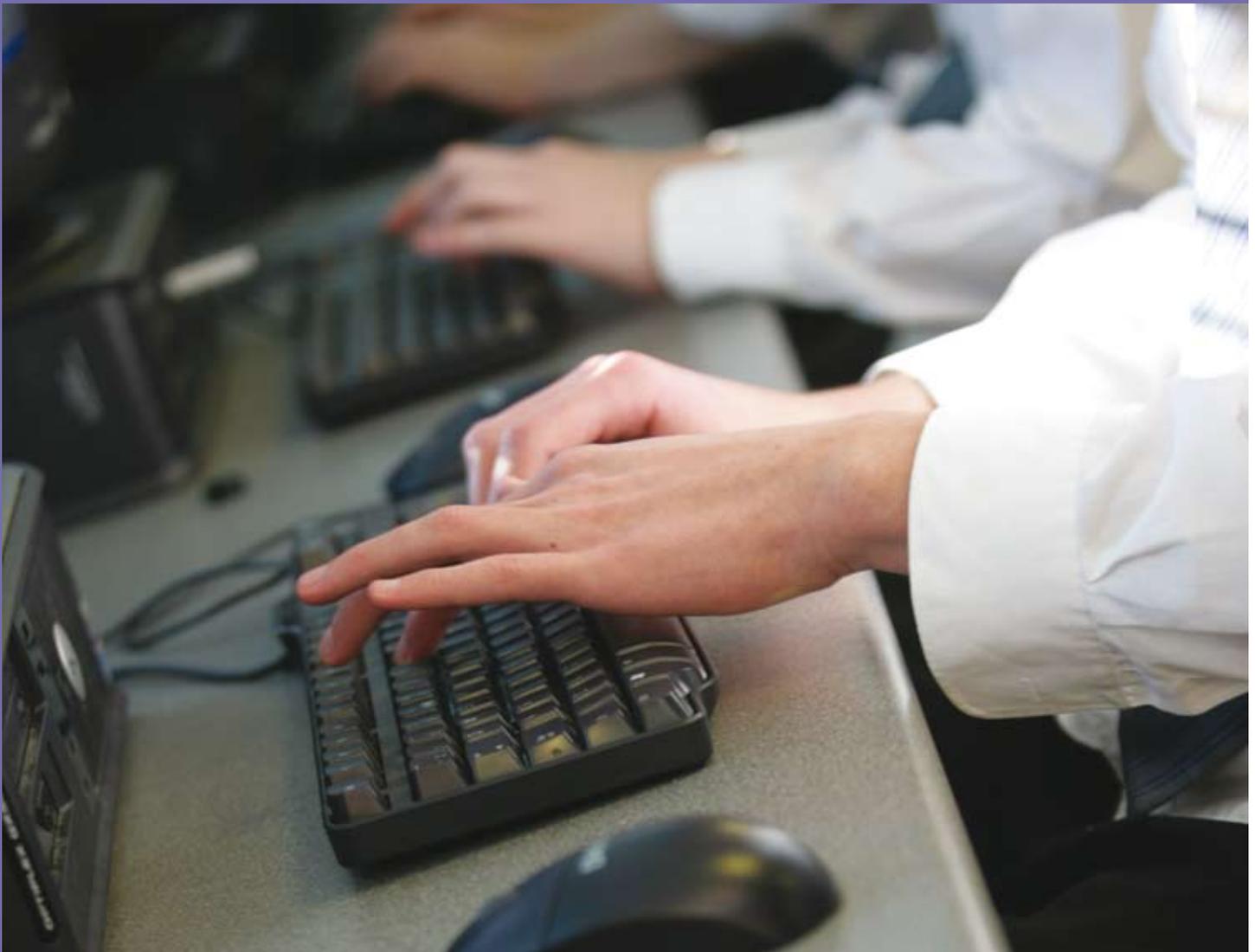




Evaluation of Skills in the Workplace: Stage 2 Report



Research

Research document No: 017/2008

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Evaluation of Skills in the Workplace: Stage 2 Report

Audience	Careers and business advice and guidance organisations, Colleges of Further Education, employers, training providers, and DCELLS programme delivery, funding and planning departments.
Overview	Skills in the Workplace is designed to “raise skill levels of employees and create an ethos of training within SMEs in North Wales”. This Stage 2 report addresses the current position, and the ‘distance travelled’ over the past 6 months or so, along with 2 thematic reports on ‘confusion in the marketplace’, and SitW’s relevance to different sectors.
Action required	No action required.
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Related documents	SitW Thematic Report: The Adoption of Skills in the Workplace by Different Industrial Sectors SitW Thematic Report: Confusion in the Marketplace

Evaluation of Skills in the Workplace

Stage 2 Report

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List of Abbreviations

CITB: Construction Industry Training Board
CQFW: Credit and Qualification Framework Wales
DCELLS: Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
DECWL: Department for Education, Culture and the Welsh Language
DELLS: Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
ELWa: Education and Learning Wales
ESF: European Social Fund
FMA: Foundation Modern Apprenticeship
FSW: Future Skills Wales
IT: Information Technology
LWP: Learning Workers Pilot
LSC: Learning and Skills Council
MA: Modern Apprenticeship
MAP: Management and Analysis and Planning
NVQ: National Vocational Qualification
SfB: Skills for Businesses
SfE: Skills for Employment
SME: Small/ Medium-sized Enterprise
SitW: Skills in the Workplace
SPG: Sustaining Profitable Growth
SSC: Sector Skills Council
TAG: Thematic Advisory Group
TULiP: Trade Union Learning in Partnership
WBL: Work Based Learning
WEFO: Welsh European Funding Office

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Appendix 1: Detailed Comments

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

In January 2007, CRG Research Ltd were commissioned by what was then the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Education, Lifelong learning and Skills (DELLS) - now the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) - to carry out an Evaluation of the Skills in the Workplace (SitW) project.

In essence, Skills in the Workplace, launched in June 2005, is a Welsh Assembly Government initiative designed to "*raise skill levels of employees and create an ethos of training within SMEs in North Wales*"¹. The project attracted European Social Fund (ESF) support, and will run until May 2008.

The Evaluation has a number of stages, summarised in Figure 1.

An inception and scoping phase led to an inception report and subsequent discussions with DCELLS, outlined in an inception report dated 14th February 2007.

The Stage 1 Report, summarising results from this stage, was submitted in July 2007, summarising findings from the initial fieldwork and desk research programmes, and providing a suggested research framework for the rest of the evaluation.

This Stage 2 report addresses the current position, and the 'distance travelled' over the past 6 months or so, along with 2 thematic reports on 'confusion in the marketplace', and SitW's relevance to different sectors.

1.2 Skills in the Workplace

SitW builds on the previous 'Skills for Business' and 'Skills for Employment' (SfB/ SfE) projects² promoted by ELWa³ which ran in North Wales between 2000 and 2003, also attracting substantial ESF financial support, and the subject of an evaluation by CRG in 2004. The initial target of the SitW initiative over the 3 years of its planned operations was to provide "*small 'chunks' of learning up to NVQ Level 3 to 10,000 individuals working in SMEs*

¹ Specification for an Evaluation of Skills in the Workplace. Page 2.

² As well as a number of other projects, see section 2.

³ The Assembly Sponsored Public Body, which preceded DELLS, being merged into the Welsh Assembly Government from 1st April 2006.

in the Objective 1 area of North West Wales; and to involve 2,000 SME managers in the design and monitoring of learning plans for their employees”⁴.

A number of changes have been agreed to these initial targets, however. The original programme design was open to SME employees in Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn who were 25 years old or over, not receiving any other funding for this training and not taking part in any other mainstream learning. But subsequent changes mean that 18-24 year-olds may now be included too, and there was an extension of eligibility into the adjacent Objective 3 area in September 2005.

In terms of spending and beneficiary numbers, appreciable underspend was apparent in the early months of SitW operations so that the project has subsequently been reprofiled downwards, most recently in June 2007, with reductions of about 20% in relation to initial figures.

Following the pattern established by SfB/ SfE, SitW is delivered through a partnership of local providers (currently Coleg Llandrillo, Coleg Llysfasi, Coleg Meirion Dwyfor, Coleg Menai, Deeside College, Coleg Harlech, Yale College, Arfon Dwyfor Training, North Wales Training, Welsh College of Horticulture).

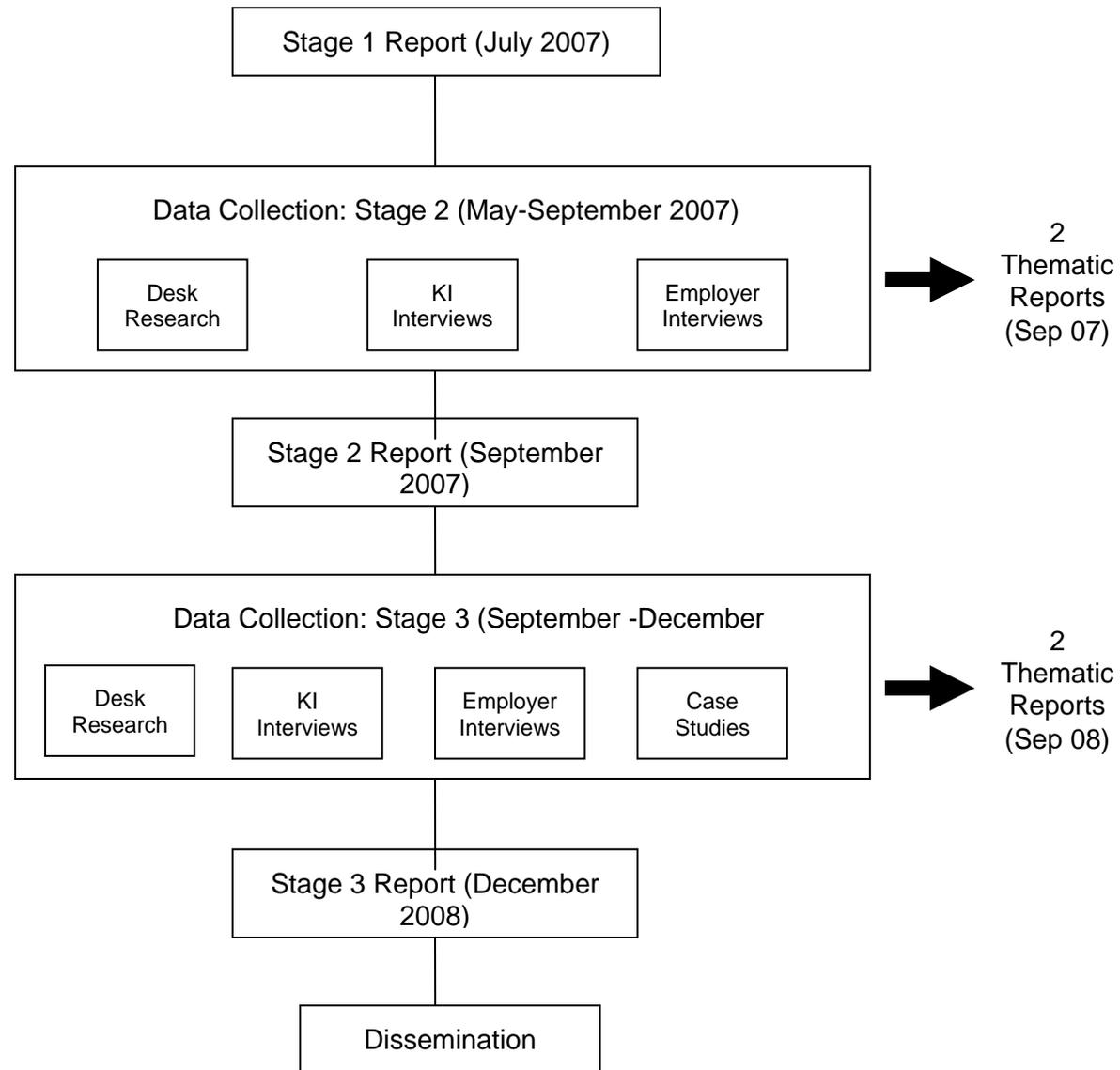
Operationally, SitW involvement for employers starts with an experienced Advisor from one of the partnership providers carrying out a free training review of companies who may be interested in taking part in the project. The review looks at staff skill levels in relation to business needs, then puts together cost-effective individual learning plans, upskilling members of staff appropriately but giving particular attention to owners’ and managers’ aspirations for growth and enhanced competitiveness in the business.

The training must take place during normal working hours, be related to job requirements and last for ten hours or more. In addition, a recognised awarding body must accredit at least one of the courses. Participating companies are required to pay £35 per employee to ‘sign up’ for SitW, after which all agreed training is free. Courses vary widely, but have included website design, health & hygiene, basic IT skills, spreadsheet accounting, book-keeping, marketing, and project management

⁴ Specification for an Evaluation of Skills in the Workplace. Page 3.

Evaluation of Skills in the Workplace

Figure 1: Overall Evaluation Structure



1.3 Evaluation Requirements

The overall requirements for the evaluation centre on addressing a series of questions. Many of these were addressed as part of the Stage 1 evaluation and several others will be dealt with in Stage 3. They underpin the whole evaluation, but are not considered directly at this stage of the evaluation.

- i. *To what extent have recommendations⁵ from the previous 'Skills for Business' evaluation been adopted?*
- ii. *To what extent is the Skills in the Workplace initiative meeting the upskilling needs of individuals and SMEs in North Wales in terms of content, administration and method of delivery?*
- iii. *How effective are the management and delivery processes of the initiative by DELLS and its training providers?*
- iv. *What is an appropriate evaluation framework to allow on-going appraisals of effectiveness, allow appropriate adjustments to be made to keep the project on course and give providers a framework within which to operate and facilitate self-evaluation?*
- v. *To what extent is the Skills in the Workplace initiative still relevant and appropriate in light of changing policy foci and programme developments?*
- vi. *What is appropriate in terms of the future of the initiative, roll-out to other parts of Wales, and possible delivery structures and models?*
- vii. *What impacts attributable to Skills in the Workplace can be identified in terms of careers, job satisfaction, employer attitudes to training and business performance?*
- viii. *What added value has Skills in the Workplace provided?*
- ix. *What represents good practice in relation to effective workplace development elsewhere?*
- x. *Why have some providers chosen not to remain involved with Skills in the Workplace?*
- xi. *What seems to be the cause of initial underspending?*
- xii. *Does the available evidence support the underlying rationale of the project?*
- xiii. *Are the goals and targets set for Skills in the Workplace realistic and achievable?*
- xiv. *Are there contextual changes needed for Skills in the Workplace to succeed?*

⁵ These were:

- Continuing with the main features of SfB/SfE (flexible delivery, targeting employees in employment, delivery through partnership structures), drawing heavily on the extensive investments and learning which have taken place so far.
- Devoting appreciably higher levels of resourcing to project management, database and Management Information systems and support.
- Giving active consideration to targeting provision – perhaps on particular sectors (e.g. construction, manufacturing) and higher levels of skills than in the past – while still offering opportunities for general workforce development.
- Giving serious consideration to requiring participating employers to make a financial contribution – to avoid concerns about a culture of dependency.

- xv. *Are added value criteria being met?*
- xvi. *What would have happened without Skills in the Workplace?*
- xvii. *Has the project team secured the involvement of providers, sought guidance from WEFO, managed and monitored Skills in the Workplace appropriately?*
- xviii. *Have previously identified preferences for shorter, more focused courses persisted on the part of both employers and employees?*
- xix. *Have previous problems with databases been fully resolved?*
- xx. *Have administration and management functions been appropriately resourced, and supported providers, employers and participants appropriately?*
- xxi. *Is there evidence that the programme has continued to ‘chip away’ at apparent reluctance to train amongst SMEs in North Wales?*
- xxii. *Is there evidence of capacity within the provider network increasing in both quantity and quality?*

The evaluation must also address ESF requirements⁶ which include addressing questions such as:

- xxiii. *What is the evidence for the relevance of the programme, consistency with wider policies and goals, and the efficiency and effectiveness with which it is delivered?*
- xxiv. *Does the project pay appropriate attention to cross-cutting themes of equal opportunities, sustainability and ICT?*
- xxv. *What evidence is there of both direct/indirect and gross/net impacts?*

In addition, the evaluation will take place over a 2-year period, potentially leading to questions including:

- xxvi. *How can findings from the earlier stages of the evaluation be utilised to inform the management and delivery of Skills in the Workplace?*
- xxvii. *How can changes in the demand, delivery and context for Skills in the Workplace best be identified and accounted for within the evaluation?*

⁶ See ‘GGuidelines for systems of monitoring and evaluation of ESF assistance in the period 2000 – 2006’.

Discussions at the Inception meeting led to adding the following questions:

- xxviii. *What impact is 'competition' from WBL and other DELLS 'products' having on Skills in the Workplace?*
- xxix. *Is there 'confusion in the marketplace' in the minds of employers commissioning training? If so, how might this best be resolved (e.g. through HRD advisers acting in an 'honest broker' role)?*
- xxx. *Bearing in mind not only Skills in the Workplace, but 'competitor' products and also commercial options, what would be the best way of meeting employers' needs and expectations for improving skills in the workplace: in particular, what might appropriately be provided commercially; what needs can be foreseen for flexible, 'bite-sized chunks of learning' in the medium-term?*

Cutting across all of these issues are a group of 'strands' to structure both data collection and eventual reporting.

Strand 1: Impact on employers

Strand 2: Impact on employees

Strand 3: Coherence with wider policies, needs, good practice

Strand 4: Delivery effectiveness

Strand 5: Added value, net impacts

Strand 6: Sustainability – longer-term enhancements to employer attitudes, provider capacity, etc.

Strand 7: Lessons for future programmes.

1.4 Methodology

The Stage 1 report included a detailed a Research Framework for the overall evaluation of Skills in the Workplace, summarised in figure 1. This 5-Stage model represented a refinement of the approach set out in the earlier Inception Report.

The Research Framework has steered our research activities and guided the focus of this Report. The methodology for Stage 2 was as follows:

- Desk research updating information on project files, course evaluation questionnaires, labour market characteristics, information on comparable programmes, planning and monitoring data supplied by the SitW project team
- Telephone interviews, in June and July 2007, with 105 employers participating in SitW. 73 were follow-up interviews with SMEs spoken to during Stage 1: all 103 Stage 1 employers were approached, but in 30 cases it was not possible to complete the planned interview, mainly because of non-availability of relevant people, but including a small number of business closures and direct refusals to participate. This represents a sample attrition

rate of about 29% between rounds 1 and 2. An additional top-up sample of 32 SMEs with similar characteristics to those lost from the Stage 1 sample was drawn from DCELLS records, both to deal with this sample attrition but also provide a sample of companies joining the scheme more recently. Interviews were based around agreed topic guides (see Appendix 3)

- Semi-structured telephone interviews with all 12 SitW providers in July and August 2007
- A mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews with ‘key informants’ – staff from DCELLS, Providers, SSCs, other Assembly Departments – were based around agreed topic guides to give information about the developing context for SitW, links to other programmes, perceived relevance to needs, management effectiveness, good practice, etc
- Attending Network/steering group meetings
- Continuing discussions with members of the evaluation steering group and SitW project team
- Production of two thematic reports dealing with ‘Confusion in the Marketplace’ and ‘SitW Take up in Different Sectors’

1.6 Structure and purpose of this report

For the rest of this report:

- Section 2 gives brief update information on the background to SitW; key features of operations, management, funding, etc.
- Section 3 summarises key findings from the ‘stage 2’ data collection programmes up to this point in relation to overall performance data, employers, employees, and key informants
- Section 4 draws a number of conclusions from these findings – based on the research questions set out in the ITT
- Section 5 makes brief recommendations for the rest of the evaluation and for SitW more widely.

The purpose of the report is to summarise the position reached at the end of stage 2 of the evaluation, note distance travelled since Stage 1, and pave the way for Stage 3 and the full, summative evaluation.

2. Skills in the Workplace: Background and Context

2.1 Skills in the Workplace – Background

SitW is co-financed under Priority 1 Measure 4⁷ of the West Wales and the Valleys Objective 1 Programme. The total project cost at approval stage was £10,000,000, with ESF funding of £4,423,646 (intervention rate of 44.236%) and projected beneficiaries of 10,000 employees and 2,000 SMEs.

Since initial approval, a number of significant changes have been made to the project profile, most notably to reduce both target expenditure and beneficiary numbers by about 20% (the revised total project cost is now £8,106,504). The most recent financial reprofiling was negotiated on a provider-by-provider basis during the summer of 2007, essentially triggered by the significant underspend experienced in the early period of SitW operations, looked at in the Stage 1 report. Table 1, given below in Section 3, gives more details about current financial profiles, and recent performance against these targets. Within the revised overall financial profile, beneficiary numbers were reduced more or less *pro rata*.

As we pointed out in Section 1, the target of the initiative over the 3 years is to provide “*small ‘chunks’ of learning up to NVQ Level 3 to... employees working in SMEs in the Objective 1 area of North West Wales; and to involve ... SME managers in the design and monitoring of learning plans for their employees*”⁸. The initial focus on employees over 25 years old in Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn has been altered to allow 18-24 year-olds to participate, in addition to opening the scheme up to the adjacent Objective 3 areas of Wrexham and Flintshire (approximately 20% of the project resources).

A notable feature of the SitW model is the requirement for beneficiary companies to pay a one-off charge of £35 per participating employee towards the cost of training. This charge follows one of the SfB/ SfE evaluation recommendations (“*Giving serious consideration to requiring participating employers to make a financial contribution – to avoid concerns about a culture of dependency*”). and represents a conscious effort to demonstrate that there is ‘value’ in the programme, also encouraging longer-term buy-in from participating employers. The £35 contribution also counts towards the overall match-funding arrangement for the project, which is detailed later in this section.

⁷ Promoting Adaptability and Entrepreneurship

⁸ Specification for an Evaluation of Skills in the Workplace, page 3.

2.2 Skills in the Workplace – Management

SitW is managed by Welsh Assembly Government Department for Education Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), as lead partner on behalf of the wider SitW partnership. A dedicated SitW project team is based at the St Asaph offices.

The relationship between DCELLS and the project partners is set out in a Memorandum of Understanding, signed by all partners designed to:

- Establish a sound working relationship between the organisations which form the partnership,
- Provide a clear statement of the respective roles of the organisations,
- Ensure the effective and efficient management and delivery of activities.

The individual project partners are responsible for the delivery of the project in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract with DCELLS, and play an active role at Steering Group meetings and sub-groups or task-and-finish groups as required.

The Steering Group is made up of DCELLS, project partners and representatives of Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus; meetings are held bi-monthly, chaired by DCELLS staff.

In addition to the main Steering Group, two sub-groups (Operational and Finance subgroups) have been established, again meeting on a bi-monthly basis. The Steering Group also has the authority to commission Task and Finish groups to carry out specific tasks as required.

2.3 Skills in the Workplace - Rationale

Looking at the rationale for SitW, an increasing policy emphasis on workforce development is readily identifiable **now** – both in Wales and elsewhere within the UK. This does represent an important change for publicly-funded training, however, and links with the view that SfB was ‘ahead of its time’ in supporting skills development for employed people over 25 years old – a group not traditionally funded through mainstream training programmes (with the exception of a certain amount of FE-based provision).

Several reports have made powerful claims for the potential impact of effective workforce/ workplace development, including those in the 2004 ELWa report ‘Developing the Workforce – Learning in and for the Workplace’ which noted that

“improvements in workforce development are vital to Wales’ future competitiveness and growth, business success and individual prosperity”⁹.

The Future Skills Wales (FSW) Employer Survey published in March 2006 reports that employers in Wales are still suffering from skills gaps (i.e. gaps between the skills employers need and those their staff currently possess) and skills shortages (i.e. hard-to-fill posts which emerge due to a general lack of relevant skills in the labour market): Supporting the target groups identified for the Skills in the Workplace project, the FSW report found that those with the greatest need for support work within the smaller businesses.

To add further areas of concern are suggestions that, in the past at least, courses and frameworks offered to people in work are *“not in line with the needs of the business and lack flexibility and responsiveness”¹⁰.*

2.4 Other Programmes in Wales

The issue of potential ‘confusion in the marketplace’ is dealt with specifically in the thematic report, but in brief, a range of DCELLS ‘products’ now support skills development in the workplace. The main features of several are given below; the data has been summarised from the ‘Skills. People. Success’ website¹¹.

Modern Apprenticeships

Employees get to train and gain qualifications to NVQ Level 3, yet are still able to work and earn. Based on the principles and qualities of traditional apprenticeships, they also include modern teaching practices.

Foundation Modern Apprenticeships

Foundation Modern Apprenticeships lead to NVQ Level 2 and are often used as a stepping stone to a Modern Apprenticeship.

Modern Skills Diploma

The Modern Skills Diploma is designed for managers, technicians and other team members in positions of responsibility who have the ability to train to NVQ Level 4 within SMEs.

Skill Build and Skill Build+

Skill Build and Skill Build+ are aimed at learners who lack confidence, have poor basic skills and need encouragement to improve their skills.

⁹ ELWa: Developing the workforce: Learning in and for the workplace: Interim Report 2004, page 11.

¹⁰ ELWa: Developing the workforce: Learning in and for the workplace: Interim Report 2004. Page 5.

¹¹ www.skillspeoplesuccess.com; a main element within the overall DELLS Business Communications and Marketing Strategy

Other programmes include:

- The 2001 National Basic Skills Strategy contains the Basic Skills Employer Pledge, which aims to improve poor basic skills in the workplace by getting employers to make a commitment to improve the reading, writing and maths of their workforce¹².
- The 'Sustaining Profitable Growth' (SPG) programme was set up in 2003 with European funding by Cardiff Business School and Telos Partners to develop creative leadership skills in the workplace¹³.
- The INTERREG Step Up Project, established in 2006 and running until June 2008, is part of the Ireland/Wales Step Up Programme, "*to encourage those in employment to gain skills which could help them gain promotion, secure a new, higher income position or just re-kindle an interest in learning*"¹⁴.
- The Trade Union Learning in Partnership (TULiP) programme, established in 2005, is a free training programme that gives all Ceredigion County Council employees an opportunity to expand on their skills¹⁵.
- A number of other Structural Funds-supported programmes, including elements of Farming Connect which help farmers and their families to participate in targeted training to help develop or diversify their businesses;
- and CITB's programme for accrediting existing skills, and promoting the uptake of Construction Sector Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards.

¹² <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/Forums/Basic+Skills+Agency/f8477c42-0c48-4203-ad70-dcc72ab4ceb3.htm>

¹³ <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/newsevents/media/mediaref/mr0903/mr030902.html>

¹⁴ http://www.powys-training.co.uk/business/mach_stepup.php

¹⁵ <http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3215>

3. Findings

3.1 Overview

This section gives results from data collection exercises looking at beneficiary SMEs, employees and ‘key informants.’ It starts, however, with a summary of the recent performance of SitW in terms of financial expenditure and beneficiaries, taken from Management Information collated by the SitW project team.

3.2 Overview of Activities and Performance

Table 1: SitW Financial Performance

Provider	A Allocated Contract	B Providers Profiled amount to end of July 07	C Cumulative Claim to Date	C/B % of Profile Delivered	G % Of Contract delivered
Arfon Dwyfor Training	328,486	173,736	154,472	88.91%	47.03%
Coleg Meirion Dwyfor	195,188	89,788	45,909	51.13%	23.52%
Coleg Menai	548,305	178,148	155,088	87.06%	28.29%
Deeside College ¹	1,004,939	449,439	396,891	88.31%	39.49%
Llandrillo College	1,829,640	1,045,646	861,249	82.37%	47.07%
Coleg Lllyfasi ¹	600,000	289,987	287,015	98.98%	47.84%
North Wales Training ¹	959,686	520,328	493,050	94.76%	51.38%
Welsh College of Horticulture ¹	374,602	161,097	135,517	84.12%	36.18%
Coleg Harlech/Workers' Educational Association	275,428	119,727	102,760	85.83%	37.31%
Yale College ¹	1,306,731	475,190	376,601	79.25%	28.82%
Basic Skills Pilots	141,739	40,492	-	0.00%	0.00%
SITW Team Exp. To June 07	541,760	375,487	377,108	100.43%	69.61%
	£8,106,504	£3,919,065	£3,385,660	86.39%	

Table 1 describes recent financial monitoring data based on reprofiled figures agreed in the summer of 2007. Our interview data indicates that all partnership members are now confident that these revised targets will be met and indeed most are now very close to their profile targets. Earlier concern over under-spend and performance seems to have been overcome due to:

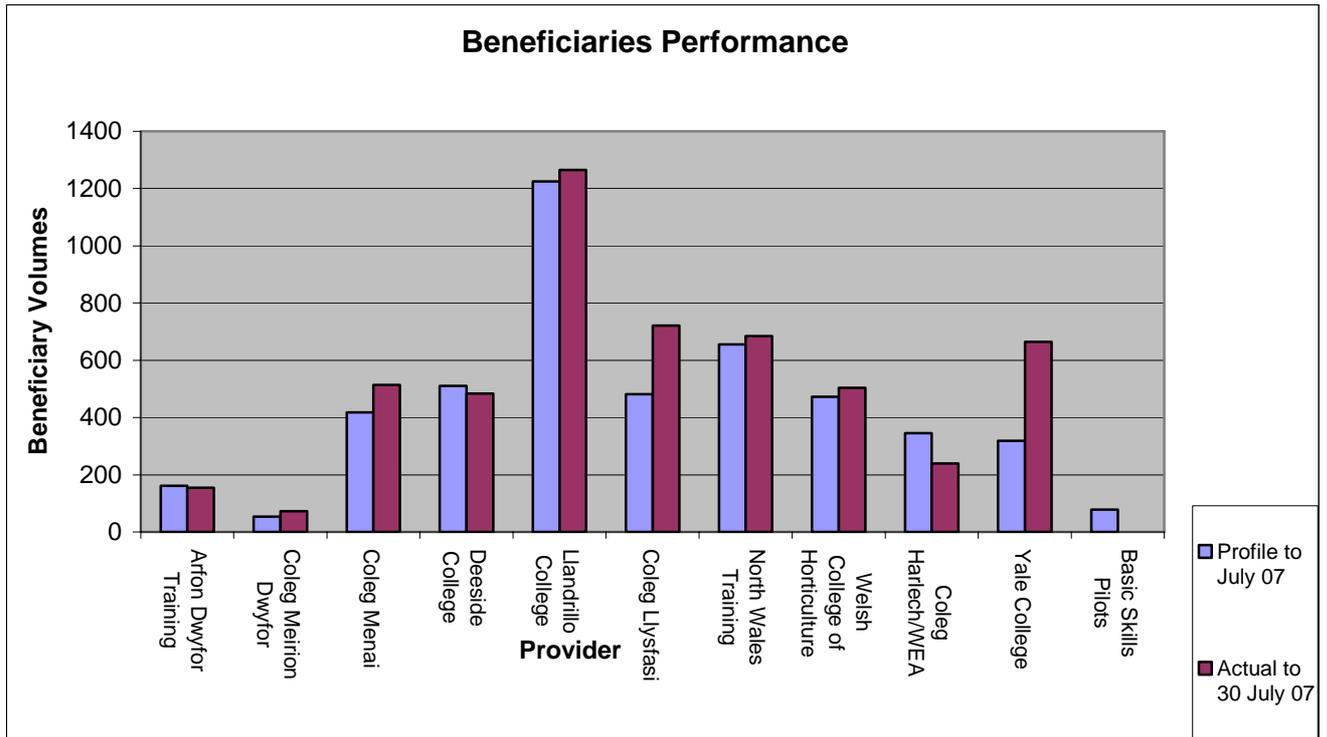
- more realistic profiles
- systems and staff now fully “bedded in”
- giving particular attention to promoting SitW and engaging employers – resulting in stronger demand and ‘brand awareness’

Table 2 and Figure 1 give an even more positive picture about recent SitW performance in terms of beneficiary trainees – more than 12% above profile at the end of July. In both financial and trainee numbers, there are clearly some differences between providers, and – bearing in mind past underperformance – there is little scope for complacency. But, the much more favourable position achieved between Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the evaluation is certainly notable.

Table 2: Beneficiary Trainee Numbers

Beneficiaries Volumes				
Re-Profile Jun 07	Profile to July 07	Actual to 30 July 07	Variance	Actual to profile as %
Arfon Dwyfor Training	162	155	- 7	95.68%
Coleg Meirion Dwyfor	53	73	20	137.74%
Coleg Menai	418	514	96	122.97%
Deeside College	510	484	- 26	94.90%
Llandrillo College	1,225	1,265	40	103.27%
Coleg Llysfasi	482	721	239	149.59%
North Wales Training	655	684	29	104.43%
Welsh College of Horticulture	473	504	31	106.55%
Coleg Harlech/WEA	345	240	- 105	69.57%
Yale College	319	664	345	208.15%
Basic Skills Pilots	78	-	- 78	0.00%
Total	4,720	5,304	584	112.37%

Figure 1: Beneficiary Trainee Numbers



There have been appreciable differences in SITW take-up in different parts of North Wales. Table 3 compares the distribution of employers and employees taking part in SitW with the distribution of VAT-registered businesses. Not an ideal match (many participating employers are not VAT registered) this nevertheless points out the lower levels of take-up – as planned – in the Objective 3 area. Other differences, like much higher proportionate take-up in Conwy than Anglesey are less clear, but suggestions from our interview programme pointed to a combination of the underlying employer base (SitW has been particularly successful in care and hospitality, for example) and the extent of provider representation and promotion activities.

Table 3: Regional Comparison of SITW take-up

Local Authority	% of SITW Employers	% of SITW Employees	% of all North Wales Businesses ¹⁶	% of Local Businesses Participating in SitW
Conwy	35%	28%	17%	8.1%
Denbighshire	23%	31%	15%	6.5%
Gwynedd	23%	21%	23%	4.2%
Isle of Anglesey	6%	7%	11%	2.3%
Wrexham	6%	8%	15%	1.7%
Flintshire	6%	6%	19%	1.3%
All	100%	100%	100%	4.1%

Source: DCELLS / StatsWales

¹⁶ Source: StatsWales – VAT Registered Businesses by Local Authority

3.3 Beneficiary Employers

This Section draws on 3 sources of data:

- The ‘stage 1’ survey of 103 beneficiary employers (carried out in April/ May 2007);
- ‘Follow-up’ contacts with all ‘stage 1’ employers leading to interviews with 73 of them carried out in July/August 2007 (29% attrition rate) essentially to track changes in their views or experiences of impact;
- 32 additional (‘new’) interviews with beneficiary employers to maintain overall interviewee numbers and broad characteristics, and identify any changes in views or experiences on the part of more recent SitW employers.

As with the stage 1 survey, for the ‘new’ survey an initial sample of contacts was drawn from the DCELLS database, designed to be broadly representative of the locations, sectors and sizes of firm supported through SitW. ‘Topping up’ took place from a reserve list in the case of non-responses or refusals to participate, maintaining proportionate coverage of the main characteristics of all participating employers. Interviewees were offered Welsh or English language interviews, as they preferred.

Tables 4 and 5 summarise the sectoral and size characteristics of those firms where interviews were completed in the ‘follow-up’ and ‘new’ samples respectively. In both instances, most were very small and came from the services sectors, paralleling the emphasis within SitW as a whole.

Table 4: Sectoral Characteristics of Sampled SMEs

Response	Follow-up Sample	New Sample
Care (including childcare)	30%	35%
Manufacturing	12%	3%
Sales	11%	3%
Restaurant/Catering	10%	19%
Hotel	7%	-
Tourism	6%	16%
Textiles	5%	-
Health and Beauty	3%	-
Engineering	2%	-
Others	15%	23%
Total	72	31

Table 5: Numbers of Employees at Sampled SMEs

Response	Follow-up Sample	New Sample
1-4	27%	35%
5-10	23%	16%
11-20	25%	23%
21-50	16%	19%
50+	9%	6%
Total	72	31

In terms of the training triggered by SitW, Table 6 gives data from Stages 1 and 2 (follow-up and new samples have been combined to give the Stage 2 figures). It demonstrates a very wide range of training taking place throughout the SitW period so far. On the whole, ‘Stage 2’ trainees seem to have taken part in an even wider range of courses than their Stage 1 counterparts – although it does have to be acknowledged that there were differences between the 2 data collection points (e.g. different times of the year) which could have influenced these differences.

Table 6: Training Supported by SitW in Sampled SMEs (Multiple Response)

Response	Phase 1	Phase 2	Change
Health & safety	37%	45%	7%
Food hygiene	36%	37%	1%
Industry NVQ	28%	36%	8%
First aid	34%	35%	1%
Specialist / industry-specific courses	19%	21%	3%
Manual handling	18%	18%	1%
Computing	18%	16%	-2%
Equipment use (not computers)	5%	12%	7%
Management	11%	11%	-1%
Personal development (e.g. time management, self-esteem)	7%	7%	0%
Specific software	7%	2%	-5%
Not yet participated ¹⁷	2%		-2%
Other	6%	4%	-2%
Total	107	103	-4

Answers to the question: ‘How did you first hear about the Skills in the Workplace Programme?’ did seem to show major distinctions between the Stage 1 and the new Stage 2 employers, however the results should be treated with caution due to the low numbers in Stage 2, being too small to establish definite significance. The high

¹⁷ Training had been arranged but had not been completed –in one case because of a cancellation by the provider.

proportion of ‘new’ employers who said they been contacted by providers would, however, seem to confirm much more proactive promotion and liaison work by individual providers. Higher proportions of employers contacting providers seem to confirm greater efforts by providers and DCELLS to promote the programme generally.

Table 7: Finding Out About SitW

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2: New Sample
Employer contacted provider	37%	6%
Industry Contacts	14%	10%
Don't Know	10%	3%
Provider contacted employer	8%	71%
Word of Mouth	8%	3%
Other College (not provider)	6%	-
SIW Literature	6%	-
Advertisement	6%	3%
Internet	3%	-
Other	1%	3%
Total	107	31

Table 8 describes reported employer motivations for engaging in SitW training. Again the changes between Stage 1 and ‘new’ Stage 2 employers should be treated with caution due to the ‘new’ Stage 2 numbers being too small to establish statistical significance, but seem to reinforce the picture of yet more attention being given to the skills employers think they **must** provide.

Table 8: Stated Reasons for participation in SitW (Multiple Response)

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2: New Sample
To upskill employees (not directly related to business)	39%	29%
To meet regulations	23%	65%
Affordable / financial incentive	25%	48%
To fill skills gap (directly related to business)	15%	65%
Good choice/quality of courses	12%	10%
Convenience	10%	3%
To support local college	2%	3%
Don't know	1%	0%
Other	-	6%
Total	107	31

No less than 88% of the ‘new’ employers said they were aware that SitW is part-funded by the ESF; for 83% this was ‘clear from the outset’. Answers to the question ‘How did you know?’ are given in Table 9.

Table 9: Ways in which Employers Learned About ESF Support towards SitW (Multiple Response)

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2 New Sample
Provider/tutor	54%	68%
SIW Literature	11%	16%
Word of mouth	9%	4%
Don't know	9%	
Industry contacts	6%	12%
Other College (not provider)	4%	
Paperwork	3%	
Newspaper	3%	
Internet	1%	
Total	79	25

Table 10 reinforces the point that employers joining SitW recently have been focussing on job-specific, often ‘necessary’ skills – although the seemingly increased mention of ‘management’ skills is notable (again, this should be treated with caution).

Table 10: Skill Needs Addressed by SitW (Multiple Response)

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2 New Sample
Specialist / industry-specific courses	23%	35%
Health & safety	21%	45%
Computing	20%	10%
Food hygiene	18%	39%
First aid	17%	35%
Industry NVQ	13%	35%
Specific software	7%	3%
Management	6%	19%
Personal development (e.g. time management, self-esteem)	5%	6%
None	5%	3%
Manual handling	3%	19%
Equipment use (not computers)	3%	10%
Other	27%	10%
Total	107	31

In terms of impacts, most respondents at both stages had noted positive changes in the attitudes of people taking part in the programme; Table 11 summarises the kinds of changes being identified, and Table 12 describes the very varied range of business-related benefits employers can point to. The slight declines in some of the figures in Table 11 seem partly due to changes in courses covered and partly due to the approach to collecting this data (fewer ‘don’t know’ answers), and so are thought not to be significant. Major gains in business benefits – particularly to ‘meeting regulations’ and ‘providing better service’ - do seem notable, however.

Table 11: Main Changes in Staff Attitudes Identified by Employers Following SitW Participation (Multiple Response)

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
More confident	64%	58%	-6%
More motivated	10%	18%	9%
More professional / responsible / conscientious	27%	17%	-10%
More positive	15%	16%	0%
Other	3%		-3%
Total	73	103	30

Table 12: Principal Benefits from SitW Participation (Multiple Response)

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
Meets regulations	12%	61%	49%
Provide better service	10%	41%	30%
Better staff performance	27%	36%	9%
More efficient	14%	30%	16%
More productive	10%	12%	1%
Take on more advanced work	7%	12%	4%
Less staff turnover	4%	6%	2%
More competitive	9%	6%	-4%
Don't know	8%	2%	-6%
None	12%	2%	-10%
Other	5%		-5%
Total	107	103	-4

The stage 1 report gave relatively positive information about sustainability, and Tables 13 and 14 show, overall, an even more favourable picture in Stage 2, with staff even more ‘likely to train’ and an increase in employers who ‘might’ contribute to training costs – so SitW does seem to be successful as it seeks to ‘nibble away’ at well-entrenched employer attitudes. .

Table 13: Responses to the Question: ‘Are your staff more likely to continue in training / learning as a result of their experiences?’

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
SitW made staff more likely to train	79%	89%	10%
Would be doing more training anyway	6%	9%	3%
Don't know	3%	1%	-2%
Maybe	3%	1%	-2%
SitW experiences made less likely to train	9%		-9%
Total	101	103	2

Table 14: Answers to the Question ‘What are your views about paying for training?’

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
Might contribute	17%	45%	28%
Would contribute	59%	41%	-17%
Wouldn't contribute	18%	13%	-6%
Don't know	6%	1%	-5%
Total	104	102	-2

Table 15 reinforces the picture of SitW ‘chipping away’ at employer views about training with slightly more seeking improved skills and slightly less indicating a perceived inability to pay for training.

Table 15: Reasons Why Interviewees Might/ Might not Train Staff Anyway

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
Had to in order to meet regulations	59%	58%	-1%
Wanted to get skills	20%	28%	9%
Couldn't afford to for all staff	2%	9%	7%
Couldn't afford to at all	16%	4%	-11%
Other	4%	1%	-3%
Total	51	92	41

Tables 16 and 17 indicate employers’ views about whether learning experiences could have been improved for the employers themselves and for employees respectively. In general terms this data too points to generally good levels of satisfaction with SitW, although several suggestions for ways in which improvements might be made are given in Appendix 1.

Table 16: Employers' Responses to the Question: Are there any ways that the learning experience could have been improved for you?

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
Yes	25%	29%	5%
No	73%	70%	-3%
Not sure	3%	1%	-2%
Total	102	103	1

Table 17: Employers' Responses to the Question: Are there any ways that the learning experience could have been improved for your employee/ employees?

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
Yes	27%	11%	-16%
No	70%	88%	18%
Not sure	3%	1%	-2%
Total	96	102	6

Around two thirds of interviewees struggled to think of any way of improving SitW but a number of suggestions did arise, with responses summarised in Table 18.

Table 18: Responses to the Question: 'Are there more appropriate or effective ways of enhancing the skill base of local businesses (Multiple Response)

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2: New Sample
No suggestions	66%	71%
Courses tailored to local businesses' needs	10%	-
More on-site training	8%	19%
Local industry networking	7%	-
More communication between employer and provider	6%	3%
Other	7%	13%
Total	107	107

Table 19: Responses to the Question: Should the project be more focused on qualifications?

Response	Stage 1	Stage 2	Change
Yes	35%	6%	-29%
No	39%	83%	44%
Partially / possibly	18%	9%	-9%
Not sure	8%	2%	-6%
Total	102	101	-1

In what seems to be a reflection of greater emphasis on ‘necessary,’ short-term training, Stage 2 employers seem to be substantially less interested in qualifications than those interviewed at Stage 1.

As with Stage 1, the detailed comments given in Appendix 1 do, we think, justify attention. Clearly there are many satisfied employers who have used SitW and valued what it has offered. Equally, some employer aspirations are going to be very difficult to match – or at least match cost-effectively. The proportion of negative comments is lower than at Stage 1, but it remains important to note how much impact individual poor experiences have had: problems with cancellations, unsatisfactory tutors, etc, do call for attention.

3.4 Beneficiaries: Individuals

Data about individuals taking part in SitW comes from DCELLS beneficiary monitoring data only (the case study interviews in Phase 1 of the evaluation were not repeated for Phase 2 and extensive primary data collection from beneficiaries was not included under the specification for this research).

Examining the DCELLS data, by July 2007 a total of 4,678 questionnaires had been distributed directly to beneficiaries, either via post or the Internet. 558 had been returned, with 441 of these having completed the course, 117 still being in training and 17 having left the course.

Beneficiaries were asked about their experience by responding to statements using a 5 point scale covering ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. As with the data analysed for the Stage 1 report, results were broadly positive, with 76% saying the training had helped their work, and 1 in 5 reporting that they had gained a promotion as a result of the training. 40% had proceeded to carry out further training. The two columns below demonstrate the position at Stage 1 and at Stage 2.

Table 20 – Responses of Beneficiaries to a Series of Statements About SitW Training

Statement	% Strongly Agree or Agree Stage 1	% Strongly Agree or Agree Stage 2
I wanted the training	87%	88%
I enjoyed the training	86%	87%
My employer wanted the training	82%	84%
The training helped my work	76%	76%
I knew the course was funded	73%	73%
The training built my confidence	71%	72%
I would like further training	65%	69%
I am doing further training	40%	41%
I have been promoted	21%	21%
I want to enter self-employment	14%	14%

3.5 Key Informants

For stage 2, we interviewed 29 key informants from training providers, DCELLS, SSCs and others familiar with SitW or the wider workforce development picture. In practice, it is useful to separate the views of providers, DCELLS management staff, and ‘others’.

Providers

All SitW training providers were contacted by telephone to discuss recent progress and highlight any changes that have occurred since the Stage 1 interview. The interviews covered a number of key themes, including

- Performance/Take-Up
- Management & Finance
- Partnership Working
- HRD Advisors
- Impact
- Future Plans

Providers were also asked to comment on the two topics covered in the thematic reports, namely

- Confusion in the marketplace
- Sectoral Impact

Performance/ Take-Up

Providers reported steady progress in delivery and take-up, with numbers meeting or in some cases exceeding expectations. One provider commented that despite early teething problems *"We are now operating at full speed, and only wish the scheme could go on much longer"*.

Other providers offered similar comments on general growth, whilst noting the existence of natural peaks and troughs based around 'busy' and 'quiet' periods in the industries that they work with e.g. one commented that land-based industries would soon be entering a quiet period, which would free up employees for training courses.

Funding concerns were raised – although more in relation to detailed arrangements for NVQs and aspects of MAs than SitW – and a number of technical points have been passed to the SitW management team and NFPS evaluators. In any event, the reprofiling exercise of SitW and the WBL contracts seemed – for most – to have resolved many funding concerns apparent in the Spring of 2007.

The overall performance of SitW is seen positively by providers, however: a number mentioned that this success could in part be attributed to SitW having become a valued and recognisable 'brand'. Whilst this had taken time to develop, providers were now beginning to see the benefits of a strong level of awareness amongst employers. One provider commented: *"SitW is enjoying a particularly high profile amongst employers at the moment. People are actually ringing us to ask about SitW"*.

The parallel concerns expressed by providers were that the strong brand would be lost if delivery arrangements changed markedly in the future.

Several deep-rooted concerns remain. Providers described continuing problems with gaining enough trainees to make some courses viable, cancellations, and match-fund requirements which can *"make it difficult to put on sophisticated courses for low-paid workers: the income just isn't there"*.

Management and Finance

As with Stage 1, providers were generally happy with the way SitW was being coordinated and managed by DCELLS. Individual staff members were singled out for praise, with positive comments on the willingness of staff to support the work of providers.

One of the more challenging aspects of managing the project over past months has been dealing with the re-profiling exercise. In the main, Providers felt that this work

had been handled well, with frank and open discussions held between DCELLS and providers and in the Steering Group.

Providers privately expressed some doubt about other partners' performance: *"Checking everyone has spent correctly and allocating resources to other providers has been difficult for the group"; "I don't see how XXX will be able to meet their targets"; "Some provides may have taken too much (to satisfy corporate targets), thus running the risk of compounding earlier errors where people set unrealistic targets for beneficiaries and spend"*.

For one provider, wider contact with the Assembly Government was a challenge: *"... it's difficult speaking to the right person at the Assembly. They say things are going fine, but it isn't... the staff here are confused... the process is wrong"*.

On the whole however, the management and coordination of SitW was seen as being handled well by a respected, and by now experienced team.

Partnership Working

Overall, the partnership arrangements were felt to be working well, with the Steering Group having had ample opportunity to comment and shape the recent re-profiling exercise. One provider commented *"All providers are by now more clued-up about SitW. The meetings are now far more focussed"*.

Another mentioned a point that had been raised during the last research stage, namely that *"The wrong level of people are being sent to these meetings – we need people there who can make decisions"*.

In terms of added value from the partnership model, there was some evidence that providers were referring employers between each other when they could not meet their needs. That said, it would be fair to say that the approach has relied upon the initiative of individuals as opposed to any formal referral process. As one provider commented, *"At the end of the day, we are competitors"*.

HRD Advisors

The role of HRD advisors within the SitW delivery model was raised when SitW stakeholders met at an event in Conwy earlier this year. As a result, providers were asked whether they had experienced any major changes to the level and quality of contact with HRD advisors.

Responses to this question noted modest improvements at best. Some providers had made contact with HRD advisors following the stakeholder event and indeed some

referrals had been reported. The majority of providers however reported little or no change.

One provider commented that this was a missed opportunity, expressing her disappointment “... *that the same department controls SitW and HRD advisors, yet appears incapable of getting the two working together in harmony*”.

Another provider stated that they “... *hadn't noticed any difference since the meeting in Conwy. In my view they are a complete waste of money*”.

Impact

Comments on impact largely mirrored the positive comments given on performance and take-up. In the main, providers like the SitW model and believe that it is working and benefiting companies. One provider commented “*Learners are improving their skills: SitW has opened up the learning process for many. We work a lot in the care sector and SitW is really answering local needs*”.

As with the employer survey, positive ‘soft’ data is emerging: gathering more robust ‘hard’ data will be a key feature of Stage 3.

Future

All providers were asked about their views about the future of SitW or ‘SitW-type’ provision. Two key points emerged. First most, if not all providers, felt that there was an ongoing need for something like SitW to meet employer needs. Secondly, providers felt “*in the dark*” about what was going to happen after the SitW funding came to an end in May of next year. Most were of the view that they would not be able to offer SitW type provision once the scheme ended.

DCELLS Staff

Regular contact with the SitW team has enabled us to keep track of project performance and key issues as they emerge. In addition, attendance at Steering Group meetings and other events has allowed us to obtain an overview of how the scheme works in practice.

Key points raised during interviews centred on the efforts that have gone into achieving what is now seen as a very good overall performance, and good partnership working with providers.

DCELLS staff do see the issue of ‘competition’ with other programmes very starkly, which, for some, “*undermines the case for continuing with something like SitW* –

which would be a shame, because it's now going well". We look at this further in that thematic report.

Others

Interviews with SSCs and other Assembly Government staff gave an interesting picture of limited clarity about SitW overall (reinforcing the point about 'confusion in the marketplace', considered in the thematic report) and several concerns about the degree of 'joining up' of support to business – particularly through the HRD advisors. For one SSC *"I didn't really understand SitW or the Advisor Service. I got allocated an advisor and thought she would explain things. I've rung three times and we're still not much wiser"*. For another SSC *"I think SitW is doing better – have been hearing one or two good reports"*.

Because of SSCs' sectoral responsibilities, we did gain valuable information for the sectoral thematic report. For this main report however, the data we gathered from these more strategic-level discussions was typically constrained by limited understanding of SitW's rationale and operations.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This is essentially an interim report – noting progress since Stage 1, but paving the way for the main conclusions and recommendations which will be presented within the Final Report in December 2008.

In terms of brief conclusions at this stage, it is convenient to use the 7 strands (see section 1.3) rather than the full list of 30 research questions.

1. Impact on Employers

SitW continues to ‘chip away’ at negative employer attitudes towards training. For those who do become involved, generally good performance is apparent, with a particular focus on training which meets specific short-term needs.

The uneven sectoral performance points to many employers not benefiting from SitW. We address some of these issues in the relevant thematic report, but steadily improving promotion and outreach work seems to be achieving a better picture on a gradual basis.

2. Impact on Employees

We have strictly limited data to work with, but data from the DCELLS survey suggest satisfactory performance or better – backed up by employers’ views about staff skills and performance.

3. Coherence with Wider Policies, Needs, Good Practice

Although well-aligned with Welsh Assembly Government policies we do conclude that there is indeed now a ‘confused marketplace’ with several other programmes impinging on SitW’s previously distinctive niche – although mitigating factors reduce any negative consequences for employers. Attempts to build links with HRD advisors have, so far, borne little fruit.

4. Delivery Effectiveness

Most feedback from employers and individual beneficiaries is very positive. Management and coordination are seen as good. Partnership working is increasingly apparent – although inevitably limited by the primary focus of each provider on their individual interests.

5. Added Value, Net Impacts

Limited information so far; a key task for Stage 3.

6. Sustainability

Again, largely a matter for Stage 3. Some evidence of better employer attitudes; providers clearly do have new programmes, improved staff capabilities, etc, as a result of SitW

7. Lessons for Future Programmes

Considered in recommendations.

For the evaluation itself the current framework is 'fit for purpose' but continuing discussions with the Project Manager and Steering Group will be most welcome to agree appropriate adjustments and updates.

Recommendations

Short-term recommendations for SitW follow much of what was said in the Stage 1 report: continued attention to promoting the programme, collating and analysing monitoring information, and promoting continuous improvement via the Network should all be addressed.

For the **medium-term** – i.e. up to the end of SitW – we recommend:

- DCELLS, the Network and individual providers continuing with efforts to reach non-engaged employers, particularly in sectors and locations currently under-represented in SitW. Evidence so far suggests that the best results will come from direct outreach work on the part of providers, but wider promotional activities and good links to intermediaries (see below) can play an important part
- Further developing partnership working amongst providers and other partnership members, so that learners can be more actively referred to other Network members when appropriate
- Further efforts by the Network to build links with HRD advisors, SSCs and others able to refer employers to SitW.

As for **future** programmes, there is clearly an important potential role for programmes like SitW and it is recommended that consideration should be given to developing a continuation programme, but this must be contingent upon work to identify a definite niche in what has become a congested – and for many, a confused – set of DCELLS workforce development programmes. This point is considered further in the thematic report.

Appendices:

1. Detailed Comments

Appendix 1: Detailed Comments

Follow Up Results

What has gone well in terms of the activities?

- good courses, staff have enjoyed them.
- good, well run courses.
- good courses, not too long.
- good course, we got what we needed.
- good course
- good course, went on it a long time ago though.
- good courses. the lads enjoyed them.
- I was enjoying the course.
- good courses.
- good course
- good courses, met needs
- good courses.
- They were great while they lasted.
- good courses
- good courses, we haven't had any complaints.
- good course, very enjoyable.
- course has delivered.
- good course.
- good courses, we haven't had any complaints.
- courses were fine, we had to do them, it was nothing that we didn't already do but we had to have a piece of paper saying that we could do it.
- great course!! want to do more!
- good courses.

What has gone less well?

- They cancelled the course half way through. I managed to get onto another course, but it was disappointing and upsetting at the time.
- I want to do a course on photoshop but the nearest college that does it is Manchester.
- I think the students need more 1 on 1 tuition as when they get back in the shop they are quite panicky when attempting something new.
- nothing, everything was fine.
- The funding has been pulled and so the courses have stopped - the business has folded as a result.
- They did have to change the day the course was held on a couple of times, but nothing major.

New Results

What has gone well in terms of the activities?

- commitment of the assessors, courses are done very quickly, they do not have to do key skills to get an nvq.
- everyone has enjoyed the courses
- very well, staff enjoyed the courses.
- everything, it's been enjoyable for the staff and has motivated them.
- enjoyable, accessible
- enjoyable courses, approachable tutors
- enjoyable, tutors are excellent.
- staff benefited from them
- enjoyable, tutors are excellent.
- very good course, very informative. The tutor actually runs his own pub, so he knew what he was talking about.
- informative courses.
- great courses, committed teaching staff, setting is beautiful.
- extremely well run courses
- courses are well designed and informative.
- informative course, professionally done.
- the course was great and benefited the business
- excellent courses, all staff were full of praises.
- very helpful courses, good tutors. Nice to have tutors who have had practical experience in the field and not just theory based.
- I am very pleased with the courses. I think it is excellent value for money.
- enjoyed courses, NVQs can be done in people's spare time so the business doesn't suffer too much with people being taken out of work to train.

What has gone less well?

- very pleased with everything!
- no problems.
- Everything has been great, there may be too many forms to fill in, but that is always the case when you have funding for something.
- some of the mandatory training needs to be improved. Manual handling need to have more focus, and not just for the 'care' staff but for everyone who works here.
- everything has been fine
- nothing, it's been perfect.
- one for one course, I only received the course material 2 days before the course started.
- food course was rushed.
- Better communication with regards to what's available and what's funded.

- some of the courses didn't cover what was expected in the exam, but I feel that this was due to the tutor. Also, more time was needed for some of the courses.
- 10 years ago, Rhyl college didn't have the facilities, but since they have expanded they provide great courses.

How satisfied are you with the training?

- Staff are more capable and motivated once they have had training.
- The training has helped us enhance our skill base.
- I want someone from the Welsh assembly to contact me to discuss funding and what courses are available
- In the past we have had to go far a field to get on these training courses which were expensive and time consuming.
- The funding should be on going and a chance to invest in people and businesses. Far too often you trial something for a limited time and then scrap it or change its name.

How has the project improved the skills of your staff and enabled them to successfully apply these new skills in the workplace?

- They offer a range of courses that can be done quickly that meet regulation.
- makes staff more aware of situations.
- Skills have obviously generally improved. Staff are more aware of food handling and storage.
- I have seen changes. Staff's approach to the job and the standard of care has increased, which has a knock on effect for the business and in the longer term its profitability. Staff feel more valued which increases a happier work environment.
- improvement in plant propagation techniques.
- more confidence, everyone doing the same thing, same opportunities for everyone. There is more consistency in staffs work because they are all at the same level.
- one staff hadn't worked in care before and therefore needed to be trained so he knew what he was doing.
- lady passed away, and as the staff has had the health & safety training they dealt with it effectively and without fuss.
- meets regulations. If I hadn't done the course I wouldn't have got my license.
- Needed them to meet regulations.
- My staff were good anyway, but it has given them more confidence.
- They are more able to do the job
- More aware of risks when lifting.
- More computer literate.
- more aware, more responsible.
- not very specific, personally or for my business.

Are there any examples of benefits your business has experienced as a result of the programme?

- More staff are qualified in a range of things, therefore we can deliver a better service and in turn we are more sort-after.
- Staff are more observant and aware of risks so they stop problems before they arise.
- Customers see a difference in the competence of staff and their ability.
- better standard of care, therefore a better reputation.
- Enhanced staffs skill base.
- staff are more competent
- staff are more aware and able to do jobs.
- Staff now have more awareness.
- we have received environmental awards.
- We now have a core group of permanent staff who stay with us as they feel valued and are able to progress. We show them that we are able to invest in them and improve their skills.
- She was able to do the accounts and business work via the computer.
- They are kept up to date with advances in technologies - this means I don't have to be in 5 places at once to keep an eye on them as they are now capable of doing it themselves.
- I am a business consultant so I did the food hygiene course, not for myself, but so that I had the knowledge to help those who were working in that sector. I updated my knowledge and skills.

Are there any ways that the learning experience / business benefits could have been improved for you, the employer?

- correspondences need to be in a consistent format. All via email would have been easier.
- Better communication of what's available, what's funded and when. Running a small business is very time consuming and I haven't always got chance to chase people through departments to find answers.
- more consistency between colleges and the knowledge and communication that is provided. One college offers a larger range of course and a rep from the college came and spoke with me and gave me a booklet on what's available.
- more access to a variety of training, more funding.

Are there more appropriate or effective ways of enhancing the skill base of local businesses?

- more areas could be funded
- more local based courses to stop excessive travel.
- Bring back funding for apprentices.

- better to do nvqs as people need to be on the premises. It is very costly to my business when we have to pay for staff training and cover the costs of staff cover.

Are there any other comments you would like to add in relation to any aspect of the Skills in the Workplace projects?

- the training courses have helped in providing equality to my staff. If we had to find the funding ourselves then we would have to be very discriminative on who gets the training and when. This would affect relationships, commitment and loyalty.
- I get satisfaction seeing my staff improve and become more confident in their abilities.
- Please continue funding so that small businesses such as ourselves can benefit from the training packages.
- Keep funding to give businesses like myself a chance.
- Very grateful for the funding and the help we get.
- The funding is of great benefit and has created equal opportunities for all staff members.
- Grateful for the funding we get. It allows our staff to achieve things.
- Glad of the funding.
- You provide good, varied courses.
- Glad of the help with funding.
- I found that I sent this person on the course and initially it benefited the business, but then she left and got herself a better job as she had the qualification.
- Overall we are happy with the help received and the choice of courses.
- We cannot afford to take on any new trainees as it is expensive and time consuming to train them. You should support young trainees by bringing back the apprentice scheme again.
- Be consistent is what you have to offer, and consistent in levels of qualifications.
- Please maintain your commitment to local businesses, their growth and staff training. Remain consistent with your policies and the equal opportunities it gives staff. Some funding is not available for 25+ - this is ridiculous.

