the Programme represents very good value for money.
- 2.23 In terms of the wider CBA measure, there are several limitations in the dataset that undermine the robustness of the approach. The targeted nature of the Lift Programme and its engagement with those typically seen as the hardest to reach and help is reflected in the fact that only a small number of individuals responding to the longitudinal Quarterly Labour Force Survey ((QLFS) as the source of the comparison group) match the key characteristics of Lift participants.
- 2.24 The small sample size and the lack of detailed information on geographical location within the QLFS made it impossible to control for the socio-economic context within which the



comparison group are based. In this regard, undertaking a robust CBA on a tightly targeted area-based initiative is fraught with difficulty.

- 2.25 Government research<sup>7</sup> and other evaluations<sup>8</sup> have suggested that the labour market history reports contained within the Labour Force Survey are less reliable than administrative data routinely collected by DWP. However, DWP has thus far been unable to make full labour market history data available for programme evaluation purposes. Were this information made available, it would significantly strengthen the robustness of the CBA and enable a more closely matched comparison group to be assigned to the research.

### **Recommendation**

- Agreements should be sought with DWP to share administrative information, therefore improving the validity of the labour market history data for the comparison group and increasing the purchase of the statistical analysis underpinning the CBA.

## **3. Conclusions**

- 3.1 The Lift Programme has operated successfully as a geographically targeted, flexible employability programme responding to spatial concentrations of workless households in Wales and supporting individuals distant from the labour market.
- 3.2 The Programme operated with an efficient delivery model, utilising existing infrastructure and targeting available resources at the Programme's participants. The minimal resources associated with the Programme did however limit its resilience to the loss of delivery area staff who played a critical role in its success.
- 3.3 The emphasis on personalised, participant-led provision that uses the building of trust as a foundation to the model appears to have been a key ingredient in the Programme's success. Evidence of distance travelled towards the labour market is illustrated through gains amongst participants in their confidence to hold down a job in addition to positive well-being effects.
- 3.4 The programme also presents clear evidence of accelerating participant transitions into employment and has delivered employment outcomes in a cost-effective manner to almost a third of participants, many of whom had never worked or had been out of work for over five years.

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<sup>7</sup> Bibby, D. et al. (2015) *Impact of skills and training interventions on the unemployed: Phase I report*. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Research Paper. 158

<sup>8</sup> Learning and Work Institute and Wavehill (2016) *Skills conditionality pilot evaluation: Final report*, Welsh Government

Oliver Allies

wavehill

social and economic research

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Full Research Report available at: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-lift-programme/?lang=en>

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

For further information please contact:

Siân Williams

Communities Division

Welsh Government, Rhyd y Car Business Park

Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 1UZ

Email: [Sian.Williams50@gov.wales](mailto:Sian.Williams50@gov.wales)

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