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Evaluation of the Childcare Works Project

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

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
CCLD	Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development – recognised qualification for childcare professionals.
Childcare Offer	30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of three- and four-year-olds, for up to 48 weeks of the year.
C4W	Communities for Work – a Welsh Government partnership programme between local authorities and Department for Work and Pensions, supported by the European Social Fund, to deliver employment support services in Wales.
DBS check	Disclosure and Barring Service check – a criminal record check.
Economically inactive	An individual is of working age, but not in employment and is not actively seeking employment.
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association Wales.
NEET	Not in education employment or training.
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
PaCE	Parents, Childcare and Employment – programme providing childcare support to parents whilst undertaking training or looking for employment.
TNA	Trainee Nursery Assistants – the job title given to individuals taking part in the Childcare Works project.
WEST	Wales Essential Skills Toolkit.
WCVA	Wales Council for Voluntary Action - the national membership body for voluntary organisations in Wales.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Welsh Government commissioned Arad Research to undertake an evaluation of the Childcare Works project. This report presents the findings from the evaluation, based on research conducted between January 2020 and January 2021. The evaluation research was, however, paused between March and July 2020, as was the Project itself, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of this pause, the delivery of the Project was extended by three months to March 2021, although the timeframe of the research remained within those originally agreed.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

1.2 The key aims and objectives of the evaluation, as set out in the specification were as follows:

- To understand the extent to which project activities are effective in attracting and supporting participants to enter and aspire to progress in the childcare workforce;
- To understand the extent to which project activities are suitable to prepare participants for employment and progression in the childcare sector;
- To understand the extent to which the implementation of the project activities were effective in reaching and supporting the target populations to enter and aspire to progress in the childcare sector;
- To explore the barriers and enablers to participation in the scheme, and;
- To make recommendations to inform the future design and implementation of the employability pathway.

Background and policy context

1.3 The Childcare Works project has been delivered by the National Day Nurseries Association Wales (NDNA) in partnership with the Welsh Government to test new approaches to supporting workforce development and training. Project delivery has been undertaken over two phases. Phase 1 of the project was delivered within five local authority areas between October

2017 and July 2018. Phase 2 of the project was delivered within 10 local authorities between May 2019 and March 2021. Further details relating to the delivery of the project during these two phases are included in the Childcare Works Project overview section below.

1.4 The Welsh Government provided £760,838 of funding to support the delivery of the Project across both these phases (£111,000 for Phase 1 and £649,838 for Phase 2). Both phases of the project offered participating individuals support comprising of four weeks (approximately 64 hours) of childcare related training followed by a three month, 16 hours a week paid placement at a childcare nursery.

1.5 Phase 1 of the project achieved its target of engaging with 16 economically inactive individuals aged 50 or over, and 32 young people aged between 18 and 24 who were not in education training or employment (NEET). Phase 2 of the project overachieved on its target of engaging with 84 participants by supporting 93 long term unemployed individuals aged 25 and over.

1.6 The rationale and design of the Childcare Works project originated from NDNA's recognition that childcare settings often find it difficult to recruit good quality childcare workers. The Project is also aligned with Welsh Government policies relating to workforce capacity within the childcare sector and supports the Early Years workforce 10-year plan to build capacity and capability across the childcare sector in Wales[1].

Supporting workforce capacity

1.7 The Welsh Government's strategy *Prosperity for All* sets out the aim for 'children from all backgrounds to have the best start in life' and recognises that early years plays a significant part in shaping individuals' future.[2] 'Early years' is therefore one of the five cross-cutting priority areas.

1.8 Alongside this strategy, the Welsh Government has published a ten-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce which was developed through

[1] Early years workforce plan (gov.wales)
[2] Welsh Government (2017) *Prosperity for All: the National Strategy*.

a process of engagement with internal and external stakeholders[3]. The plan highlights the importance of raising the status of the early years, childcare and play profession and sets out how the Welsh Government intends to support and develop the workforce over the next ten years, with proposals under three high-level themes: attracting high-quality new recruits; raising standards and skills and investing in building capacity and capability. The Childcare Works project aligns with all three themes, but mainly supports the theme of attracting new recruits.

1.9 In September 2017, the Welsh Government began the early implementation of the Childcare Offer for Wales to test the provision of 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of three and four-year-olds. After a phased roll out of the Offer, it is now delivered nation-wide. Although the Offer aims to support progress in the delivery of early education and childcare in Wales, there were concerns that demand for childcare places would significantly increase, placing pressures on the capacity within some areas of the childcare sector to provide good quality childcare. Social Care Wales estimated that an additional 2,700 new entrants would be required by the childcare sector in Wales by 2020 to meet the demand for childcare provision.

1.10 As part of the evaluation of the early implementation of the Childcare Offer, childcare settings were asked whether they had the capacity to expand should there be an increase in demand[4]. A significant minority reported that they had no capacity and a key reason given was a reluctance or perceived inability to take on the additional staff that would be required.

1.11 In order to address these issues, the NDNA introduced Phase 1 of the Childcare Works project, which aimed to recruit individuals who, despite the fact they may not have had previous experience of the childcare sector, were considered to have the right personal skills and attributes to work with children.

[3] Welsh Government (2017) *Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan*.
[4] Glover et al (2018) Evaluation of the Early Implementation of the Childcare Offer for Wales.

Employability Support for Redundant, Unemployed and Economically Inactive individuals

1.12 The policy direction and targets articulated in the cross-governmental Employability Plan, published in March 2018 sets out the Welsh Government's ambitions to reduce unemployment and economic inactivity, increase skill levels, respond to skills gaps and prepare people for the future world of work.[5]

1.13 A key commitment within the plan was to provide an individualised approach to employability support. Introduced in May 2019, the Working Wales service, delivered by Careers Wales is the new approach to providing free, impartial, employability and careers advice for individuals over the age of 16 across Wales. The service provides a national entry point to a wide range of national, regional and locally based employability support, which supports and complements existing channels.

1.14 Alongside this Welsh Government continue to fund a range of employability support to help individuals overcome barriers to work. The Welsh Government's Community Employability Programmes – Communities for Work (CfW), Communities for Work Plus (CfW+) and Parents, Childcare & Employment (PaCE) – provide intensive individualised mentoring and advisory support to participants who have complex barriers to employment which include disabilities and work limiting health conditions.

1.15 Other Welsh Government programmes employability and skills support initiatives which support redundant, unemployed and economically inactive individuals include ReAct, Jobs Growth Wales, Access, Traineeships, the Employability Skills Programme and Out of Work programme.

1.16 Aligning with the Welsh Government's commitments to support economically inactive individuals, the Childcare Works Project was launched to engage out of work individuals in a programme of training and practical work experience to equip them to enter the childcare sector. The 16 weeks training and supported

[5] Employability plan | GOV.WALES

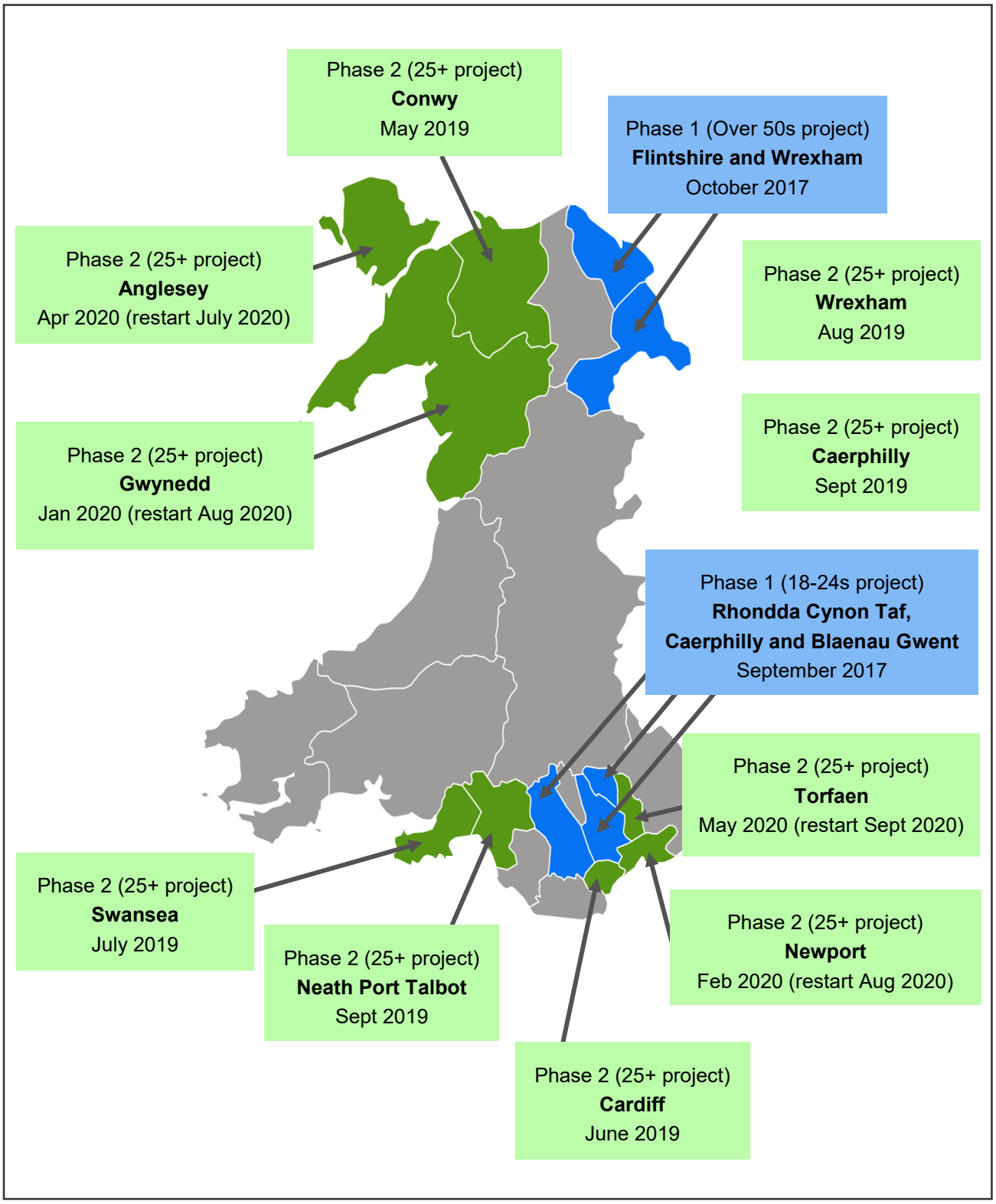
employment is the first step towards a career in childcare and early years. The intention was that the Childcare Works project could be embedded within future delivery of Working Wales and Job Support Wales.

Childcare Works Project overview

1.17 Between October 2017 and July 2018, NDNA piloted phase 1 of the Childcare Works project, which was supported by the WCVA Active Inclusion fund[6]. This phase consisted of two projects which were both similar in delivery, but targeted cohorts of a different age range, and delivery took place across different areas in Wales. This first phase was then followed by Phase 2 of the Project. Figure 1.1 presents an overview of the delivery areas for each phase of the project. This is then followed by an overview of the details of each phase of the project, including the focus, rationale and outcomes for each phase.

[6] The Active Inclusion Fund is managed by the WCVA and supported by funding from European Structural and Investments Funds. It aims to reduce economic inactivity in Wales and improve the employability of disadvantaged people.

Figure 1.1. Childcare Works Project Phases 1 and 2 locations, participants' age and project start date



Phase 1 – 18-24s project

1.18 The first project, undertaken during Phase 1, focussed on supporting participants who were not in education employment or training (NEET), aged 18 to 24 in certain areas across South Wales – Rhondda Cynon Taf, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent. Activities to engage with and support the 18 to 24 age group within this phase of the Project, was supported by £28,000 from the Welsh Government to match fund the funding provided by the Active Inclusion Fund[7]. Part of the Active Inclusion criteria for east Wales is that the funding should be used to support young people aged 16 to 24 who are NEET. It was this criterion therefore, that formed the basis of the project's rationale for focussing on participants within this age range as part of the first Phase 1 project.

1.19 The 18-24s project produced a number of successful outcomes, including job creation opportunities for participants. The target was to engage 32 young people who were NEET, which the Project achieved. Out of these 32 participants, nine (28 per cent) were successfully supported into employment within the childcare sector, seven (22 per cent) securing employment in other sectors (e.g. retail, food production and care sectors) and three (9 per cent) started volunteering roles after completing the project.[8]

Phase 1 – Over 50s project

Although the 18-24s project generated positive outcomes, the NDNA were aware, that most new recruits into the childcare sector were already those under the age of 25 (i.e. mainly school and college leavers). Furthermore, there was a recognition of the existence of a 'wealth of untapped ability' to work in the childcare sector amongst older individuals, who often have relevant life experiences and informal childcare skills, but lack the training and experience of the formal childcare environment required to gain employment in the sector. It was the recognition that there was an opportunity to 'tap into this

[7] The Active Inclusion Fund is managed by WCVA, supported by funding from European Structural and Investment Funds and aims to reduce economic inactivity in Wales and improve the employability of disadvantaged people.
[8] National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), 18-24 Childcare Works Project Closure Report

potential pool of experience' that formed the rationale for the other element of Phase 1 of the Project which engaged with economically inactive individuals aged 50 and over. This part of Phase 1 of the Project was fully funded by the Welsh Government and was delivered in Flintshire and Wrexham.

1.20 Phase 1 of the project met its target of recruiting and delivering the programme to 16 economically inactive individuals over 50 years old. Out of these participants, 10 (67 per cent) successfully progressed into employment, of which seven secured employment with their Childcare works placement employer.[9]

Phase 2

1.21 At the end of Phase 1, it became apparent to NDNA representatives and the Welsh Government, that there were a number of individuals, who may have been suitable for, and benefited from the project, that were not eligible to participate due to their age (i.e. those aged over 24). In recognition of these age-related factors, Phase 2 of the project focussed on providing support to economically inactive and unemployed individuals aged 25 and above. Those over the age of 50 therefore remained eligible for the project, but those aged 24 or below were not.

1.22 The rationale for focussing the Childcare Works support on the over 25s was also based on the recognition that other forms of employment support were already available to 18 to 24-year olds. The rationale was also based on the recognition that, as noted above, traditionally most new entrants into the sector are mostly school and college leavers under the age of 25. Individuals over the age of 25 who are recruited by employers in the childcare settings tend to be those who already have experience of working in the sector. As such opportunities for people over the age of 25 who do not have any previous experience to gain employment in the sector as new entrants, appear to be limited. Supporting individuals over the age of 25 into employment within the

[9] National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), Over 50s Childcare Works Project Closure Report

childcare sector also contributed to the age diversity of the childcare workforce in Wales – a further aim included in the Early Years workforce plan[1].

1.23 Therefore, following the successes and lessons learnt from Phase 1 (see overview of project outcomes above), Phase 2 of the Project aimed to build on this pilot phase, expand upon it to include a training pathway that would support the induction level of the new suite of childcare qualifications.

1.24 Phase 2 of the Project, as with Phase 1, was delivered by NDNA and funded by two divisions within the Welsh Government (i) the Childcare, Play and Early Years (CPEY) division and (ii) the Employability and Skills division. This funding-split reflected both elements of the project's rationale – i.e. to attract and support more qualified individuals to work in the childcare sector throughout Wales (CPEY focus), as well as support the targets set out in the Welsh Government employability plan (Employability and Skills focus):

- Reduce the number of people unemployed
- Reduce the number of people economically inactive
- Reduce the number of young NEETs
- Increase the number of disabled people in work

1.25 Phase 2 was to be gradually rolled out across Wales in the following local authority areas:

- Conwy / Wrexham
- Gwynedd / Anglesey
- Cardiff / Caerphilly
- Torfaen / Newport
- Swansea / Neath Port Talbot.

1.26 Figure 1.2 presents a timeline of when phase 2 was delivered in each of the above local authority areas.

1.27 Phase 2 of the Childcare Works project at the time of writing (February 2021) is nearing the end of its delivery period and is due to be completed in March

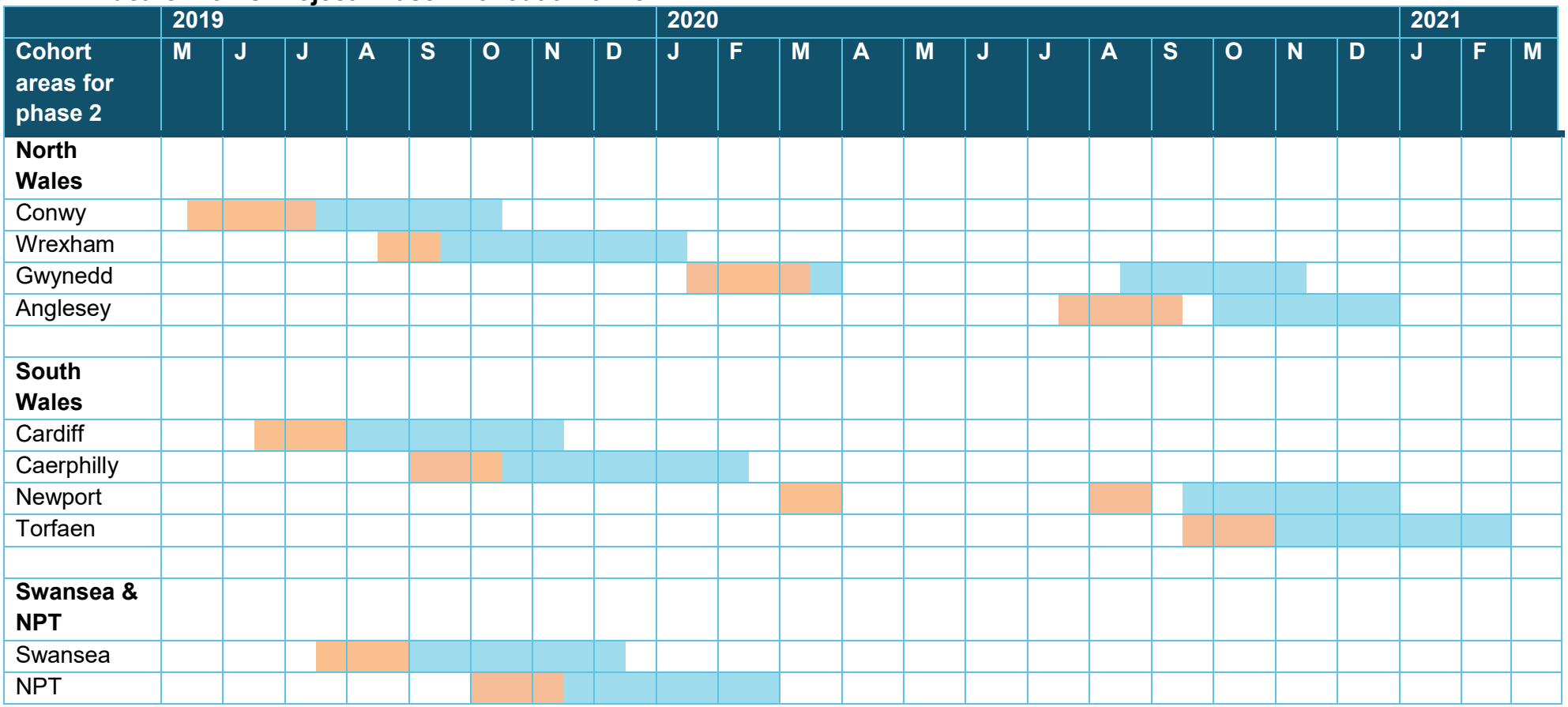
2021. This phase was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, which created challenges for the Project, with childcare settings having to temporarily close and the Project having to adapt its approach (see section 4 for more detail on the impact of COVID-19 on the Project).

1.28 A total number of 93 participants have engaged in Phase 2 of the project (against a target of 84 participants) 15 of which left the project early. As the project is yet to be completed, monitoring data on total number of job outcomes has yet to be collated. However, evaluation interviews with NDNA project staff, participating employers and individual participants revealed that 36 of the TNAs entered employment following their completion of the project. An additional 5 have been offered employment but due to COVID-19 restrictions have been unable, at the time of writing, to take this forward. Many of these participants gained employment with their project placement employer and some with different employers within the childcare sector. Additionally, 8 participants have progressed on to apprenticeships and / or training and are either working towards or already achieved their Level 3 Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development (CCLD)[10]

1.29 In addition to these job outcomes, participants also gained soft skills through participating in the Childcare Works project. Further details on these project outcomes are discussed in section 3.

[10] Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development (CCLD) is the recognised qualification for practitioners working in the childcare sector. It is a practice-based apprenticeship, which assesses learners' knowledge and competence to practice as a childcare practitioner.

Figure 1.2: Childcare Works Project Phase 2 rollout timeline



Key

Period recruitment predominantly took place

Delivery period

2. Methodology

2.1 This section provides an overview of the methodology that was used to conduct the evaluation of the Childcare Works Project.

Desk research

2.2 A desk research exercise was conducted to provide context for the Project. This desk research consisted of a review of background documentation, to gain an initial understanding of the rationale for the Childcare Works Project and an overview of the Project's activities. Key background documentations reviewed included relevant policy documents, internal phase 1 evaluation reports and phase 2 progress reports. In addition to this background documentation, a review of project monitoring data was also conducted. The purpose of this exercise was to examine project outputs, including participation numbers and job outcome figures.

Interviews with National Stakeholders: Welsh Government and NDNA

2.3 Six semi-structure interviews were conducted with key stakeholders linked to the Project, including Welsh Government officials and representatives from NDNA involved in delivering the Project. These interviews consisted of a mix of telephone and face to face interviews.

2.4 Topics discussed included views on the strategic fit of the Project to support the workforce; design of the Project and between phases 1 and 2; support mechanisms for delivery; recruitment processes; and facilitators and challenges to implementation.

Interviews with participating TNAs, childcare providers and referrers

2.5 Overall, a total of 33 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of project trainees (Trainee Nursery Assistants – TNAs) who had completed the Childcare Works Project; childcare providers who offered placements for TNAs as part of the Project and individuals from employment agencies who

had referred candidates to the Project. Topic guides used for these interviews are presented in Annex B. NDNA contacted all participating TNAs and employers to ask for their consent to share their contact details with the evaluation team according to GDPR requirements. Contact details of those who offered their consent were shared with the evaluation team by NDNA via the Welsh Government. These individuals were contacted either via email or telephone and invited to interview. Those who agreed to contribute to the evaluation were interviewed. The initial intention was to undertake a mix of telephone and face to face interviews. However due to COVID-19 restrictions, all the semi-structured interviews were undertaken via telephone.

2.6 Of the 33 semi-structured interviews that were conducted, nine were conducted with TNAs, all of which had participated in the Childcare Works project during phase 2. These TNAs were based across the different areas in Wales that the Project was delivered. The interviews focused on TNAs experiences of participating in the Project, including the support available to them during the Project and their views on the design, structure and delivery of the Project; and the impact of their participation, including perceived effects on their awareness, knowledge and perceptions of opportunities in the childcare sector and on their future training, employment and career aspirations.

2.7 18 of the 33 semi-structured interviews were conducted with childcare providers who delivered placements to TNAs as part of the Project (3 providers from phase 1 and 15 providers from phase 2). These childcare providers were based across the different areas in Wales that the Project was delivered. Individuals interviewed were key operational contacts in the placement settings, which in most cases was the manager of the setting. The interviews focused on these interviewees experiences of supporting participants to undertake their placement; their views on the design of the Project; and the benefits and limitations they perceived of the scheme for the existing workforce and the future of the sector.

2.8 Six of the 33 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who had been involved in referring candidates to the Project. In most cases, these

individuals were representatives from agencies that offered employment support to the individuals referred to the Project, including representative from Communities for Work (C4W); PaCE (Parents, Childcare and Employment); a council Business Liaison Officer; and North Wales Training. The interviews focused on referrers views on the strategic fit of the Project to support individuals who were not in education employment or training (NEET); the Project's complementarity with other initiatives supporting employability and the childcare sector; the marketing and promotion of the Project; the referral process; and Project outcomes.

3. Findings

3.1 This section outlines the findings gathered from the fieldwork interviews undertaken with NDNA, Welsh Government and referral agencies as well as participating employers within the childcare sector and participating TNAs. It begins by providing an outline of the project design and reviewing the delivery structure of the project from initial referral and recruitment to accessing work placements. It then considers the outcomes achieved and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on these as well as the way in which the project was delivered in some areas. It finishes by reviewing the project as a possible recruitment support model for the childcare sector and an employment support model for individuals wishing to work in the sector.

Design

3.2 Childcare Works was designed with a view to support participants to become work ready trainee nursery assistants (TNAs) by offering specific childcare introductory training as well as paid work placements. The aim was that this would provide the 'steppingstones' to enable participants to pursue a formal career in the childcare and play sector.

3.3 The project design has changed slightly during its delivery period often as a result of changes in the training and qualification requirements of the childcare sector as well as feedback received directly from TNAs and employer participants. For example, Phase 2 of the project built on the initial training approach undertaken in Phase 1 and expanded it to include training that supported the new induction level of the new suite of Childcare qualifications[11].

3.4 The training comprises Social Care Wales's All Wales Induction Framework and reflects the wider early years skills and behaviours required to support children's learning and development across the 0-7 age group e.g. early speech and language development. It also supported wider Welsh Government Additional Learning Needs Transformation Programme.[12] It is

[11] Qualifications Wales / New health and social care, and childcare qualifications launched

[12] The ALN Transformation Programme seeks to explore ways of working with pre-school children to ensure those who require additional development are supported prior to commencing statutory school.

intended that this training pathway would support TNAs to receive the right introductory training for the sector and that this would become a recognised pathway for entry into the sector. The training also aims to build the confidence of participating TNAs to secure future employment and undertake the formal childcare qualifications required to work in the sector at levels 2 and 3.

3.5 Changes to the design of project delivery have also been introduced over time. For example, the initial 4-week training block followed by 12-week placement was changed to 3 weeks training, followed by 2 weeks in the placement setting, before returning for 1 week of training and ten weeks in the placement setting. This change was introduced as a result from feedback received by TNA participants suggesting that a week of further training to reflect on some early experiences picked up during the first couple of weeks of work placement would be beneficial.[13]

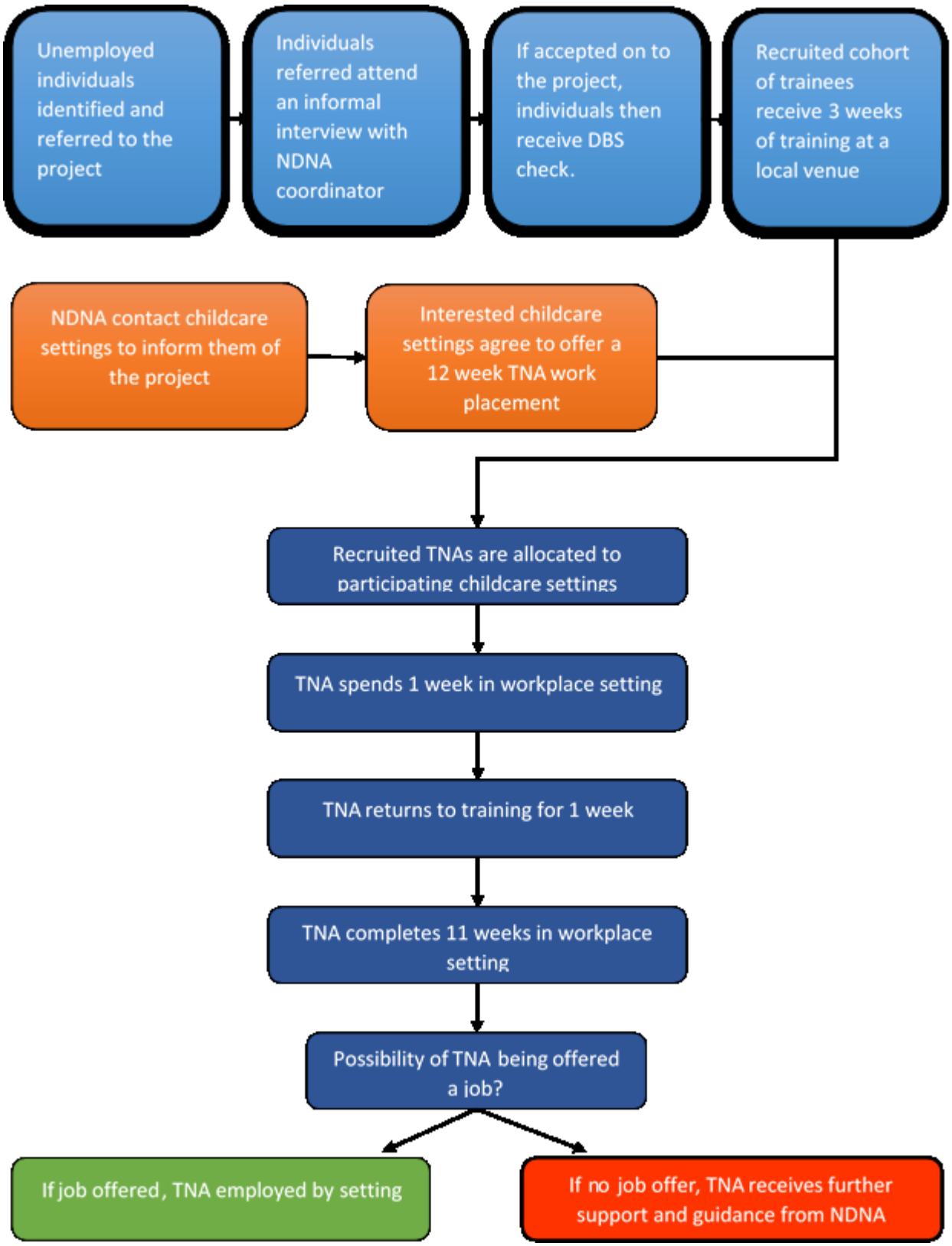
3.6 The project also introduced more flexibility during the placement. Initially TNAs spent just over three hours a day over five days at their placement setting to make up their 15 – 16 hours of work each week. Some TNAs could not commit to this rota due to childcare and other responsibilities outside work. The structure of the work placement was changed to accommodate this so that TNAs could do either do a 5 or a 6 hour a day over three days to make up their hours each week. The delivery of the project was also influenced by COVID-19 and this is focussed on in more detail in section 4.

Delivery

3.7 A summary of the delivery process for the Childcare Works project is presented in Figure 4.1 below. The process begins with the simultaneous recruitment of childcare settings and TNAs on to the project, followed by a programme of training and work experience in a childcare setting, and finally with the possibility of TNAs securing employment with the placement setting following the completion of the programme.

[13] It should be noted that due to the need to introduce online training after the project was restarted in July 2020, these changes to the timing of training delivery could not always be accommodated.

Figure 3.1: Childcare Works delivery process map



Referral and recruitment routes

3.8 Welsh Government representatives noted that the project aimed to develop a process whereby employment agencies, including Communities for Work (C4W) and PaCE, would refer individuals to the Childcare Works project coordinators. The Coordinators would then sign suitable candidates referred to them on to the programme. Developing this referral route required Childcare Works coordinators to engage with employment agencies to promote the project and encourage representatives from these agencies to identify potential and suitable participants from within their caseload and refer them to the project.

3.9 Overall those interviewed were of the view that the referral process worked well, and project coordinators noted that in most cases they were able to recruit through this process the number of candidates they required to successfully delivery the project in each area. However, the referral process experiences of project coordinators also differed across local authority areas. In some local areas – e.g. south east Wales, project coordinators were able to access referral agencies through partnership liaison officers who worked directly with local employment support organisations.[14] With the support of the local partnership liaison officers, Childcare Works coordinators, operating in these areas, were able to invite many local agencies to organised events where they could introduce the project to them. However, for project coordinators operating in more rural areas such as north west Wales, the task of raising awareness was more challenging as there was no network of providers that they could access in order to promote the Project amongst agencies. Instead these coordinators noted that in order to raise awareness and gain support for the project amongst local referral organisations in their area, they had to spend considerable amount of time travelling around job centres and other locations in their local authority area to make direct contact with each one.

[14] Liaison Officers are employed by the local authority and liaise with the job centres, Communities for Work, Remploy and any other employment agencies.

3.10 Referral agencies noted that they welcomed the opportunity to refer some of their customers on to the project. Agency representatives interviewed, praised the project coordinators' communication and support and noted that they had been well informed about the purpose of the project and who it was aimed at. Referral agencies noted that they particularly welcomed the fact that the project offered a combination of training and paid work placement. They noted that other employment support projects currently available to their customers may offer some similar elements as those available through Childcare Works i.e. training or work experience, but not both. No other employment programme, as far as referral agencies were aware, currently offered participants paid work placements.

3.11 The combination of training and work experience as well as its sector specific focus, made Childcare Works, in the view of referral agencies, 'a unique support programme' that suited the needs of many of their clients. Referral agencies were therefore happy and willing to refer individuals on to the project.

3.12 Some referral agencies noted that they had been informed by the Childcare Works project coordinators that places on the project were limited, and that only suitable candidates should be referred to it – i.e. those who demonstrated the 'right personal skills and attributes for working in the childcare sector.' In light of this these referral agencies noted that they carefully reviewed the suitability of their customers to try and ensure that only those who they felt were most likely to fully engage and therefore succeed on the project were given the opportunity to be referred on to it.

3.13 Childcare Works project coordinators noted that most of the candidates who were referred to them were suitable for the project, although this was not true in all cases. Some candidates referred to the project did not turn up to their first interview – although in some of these cases it was reported that this was due to other personal issues faced by these individuals. Other candidates referred to the programme could not be signed up because they had a police record and therefore did not pass the DBS check. One coordinator pointed to a couple of examples where the DBS checks ran on those referred to the project

highlighted minor incidents from their teenage years that resulted in a police caution. However, these individuals could still be considered suitable for the project although gaining the required DBS approval for them was sometimes a hinderance.

3.14 Project coordinators emphasised that the success of the project was reliant on the support of childcare providers to offer work placements to participants signed up to the project. These childcare providers were also the organisations that NDNA who were delivering the project, represented as a membership body. Therefore, ensuring that the candidates signed up to the project were suitable for the settings was of paramount importance to the project delivery team.

‘We tried to be thorough because you are promoting the project to the nurseries and you want to make sure that the TNAs are going to be passionate and committed to the post because you want the project to address the recruitment needs and challenges nurseries often experience. This also ensures that the trainees are given the best chance at succeeding as well.’ (Childcare Works coordinator)

3.15 Many of the individuals referred to the project were mothers of preschool aged children. It was recognised by project coordinators and referral organisations, that individuals who are parents themselves often make good candidates for employment within the childcare sector as they have gained ‘life skills and childcare skills’ from looking after their own children. However, the costs and / or practical arrangements of childcare responsibilities can also create a barrier to employment for parents, particularly parents of pre-school aged children. As such, the Childcare Works project appeared particularly relevant to individuals being supported by the Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE) project, as these are unemployed parents who face employment barriers due to childcare.[15] PaCE representatives also noted that they could offer the

[15] PaCE offers childcare support for parents whilst training or looking for work

individuals they referred on to the project, some childcare support while they were accessing the training elements of the project.

Induction

3.16 Candidates referred to the project by referral organisations were contacted by the Childcare Works coordinator in their area as soon as possible. This was usually followed by an informal interview. Pre-COVID this was often undertaken within a local library or other community-based setting. Following the start of the pandemic, these interviews were undertaken over the phone or via online platforms. Some coordinators referred to the interview as a 'getting to know you' session as opposed to anything that resembled a formal job interview. However, it did offer an opportunity for Childcare Works coordinators to further explain to participants what the project entailed and what was expected of them as participants. This also offered an opportunity for project coordinators to gauge whether these candidates had the enthusiasm and commitment to the project that they were looking for. Coordinators noted that the majority of candidates continued on to the project following this interview, although it was also noted that a few candidates realised during the interview, that the project was not suitable for them and dropped out at this stage.

'It was clear that some [referred candidates] didn't have a real interest in childcare and therefore it was a question of explaining to them what the project will entail to make sure they realise what they are letting themselves in for. This often involved a three-way discussion between the coordinator, referrer and participant' (Childcare Works coordinator).

3.17 Those who continued on to the project after the interview were referred to as trainee nursery assistants (TNAs). In most areas the recruitment process took around six weeks to complete. For some of the TNAs enrolled on to the project at the start of the recruitment period, there was therefore a gap of several weeks before they received any of the training. However, coordinators and TNAs interviewed noted that constant communication was maintained with TNAs during this time. This lead-in period prior to the training was also necessary as it provided an opportunity to undertake the DBS checks, as well

as other requirements such as getting TNAs to produce their ID evidence (which wasn't always easily accessible for all candidates) and undertaking initial assessments such as the WEST assessment.[16]

Training

3.18 Once a cohort of TNAs within a local authority area had been recruited onto the Project, they were offered training which, pre-COVID, was delivered in face to face group sessions within a local community setting, hired by the coordinator specifically to deliver the training. The setting chosen was, as far as was possible, located in an area that was within easy reach of all participating TNAs. In most urban areas, delivering the training in this way was not a problem. However, some coordinators noted that finding a location to deliver training that was accessible to all TNAs in rural area was, at times, challenging. For example, TNAs from Gwynedd participating in the Project were recruited from across a large geographical area within the local authority. Trying to find a location to deliver training to the whole group in a setting that was easily accessible to all participants was difficult as, whichever location was chosen, at least some of the TNAs needed to travel relatively long distances to reach it. Similar travel and access challenges were encountered in rural areas in relation to the ability of some TNAs to access their work placement settings (see below).

3.19 Most of the training was delivered by the project coordinators. However, some specialist training was also delivered by speech and language therapists, NSPCC and external health and safety training providers. As noted earlier in section 3.3 the focus of the training changed between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Project to reflect the newly introduced induction level of the Childcare qualifications.

3.20 In most cases the specialist training sessions were also delivered in group sessions in the same location as all other training. Participating TNAs noted that they liked the group sessions, not only for the training they received but

[16] Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST).

also because of the social interaction with their fellow trainees they gained in the process. However, delivering the training in this way required the project to recruit and train a minimum number of TNAs within a given geographical area to ensure that the delivery of the training was cost effective. This was one of the main reasons why the project was delivered within individual local authority areas as opposed to a regional or national delivery approach. However, as a result of the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19, face to face group training sessions such as this could no longer be delivered.

3.21 Training was delivered online once the project restarted in July. This placed some limitations on the training (see also section 4.4), and some aspects of the training e.g. First Aid could not be delivered and assessed online and had to be arranged and delivered separately for each, or smaller groups of TNAs. These practical elements of the training were however successfully delivered and assessed despite the limitations imposed by COVID. The required move to mostly online training also highlighted some opportunities – i.e. the training no longer had to be delivered to groups within a hired venue. This in turn overcame some of the travel challenges noted above for participants in rural areas.

3.22 The training provided participants with the skills and knowledge they required to begin work as a TNA in a childcare setting. The training led to a level 2 qualification in food hygiene and was aligned with the All Wales Induction Framework for Early Years and Childcare, and therefore provided participants with their first steps towards a childcare qualification. One of the aims of the training was to demonstrate to the trainees that it was within their capability to successfully complete training of this nature and that there was nothing, therefore, for them to fear from pursuing at some point in the future, the full childcare qualification they required to work in the sector. Project coordinators and referrers noted that many of the TNAs had been out of work for some time, some had never worked, and lacked confidence in their ability to engage in any formal training. Breaking down some of the fear barriers to training was therefore, in the view of project coordinators, an important part of the TNA's training experience.

3.23 On the other hand, one coordinator outlined that although encouraging confidence amongst TNAs was important, it was also important to manage their expectations. A couple of the TNAs had expected the Childcare Works training to lead to a level 2 qualification in childcare. Coordinators therefore had to ensure that TNAs realised that the training they received through Childcare Works offered a good start towards gaining the qualification they need to work in the sector, but further training would be required before they could become a qualified practitioner.

3.24 Employers also considered the training to be appropriate and that it offered a sound base of knowledge to prepare TNAs for working in a childcare setting. Employers also welcomed the fact that the TNAs allocated to them had already done some of the required First Aid and safeguarding training before starting their work placement. If this had not been the case employers noted that they would have needed to provide this training to TNAs themselves as part of the induction process, they provide for all new members of staff. Employers also welcomed the fact that all TNAs had undergone a DBS assessment – a further requirement set by all settings before any TNAs can start work.

Recruiting employers

3.25 Alongside recruiting and training TNAs, Childcare Works coordinators also recruited employers across childcare settings to participate in the project and to agree to take on a TNA for a 12-week work placement. Coordinators contacted providers who were NDNA members and therefore all participating employers were day nurseries. Employers noted that they heard about the Project in various ways including presentations delivered at NDNA networking events as well as through direct contact from project coordinators. Almost all employers noted that they were happy with the information they had received about the project, most also noted that they were very happy to participate in the Project.

3.26 For some of the employers interviewed the incentive to get involved in the Project was to fill some job vacancies they had advertised at the time. For

other employers, the incentive to participate was to help individuals to gain a job in the industry by offering them work experience at their setting even though they might not have been looking to recruit anyone within their setting at the time. Some of the participating employers who were not looking to take on a new member of staff at the time, ended up keeping the TNA on anyway at the end of the placement – see also the section outcomes in section 4.

3.27 Employers also noted that the fact taking on an a Childcare Works TNA offered an opportunity to 'gain an extra pair of hands' at no cost was also an incentive.[17] Almost all employers also noted that they valued the support they had received from NDNA in the past and therefore the opportunity to support a project coordinated by them was an additional incentive that encouraged their participation.

3.28 Project coordinators noted that they did not face any significant challenges in gaining the support of employers to participate in the Project. In fact, in some areas the number of employers who wanted to participate was higher than the number of TNAs recruited on to the Project - leaving some employers feeling disappointed that they could not take on a TNA.

'In Cardiff, we didn't have enough trainees for the amount of nurseries that were interested. And some nurseries were quite disappointed to not have a trainee'. (Project coordinator)

3.29 Not all employers contacted participated. Coordinators noted that some providers did not want to or were unable to participate often because they had very recently taken on a new apprentice or other trainee, and therefore felt that that they could not also accommodate a TNA work placement.

Childcare settings that are NDNA members represent approximately 30 per cent of all childcare settings. Although engaging with these settings alone generated the required support and participation required by the Project to offer work placements for all participating TNAs, it also meant that that 70% of providers were not given the opportunity to participate. This includes, for some

[17] Although TNAs were paid during the work placement the salary they received was funded by the Project and therefore did not place any additional costs on the participating employers.

sessional play settings and Welsh language settings supported by Mudiad Meithrin. As some participants, particularly those in rural areas noted that they found travelling to and accessing work placement settings challenging at times, encouraging participation from a wider pool of providers could, possibly have overcome some of these challenges. Encouraging participation from a wider range of childcare employers could also have possibly offered TNAs wider options in relation to the type of work settings within which they could have undertaken their work placement, and offered more employers the opportunity to recruit good quality staff.

The work placement

3.30 Following the recruitment process project coordinators within each local authority area then matched participating TNAs with participating employers in preparation for the work-placements. The ability of TNAs to travel to the childcare setting during the work placement was the first consideration. As such TNAs were usually allocated to the nursery setting that was closest to where they lived. However, other factors were also taken into consideration including the size of participating settings. Project coordinators noted that they tried, where possible to allocate TNAs to settings that matched their personalities. For example, TNAs that were confident and 'outgoing' were allocated to larger and often busier settings. TNAs that were less confident were allocated to smaller quieter settings where they were less likely to be 'overwhelmed' by the environment.

3.31 Project coordinators noted examples where they had shared a list of local participating employers with the TNAs and asked them if they had any preferences as to where they were located. Some TNAs had made requests at this stage to be allocated to specific settings, and project coordinators noted that they tried to accommodate this as far as they could.

3.32 Participating employers on the other hand were not offered an opportunity to choose which TNA they wanted to take on. Some settings had the opportunity to meet the TNA before they started their placement, but this was not an interview or part of a selection process. Most employers interviewed were

happy with this arrangement. Some employers referred to the fact that they trusted NDNA and were therefore confident that they would allocate them a TNA that was suitable to their setting. One employer did note however, that they would have liked more information about the TNA who took up a placement at their setting before they started.

3.33 Project coordinators noted that before TNAs could start their work placement they would meet with the nursery setting to undertake a health and safety audit and ask the employer to complete the necessary paperwork. Prior to the pandemic, these tasks were undertaken during visits by the coordinators to each of the settings – however after the project was restarted in July 2020, these tasks were done online. Most employers noted that they were happy with these initial assessment process. However, one employer noted that the process had, in their words 'been more effort than it was worth.' This employer had been asked three times to submit the same information relating to health and safety and COVID-19 safety protocols they had in place. It would appear that this situation occurred due to a change in project co-ordinators in the area during a short period of time at the time, and a lack of information being transferred from one coordinator to the other.

3.34 Most employers noted that the work placement had gone well, and that following their usual introduction and induction process that all new members of staff receive, the TNA were set to work helping out where they were needed. Many of the employers noted that they were grateful for the 'extra pair of hands' that the TNAs provided.

3.35 However, a few employers noted that in their view, the 16 hours of work a week undertaken by the TNAs was not enough for the TNAs to fully experience or get sufficiently involved in all the daily tasks undertaken within the setting. Other employers noted that they weren't always sure what type of tasks TNAs were expected or allowed to do and which ones they were not. For example, one provider noted that they were not sure, due to safeguarding reasons, whether the Childcare Works TNA within their setting was allowed to change the nappies of the younger children. These employers noted that they

would have welcomed more guidance from the Childcare Works coordinator as to what was expected of TNAs as well as of them as a setting.

3.36 Almost all employers noted that very little, beyond recording the weekly attendance of the TNA, was expected from them in terms of monitoring or progress data that they had to provide to the project coordinator. They also noted that it was clear that the project coordinator was available and could be contacted at any time if they did have any queries or encountered any problems. Employers valued this and commented that it made the process of taking on a TNA placement 'very easy'.

'Once the TNA is in place, we just contact the employer at the end of each week to double check everything's okay and also check the working hours of the trainee. (Project coordinator)

3.37 Almost all employers noted that they were very pleased with the attitude and ability of the TNAs they were given as placements, and none of the employers reported any major difficulties they had encountered during the placement. A couple of employers who had taken on more than one TNA during the time of the project, did however, comment that it was clear that some TNAs were not well suited for childcare. However, they also noted that it was better for them as employers and for the TNAs themselves to realise this during a work placement than after they had committed to an employment contract. However, none of the employers or project coordinators noted that any of the TNAs had dropped out of the placement because they did not want to work at the setting.

'We haven't had anybody who's finished [the work placement] early because they decided it's not for them.' (Project coordinator)

3.38 TNAs and employers noted that they welcomed the opportunity that the placement offered for them to see whether they were suitable for childcare work and the setting they were allocated. Many of the employers and referral organisations used the term 'a twelve-week job interview' to describe the placement period.

3.39 A couple of the referral organisations noted the importance and benefit, in their view, that the Project offered TNAs a paid, as opposed to an unpaid work placement. This, in their view, ensured that the TNAs felt valued and that they were genuinely part of the workforce, as opposed to 'free labour.' These referral organisations went on to explain that receiving a wage, as opposed to unemployment benefit, during the work placement demonstrated to the TNA participants, that paid employment, even part time employment, was a viable option for them.

3.40 TNAs generally noted that they enjoyed the work placement period and that they gained a lot in the process both in terms of experience and confidence. They also noted that they felt well supported by the setting as well as the project coordinator throughout the 12-week period of the placement. Project coordinators also noted that they ensured that they maintained close contact with TNAs during this period offering them as much mentoring support as they needed. Coordinators outlined that for most participants, the work placement was their first experience of entering a work environment for a long time – in a few cases, the first time ever. For some of these participants the work placement experience could therefore be 'scary.' Offering mentoring support for these individuals to help them overcome any fears or uncertainties they had – especially during the first few weeks of the placement was considered an important part of the Project.

Outcomes achieved

3.41 Phase 2 of the Project was set a target of getting 50 percent of all participants into employment, apprenticeship programme or other training. Despite the limitations of COVID, the project exceeded its target of engaging with participants (engaging with 93 against a target of 84) and supporting employment outcomes for 44 participants (36 into employment and 8 into apprenticeships) against a target of 42.

3.42 However, employment opportunities for TNAs were limited in the period immediately following the initial pandemic lockdown in March 2020. Many nursery settings temporarily closed at this time and were not therefore in a

position to offer any vacancies. This also resulted in some TNAs, having job offers they had been given just prior to the period leading up to March 2020, retracted. The project's ability to generate the outcomes it has achieved in light of these challenges is therefore impressive.

3.43 Alongside examples of employers offering the TNAs a job at the end of the placement to fill an existing vacancy within the setting, examples have also emerged of employers who had offered the TNA a job at the end of their placement, even though the setting had no intention of doing so at the start of the Project. One setting even noted that they were so pleased with the TNA they had been allocated, that they created a position within the setting for them at the end of the placement to make sure they could retain them within their workforce. Many of these TNAs have remained in post and some of those who gained employment during Phase 1 of the Project have since progressed to gain a level 3 childcare qualification.

3.44 Five TNAs were offered a job at the end of their placement but could not take it up either because it involved more hours than they could commit to or was not a financially viable option for them as it offered too few hours or it was an offer of a zero hour contract. Some TNAs were offered an apprenticeship position within the setting but again either couldn't manage on the income they would gain for this and / or commit to the hours of training and learning required – especially if they had a family to support. A couple of examples were also provided of TNAs that had been offered a job but were unable to take it up because they did not have access to transport to travel to the job each day.

3.45 As noted earlier, some TNAs who initially thought that they wanted to pursue a career in childcare, realised during the placement that this was not the job for them. One project coordinator referred to an example of a TNA who had previously worked as a chef and wanted to work with children. However, they realised after their placement that they did not want to be a childcare practitioner but through their placement ended up gaining work as a cook in a childcare setting.

3.46 Forty-nine TNAs however, did not get offered a job at the end of their placement – in most cases this was because the setting did not have a vacancy for them at the time. However, even TNAs that did not get into work were of the view that their participation in the Project placed them in a much stronger position to gain employment in the future. This was a view that was echoed by project coordinators and referral agencies.

3.47 Coordinators pointed out that the skills and training the TNAs received through the Project has provided them with all the foundation information they require to become a new entrant in the childcare sector, and they are therefore in a strong position to apply for these jobs when they arise. The training also provided qualifications and transferable skills that participants could apply to other job roles if they wished. These skills, along with the practical work experience gained from the work placements are now positive attributes they can include on their CV. Referral agencies stressed the importance of this, especially for those who have been out of work for some time, as finding something recent and relevant for these individuals to put down on their CV can often be a challenge. TNAs, coordinators and referral organisations also noted the increased confidence they had witnessed amongst project participants and how this was also a factor that would support them to gain employment or access further training in the near future.

Support provided to TNAs post placement

3.48 The Childcare Works Project continued to offer support for up to 4 weeks after the placement had finished, for participants who did not end up in employment or training at the end of their placement. The support was delivered by the project coordinators and was tailored around what the participants planned or wanted to do next. For some participants, the first area of support they required was to help them update their CV so that it reflected all the skills and experience they had gained through the Project. Coordinators also helped participants to circulate their updated CVs to local nurseries that might be hiring. Other TNAs were supported to access further training opportunities that they wanted to pursue.

3.49 In some cases, the participants were referred to another employment support organisation. However, it was not always possible to refer participants back to the referral organisation that initially referred them to the Project. This was because the participants had gained paid employment during their placement and support programmes such as C4W can only support individuals who have not been in paid employment for 12 months or longer. However, during 2020, project coordinators had the opportunity to refer participants who remained out of work or had not accessed any training, 4 weeks after the end of the placement, to Working Wales.[18] This is a relatively new service that supports individuals over 16 to overcome obstacles to employment.

3.50 Project coordinators noted that some participants decided, at the end of the placement, that they no longer wanted to pursue further employment opportunities in childcare. These were also offered support to pursue alternative employment options. For example, one coordinator referred to an example of a participant they had helped to gain employment in another area of the care sector during this 4-week period of post-placement support.

[18] About Working Wales Leaflet Jan 2021 - English (gov.wales)

4. Impact of COVID-19 on performance and Project outcomes

4.1 The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March, in the middle of the delivery period of Phase 2 of the Project. Many childcare settings closed as a result of these restrictions and the face to face training element of the Project could not be facilitated. It was not therefore possible to continue with the Project during this period and it was put on pause for an initial period of 3 months and the project coordinators were furloughed. The project completion deadline was also extended by three months to March 2021.

4.2 At this stage, the Project participants had already completed their training and work placements in 6 of the 10 participating local authority areas (Swansea, Neath, Cardiff, Caerphilly, Conwy and Wrexham). However, for the four remaining local authority areas (Gwynedd, Anglesey, Newport and Torfaen) the Project had either just started the recruitment process or had not yet started at all.

4.3 The pandemic had an impact on the project delivery and outcomes across all the areas involved. For example, in Gwynedd, seven participants had already been recruited on to the programme and had started their training by March 2020. The Project was then paused until August 2020 by which time four participants had dropped out of the Project and there was no time to recruit others before the training could resume. Across the six local authority areas where the Project had been completed, some of the TNAs, who had previously secured employment following their work placement, lost their jobs because the settings where they worked had to temporarily close. A few TNAs were also told by the employer at the setting where they had competed their placement that they would possibly be in a position to offer the TNA a job when COVID-19 restrictions would be lifted, but could not offer any guarantees as to when or even whether this would happen.

4.4 When the Project resumed across the four remaining local authority areas, its delivery had to change to accommodate COVID-19 restrictions. All the recruitment and initial interviews had to be done via phone or online platforms. The three-week training period was also delivered online (apart from the First

Aid practical assessment which had to be undertaken within designated settings). Some of the coordinators felt that having to deliver elements of the Project online instead of face to face, lost some of the 'personal touch' that had previously been associated with the Project. These coordinators were of the view that it wasn't as easy to build a rapport with participants online as it was during face to face contact. They also voiced some concerns that participants were not gaining the same level of confidence, enthusiasm and camaraderie with their fellow TNAs online as they did during group training sessions. However, another coordinator noted that the comments they had received from evaluation forms completed by Childcare Works TNAs who had undertaken their training online suggested that they had 'thoroughly enjoyed' the training and 'learnt a lot'.

4.5 Project coordinators also noted that delivering the training online had a number of advantages. As noted in 3.20 above, providing training online removed some of the limitations associated with delivering face to face training, including delivering to groups of participants within a specific geographical area. It also removed some of the costs associated with hiring venues to deliver the training. The NDNA Childcare Works project leads used the money saved from hiring training venues to hire laptops which they could lend to participants to enable them to access the online training provided and ensure uniform accessibility.

4.6 The COVID-19 pandemic has hampered the delivery, and in some cases reduced the number of individuals participating in the Project. The temporary closure of many childcare settings also limited the employment outcome opportunities of TNAs who had participated in phase 2 of the Project, before and after the pandemic outbreak. However, despite these challenges, the Project met and, in many cases, exceeded its targets in relation to number of participants engaged and the employment outcomes generated.

5. Childcare Works as a model for recruitment and employment support

Childcare Works as a recruitment support model for employers

5.1 Some of the employers who participated in the Project considered the aim of Childcare Works, and their participation in it as an opportunity to potentially recruit additional staff to fill vacancy they already had within their setting. Other employers viewed their participation and the aim of the Project to be a means of supporting individuals to gain experience of working in childcare so that they could gain future employment in the sector. To some extent the way employers viewed the Project was dependent on the way coordinators promoted the Project to them. Some employers noted that project coordinators had approached them and asked if they'd be willing to 'help out' by supporting individuals to gain work experience. Other employers noted that the Project was promoted to them as a means of potentially addressing recruitment challenges they faced. As the Project aimed at supporting both these aims, project coordinators noted that they promoted the Project to employers in a way that best suited the circumstances of their setting at the time.

5.2 However, regardless of the way the Childcare Works was promoted to employers and the way in which employers initially perceived the main aim of Project, most employers were of the view that Childcare Works did present itself as a potential recruitment model that they would be interested in accessing again in the future. As noted elsewhere in this report, some employers who were not looking to recruit new staff when they first engaged with the Project, ended up offering the TNA who took up a placement at their setting a job.

5.3 Most employers noted that their usual recruitment process involved advertising vacancies on social media and / or local press in order to attract applicants. Short listed applicants would then usually be invited to an interview, which in some cases involved participating in a practical childcare session within the setting. Employers noted varying degrees of success with this recruitment approach. Some noted that it was suitable to recruit individuals who had a

proven track record and experience of working in the childcare sector in this way. However, most agreed that it was very difficult to gain a real impression of the suitability of a candidate from just a short interview.

‘Some people perform well at an interview, but when they start work you realise they don’t really live up to your expectations’ (Childcare employer)

5.4 Employers often referred to the Childcare Works Project as a 12-week interview process, during which they got to know the individual TNAs well and therefore fully assess their suitability for working in their setting.

5.5 Some employers noted that their main recruitment process was to take on apprentices, mostly school or college leavers. These employers often had links with local colleges and offered apprentice students studying there, voluntary work placements. This offered the opportunity for the employer to get to know individuals in the same way as the Childcare Works work placements did, before offering them a job or full-time apprenticeship. Employers noted that the advantage of taking on individuals straight from college was that they could be confident that these individuals were committed and enthusiastic to work in the childcare sector. However, these employers also noted that college leavers were usually very young and often lacked the life skills held by older applicants.

5.6 The findings presented above suggest that the Childcare Works Project offers employers an additional recruitment route that supports other more traditional recruitment approaches already used such as, interviews to recruit experienced workers and apprenticeships to recruit school and college leavers. The findings also suggest that the Project enables employers to recruit more individuals into the sector without excluding or crowding out any others e.g. young school and college leavers and / or older, experienced childcare workers.

Childcare Works as an employment support model for unemployed individuals

5.7 The findings presented above outline that a number of the Project’s TNA participants gained a job at the end of the Project within childcare setting

where they undertook their work placement. These participants had been out of work for at least 12 months, and had very little, if any, previous experience of working in formal childcare settings.

5.8 Referral organisations were very positive about the Project's ability to support individuals into employment. They noted that the majority, if not all of the participants they referred to the Project would not even have been considered for employment within any childcare settings without the support of the Project.

"This [Childcare Works] is the best programme I have referred anyone on to" (Referral / employment support organisation)

5.9 Referral organisations outlined that although the individuals they referred on to the project demonstrated, in their view, attitudes and enthusiasm that made them very suitable for work in formal childcare, they did not have anything to demonstrate this that they could include on their CV. As a result, employers were very unlikely to even consider an application from these individuals for any jobs that they may have available. As such, it is possible to conclude that it is likely that none of the employment outcomes supported through this Project would have been achieved without the support provided i.e. the Project only generated additional employment outcomes and there was no obvious deadweight.

'Trying to find opportunities to get employers to notice our customers is the one of the biggest challenges we face. The Childcare Works offers the opportunity to get people in front of employers to show them what they can do.' (Referral / employment support organisation)

5.10 Representatives of referral organisations were of the view that the combination of sector specific training and paid work placements were the main factors associated with what they considered to be the success of the Project. There was also a consensus amongst all referral organisation representatives that the Childcare Works Project also offered a model to support unemployed individuals into work within other specific sectors.

Age focus of Childcare Works

5.11 The Project's rationale for focussing support to those aged 25 and over is outlined in section 1 above. The findings of this evaluation indicate that the age focus of the Project is appropriate as most new entrants into the sector are usually younger, school and college age individuals. Traditional employment routes into childcare for people aged over 25 appear, in most cases, to be only available to those who have previous experience of working in the sector. The Childcare Works project broadened these employment routes to also make them available to individuals over 25 who did not have any previous formal childcare experience or qualifications. This has been reflected in the views expressed by referral organisations, Project coordinators and employers.

5.12 One employer noted that their experience of participating in the Project has changed their outlook on recruitment and noted that they would now consider employing older new entrants in their setting.

> 'There is a tendency to think that childcare is a younger person's field. Since participating in the Project, the staff are now more aware of looking at the age of people who want to work in childcare and we don't just discount applicants because they are a bit older.' (Employer)

5.13 Other employers also noted the benefits of employing older people who are in their view more 'settled' as they have found they tend to be more likely to want to stay in their job and therefore reduce staff turnover rates within settings.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The Childcare Works Project offered long term unemployed individuals the opportunity to undertake childcare related training and to access 12 weeks of paid work experience funded through the Project. As a result, the Project successfully supported many of its participants into paid employment within the childcare sector. The Project has also supported employers within the childcare sector to recruit suitable individuals as new trainee nursery assistants (TNAs) to fill vacancies they had within their nursery day-care settings.

6.2 Phase 1 of the Project met its engagement targets and Phase 2, despite the limitations of COVID, exceeded its target of engaging with participants (engaging with 93 against a target of 84) and supporting employment outcomes for 44 participants (36 into employment and 8 into apprenticeships) against a target of 42.

Attracting and supporting participants to enter the childcare workforce

6.3 Project coordinators successfully engaged with a range of employment support agencies to raise their awareness of the Project and to encourage them to refer suitable long-term unemployed individuals they supported, onto the programme. Employment support agencies welcomed the Project and considered it 'unique' in that it offered participants sector-specific training as well as paid work experience. As a result, the employment agencies were very willing to refer suitable candidates onto the programme.

6.4 The Project appears to be well suited to parents as it enables them to utilise the skills and experiences they have acquired looking after their own children. The Project delivery is also sufficiently flexible to accommodate the childcare responsibilities of individual participants. The Project therefore appears particularly suitable for individuals supported by PaCE.

6.5 Project coordinators successfully engaged with and encouraged sufficient numbers of childcare settings to participate in the Project and to agree to offer TNA participants a 12-week work placement. Employers had different reasons

for participating in the Project; some considered it an opportunity to recruit new staff, while others considered it an opportunity to support individuals along their journey to gain employment in the sector.

6.6 One common reason for participating, noted by all employers consulted, was that they trusted NDNA as the delivery organisation and were therefore confident and reassured that the Project was worthwhile. It would appear therefore that NDNA's reputation within the childcare sector ensured that the project coordinators were considered as trusted facilitators of the Project and this was a key factor that encouraged the participation of employers. Furthermore, it would appear that the need to maintain this reputation ensured that the NDNA placed particular emphasis on recruiting participants who were suitable to take up work placements within participating settings. It is likely that this combination of trust and attention to recruiting suitable participants was a key contributor to the employment outcomes generated.

Recommendation – The success of the Childcare Works Project appears to be largely dependent on it being delivered by a trusted facilitator and on its ability to recruit suitable candidates. Any future project of this nature should try and ensure that these two factors are taken into consideration and incorporated in its delivery design.

6.7 Participating employers were mostly members of NDNA and most were therefore day care nurseries. Most other childcare settings including open access play, sessional care including Welsh medium provision delivered by Cylchoedd Meithrin were not included. Encouraging participation from a wider range of childcare employers could also have possibly offered TNAs wider options in relation to the type of work placement available to them and offered more employers within the sector the opportunity to use the Project as a means of recruiting good quality staff.

Recommendation – Any future project of this nature should consider widening participation to include a wider range of providers including Welsh language providers supported by Mudiad Meithrin.

Preparing participants for employment and progression in the childcare sector

6.8 The combination of industry relevant training and work experience offered by the Project would appear to prepare participants well for entry level employment in the childcare sector. The training provides participants with a knowledge base that prepares them for working in the sector. It also supports the induction level of the new suite of childcare qualifications and therefore guides participants along the first steps needed to progress towards further training that will lead towards the level 2 and 3 childcare and play qualifications they need to work in the sector.

Recommendation - the Childcare Works training package has been tailored by NDNA during the course of this Project to ensure that it provides individuals with all the foundation information they require as new entrants to the childcare sector. Efforts should be considered to continue the delivery of this training either within a standalone project or as an additional area of support that could be offered within other employability support programmes.

6.9 Offering participants paid work placements ensures that TNAs feel valued, which in turn increases their confidence in their ability to progress within the sector. Paying participants' a wage during the work-placement also enables them to review the financial viability of accessing paid employment.

Recommendation – Any future employment support projects of this nature should consider maintaining the funded wage payments made to participants during work placements.

Barriers and enablers to participation in the Project

6.10 A lack of transport created a barrier for some participants to access the training and employment opportunities supported by the Project, particularly those located in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic also created a significant barrier to, and placed limitations on the delivery, participation and outcomes supported by the Project.

6.11 The introduction of online recruitment and training as a result of COVID-19 restrictions placed some limitations on the personal contact and rapport featured in the delivery of the service during the pre-pandemic period. However, delivering online training also removed some of the travel access barriers to training previously encountered. Online training also enabled project coordinators to deliver training across a wider geographical area.

Recommendation - The broader reach of online training compared to face to face group training lends itself to a training model that can be delivered regionally or nationally as opposed to a local authority-based project. This should be taken into consideration in the design of any future employment support projects of this nature.

Childcare Works *as a model for recruitment and employment support*

6.12 The findings outline that the Project supported employers to recruit older individuals into entry level jobs within the childcare sector without excluding or crowding out any other individuals e.g. young school and college leavers and / or older, experienced childcare workers.

6.13 It would also appear that the Project has developed a proven pathway that can support economically inactive and unemployed individuals who would otherwise find it very difficult to gain employment in the sector, an opportunity to get their foot on the first rung on a career in childcare.

Recommendation – The successful outcomes supported by the Project would suggest that the support it has delivered to employers and unemployed individuals should be continued in the future either as a standalone project or ensure there is a suitable pathway within employability programmes for those who wish to pursue a career in Childcare.

6.14 Targeting the support to those over 24 also appears to be appropriate as more employment support is already generally available to under 24 year olds and most entrants into the childcare sector appear to be school and college leavers (i.e. those aged under 24s).

6.15 The Childcare Works Project has worked well within the context of the childcare sector, and many employment support agencies were of the view that it presented itself as a model that could be applied in the context of other sectors.

Recommendation – Further consideration should be given to adopt the delivery model developed for the Childcare Works project to support employment paths for out of work individuals seeking employment in other sectors.

Annex A: Privacy notice

Evaluation of Childcare Works

The Childcare Works Project was launched to engage individuals who were economically inactive in a programme of training and practical work experience to equip them to enter the childcare sector.

We are seeking to test, under the Childcare Works project, an introductory pathway that provides training to support employers to recruit individuals with the right personal skills and attributes for working in the sector, and whom have been supported to gain the introductory skills required to meet regulatory requirements.

This process evaluation will inform our evidence base on supporting individuals to enter the childcare workforce and developing relevant skills in the workplace. The findings of the evaluation will serve to inform the future integration of the employment pathway into a future delivery model for the childcare sector, being developed under a new employability framework entitled Job Support Wales.

The Welsh Government has commissioned *Arad Research* to undertake an evaluation of the *Childcare Works project*. The aim of this evaluation is to inform the development of future employment pathways for the childcare sector. As part of this evaluation *Arad Research* will be gathering information through interviews with stakeholders, learning providers, employers and learners.

The Welsh Government is the data controller for the research. However, *Arad Research* will delete any personal data provided through the interviews, and anonymise the raw data, before it is shared with the Welsh Government.

The information collected during the project will be included in a report published on the Welsh Government website.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. However, your views and experiences are important in order to help inform Welsh Government policies.

The contact for this research at *Arad Research* is Stuart Harries or Jennifer Lane

E-mail address: Stuart@arad.wales or Jennifer@arad.wales

Telephone number: 02920 440552

PRIVACY NOTICE

What personal data do we hold and where do we get this information?

Personal data is defined under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as 'any information relating to an identifiable person who can be directly or indirectly identified by reference to an identifier'.

The National Day Nurseries Association that delivers the Childcare Works project hold your contact details for project administration and evaluation purposes, on behalf of the Welsh Government. They have provided your contact details to *Arad Research.*

This research does not require the collection of additional personal data from you.

Your participation in a research interview is voluntary and if you do not wish to take part or be sent reminders then please let us know using the telephone number provided or by replying to the invitation email and your details will be removed. *Arad Research* will only use email address and telephone number for the purposes of this evaluation.

You will not be asked to provide any additional personal data as part of the research. If you do provide any identifiable information, we will anonymise this early on in our reviewing of the research data, and try not to identify you from, or link your identity to, the responses you provide. If you raise a query or complaint and provide personal data requesting a response, the researcher will forward the request only to the relevant official and subsequently delete it from the research data.

What is the lawful basis for using your data?

The lawful basis for processing information in this data collection exercise is our public task; that is, exercising our official authority to undertake the core role and functions of the Welsh Government.

Participation is completely voluntary. Research studies such as this are important for the Welsh Government to collect information and actionable evidence about its ability to deliver government priorities. The information collected in this research, for example, might be used to inform the development of other employment pathways or support to enter the childcare workforce.

How secure is your personal data?

Personal information provided to *Arad Research* is always stored on a secure server. The data can only be accessed by a limited number of researchers working on this project. *Arad Research* will only use this data for research purposes. *Arad Research* has a Cyber Essentials certification.

Arad Research has procedures to deal with any suspected data security breaches. If a suspected breach occurs, *Arad Research* will report this to the Welsh Government who will notify you and any applicable regulator where we are legally required to do so.

All data gathered through this research will be reported in an anonymised format. It will not contain your contact details and any identifiable information in open-ended answers will be removed. *Arad Research* will use the information gathered to produce a report that will be published on the Welsh Government website. This report will not include any information that could be used to identify individual participants.

How long do we keep your personal data?

Arad Research will hold personal data during the contract period, and any personal data will be deleted by *Arad Research* three months after the end of the contract. This includes your contact details. *Arad Research* will provide Welsh Government with an anonymised version of the data which will not include information that could identify you.

Individual rights

Under GDPR, you have the following rights in relation to the personal information you provide as part of this project, you have the right:

- To access a copy of your own data;
- For us to rectify inaccuracies in that data;
- To object to or restrict processing (in certain circumstances);
- For your data to be 'erased' (in certain circumstances); and
- To lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection.

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are: Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Phone: 01625 545 745 or 0303 123 1113. Website: www.ico.gov.uk

Further Information

If you have any further questions about how the data provided as part of this study will be used by the Welsh Government or wish to exercise your rights using the General Data Protection Regulation, please contact:

The Welsh Government's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at:

Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ, Email: DataProtectionOfficer@gov.wales.

Annex B: Topic guides

Topic guide for scoping / stakeholder and partner interviews

Arad Research has been commissioned by Government to evaluate the Childcare Works Project. A range of stakeholders are being interviewed to gather views on the process of developing, establishing, delivering and any early impact of the project.

Participation in the research is voluntary. All information collected will be reported anonymously. The evidence gathered will be included in a report, and possibly in other Welsh Government publications.

Note: the privacy notice was circulated via e-mail and is available if requested.

Background

1. Please explain your role/organisation and how you became involved in the Childcare Works Project.
    - Involvement in earlier pilot? / Level of involvement now?
    - [may not be applicable for all] What other types of programmes are you engaged in?

Rationale and strategic fit

2. Why was the Childcare Works Project needed?
3. How does the Childcare Works Project fit with other initiatives supporting:
    - employability
    - the childcare workforce /childcare sector?

Is the rationale for the original pilot and this project different? – if so in what way?

Project design

4. What are your views on the overall design of the project?
5. What are the main differences in the project's design since the pilot phase? And why?
    - What was learnt during the pilot?
    - Phased roll out / change in participants targeted

Project delivery

6. What is your view on the recruitment process for the project participants?
    - How were participants recruited
    - Expected participants' skills and attributes
    - Interview/selection process – partner organisations' involvement?
7. How effective is communication?
    - With Welsh Government / NDNA / partner organisations
    - Delivery partners – trainers/employers
    - Monitoring data requirements
8. What factors have helped / hindered the implementation of the project?
    - Ease of recruitment – participants / employers

- Retention
- Communication with employers / other partner organisations
- How have any barriers been solved?

9. What aspects of the delivery process work particularly well / what is challenging?

10. Have equal opportunities been considered in the design and delivery of the project? If so, how?
    - Gender of participants
    - Ethnicity of participants
    - Welsh language (Welsh-medium provision/ Language of participants)

Impact and outcomes

11. Are you aware of any impact of the project (pilot)?
    - On participants
    - Childcare providers
    - Workforce capacity and capability
    - Children

12. What are your expectations for the phased roll out of the project – improvements on the pilot?

Additional research questions

13. Are there any particular areas you think this research should focus on?

Topic guide for participant interviews (Phase 1 and Phase 2)

Arad Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to evaluate the Childcare Works Project. Participants and employers are being interviewed to gather views on expectations, project experience and impact.

[Participants who did not complete the project – adapt questions as appropriate according to the length of time they participated].

Participation in the research is voluntary. All information collected will be reported anonymously. The evidence gathered will be included in a report, and possibly in other Welsh Government publications.

Note: the privacy notice has been circulated via e-mail and is available if requested.

Background

14. [Sensitivity may be needed]
    Please provide a brief overview of your employment journey before participating in the project
15. Please explain how you became involved in the Childcare Works Project.
    - When did you start and finish your placement (unless still on placement)
    - How did you find out / become aware of the project?
    - What was your motivation to get involved? e.g. to work in childcare – to gain work anywhere?
    - What were your expectations of the project – have these been met?
    - [may not be applicable for all] Have you been involved / taken part in any other / similar work / employment programmes in the past? – if yes which ones - how does Childcare Works compare and contrast with these?

Project aims

16. What was your understanding of what the project was aiming to support you with?
    Prompt – e.g. to get you a job as a childcare worker – to give you childcare work experience / skills – other?
    - Did the project meet these aims in your opinion?

Project delivery

Talk me through, and offer your views on how you become involved in the project

17. How were you recruited to the project? Prompts
    - Level of information received about the project – what was involved etc
    - Interview/selection process?
    - Administration processes assessments e.g. WEST

18. What training did you receive?
    - Where was the training delivered?
    - How much time did you spend training?

- What were the main things you learnt – skills knowledge accreditation gained?
- **[For phased roll out participants]** did you receive extended training provision to achieve a Level 2 qualification? If yes what was this
- what are your views on the areas covered in the training (e.g. ALN, Speech and Language, Makaton)
    - were these aspects of the training useful? – if yes in what way? if not why?
    - what other areas of training would have been useful to you?
- Are there any areas you needed more training support with than others? If so, what are / were these? – did the training support you received meet these needs?

19. What did the placement at a childcare provider involve?
    - How did you get allocated to a childcare setting?
    - What hours did you work – what tasks were you set?
    - Did you receive any in work training or skill support from your employer during your placement?
    - Were you assessed on your progress at all?

20. What are your views on the support you received from the project coordinator throughout your time on the programme?
    - Phone calls (etc.) during your placement?

For participants who did not complete the project:

- Why did you not complete the project? (What are you doing now?)
- What would have helped you to complete the project?

Impact and outcomes

21. What happened / what do you envisage will happen at the end of your placement?
    - Prompts if necessary – were you offered a job at the childcare setting where you did the placement?
        i. If yes - did you take up the offer? – if not, why not?
        ii. If no – were you given a reason why?
    - What role are you working in now? What have you done since the project? If still on placement - What are your plans once placement completed?

22. What has been the impact of the project in relation to your skills (confidence, communication, job specific), employability, experience, future career intentions?

23. How effective has this project been in relation to raising your awareness of career progression opportunities in childcare? – please provide details

24. What are your plans for the future – e.g. continue to work / look for employment opportunities in the childcare sector? Return to education training? Look for employment in another sector – don't know?

25. Do you have any suggestions as to how the Childcare Works programme could be improvements e.g.
    - Target age of participants?
    - Length of time / timing / content of training?
    - Length of time / type of work placement?

26. Overall how would you rate the childcare works project?

Topic guide for employer / childcare setting interviews

Arad Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to evaluate the Childcare Works Project. Participants and employers are being interviewed to gather views on expectations, project experience and impact.

Participation in the research is voluntary. All information collected will be reported anonymously. The evidence gathered will be included in a report, and possibly in other Welsh Government publications.

Note: the privacy notice has / was circulated via e-mail and is available if requested.

Background

27. Please provide brief overview of your setting (e.g. type of setting, number of children/staff)
28. What is the main language used at your setting?
    - English medium
    - Mostly English with some use of Welsh
    - Half English half Welsh
    - Mostly Welsh with some English
    - Welsh medium

29. Please explain how you became involved in the Childcare Works Project.
    - How did you find out / become aware of the project?
    - What was your motivation to get involved?
    - What were your expectations – have these been met?
    - [may not be applicable for all] Have you had experience of similar programmes? – if yes how does Childcare Works compare and contrast with these

Project aims

30. What was / is your understanding of the Project's aims?
    Prompts – in relation to:
    - Routes to employment
    - Developing workforce capacity within childcare settings

Project delivery

31. Talk me through, and offer your views on your involvement in the project
    Prompts – in relation to
    - Level of information received about the project
    - Being allocated a participant

32. What were your requirements as an employer during the placement in relation to:
    - Allocating tasks for the participant
    - Offering any training / skill development support
    - Monitoring progress of participants / Submitting monitoring / progress data about the participant

33. How effective was the support you received?
    - from NDNA/ Business Wales
    - What areas of information and support did you find the most beneficial / effective? – least useful / effective?
    - Any areas you needed more support in than others? Solutions?

For employers where participant did not complete the project:

- Why did they not complete the project?
- What would have helped to ensure that the part to complete the project?

Impact and outcomes

34. Did you / are you likely to offer the participant a job at the end of the project?
    - **If no** – what are the reasons for this - Where is your participant working now/or future plans (if known)?
    - **If yes** – what has led to this decision?
    - Would you have taken on this individual without the support of the project?
        - If not how has the project supported you to take on this individual?

35. To what extent, if at all, has the project had any impact in relation to:
    - The workforce capacity in your setting?
    - Your ability to attract / recruit better skilled individuals to you setting?
    - Future sustainability of your setting?

Impact on skills

36. Are there any specific skills that your setting needs / finds difficult to recruit – e.g. welsh language skills, previous skills and experience of working with children?
    - If yes – what are these skills / areas of experience
    - Did the project help you find individuals who had these skills / experiences?

37. Overall what would you say has worked particularly well in relation to your participation in this project?
    - what, if any have been the challenges?

38. Do you have any other comments suggested improvements for this or similar future projects? Possible prompts:
    - Target age of participants
    - Approach to training /placement (length of time/level/content of training /support package)

Topic guide for referrer interviews

Arad Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to evaluate the Childcare Works Project. A range of referrers are being interviewed to gather views on the referral process, strategic fit, project design and impact.

Participation in the research is voluntary. All information collected will be reported anonymously. The evidence gathered will be included in a report, and possibly in other Welsh Government publications.

Note: the privacy notice was circulated via e-mail and is available if requested.

Background

39. Please explain your role/organisation and how that links with the Childcare Works Project.
    - How many individuals have you referred to the Project?
    - Involvement in earlier pilot? / Level of involvement now?

Rationale and strategic fit

40. What do you understand the key aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the Childcare Works Project to be?
41. Why was the Childcare Works Project needed?
42. How does the Childcare Works Project fit with other initiatives supporting:
    - employability
    - the childcare workforce / childcare sector?

Marketing and promotion

1. How did you first hear about the Childcare Works Project?
    - Did you have links with NDNA / Project Coordinator prior to the Childcare Works Project?
    - What information did you receive about the Project? How useful was this information?
2. How effective do you think the marketing and promotion of the Childcare Works Project has been?
    - Was there enough promotion?

Referral Process

3. Please talk me through the process of referring a client to the Childcare Works Project.
    - What did this process involve?
    - Engagement with NDNA Project Coordinator and information received?
    - What information did you provide to clients about the Project?
4. What are your views on the effectiveness of this referral process?
5. Could any improvements be made to this referral process?

6. Were any individuals you supported:
    - referred to the project and not accepted? If so, what were the reasons for this?
    - Who did not want to be referred to the project even though you thought they might be suitable?
    - Who wanted to be referred to the project, but you did not think were suitable?

(Please provide reasons for your responses to each).

Project design and delivery

7. What are your views on the overall design of the project?
8. What is your view on the recruitment process for the project participants?
    - Expected participants' skills and attributes
    - Interview/selection process?
    - What proportion of your clients that you referred to the Project were recruited and participated in the Project?
9. To what extent do you feel equal opportunities have been considered in the design and delivery of the project?
    - Gender of participants
    - Ethnicity of participants
    - Welsh language (Welsh-medium provision/ Language of participants)

Impact and outcomes

10. Are you aware of any impact of the project?
    - On participants
    - Childcare providers
    - Workforce capacity and capability
11. Overall, to what extent do you think the Project has met the needs of your clients?

12. Overall, what would you say has worked particularly well in relation to your participation in this project?
    - what, if anything has helped / hindered your involvement in the project?

13. Do you have any other comments suggested improvements for this or similar future projects? Possible prompts:
    - Target age of participants

- Approach to training /placement (length of time/level/content of training /support package)