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# Evaluation of the Lift Programme

## Phase 3 Report: The Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Lift Programme

### 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 Clusters<sup>2</sup> across Wales. 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.
- 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 are known as Nationally Brokered Opportunities.

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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 were 52 Clusters in total covering the most deprived communities in Wales.

## 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 focuses 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:
- Interviews with the Programme Management team to explore progress, lessons learnt and the legacy of the Lift Programme.
  - Telephone interviews with seven of the nine Cluster Managers and 13 Mentors across all delivery areas to explore how the programme had evolved over the previous 12 months and the key successes and challenges they had faced.
  - A telephone survey with 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

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

- 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 with 24 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).

## **2. Key findings and Recommendations**

### **Rationale**

- 2.1 Rates of unemployment in Wales continue to fall, as has the corresponding rate of workless households, however 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 participants secured employment, illustrating the role that the Programme 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.

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<sup>4</sup> See the phase 1 report: Logic of the Lift Model. <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-lift-programme/?lang=en> for the Lift Programme's Theory of Change

- 2.3 The rationale for the Programme emphasised eligibility associated with individuals from households workless for in excess of 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. As the Programme has developed, the tight restrictions on eligibility have been met with some frustration. It is therefore welcome that the Communities for Work Plus (formerly called Employability Grant) scheme will operate with greater flexibility around geographical targeting.

### **Resources**

- 2.5 The Programme provided intensive support to the participants engaged at a cost of approximately £1,000 per enrolment and £1,200 per active participant engaged. Staffing and administrative resources have been kept to a minimum, thus offering a high efficiency but increasing the Programme's exposure to several risks. The tendency for delivery area teams to be made up of just two staff members provided little resilience if one individual became unavailable.
- 2.6 Delivery areas were designated as the data owners for evidence gathered, which has limited any detailed tracking of participants through the Programme prior to January 2016.

### **Recommendations**

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

## **Activities**

- 2.7 The nature of activities delivered through the Programme have remained largely consistent with a high degree of flexibility in approach. This is an important element in enabling Mentors within delivery areas to adapt to their local situation and 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 European Social Funds funded activity.
- 2.8 Integration with Communities First Clusters has varied in its success and at times has caused confusion amongst external stakeholders and between Lift and Cluster staff.
- 2.9 The introduction of Communities for Work has had a variable impact, typically linked to the extent of integration between Lift teams and the Clusters. Ultimately, in some areas it has led to heightened competition for participants within tight geographical areas whilst in other delivery areas it has acted as a useful complementary offer.

## **Outputs**

- 2.10 Delivery areas described a fall in referrals in the final year of the Lift Programme, conversely, across most delivery areas the number of nationally brokered opportunities continued to rise. In the final year of the Programme these represented 10 per cent of all opportunities provided and are reportedly highly valued by Lift participants as routes to sustainable, stable careers within a particular sector. There is increasing evidence to suggest that this model of cross departmental collaboration can be particularly impactful on employment schemes and recent policy announcements from Welsh Government<sup>5</sup> appear to encourage further enhancements to these elements.

## **Results**

- 2.11 Despite the apparent deceleration in referrals, the Programme operated ahead of profile throughout and met its target for the provision of 5,000 opportunities two months earlier than forecast.
- 2.12 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 who held below Level 2 qualifications and had been out of work for in excess of five years secured employment, illustrating the success of the Programme in supporting these groups.
- 2.13 From a results perspective, the Programme has exceeded expectations. There is evidence of 'distance travelled' towards employment amongst those participants who remain out of work, including improvements in confidence of holding down a job. Indicators of well-being

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<sup>5</sup> Welsh Government (2018) *Prosperity for All: Employability plan*, Welsh Government

have also increased amongst participants actively engaged in the Programme. This is likely a reflection of the wraparound intensive support provided to participants who, on engagement with the Programme, are often reported as leading chaotic lifestyles.

- 2.14 Resource pressures on Lift delivery teams have meant that post-employment 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**

- The provision of dedicated resources to support both participants and employers where a participant enters a work placement or employment.
- 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.
- For mechanisms to be put in place to enable the timely gathering 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.
- For options to be explored for the longer-term tracking of participants post-programme exit, particularly where the likely sustainability of employment is perceived to be a key element of additionality derived from the support on offer.

### **Value for Money Assessment**

- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 On the wider cost benefit analysis (CBA) measure there are a number of 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 (as the source of the comparison group) match the key characteristics of Lift participants.

- 2.17 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.
- 2.18 DWP research<sup>6</sup> and other evaluations<sup>7</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**

- That agreements be sought with DWP to share administrative information to increase the validity of the labour market history data for the comparison group and to increase 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 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 undermine its resilience to the loss of delivery area staff who played a critical role in its success.
- 3.3 The Lift Programme has been effective in delivering employability support, achieving significant gains amongst participants in their confidence to secure and hold down a job.
- 3.4 Analysis of the programme shows clear evidence of accelerating participant transitions into employment and has delivered employment outcomes to almost a third of participants, many of which had never worked or had been out of work for over five years.

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<sup>6</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>7</sup> Learning and Work Institute and Wavehill (2016) *Skills Conditionality Pilot Evaluation: Final Report*, Welsh Government

3.5 The nationally brokered opportunities have become more widely available across the delivery areas as the Programme has progressed and provide an indication of the effective role that cross-departmental collaboration can play in achieving outcomes on programmes of this nature.

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Full Research Report available at:

[www.gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-lift-programme/?lang=en](http://www.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

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