Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-14: Apprenticeships

Revised

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

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Glossary

AMS	Apprenticeship Matching Service
APS	Annual population Survey
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (England)
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic groups
CIE	Counterfactual Impact Evaluation
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CW	Careers Wales
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
ES	Essential Skills
ESDGC	Education and Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship
ESF	European Social Funding
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESW	Essential Skills Wales (Qualification)
EPS	Employer Perspectives Survey
FA	Foundation Apprenticeship (Level 2)
FE	Further Education
HA	Higher Apprenticeship (level 4+)
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
JGW	Jobs Growth Wales
L3	Level 3
LFS	Labour Force Survey

LMI	Labour Market Information
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NTFW	National Training Federation for Wales
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
STEM	Science, Technology Engineering and Maths
UKCES	UK Commission for Employment and Skills
WBL	Work-Based Learning
WCA	World Class Apprenticeships
WEFO	Wales European Funding Office
WEST	Wales Essential Skills Test
YRP	Young Recruits Programme

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   The Welsh Government commissioned York Consulting, in association with Old Bell 3, the University of Cardiff and IFF Research to carry out an evaluation of the work-based learning (WBL) Programme 2011-14.

2.   The key elements of the methodology included: interviews with Welsh Government officials, external stakeholders and learning providers; a review of apprenticeship management information and programme performance data; a telephone survey of 95 employers involved with apprenticeships delivery; an e-survey of current apprentices; a telephone survey of apprenticeships leavers; case studies of employers involved with apprenticeships and their apprentices (where available); and, counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) analysis comparing the apprenticeship quantitative survey data to a sub-sample of the Annual Population Survey (APS).

   Key findings

3.   A review of literature highlighted that similar developments in apprenticeship policy have been taking place across the UK. All UK governments have seen the value of apprenticeships to their economies and in particular are keen to spread the level of investment between government and employers. However, there are some clear differences in terms of timeframes and in policy detail.

4.   Some of these divergences may have longer term implications for the UK and consequently for Wales. For example, as approaches to apprenticeship specification change then larger employers will face a widening gulf between systems operating across areas of the UK. Whilst we cannot quantify the effect of this it is expected that it could result in dilemmas and decisions which may influence the location of apprenticeship training to avoid multiple systems within single employers.

5.   The tendering process known as WBL3 and WBL4 were regarded to have been effective and to have secured a good range of providers. It achieved a blend of colleges, private WBL providers and third sector WBL providers. The

expectations of providers were clearly set out following previous versions of the apprenticeship programme.

Programme performance

6. The total number of unique learners between August 2011 and December 2014 was 99,775. Annual apprenticeship learner numbers had risen to 54,350 in 2013-14 but fell by 11 per cent in 2014-15 to 48,335. Numbers of learners fell in foundation apprenticeships by 21 per cent and apprenticeships (L3) by 13 per cent; although learners involved in higher apprenticeships rose by 47 per cent.

7. The biggest sectoral change was the increase in share of apprentices in Health Care and Public Services (increased from 30 per cent in 2011/12 to 35 per cent in 2013/14).

8. Generally learners had a prior qualification equal to or higher than their level of study when compared with the level of learning that they were working towards.

9. Data from the Employer Perspectives Survey suggests that there is room for apprenticeships to develop further beyond the current 15 per cent of employers, especially among smaller employers.

10. Generally, apprenticeship success rates have been rising and are high at 84 per cent. However, success rates among higher apprenticeships (HA) are measurably lower at 67 per cent (but with caution needed with regard to this data due to apparent data quality issues for a small number of learning providers).

11. The programme exceeded all ESF targets with the exception of Level 2 qualifications (only narrowly missed) and older people.

12. Just over half of all participants (51 per cent) achieved a qualification (although this may rise as some apprentices are still in learning).

13. Just over two-fifths of participants (61 per cent) were from Convergence areas of Wales. The proportion of all participants that achieved qualifications in Convergence areas was even higher (68 per cent). The rate at which Convergence participants gained qualifications was also higher (56 per cent)

than those in Competitiveness areas (43 per cent). Over half of all participants were female (57 per cent).

Stakeholder and provider perspectives

14. Overall, the demand for apprenticeships was regarded by all stakeholders and providers as consistently high and the programme was believed to be gaining credibility.

15. There was unanimous agreement that the WBL programme generally fitted in well with wider Welsh Government policy objectives and also met local training needs.

16. In terms of awareness there remained concerns about parents' knowledge of apprenticeships. There were also mixed views about how informed employers were.

17. There remained concerns that schools were not providing sufficient impartial information to young people to enable them to make informed choices about apprenticeships compared with other options.

18. The main forms of recruitment to apprenticeships were: from the Apprenticeship Matching Service (AMS) website; through direct recruitment by employers/providers and through conversion of existing staff to an apprenticeship. Providers' views of the AMS system were generally critical, with a sense of dissatisfaction.

19. A number of benefits were identified that were associated with the emerging higher apprenticeships. However, a few stakeholders and providers expressed concern that HAs might be having the effect of trying to force some employees into more senior roles than they really want to undertake. Providers felt that HAs had probably engaged some employers that would not have traditionally taken apprentices on. This suggests that progress has been made to encourage more employers to invest in training in the future.

20. Providers generally agreed that there was minimal demand for apprenticeships in the Welsh language. All providers said they promoted learning through the

medium of Welsh. Many said their documentation was bilingual. Taking a 'blended' approach to the Welsh language – promoting bi-lingualism – was enabling apprentices to talk in Welsh with their assessors if they so wished but to undertake their assessment/course work in English if this was their preferred option. A number of providers used this 'blended approach'.

21. All providers were aware of the importance of addressing gender stereotyping, however, there was not a great deal of evidence of proactive responses or challenging employers.

22. On the subject of competition between providers for learners there were mixed views. Some providers felt there was no internal competition within their group of sub-contractors, while others recognised there was.

23. Probably the biggest issue for providers was underspend. Some providers were not highlighting under-spend or under-utilisation at an early enough stage for the places to be re-allocated.

Employer experiences

24. The majority (56) of employers were very satisfied with their apprenticeship participants since 2011, and nearly all (72) apprenticeship employers said that the overall efficiency of the workforce had been positively impacted because of the organisation's involvement with the apprenticeship programme.

25. The majority of employers were satisfied with most aspects of their relationship with their provider. Employers were clear about what was expected of their organisation's involvement with apprenticeships.

26. The majority of employers were very satisfied with their recent experience of the WBL programme (51) and said that it was very likely that they would offer placements in the future, given their recent experience (58), while 18 said that it was likely.

Experiences of apprentices

27. The experience of current and past apprentices is very similar.

28. The top three reasons for doing their apprenticeship were 'to develop a broader range of skills and/or knowledge', 'to improve or widen their career prospects' and 'to develop more specialist skills and/or knowledge'.

29. Nearly three-quarters of past participants were not aware of the AMS. Of those that were aware, 43 of them (30 per cent) used the AMS when thinking about doing an apprenticeship. Of these 43 respondents, nearly all of them (98 per cent) found the service a useful tool.

30. Nearly three-quarters of past participants were working for the same employer before starting their apprenticeship that they were working for during their apprenticeship. Approximately one-quarter of respondents were recruited specifically as an apprentice or to undertake an apprenticeship.

31. The majority of respondents agreed that apprenticeships were 'good for getting experience and skills', 'a good stepping stone towards getting employment', and 'help you progress in employment'.

32. Of the 144 respondents that said that they could speak Welsh: over fourth-fifths were given the opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh (85 per cent) and to use Welsh during their course (86 per cent); nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) were given the opportunity to use Welsh in the workplace; and almost three-fifths (58 per cent) were given the opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification.

33. The majority of respondents were satisfied with their provider overall (88 per cent) and with their employer overall (85 per cent).

34. Of those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship (267 respondents), just under a third (31 per cent) had had a promotion since doing their apprenticeship. The majority of respondents (86 per cent) felt that they had been able to apply what they learnt on their apprenticeship. Just under half of the apprentices surveyed felt that their apprenticeship had exceeded the expectations they had before starting (46 per cent). Overall, just over four-fifths (83 per cent) were satisfied with the

apprenticeship. Three-fifths (60 per cent) would do the same apprenticeship at the same place.

Recommendations

35. The following recommendations were identified as a result of this evaluation:

- Given the high level of demand for apprenticeships there would be merit in considering more careful targeting of the funded support in the future. Key target areas might include: smaller employers, learners with lower prior qualifications and priority sectors.

- A review of the AMS should be undertaken to assess its value for money, given the relatively low proportion of apprentices using it. We understand it was designed in a way that it should be relatively low cost to administer but providers indicate that the cost of maintaining the data outweighs the benefits. This needs to be balanced against the marketing effect, as it may also be a 'lightening rod' to support awareness of apprenticeships, especially among young people and their parents.

- Developing more effective forms of communication about apprenticeships in general and specific opportunities in particular should be explored. These should consider youth-friendly forms of communication such as Facebook and similar social networking mechanisms.

- More detailed research and understanding is required specifically about higher apprenticeships. The HA share of all apprenticeships is rising but concerns about widely varying success rates and some differences in expectations among employers, providers and participants indicate that more attention is required to ensure effective development.

- Identify improved management of provider learner numbers to avoid the compound risks associated with providers hanging on to apprenticeship places and then releasing them at too late a stage to enable other providers to react.

- From a research point of view improving the levels of consent to participate in research would enable more robust evaluation analysis to be undertaken.

1   Introduction

1.1   The Welsh Government commissioned York Consulting, in association with Old Bell 3, the University of Cardiff and IFF Research to carry out an evaluation of the WBL Programme 2011-14. The evaluation commenced in early November 2013.

1.2   In summer 2010, the (then) Welsh Assembly Government issued an invitation to tender to deliver its WBL programmes between August 2011 and July 2014. WBL 2011-14 covered three main areas, elements of which received funding from the European Social Fund:

- Apprenticeships - Foundation Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships, Higher Apprenticeships and Flexible Learning.

- Traineeships - Engagement Traineeships and Level 1 Traineeships.

- Steps to Employment - withdrawn for new entrants on 31 July 2013 and replaced with the Work Ready programme, therefore not part of this evaluation.

1.3   There were a number of other projects related to the WBL programme that provided opportunities for young people to gain skills and/or progress towards employment: Jobs Growth Wales, Pathways to Apprenticeship, Shared Apprenticeships and Young Recruits. These were subject to separate evaluations but are examined in this evaluation in terms of linkages.

Evaluation Overview

1.4   The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the contracting and delivery for WBL 2011-14;

- Satisfy WEFO's evaluation requirements for projects receiving ESF funding;

- Carry out specific evaluation of the delivery of Traineeships;

- Assess the delivery of outputs, outcomes and impacts;

- Assess the extent to which the programme had secured the participation of individuals according to protected characteristics;

- Review how Essential Skills Policy has been embedded in the delivery of WBL and how this has contributed to the achievement of WBL 2011-14 objectives.

1.5 An evaluation report in relation to the Traineeships programme will be published separately.

1.6 This current phase of evaluation took place between January 2014 and December 2015. It included the following elements (detailed further in Appendix A):

- Interviews with five Welsh Government officials responsible for different aspects of apprenticeships provision between 2011 and 2015.

- Interviews with five external stakeholders to the programme.

- Interviews with ten learning provider consortia leads/lead contractors.

- A review of apprenticeship management information and programme performance data.

- A telephone survey of 95 employers involved with apprenticeships delivery.

- An e-survey of 559 current apprentices.

- A telephone survey of 520 apprenticeships leavers.

- Case studies of ten employers involved with apprenticeships and their apprentices (where available).

- Counterfactual impact Evaluation (CIE) analysis comparing the apprenticeship leaver survey data to a matched sample of the Annual Population Survey (APS).

Reporting phases of this evaluation study

1.7   The key reporting stages of this evaluation are as follows:

- Initial phase (focused on WBL contracting) [March 2014].

- Traineeships report [July 2016].

- Apprenticeship evaluation report (this report) [March 2016].

Report Structure

1.8   In the remainder of this report, we discuss the:

- policy context within which Welsh apprenticeships exist and a comparison with systems in other UK counties

- current arrangements for apprenticeships

- performance of apprenticeships

- stakeholder and provider perspectives of apprenticeships

- employer experiences of apprenticeships

- current apprenticeship learner experiences

- apprenticeship leaver experiences

- counterfactual analysis

- conclusions and recommendations.

2 Policy Context

Introduction

2.1 This review covers policy developments before and during the period 2011 to 2014 which have directly influenced delivery of apprenticeships up to the end of 2014.

2.2 Driven by the desire to better meet the demands of the local labour market and anticipated growth in key sectors of the national economies, Wales, Northern Ireland, England and Scotland have undertaken the task of reforming apprenticeships.

2.3 The aim of this chapter is to investigate how the structure has looked in Wales over the last 4 years in comparison to Northern Ireland, England and Scotland, in order to offer policy context.

2.4 Apprenticeships have a very long history in the UK and Wales as a recognised mechanism for training people to learn and become competent in a trade or occupation and, importantly, ready for work. Originally based around a few specific traditional sectors of the economy, over the centuries, the range of trades has grown to encompass emerging sectors.

2.5 While governments have taken an interest in apprenticeships and recognise their potential for supporting individual and business returns and, therefore, economic growth, direct or indirect intervention has varied. More recently, successive governments raised the investment in and volume and profile of apprenticeships originating from a response to concerns about skills shortages in 1994. This also led to a series of reforms (UK Parliament 2012).

2.6 We discuss in turn each country and then contrast these developments in a summary section.

Wales

2.7　Vocational skills development has been increasingly prioritised by successive governments, in Wales and across the UK. At an economic level, skills are seen as underpinning national competitiveness, hence the Welsh Government has emphasised raising the volume of skills in the workforce as a key economic priority (Wiseman, 2014; Welsh Assembly Government, 2008).

2.8　At the level of the firm improved skills can raise productivity and efficiency. For individuals, skill development can increase chances of a rewarding career with improved financial returns. For society, skills investment increases social inclusion and social mobility and can contribute to reduced poverty. However, concerns have been raised about over-supply of skills (Wolf, 2011) and limited returns on investment (Keep, 2008).

2.9　There has been increased recognition of the value of work experience alongside skills development to help create work-ready individuals (Webb 2007). Although, there remain differing views on who should be responsible for funding the training of young people; the government or employers?

2.10　The general approach across the UK for the past 30 years has seen governments fund training providers to implement various national apprenticeship programmes. However, the expectation that employers should take greater responsibility through investment in and development of young people, has been an increasing feature of government policy (for example, the BIS/UKCES Employer Ownership Pilots, the Framework for Co-investment in Skills[1] (2014) and to a lesser extent Welsh Government ESF programmes such as the Sector Priorities Fund Pilots).

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[1] http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/framework-for-co-investment-in-skills/?lang=en

2.11 Increased attention has been focused on raising businesses' awareness of the importance of skills development and integrating it into business strategies (such as High Performance Skills explored by UKCES and WESB). However, the pressure of the financial crisis and recession of 2008 led to reduced recruitment of young people (Hasluck, 2011) and reduced training budgets (UKCES, 2013).

2.12 Over the past ten years successive governments in Wales have focused on reducing complexity and management costs through reducing numbers of providers (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008).

2.13 The Welsh Government also published their 'Policy Statement on Skills' in July 2014, the purpose of which was to provide a 'long-term and strategic view of how the skills system in Wales will need to evolve over the next decade.' The statement identified their current and future actions in regard to post-19 skills and employment policy, including apprenticeships, within four key areas:

- 'Skills for jobs and growth'.

- 'Skills that respond to local needs'.

- 'Skills that employers value'.

- 'Skills for employment'.

2.14 At the time of publication of this report, the Welsh Government had: committed an additional £20 million per annum to support apprenticeship training up until 2016, allowing a range of higher apprenticeships to be delivered in Wales; defined the minimum requirements for a recognised Welsh apprenticeship framework in their 'Guidance for the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales' (Welsh Government, 2013a) to ensure that 'only high-quality apprenticeship programmes are delivered and that these both equip individuals with the skills they need for successful careers and equip employers with the skilled workforce needed to help them compete and grow'; and, shared the delivery costs relating to elements of an apprenticeship framework equally with employers.

2.15 The Welsh Government's key actions for the future included:

- 'Continue to work with employers in managing the development and review of National Occupational Standards (NOS) as the basis for adult vocational qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks, and ensure that these standards align with the skills individuals need for future employment and career progression'

- 'Enable employers to fully utilise the skills of their workforce by embedding High Performance Working (HPW) practices which strengthen leadership and management skills'

- 'Support employers to recognise the value of the skills across their workforce and underpin this cultural shift with a clear set of principles for cost sharing alongside government'

2.16 Subsequent consultation on apprenticeships in Wales was due to take place in 2015, but falls outside of the remit of this analysis.

Northern Ireland

2.17 The 'Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland', published in draft in 2004, set out the 'rationale for putting in place an overarching framework for the development of skills.' It defined three different types of skills:

- 'the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, and increasingly information and communications technology (ICT)',

- 'employability skills, including the key skills of team-working, problem solving and flexibility',

- 'work-based skills, specific to a particular occupation or sector', with a need to focus on 'raising the skills of the current workforce', 'enhancing the quality of those entering the workforce', and 'addressing the employability skills of those not in employment.'

2.18 The resulting implementation plan, 'Success through Skills - The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland: A Programme for Implementation', (Department for Employment and Learning 2006), set out how the government intended to take these proposals forward 'in partnership with employers and their representative bodies; individuals and trade unions; training and education providers; the community and voluntary sector and other Government departments and agencies, in order to deliver on a long-term vision for skills in Northern Ireland.'

2.19 The Implementation Plan consisted of individual projects across four themes: 'understanding the demand for skills, 'improving the skills levels of the workforce', 'improving the quality and relevance of education and training', and 'tackling the skills barriers to employment and employability.'

2.20 The main outcome of this first phase was a 'skills delivery system which is becoming increasingly flexible and better able to respond to the changing needs of individuals and employers.'

2.21 In May 2011, DEL published 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures', which suggested that their focus would be on qualifications as a measure of skills; they describe qualifications as 'the internationally accepted 'currency' for measuring skills, noting that 'they can be seen to be both valuable to individuals (in terms of providing mobility in the labour market and enhancing self-esteem), employers (for providing information when recruiting workers) and for measuring the skill levels of the workforce.'

2.22 DEL identified that they would invest in 'those entering the labour force for the first time, up-skilling the existing workforce and ensuring those currently excluded from the labour force are provided with the skills to compete for jobs, retain jobs and progress up the skills ladder.' Their key strategic goals focussed on increasing the proportion of people in employment with Level 2-8 skills, and those qualifying from NI Higher Education Institutions with graduate and post graduate level courses in STEM subjects, from their 2008 baselines.

2.23 DEL listed five future needs in their 'Success through Skills' report including the need for: 'higher-level skills', 'to up-skill', 'to address subject imbalances', 'to increase management and leadership skills' and 'to attract skilled labour.'

2.24 In June 2014, DEL published 'Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on apprenticeships', which articulated 'a blueprint for Northern Ireland's future apprenticeship programme: a model which is driven by strategic partnership; puts employers at its very heart; matches better supply with demand; affords opportunities in a much wider range of occupations and offers a flexible progression pathway across vocational and professional education and training (VET/PET).'

2.25 At the heart of this blueprint of apprenticeships for the future was 'quality, breadth, progression and portability.'

2.26 The core aspects of the future apprenticeship system included: a 2 year minimum duration, it must take the form of a new job role, 'a breadth of training beyond the specific needs of a particular job through on and off-the-job training', 'a single award/qualification for each occupation at each level', 'will support progression beyond the initial apprenticeship through a variety of pathways including to higher level apprenticeships and to further and higher education', and 'facilitate portability within a sector and mobility within the wider economy.'

2.27 'Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on apprenticeships' also detailed the introduction of a central service, to 'promote and support apprenticeship provision, by engaging with employers and potential participants', an online apprenticeship advertising service, the support of a 'UCAS style portal' for applications on to apprenticeships and incentives for employers.

2.28 Ensuring quality was also a key focus, with the content, duration and assessment of each apprenticeship being established by employers and industry specialists, in partnership with other key stakeholders, and subject to 'rigorous assurance by inspectors who have up-to-date experience in the professional and technical areas, supported by industry experts.' There was a desire to ensure that those delivering the training remained 'expert in their field' through stringent conditions, including 'minimum qualification requirements in the subject area and related pedagogy, as well as significant and up-to-date experience in industry' and 'that all involved in the delivery of the off-the-job training will undertake professional training in pedagogy.' It was noted that 'only those providers who meet the minimum quality standards, as determined by the Department will be funded to deliver apprenticeship training.'

England

2.29 'The Richard Review of apprenticeships in England' (Richard 2012) sought to 'redefine the shape of the system itself' and asked 'how an apprenticeship system must work in a future economy.'

2.30 The Richard Review clarified that an apprenticeship must be 'linked to a real job', 'must deliver transferable skills', involve 'a new job role', and 'require sustained and substantial skills'; he suggested the replacement of some Level 2 apprenticeships, with 'a new separate work-based programme to support entry intro employment.'

2.31 Richard encouraged a focus on the outcome of an apprenticeship. He promoted the use of 'performance and real world based, rather than just theoretical' testing to assess the apprentice's knowledge and expertise at the end of the apprenticeship, and insisted that apprenticeships should include Maths and English, for those that had not already reached a good level at the time of starting. He claimed that 'for each category of occupation associated with an apprenticeship, there should be just one clear and credible qualification that describes the level of skill and competency required to do the job well and to operate confidently in the sector.' He referenced university degrees, as 'we infer from its award that the student met and exceeded a clear standard', which is not the case for apprenticeships, and should be.

2.32 Richard suggested that employers should have a much greater influence in the design and development of apprenticeship qualifications, whilst the Government clearly defined what a good quality standard meant; he sought to achieve this outcome through encouraging employers to compete for the 'best' qualification, whilst the Government 'set the judging criteria, and ensure a process which minimises the risks of politicisation and maximises rigour, trust and transparency.' These qualifications needed to be 'widely accepted and recognised amongst a broad set of employers within the industry, especially smaller businesses', whilst creating 'a standard that is adequately transferable within the relevant sector, and of a sufficiently high level of skill to merit inclusion as an apprenticeship and attract Government funding.'

2.33 From the review, the Government was offered 10 key recommendations:

- 'apprenticeships should be redefined'

- 'The focus of apprenticeships should be on the outcome'

- 'The Government should set up a contest for the best qualification'

- 'The testing and validation process should be independent and genuinely respected by industry'

- 'All apprentices should have achieved Level 2 in English and maths before they can complete their apprenticeship'

- 'The Government should encourage diversity and innovation in delivering apprenticeships'

- 'The Government has a role in promoting good quality delivery'

- 'Government funding must create the right incentives for apprenticeship training'

- 'Learners and employers need access to good quality information'

- 'Government must actively boost awareness of the new apprenticeship model'

2.34 Following the review, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) published 'The Future of apprenticeships in England: Next Steps from the Richard Review' in 2013. BIS offered support to Richard's recommendations, outlining steps they had already taken and forthcoming plans, including the development of Traineeships.

2.35 They identified the need for apprenticeships to focus on 'what is needed to demonstrate the mastery of an occupation, not competence in a series of narrowly defined tasks.' This differed from the approach in place at the time, with apprenticeship frameworks listing qualifications based on the National Occupational Standards (NOS) that apprentices had to work through.

2.36 BIS also agreed that the responsibility for designing standards sits with employers and that one, overarching qualification, with one synoptic, end point assessment, was the way forward for apprenticeships in England. As part of this piece, BIS stated that they would take further time to consider the most appropriate process, in terms of a competition for the best qualification.

2.37 BIS introduced, as of August 2014, a new requirement in terms of English and Maths qualifications; those who began their apprenticeship with only Level 1 qualifications in English and/or Maths were required to work towards a Level 2 qualification during their apprenticeship, although they would not need to complete it in order to complete their apprenticeship.

> 'The shape of every apprenticeship journey should be different. An apprenticeship should not be something taken 'off the shelf' by a provider, or something prescribed by government. Every job, every workplace, and every individual learner is different. So it should be up to employers, together with training providers and learners, to shape the learning journey themselves, and we should minimise the things that get in their way.' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013)

2.38 Throughout the review, BIS invited views on a range of questions, and stated that they would confirm their broader approach and future timetable in autumn 2012.

2.39 'The Future of apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan' (BIS 2013) outlined the plans for Trailblazers; which were early adopters in a range of sectors, who led the way in terms of development of the 'new apprenticeship standards and the high-level assessment approaches that sat alongside them.'

2.40 On publication of this review, employers and professional bodies in eight sectors had already signed up to the Trailblazers project, with the aim of providing clear examples of effective practise and approaches that others could build on. These eight sectors were identified as 'the forefront of the economy and where professional standards were already well established': Aerospace, Automotive, Digital Industries, Electrotechnical, Energy and Utilities, Financial Services, Food and Drink Manufacturing and Life Sciences and Industrial Sciences.

2.41 BIS identified that employers must meet the following criteria when designing their apprenticeship standards: 'New apprenticeship standards must be short, concise and accessible documents; they must describe the level of skill, knowledge and competency required to do a specific occupation well and operate confidently within the sector.'

2.42 Trailblazer apprenticeships were set to have a stronger focus on English and Maths, with it being mandatory that tests at Level 2 in these subjects were taken prior to the end of the apprenticeship. Those who did not pass were supported to achieve a Level 2, where possible. For Higher and Advanced apprenticeships, the Level 2 English and Maths qualifications had to be achieved prior to the end of the apprenticeship.

2.43 As part of the Trailblazer project, BIS stated that they would test the most cost-effective methods for assessment delivered by an independent third party, ensuring that employers could be confident in the standards of apprentices across the country. BIS vowed to ensure quality and consistency across apprenticeships, with a synoptic, end-point assessment and grading of apprenticeships, with either a pass, merit or distinction.

2.44 As part of the reform, apprenticeships were required to last a minimum of 12 months, with no flexibility, and had to contain a minimum of 20 per cent genuine off-the-job training. The Government insisted on a drive in advertising of apprenticeships, both through themselves and employers, and expressed a desire for employers, colleges and school to work more closely together in inspiring children and young people.

Scotland

2.45 'Education Working for All', published in June 2014, sought to 'to make recommendations towards Scotland producing better qualified, work ready and motivated young people with skills relevant to modern employment opportunities, both as employees and entrepreneurs of the future.'

2.46 Within the report, Modern apprenticeships were described as a 'unique' opportunity within the education system, and as 'a vehicle for workforce development.' The report noted the growth in Modern apprenticeships over recent years and that they were at 'an important stage in their development.' Key elements to their further development include: 'alignment with the opportunities of economic growth, the creation of progression routes, quality improvement and increasing the number of employers offering Modern apprenticeships.'

2.47 Some of the key recommendations from this report revolved around Modern apprenticeships, and included:

- Aligning them 'with the skills required to support economic growth'

- Prioritisation of the development of the 'access processes and progression pathways', including the introduction of an online Modern apprenticeship application service, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) actively working with and challenging employers to 'develop new models to deliver higher level Modern apprenticeships up to and including degree level on a more significant scale across the economy', and assisting young people and employers in their understanding of Modern apprenticeships, through clear branding of different levels, 'while continuing to be operated and regulated as part of the single programme'

- The introduction of an 'industry-led quality improvement regime' to 'oversee the development and promotion of Modern apprenticeships', with the introduction of a 'Scottish Modern apprenticeship Supervisory Board' overseeing 'the detailed strategic development and promotion of Modern apprenticeships', and a 'Modern apprenticeship Group', that reports to the board and whose role is to approve frameworks; 'Education Scotland's remit should be extended to include inspection and quality improvement of the delivery of Modern apprenticeships'

- 'If employers can be encouraged to offer significantly more good quality apprenticeships, the Scottish Government should consider a carefully

managed expansion of the annual number of Modern apprenticeship starts.'

2.48 Reflecting on employer engagement, the report suggested the development of a 'recruitment incentive package' to 'equip and support smaller and micro businesses to recruit and train more young people.' The report also suggested that young people could complete some of the 'early non-workplace content of Modern apprenticeships', whilst at school so that they could go straight into the workplace-based content subsequently; the report noted that this may be more appealing to SMEs that don't currently take on apprentices, and would also ensure young people better understood the apprenticeship opportunity before leaving school.

2.49 'Education Working for All' commented on advancing equalities, noting gender disparities within Modern apprenticeships, which needed addressing by Skills Development Scotland with realistic, but stretching improvement targets. The report reflected on young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, and suggested the development of a 'targeted campaign to promote the full range of Modern apprenticeships to young people and parents from the BME community' in order to 'present the benefits of work-based learning as a respected career option and alternative to university', with a 'realistic but stretching improvement target to increase the number of young people from BME groups starting Modern apprenticeships.' Similarly, a realistic, but stretching improvement target to increase the number of young disabled people starting Modern apprenticeships was also cited, with encouragement that funding levels should be reviewed and adjusted, and age restrictions relaxed for those who may take longer to complete their course.

2.50 Furthermore, the report insisted on encouraging colleges to contribute to the delivery of high quality Modern apprenticeships and compete with the best performing training providers. It also encouraged 'a focus on STEM… at the heart of the development of Scotland's Young Workforce', with the introduction of STEM apprenticeships, and the active promotion of these to employers and young people through incentives.

2.51 The report made reference to 'Opportunities for All' and suggested that SDS 'develop a meaningful national access to apprenticeships programme for young people who are not in education or employment', linking volume of places to anticipated employer demand, 'with guaranteed interviews for successful participants.'

2.52 Although there was no official review of Modern apprenticeships envisaged in Scotland, there was ongoing work within the Government and SDS to 'consider how higher level Modern apprenticeships can be developed over a wider range of occupations and professions in Scotland' and to introduce a foundation apprenticeship option 'which offers the first year of a 3-4 year apprenticeship in the school senior phase.'

Conclusions

2.53 Similar developments in apprenticeship policy have been taking place across the UK. All UK governments have seen the value of apprenticeships to their economies and in particular are keen to spread the level of investment between government and employers. However, there are some clear differences in terms of timeframes and in policy detail.

2.54 Common aspects included:

- Ensuring that apprenticeships are relevant to the workplace and are employed status only.

- Ensuring that apprenticeships are high quality incorporating minimum thresholds for English and Maths.

- Developing common application platforms (apprenticeship matching services) to improve the efficiency of recruitment.

- Addressing priority sectors.

- Addressing market imbalances such as representation of minority groups and gender stereotypes (especially STEM subjects for females).

- Focus on high level apprenticeships.

2.55 These common aspects serve to confirm many attributes that have developed in the Welsh apprenticeship system. Another major commonality is a frustration about schools not providing impartial advice and guidance to young people which included apprenticeships as a credible route alongside academic learning routeways.

2.56 However, there are some areas where approaches across the home countries have started to diverge:

- Extent of framework redesign. In England the Trailblazer process has led to greater involvement of employers and a re-specification of apprenticeships based on apprenticeship standards rather than NOS.

- Type of assessment. In England there are moves towards some apprenticeships which are not underpinned by a current qualification but use a single synoptic assessment process.

- Extent to which apprenticeships at level 2 are considered a priority, with increasing focus on level 3 upwards in England and Northern Ireland.

- There are some differences in the minimum length of an apprenticeship. Defined in England as a least one year long, but a minimum of two years was set in Northern Ireland. Length is not defined in Wales.

- Some differences in support at school. For example, in Scotland young people could complete some of the early non-workplace content of Modern apprenticeships, whilst at school, so that they could go straight into the workplace-based content subsequently.

2.57 Some of these divergences may have longer term implications for the UK and consequently for Wales. For example, as approaches to apprenticeship specification change then larger employers will face a widening gulf between systems operating across areas of the UK. Whilst we cannot quantify the effect of this it is expected that it could result in dilemmas and decisions which may influence the location of apprenticeship training to avoid multiple systems within single employers.

2.58 On a similar note individuals may find apprenticeships less portable across country borders as a result of these divergences.

3   Programme Design

Project Aim

3.1   The project addressed the ESF Framework Priority 3 Theme 1 aims, which included: raising levels of basic literacy and numeracy in the workforce; supporting the acquisition of ICT, generic and occupational skills in the workforce; supporting progression in employment through flexible training and learning provision; and helping low skilled workers to gain the additional skills and qualifications needed to sustain their employment, improve productivity and increase earnings via career progression.

3.2   According to the project Business Plan (Welsh Government 2014d), the World Class Apprenticeships ESF project 'supplements domestic funding to increase the number of apprenticeship opportunities available to potential participants in the Convergence areas of Wales'. The project aimed to increase the number of apprentices who successfully undertook job related learning and to raise the attractiveness, awareness of and availability of apprenticeships.

3.3   Apprenticeships were a mechanism for improving employability and skills of individuals, which in turn improves productivity and provides economic value.

3.4   The following objectives were articulated in the Version 1 Business Plan for the period 2011 – 2014 and its supplementary version regarding the Convergence area:

- Support a total of 29,671 participants for all or part of their apprenticeship journey.   Opportunities will be generated across the full spectrum of subject areas that are typically in demand by the Welsh economy, and in all fifteen Convergence Unitary areas.

- Enable 19,880 individuals to gain at least one qualification during project lifetime.

- Improve progression into appropriate and relevant further learning which adds further value after completion of the apprenticeship, including into Higher Apprenticeships. 1,780 learners will enter further learning after

completion of their ESF funded apprenticeship, including to a level 3 or 4 apprenticeship.

- Commission approximately 24 training providers who have sufficient experience, systems, and track record to provide quality apprenticeship opportunities. (including via consortia arrangements)

- Use the £38m in ESF Funding to increase the number of apprenticeships opportunities in the Convergence area from 7,394 to 21,071 (equivalent of an extra 13,677 participants)

- Secure full apprenticeship framework attainment[2] of 80% (of starters) during the contract lifetime.

Funding

3.5 Apprenticeship funding was planned to be just under £125 million (Table 3.1) as revised in the supplementary business plan.

Table 3.1: Planned Apprenticeship Funding (£)

Gross Eligible	ESF	Public Match	Private Match (revenue)	Grant Rate (per cent)
124,471,045	55,700,000	68,771,045	0	*44.75*

Source: Welsh Government (2014) Project Business Plan (Supplementary) 80660 World Class Apprenticeships for Economic Renewal v1.3

Tendering

3.6 Using the guidelines stipulated in the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, and the Specification for Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW), the project commissioned via tender, twenty training providers from the public, private and third sector, including consortia, to operate Foundation Apprenticeships (at level 2) and Apprenticeships (at level 3) and a small number of Higher Apprenticeships for Convergence area based learners.

3.7 In the previous WBL (2007-11) programme, the Welsh Government held contracts with 64 providers, with a minimum contract value of £99,000.

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[2] proportion of learners completing their programme of learning

3.8 The delivery of WBL 2011-14 was undertaken through three models of contracting:

- Delivery consortia.

- Lead contractors with sub-contractors.

- Lead contractors with no sub-contractors.

3.9 During 2011-14 there were six delivery consortia and 18 lead contractors, with minimum contract values of £350,000 for apprenticeships. Approximately 120 consortia members and sub-contractors were involved in delivering the programme. This subsequently changed with the most recent procurement round (known as WBL4, see below).

3.10 Generally providers felt that the consortia approach adopted in 2011 had worked well and was an improvement on previous approaches. Providers were critical of the largely electronic processes, as they felt it limited communication, although the Welsh Government tried to address this with more effective communication (Turner, 2014).

WBL4 procurement round

3.11 Allocations for apprenticeships from 1 August 2014 to 31 March 2015 totalled just over £60 million, which was around two thirds of the total WBL allocation (Table 3.2).

3.12 Amounts for individual lead providers ranged from the largest at £7,084,046 to the smallest at £90,000. Ten lead providers specialised in apprenticeships over other WBL delivery, with a further three lead providers where apprenticeships represented more than three quarters of their WBL provision.

Table 3.2: WBL and Traineeships provider allocations 2014-2015 (£)

	Apprent-iceships	Percentage of Apprent-iceships	All WBL[1]	Apprenticeships as a percentage of all WBL
A4E WALES LTD	693,557	1	2,476,499	28
Acorn Learning Solutions Ltd	2,277,103	4	2,277,103	100
Associated Community Training Ltd	7,084,046	12	15,781,545	45
Babcock Training Limited	1,925,976	3	1,925,976	100
Cambrian Training Company Ltd	1,734,897	3	1,734,897	100
Cardiff AND Vale College	4,534,061	8	4,550,418	100
Coleg Cambria	5,132,947	9	6,201,911	83
Coleg Llandrillo Cymru	5,604,949	9	6,977,542	80
Construction Industry Training Board	2,980,974	5	2,980,974	100
Employment Training City & County of Swansea	1,414,167	2	2,534,387	56
ESG Holdings Ltd	411,824	1	411,824	100
Gower College Swansea	1,168,577	2	2,019,473	58
Hyfforddiant Ceredigion Training (Ceredigion CC)	1,227,641	2	1,944,388	63
ISA Training Limited	1,355,218	2	1,355,218	100
ITEC Training Solutions Ltd	3,346,901	6	8,268,332	41
League Football Education	90,201	*	90,201	100
Neath Port Talbot College	2,984,977	5	6,423,680	47
Pembrokeshire College	5,068,860	8	6,693,714	76
Rathbone Training	382,490	1	2,361,593	17
The Marr Corporation	2,907,697	5	2,907,697	100
Torfaen Training (part of Torfaen County Borough Council)	3,171,842	5	5,150,741	62
Vocational Skills Partnership (Wales) Ltd	4,514,065	8	4,514,065	100
Total	60,012,972	100	89,582,178	67

Source: (Welsh Government, 2014)

Note 1: WBL includes Traineeships, apprenticeships, Work ready and Bespoke delivery
Note *=less than 1% but more than zero

3.13 The activities expected of providers included[3]:

- Work with employers (including self-employed) to encourage them to offer new apprenticeship opportunities as well as apprenticeships to the employers' existing staff;

- Undertake initial assessments including of prior learning and of essential skills;

- Confirm the appropriateness of the apprenticeship option and discuss options linked to the individuals' job role and suitability;

- Undertake a health and safety assessment;

- Register participants on the apprenticeship programme;

- Operate the qualifications accreditation process involving on the job assessments to a defined industry standard;

- Arrange or deliver underpinning technical knowledge for the learners (technical certificates/college courses – as required by their individual apprenticeship framework);

- Provide Essential Skills Wales qualifications (as required by the framework) covering communication, numeracy and ICT;

- Support apprentices through completion (often over three year period or more) and ensure next step options are considered.

3.14 Providers were made responsible for reporting all learning activity into data fields on the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) database, which was, on a monthly basis, converted into funding values based on learners recruited, activity undertaken, and qualifications/framework components achieved.

3.15 Key criteria relating to the operation of the programme were:

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[3] Tender specification for WBL 4

- All Participants starting were stipulated as being employed status (including; self-employed / with a single employer / shared apprenticeship or Group Training Association).

- Funding prioritisation by age group, (16-18 age group as the highest priority, followed by 19-25 yrs old, and finally 25+).

- Specified priority sectors and a set of non-priority sectors.

3.16 Aspects of national level marketing included:

- Apprenticeship Week. A national week for apprenticeships was an opportunity to celebrate and recognise the essential role that apprenticeships played. This was be conveyed through print media, broadcast, networking events, seminars and advertisements.

- Apprenticeship Matching Service (AMS). After a pilot phase it, it was subsequently launched pan Wales, as a fully bilingual service, in Apprenticeship Week 2012. This was supported by direct mail and periodic e-newsletters (ezines) to learning providers and employers.

- Further marketing campaigns such as 100 Apprentices in 100 days project.

- Apprenticeship Awards. A promotional vehicle which identified, showcased and rewarded apprentices, learning providers and employers who excelled in contributing to the development of the apprenticeship programme across Wales. There were a number of individual awards.

- Skillscymru. A highly interactive careers and skills event which has evolved to take place in two locations (North and South Wales), which motivated, inspired and encouraged people by helping them to explore career options.

3.17 In addition to the above national marketing activities, providers also undertook local marketing campaigns to support recruitment of employers and potential participants.

3.18 Providers were expected to increasingly work together hence the Welsh Government encouraged the role of National Training Federation of Wales (NTFW) to provide a vehicle for provider dialogue and to support sharing of best practice. Providers and stakeholders views of this are explored further in the next section.

3.19 Key elements of the programme regarded as innovative according to the Business Plan (2014) included:

- Consortia arrangements: aimed to give lead contractors the critical mass to respond in a timely way to changes in local priorities and centralised 'back-room' functions.

- Part of the budget utilised to support apprenticeship delivery with Anchor and Regionally Important Companies through bespoke call-off contracts.

- Prioritising towards nominated priority sectors encouraged HAs as these tended to be the minimum industry requirement in many sectors.

- Exploring innovative solutions to engaging with micro business via mentoring support for business, shared apprenticeships, etc. to expand the breadth of sector engagement with apprenticeships.

- Exploring innovative solutions to effectively engage with large national, UK wide and multi-national companies to expand the breadth of apprenticeship opportunities.

Cross Cutting Themes

3.20 Part of the project definition included a clear focus on cross cutting themes:

- Environmental sustainability

  – All training providers were required to participate in the ESDGC initiative (Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship), which was scored as part of the tendering exercise.

- Awareness raising by providers to employers of the European Guidance to on the NETREGS web based Government guidance and the ECOCODE system (for internal organisation management of day to day energy use and recycling).

- Equality and Diversity - providers were asked to demonstrate that:

    - They had formal policies and procedures in place to ensure that equal access to learning delivered equality of opportunity, irrespective of disability, gender, race, age, religion or sexual orientation and that they took action to tackle discriminatory behaviour by learners, staff or managers.

    - They had formal equal opportunities strategies, that met equalities legislation requirements, including monitoring, benchmarking and positive action arrangements and were reviewed every two years.

    - They had arrangements in place to address issues of bullying or harassment, discrimination or victimisation.

    - They covered Employee Rights and Responsibilities as part of the Apprenticeship Frameworks.

    - Apprentices aged 16-18 were entitled to: Support of a Learning Coach; Access to Personal Support; Careers Information, Advice and Guidance; Careers and World of Work Framework as stated in the programme specification.

    - Apprentices had a Learning Agreement; an Individual Learning Plan; on/off-the-job training; a clearly defined Learning Process.

    - Additional Learning Support – human and/or technical, where justified for apprentices requiring such support to enable them to complete their participation in learning.

- In addition there was a strong focus on:

  - Female Participation - All marketing materials aimed to recognise the equality agenda and Careers Wales aimed not to stereotype opportunities based on gender. When vacancies were recorded on the Apprenticeship Matching Service it is not possible to offer opportunities in a discriminatory way.

  - Occupational Segregation/ Non traditional Roles.

  - Science, Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM): there was an ambition to focus on sectors that had low female numbers.

Summary

3.21 The project design aimed to build on successful aspects of the programme that had operated over the past five years.

3.22 ESF funding was accessed to extend the programme to more learners across Wales.

3.23 The project specification was clearly set out at the beginning of the programme and revised at appropriate points as further funds became available. During the period of the ESF project the Welsh Government identified Apprenticeships as critical to support economic recovery. It secured additional funding to enable the recruitment of additional apprentices.

3.24 The tendering processes known as WBL3 and WBL4 were regarded by stakeholders to have been effective and to have secured a good range of providers. It achieved a blend of colleges, private WBL providers and third sector WBL providers. The expectations of providers were clearly set out following previous versions of the apprenticeship programme.

3.25 A range of national marketing activities were planned to support effective local level business development activities of providers.

4   Performance

4.1   This section explores the performance of the apprenticeship programme covering the three levels: foundation apprenticeships (level 2), apprenticeships (level 3) and higher apprenticeships (level 4).

Volumes

4.2   The total number of unique learners between August 2011 and December 2014 was 99,775[4] according to our analysis of Welsh Government LLWR data.

4.3   Annual apprenticeship learner programme numbers had risen to 54,350 in the academic year 2013/14 but fell by 11 per cent in 2014/15 to 48,335 (Table 4.1). The number of programmes fell in foundation apprenticeships by 21 per cent and apprenticeships (L3) by 13 per cent; although higher apprenticeships programmes rose by 47 per cent.

Table 4.1: Number of apprenticeship programmes in each year 2011-2015

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (p)
Foundation Apprenticeship	20,215	25,120	27,530	21,790
Apprenticeship (Level 3)	16,110	19,285	21,425	18,620
Higher Apprenticeship	280	2,480	5,395	7,925
All Apprenticeships	36,605	46,885	54,350	48,335

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government.

Note p= provisional

4.4   The gender balance overall is 57 per cent female; although this varies considerably across the apprenticeship levels from 53 per cent for FAs, 55 per cent for apprenticeships (L3) and 74 per cent for HAs.

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[4] This represents the total number of learners who participated. The figure of 60,495 used later in the report relates to those who were funded through the European Social Fund.

4.5   In terms of the age profile (Figure 4.1) the pattern for FAs and apprenticeships (L3) is similar although more of those aged 16 to 24 are FAs. Most apprenticeship programmes (L3) are to those aged between 20 and 39, whereas most HAs are to those aged between 25 and 49.

Figure 4.1: Apprenticeship programmes by age, 2013/14 [1]
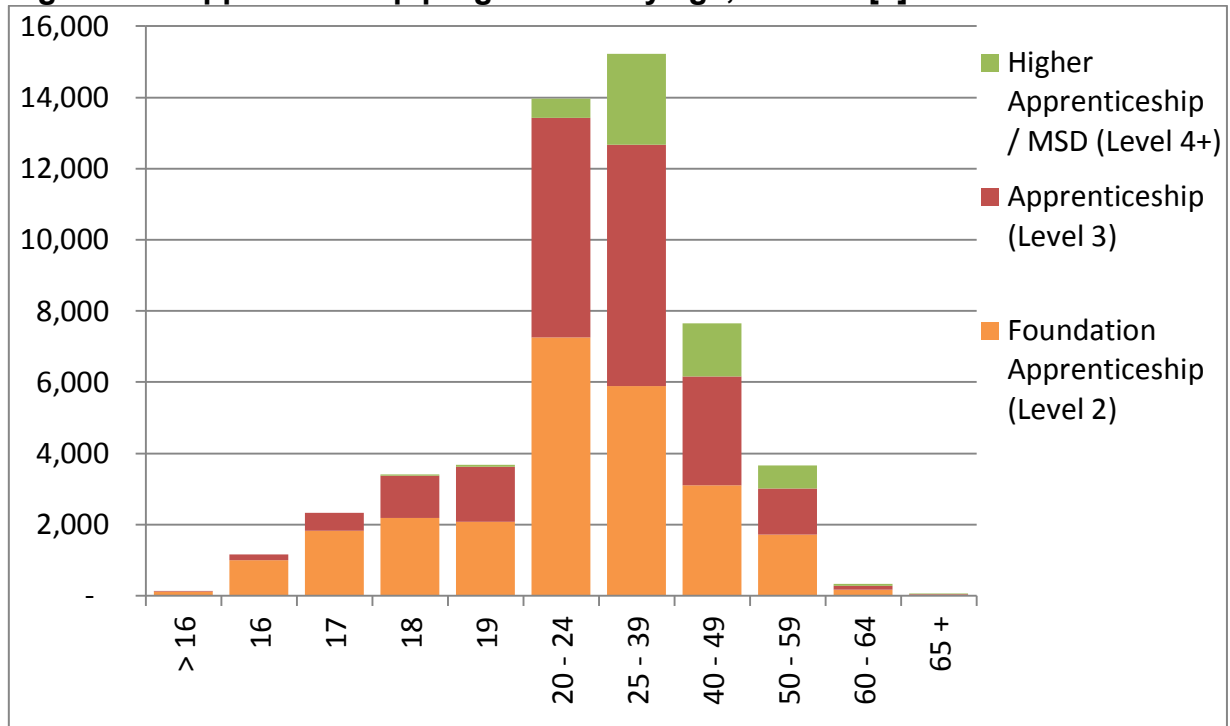
Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government.
Note: 2013/14 was the most recent date that data was available through Stats Wales

4.6   The spread across sectors has been changing over the longer term (Figure 4.2). Many of these changes continued through the period of this evaluation:

- The biggest change has been the increase in share of apprentice programmes in Health Care and Public Services (increased from 30 per cent in 2011/12 to 35 per cent in 2013/14).

- There was an increase in Management and Professional, but most other areas contracted or stayed at a similar relative size.

Figure 4.2: Apprenticeship programmes by sector, 2006-2014
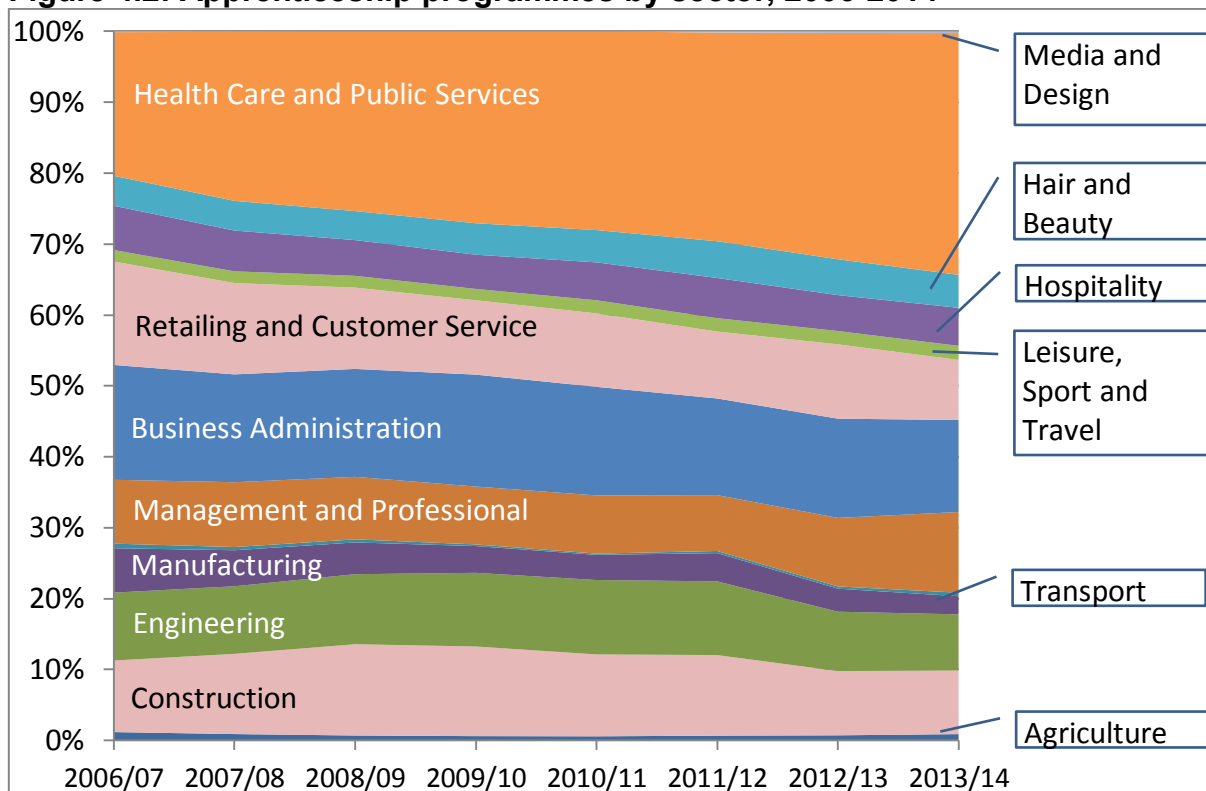
Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government.

4.7 The proportions of learners on the programme in 2013/14 varied by gender with males most likely to be on programmes in Construction (21 per cent of all male programmes), Engineering (18 per cent) and Health Care and Public Services (15 per cent). This compares starkly with females where half of programmes were in Health Care and Public Services (50 per cent).

Prior qualifications

4.8 Our analysis suggests that generally learners were well qualified compared with the level of learning that they were working towards:

- Two thirds (67 per cent) of FA learners during 2011-2014 had a prior qualification equal to or higher than their level of study (LLWR, 2014).

- Just over a third (36 per cent) of apprenticeship (L3) learners had a prior qualification equal to or higher than their level of study.

- Over two-fifths (44 per cent) of HA learners had a prior qualification equal to or higher than their level of study.

Employers

4.9   Over a third of apprentices work for employers with 250 or more employees (35 per cent)[5]. The rest are spread broadly across other employer sizes: 50-249 employees (19 per cent); 10-49 employees (25 per cent) and 0-9 employees (21 per cent).

4.10 Employer perspectives survey[6] findings indicated that in 2014 around 15 per cent of employers had or offered an apprenticeship, rising to 29 per cent that planned to offer an apprenticeship in the future. This would indicate that there is scope to increase the numbers of employers utilising apprenticeships.

4.11 There appears room for apprenticeships to develop further beyond the current 15 per cent of employers, especially among smaller employers.

Apprenticeship success rates

4.12 Generally, apprenticeship success rates have been rising and are high (Table 4.2). However, data for 2013/14 indicates a decrease on previous years. Similar rates are published for England [7], but due to differences in methodology cannot be compared directly with the figures for Wales. England reported a success rate for all apprenticeships of 69 per cent for 2013/14.

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[5] Based on the author's analysis of LLWR data covering 2011 to 2014

[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-perspectives-survey-2014-wales-data

[7] BIS (2015) SFR Further Education and Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held (March 2015) www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/477743/SFR_commentary_November_2015__1_.pdf

Table 4.2: Apprenticeship success rates 2011-2014 (per cent)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Foundation Apprenticeship	*81*	*84*	*85*	*84*
Apprenticeship (Level 3)	*83*	*86*	*87*	*85*
Higher Apprenticeship*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*67*
All Apprenticeships	*82*	*85*	*86*	*84*

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government.
Note: * = 2013/14 was the first year that framework success rates were published, the Statistical First release identified "apparent data-quality issues at a small cohort of learning providers" and advises "caution …. when using this data". Note: dash (-) means no data available

4.13 Average apprenticeship success rates did not fall below 80 per cent by sector; although some sectors achieved success rates as high as 95 per cent (Table 4.3).

4.14 Particular performance variations across sectors and levels included:

- Foundation apprenticeships range from 95 per cent for Education and Training to 80 per cent for Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care, and Construction, Planning and the Built Environment.

- Apprenticeships (L3) range from 92 per cent for Leisure, Travel and Tourism to 80 per cent for Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care.

Table 4.3: Apprenticeship success rates, by sector, 2013-14 (per cent)

	FA	App (L3)	HA
Health, Public Services and Care	85	85	79
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	80	80	-
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	85	91	*
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	80	81	-
Information and Communication Technology	83	84	-
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	83	84	-
Retailing and Customer Service	82	84	-
Hair and Beauty	81	88	-
Hospitality and Catering	86	81	-
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	82	92	-
Arts, Media and Publishing	*	*	*
Education and Training	95	90	-
Business, Administration and Law	86	84	48
All	84	85	67

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government.
Note: dash (-) = no data available, 2013/14 was the first year that framework success rates were published for Higher Apprenticeships, the Statistical First release identified "apparent data-quality issues at a small cohort of learning providers" and advises "caution …. when using this data". Note *=sample too small

4.15 Success rates by provider indicated a variation in performance (Table 4.4):

- FAs ranged from 70 to 88 per cent, five providers were below the 80 per cent target.

- Apprenticeships (L3) ranged from 79 to 92 per cent, one provider was below the 80 per cent target.

- HAs ranged from 5 to 94 per cent, 12 providers were below the 80 per cent target, although it must be recognised that numbers were very small and there were apparent data quality issues at a small number of providers, and therefore caution needs to be exercised in use of this data.)

Table 4.4: Apprenticeships Success Rates by Provider

Provider	FA		Apprenticeship		HA	
	Leavers	Success Rate Percentage	Leavers	Success Rate Percentage	Leavers	Success Rate Percentage
A4E Wales Ltd	176	82	67	84	27	81
Acorn Learning Solutions Ltd	458	76	447	79	27	56
ACT Ltd	1,760	83	1,217	83	192	73
Babcock Training Ltd	640	82	383	85	0	n/a
Cambrian Training Company	403	85	239	87	87	79
Cardiff and Vale College Consortium	502	85	488	86	25	64
Coleg Cambria	868	87	740	90	65	88
Construction Skills	463	82	275	86	0	n/a
Gower College Swansea	148	87	131	84	41	73
City and County of Swansea Employment Training	337	78	165	81	11	55
Grwp Llandrillo Menai Consortium	1,174	88	811	87	60	65
ISA Assessment & Training Ltd	374	79	151	85	0	n/a
ITEC Training Solutions Ltd	890	84	543	82	65	75
Mid Wales Work-based Learning Consortium	198	78	164	80	14	57
Rathbone Training	37	70	*	n/a	0	n/a
Skills Academy Wales @ Grwp NPTC	463	83	415	86	15	60
Skills Academy Wales (South West)	810	84	705	89	60	68
T2 Business Solutions	187	85	38	92	175	5
Torfaen Training	750	86	610	88	125	94
Vocational Skills Partnership	1,055	86	518	84	137	89

Source: 2013/14 Welsh Government Learner Outcomes Report

Note: The Statistical First release identified "apparent data-quality issues at a small cohort of learning providers" for Higher Apprenticeships and advises "caution …. when using this data".

Delivery by Convergence and Competitiveness areas

4.16 The Convergence area of Wales covers West Wales and the Valleys (15 local authority areas) and the Competitiveness area covers East Wales (7 local authorities).

4.17 Just over half of all participants (51 per cent) achieved a qualification (although this may rise as some apprentices are still in learning).

4.18 Just over two-fifths of participants (61 per cent) were from Convergence areas of Wales (Table 4.5).

4.19 Sixty eight per cent of all participants who achieved qualifications were in the Convergence areas. The rate at which Convergence participants gained qualifications was also higher (56 per cent) than those in Competitiveness areas (43 per cent).

Table 4.5: Participants[8] by area, 2011 - 2014

Indicators	Conver-gence	Per-centage	Competi-tiveness	Per-centage	Total	Per-centage
Total Participants	37,161	*61*	23,334	*39*	60,495	*100*
Total Participants Gaining Qualifications	20,864	*68*	9,983	*32*	30,847	*100*
Total Participants Entering Further Education	219	*67*	108	*33*	327	*100*
Output indicators						
Participants Gaining Level 2 qualifications	12,789	*68*	6,034	*32*	18,823	*100*
Participants Gaining Level 3 qualifications	6,760	*68*	3,154	*32*	9,914	*100*
Participants Gaining Level 4 and above qualifications	413	*62*	251	*38*	664	*100*

Sources: Welsh Government POR (Impact Indicator) Report

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[8] The figure of 60,495 relates to those who were funded through the European Social Fund, rather than the larger figure of 99,773 that represents the total number of learners who participated.

ESF Performance against Targets

4.20 Performance against the key ESF targets and output indicators, for the whole programme, is set out in Table 4.6. The programme exceeded all ESF targets with the exception of Level 2 qualifications (only narrowly missed) and older people.

4.21 In terms of participant indicators, 125 per cent of targeted participants were recruited and 105 per cent of the target participants gained qualifications.

4.22 During the period of the ESF project the Welsh Government identified apprenticeships as critical to support economic recovery. It secured additional funding to enable the recruitment of additional apprentices. Consequently, targets in the Business Plan have been exceeded.

Table 4.6: Performance against the revised ESF convergence targets

Indicators	Target	Actual	Percentage of target achieved
Total Participants	29,671	37,161	125
Total Participants Gaining Qualifications	19,880	20,864	105
Total Participants Entering Further Education	55	219	398
Output indicators			
Participants Gaining Level 2 qualifications	12,922	12,789	99
Participants Gaining Level 3 qualifications	4,970	6,760	136
Participants Gaining Level 4 and above qualifications	397	413	104
Work limiting health condition or disability	1,866	2,670	143
Older Participants (55+)	2,124	1,824	86
BME Participants	498	664	133
Female Participants	16,541	20,681	125

Sources: Welsh Government POR (Impact Indicator) Report
Welsh Government, WEFO Business Plan v1.3 April 2014

Participants Entering Further Learning

4.23 Small numbers of participants entered further learning and most participants maintained their employment. A total of 219 ESF Convergence learners entered further education following their apprenticeship (1 per cent). The target for participants entering further learning was more than achieved. The original Business Plan targets were 1259 however these were over profiled therefore in the Supplementary Business Plan submitted in March 2014 the target was amended to 55.

Migrant Learners

4.24 A total of 629 ESF Convergence learners were migrants from European Union and non-European Union countries (2 per cent of all participants). There was little difference between the proportion of learners who were migrants in ESF Convergence areas compared with Competitiveness areas.

Female Learners

4.25 A total of 20,681 ESF Convergence participants were female (56 per cent of all participants, just ahead of the Business Plan proportion of 55.75 per cent). The proportions were almost the same for ESF Convergence areas (56 per cent) compared with Competitiveness areas (57 per cent).

Older Learners

4.26 A total of 1,824 ESF Convergence participants were aged 55 or over (3 per cent of all participants, under half the Business Plan target proportion of 7.16 per cent). There was no difference between the proportion of learners who were migrants in ESF Convergence areas compared with Competitiveness areas.

Disabled Learners

4.27 A total of 2,670 ESF Convergence participants were disabled (7 per cent of all participants, just above the target proportion of 6.3 per cent). The proportions were the same for ESF Convergence areas compared with Competitiveness areas. This is broadly in line with the population in general.

Black and Minority Ethnic Learners

4.28 A total of 664 ESF Convergence participants were from black and minority ethnic groups (2 per cent of all participants, above the target proportion of 1.68 per cent). A higher proportion of learners were from black and minority ethnic groups in Competitiveness areas (6 per cent) compared with ESF Convergence areas. This is slightly lower than might be expected across the population in Wales. This is above the Business Plan Target of 1.68%

Prior Qualifications

4.29 The spread of prior qualifications was broadly similar, but overall slightly lower in ESF Convergence areas compared with Competitiveness areas (Table 4.7) with no more than two percentage point differences, except that there were more with below NQF Level 2 prior qualifications in the ESF Convergence areas (25 per cent) than Competitiveness areas (22 per cent).

Table 4.7: Learners' previous qualifications

Prior Qualifications	Percentage of all learners	Percentage of all learners Convergence	Percentage of all learners Non-ESF	Percentage point difference Convergence to Non-ESF
None	*	*	*	0
Below NQF level 2	24	25	22	+3
At NQF level 2	46	47	46	+1
At NQF level 3	20	20	20	0
At NQF level 4-6	9	8	10	-2
At NQF level 7-8	1	*	1	-1
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	

Source: Welsh Government POR (Impact Indicator) Report
Bases: Total=5,503; ESF Convergence=3,931; Non-ESF=1,572.
Note *=less than 1 per cent but more than zero
Notes: Percentage point differences do not sum to zero due to rounding.

Qualifications Gained

4.30 In terms of qualifications gained, 12,789 ESF Convergence participants (61 per cent) achieved at NQF Level 2. This was very similar between Competitiveness areas (60 per cent) compared with ESF Convergence areas. A total of 6,760 ESF Convergence participants gained an NQF Level 3 (32 per cent). The proportion was the same for Competitiveness areas. Only 413 ESF Convergence participants (2 per cent) gained a qualification at Level 4 and above.

Participant Location

4.31 The location of ESF Convergence participants was broadly in line with the spread of the working population across local authorities (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8: WCA participants by local authority compared with those in employment, 2011-2014

Local Authority	Number of learners ESF Convergence	Number of learners Competi-tiveness	Percentage of WCA learners	Percentage of working population	Percentage point difference
Blaenau Gwent	1,750	0	3	2	+1
Bridgend	2,513	0	4	5	-1
Caerphilly	3,931	0	6	6	0
Carmarthen	2,990	0	5	6	-1
Ceredigion	1,147	0	2	2	0
Conwy	2,401	0	4	4	0
Denbighshire	1,962	0	3	3	0
Gwynedd	2,207	0	4	4	0
Isle of Anglesey	1,251	0	2	2	0
Merthyr Tydfil	1,251	0	2	2	0
Neath Port Talbot	2,557	0	4	4	0
Pembrokeshire	2,293	0	4	4	0
Rhondda Cynon Taff	4,650	0	8	8	0
Swansea	3,879	0	6	8	-2
Torfaen	2,271	0	4	3	+1
Cardiff	0	7,103	12	13	-1
Flintshire	0	3,396	6	5	+1
Monmouthshire	0	1,596	3	3	0
Newport	0	3,320	5	5	0
Powys	0	2,237	4	5	-1
Vale of Glamorgan	0	2,523	4	4	0
Wrexham	0	3,155	5	5	0
Total	**37,161**	**23,330**	**100**	**100**	**0**

Source: WEFO European Funding Claim Reports

Note: Those in employment from Annual Population Survey / Local Labour Force Survey summary of economic activity, Aged 16 to 64, year ending 30 Jun 2014. This included people who are either in employment or ILO unemployed. This included employees, self-employed, people on government supported training and employment programmes, and unpaid family workers.

Summary

4.32 The total number of unique learners between August 2011 and December 2014 was 99,775.

4.33 Annual apprenticeship learner programme numbers had risen to 54,350 in the academic year 2013/14 but fell by 11 per cent in 2014/15 to 48,335. Numbers of programmes fell in foundation apprenticeships by 21 per cent and apprenticeships (L3) by 13 per cent; although higher apprenticeship programmes rose by 47 per cent.

4.34 The biggest sectoral change was the increase in share of apprenticeship programmes in Health Care and Public Services (increased from 30 per cent in 2011/12 to 35 per cent in 2013/14).

4.35 Generally learners had a prior qualification equal to or higher than their level of study when compared with the level of learning that they were working towards.

4.36 Generally, apprenticeship success rates have been rising and are high at 84 per cent. Success rates among HAs were measurably lower at 67 per cent (although there were some data quality concerns with a small number of providers). Average success rates did not fall below 80 per cent by sector; although some sectors achieved success rates as high as 95 per cent. Success rates by provider indicated a variation in performance, for example by 18 percentage points for foundation apprenticeships.

4.37 The programme exceeded all ESF targets with the exception of Level 2 qualifications (only narrowly missed) and older people.

4.38 Just over half of all participants (51 per cent) achieved a qualification (although this may rise as some apprentices are still in learning).

4.39 Just over two-fifths of participants (61 per cent) were from Convergence areas of Wales and 68 per cent of all participants achieving qualifications were from Convergence areas. The proportion of Convergence participants who gained qualifications was also higher (56 per cent) than those in Competitiveness areas (43 per cent).

4.40 Performance against cross cutting themes included:

- Over performance against targets for participants with a work limiting health condition or disability (143 per cent of target), BME participants (133 per cent of target) and female participants (125 per cent of target).

- Slight underperformance against the target for older participants (86 per cent of target of those aged over 55).

5 Stakeholder/Provider Perspectives

5.1 This section sets out the perspectives of stakeholders and providers in terms of overall perceptions, recruitment, delivery employer engagement, Welsh language, gender stereotypes, contract management and other similar programmes.

Overall Perceptions of apprenticeships

Demand and Understanding

5.2 Overall, the demand for apprenticeships was regarded by all stakeholders and providers as consistently high and the programme was believed to be gaining credibility:

- 'Apprenticeships are now vogue.'

- 'Everyone including professional bodies are now talking about apprenticeships.'

- 'Apprenticeships have been improving and have become well established.'

- 'Traditionally it has not been common to say that apprenticeships are equitable with other qualifications, however we have moved on from apprenticeships being delivered in a portakabin round the back of a main building'.

- 'What we've got in Wales is a good product' that has been promoted to both employers and participants effectively.

- 'Overall demand for apprenticeships was strong, and has been consistent over the duration of the 2011-14 period'.

- 'There has been quite a lot of demand for apprenticeships', so much so that the company couldn't fulfil it in terms of funded training.

- 'The consortium has successfully applied for an increase in funding in order to deliver a number of apprenticeships over their original target, but this was still not enough to meet demand'.

5.3 As one stakeholder explained, 'apprenticeships are now better understood. At one time there was too much direct comparison with apprenticeships in the 60's and 70's.'

5.4 There was unanimous agreement that the WBL programme generally fitted in well with wider Welsh Government policy objectives and also met local training needs. All providers understood the reasons for the policy change towards 16-24 year olds, although some felt that this had had a major impact on their business model and they had undergone a period of restructuring in terms of the staff skills required.

5.5 Some providers explained that this has left an unmet demand at the older age group, stating that, 'we have a waiting list of over 25s wanting to start apprenticeships'.

5.6 There remain concerns about parents' knowledge of apprenticeships. Some providers and stakeholders think this is improving while others feel that parents' understanding has remained at a low level with the resulting impact of poor advice to young people.

5.7 In one provider, informal feedback from tutors indicated that apprenticeships in hairdressing became more popular when there were shows about it on BBC3. This suggests that demand for apprenticeships may be sensitive to perceptions in popular culture.

5.8 There were mixed views about how informed employers were. Ranging from one provider who said 'employers were generally not well informed about WBL with more information and promotion needed'. Through to others who thought that employers' understanding of apprenticeships had improved, citing increased demand and interest. A key challenge for providers was getting to know what the employers wanted out of an apprenticeship. One provider said that outlining the employer's roles and responsibilities in the whole process was the key to a successful relationship.

5.9 One provider encountered a few scenarios where employers did not fully understand or were not fully aware that the student they had taken on was on a full apprenticeship, and therefore were unsighted on what was required of them.

5.10 Some providers said there was a clearer feeling that employers were buying in to the programme and seeing it as part of their development of future staff, although a minority of employers were felt to be more motivated by access to publicly funded training.

5.11 There was a sense that employers can get confused between all the different schemes and funding sources available (this is discussed further below).

5.12 One provider sensed that A-level students were increasingly put off by the idea of student debt, and as a result choose to go down the apprenticeship route rather than going to university.

Higher apprenticeships

5.13 Providers argued that there were a number of benefits identified that were associated with the emerging higher apprenticeships. These included that:

- Higher level apprenticeships sent positive signals throughout an employer organisation that investing in staff development was a good thing.

- Higher level apprenticeships had probably engaged some employers that would not traditionally have taken apprentices on.

5.14 There was evidence that higher level apprenticeships may, to some extent, be seen as the 'only option left' for providers to support the over 25s'. This, combined with the provider perception that Welsh Government were keen on them promoting HAs, was leading to some concerns that the programme should not try to encourage people down the higher route if, in practice, it was not for them or their employer.

5.15 Some provider responses indicated that there was some deadweight associated with higher level apprenticeships where some people were effectively going down this route when they might have otherwise done an HNC anyway. This was because there was a financial incentive for employers to take the higher apprenticeship route rather than a HNC.

5.16 There is some evidence higher apprenticeships have not been as successful to date; with lower success rates (but with caution needed with regard to this data due to apparent data quality issues for a small number of learning providers). This is generally attributed to many learners not being aware of the extra demands of the work that were required to be undertaken. Learners did not always have opportunities to undertake the relevant learning in the appropriate learning environment. Employers need to fully understand the requirements and providers need to be clear about what is required (there were risks that they may have been over sold in some cases by providers).

Schools

5.17 There remain concerns that schools were not providing sufficient impartial information to young people to enable them to make informed choices about apprenticeships compared with other options. The following examples indicate the range of views:

- 'Learners were enrolling on different courses and schemes immediately after leaving school, before deciding to start apprenticeships at a later date.'

- 'There remains major resistance to providing impartial advice and guidance especially in 11 – 18 year old schools. In 11 – 16 year old schools there is less of an issue.'

- 'A major challenge is schools where lots of teachers don't understand how apprenticeships work.'

- 'A major challenge is to get access to the young people to tell them about apprenticeships.'

5.18 One provider said they had drawn on their experience of delivering traineeships by sharing experiences of 'proactively engaging with schools and Careers Wales' amongst consortia members. They regarded this as part of the CPD of key individuals involved in the consortium.

5.19 Some providers still feel that there is a fundamental need for the statutory education system to better equip young people with basic skills to enable apprenticeships to focus on 'up-skilling rather than remedial work'.

Recruitment of apprentices

5.20 Stakeholders were of the view that the main forms of recruitment channels into apprenticeships have been as follows:

- From the apprenticeship Matching Service (AMS) website hosted by CareersWales.com.

- Through direct recruitment by employers/providers.

- Through conversion of existing staff to an apprenticeship.

5.21 The evidence gathered via the qualitative interviews suggested that the relationship between Careers Wales and providers was somewhat variable particularly in terms of the robustness of the matching process linking candidates to apprenticeship opportunities. For instance, the following feedback was received;

- The links between training providers and Careers Wales 'have worked quite well but the processes weren't always up to standard' – in terms of candidates applying for inappropriate roles.

- 'In terms of links with Careers Wales we had good links with various offices, but the relationship had been hampered by staff changes within Careers Wales'.

5.22 Providers' views of the AMS system were generally critical, with a sense of dissatisfaction:

- 'I used the AMS system to advertise apprenticeship vacancies, but found that the number of referrals provided via this system was often poor.'

- 'Only a small percentage of learners had been referred through AMS.'

- 'The AMS system is clunky at best.'

- 'AMS tends to hold apprenticeships that can't generally be filled for example: Retail and Customer Services, Mechanics, Hair and Beauty.'

5.23 However, there was a sense of high expectations on both sides and a lack of alignment of expectations between Careers Wales and providers. For example, Careers Wales felt that providers did not maintain their data completely, did not follow all agreed protocols and did not include all opportunities. From the providers' perspective AMS was not a very fruitful source of candidates, was not as user-friendly as it could be and they felt Careers Wales did not do enough to promote opportunities (although it is not clear that was their full responsibility) or to ensure learners attended (although it is not clear they had responsibility for ensuring attendance of young people).

5.24 For example, a provider advertised for apprentices for an industry-based apprenticeship via AMS, but when they invited applicants to attend an interview many of them failed to show up. Careers Wales suspected that young people tended not to read their emails. As such, they have been considering whether there are ways to communicate and prompt people via text message or similar to encourage better attendance levels. It would seem sensible to maximise opportunities to encourage individuals to attend through this type of approach.

5.25 Careers Wales reported increased applications through AMS from 2011-2014, although there was a decline during 2014-15.

5.26 Stakeholders and providers agree that many opportunities, especially for perceived 'better apprenticeships', do not reach AMS, because the employer/provider used their own website/proformas for application. This feeds the perception by young people that it did not contain a wider variety of sector/job roles, which erodes the idea that it is a one-stop-shop for apprenticeship opportunities.

5.27 One of the grumbles young people reported to providers was that they did not get feedback when a job was evaluated. For example, all those individuals who have been unsuccessful sometimes do not learn that the apprenticeship has been taken and they were not successful. This is because the providers do not complete some of the fields which confirm and communicate back to the young people that someone has been successful. This situation was contrasted by Careers Wales with the situation of Jobs Growth Wales, where providers needed to close vacancies to achieve their funding, which created a clear motivation.

5.28 One suggestion was that the provision could be incorporated into something else, perhaps Jobcentre Plus. Another was that providers could operate a more effective system based on some of their current websites, which advertise apprenticeship opportunities.

5.29 This discussion quickly leads into the consideration about the need for an effective brokerage system. Concerns were raised that sometimes employers (including government agencies) have enquiries and questions about how to set up an apprenticeship scheme but do not know where to go and struggled to find information. An example was given of an enquiry to NTFW where, for transparency reasons, the best response was to email all relevant providers and let them contact an employer; which is not ideal from an employer point of view, with no clear handover from the initial enquiry. One stakeholder contrasted the approach in Wales with Scotland where apprenticeships are run by an agency who used a Facebook style of communication which was considered much more youth friendly.

Delivery

Initial assessment

5.30 For most of the funding period of 2011-2014 providers and stakeholders believe that the initial assessment process has worked well: 'it has helped establish the needs of the learner, especially around essential skills'.

5.31 Although there was a mixed reaction to the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST), which had been piloted towards the end of the funding period, there had been optimism that it would become an effective assessment with clear alignment to the Welsh context. However, some providers felt that it was not operating effectively: 'it takes one and half hours for each subject. This can result in four and half hours of assessment. This is not working effectively.' One provider explained that 'learners had started to realise that if they make sufficient mistakes then the test will end more quickly'.

Ongoing support

5.32 Careers Wales identified that in a small number of instances, there were some process issues including young people complaining that nobody monitors what they were doing and a perception that there were no tutors present and that they were being allowed to go home early from provision. In some instances, where they heard about this, Careers Wales flagged up such issues directly to providers. To their knowledge in most instances it was then dealt with.

Delivering essential skills

5.33 Stakeholders noted that delivery of essential skills was best done in a contextualised approach so that it did not appear too separate or patronising to participants. One example mentioned by a number of stakeholders and providers was to integrate essential skills delivery 'by stealth' along with European Skills Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) elements.

5.34 One stakeholder raised the issue of staff competence and confidence: 'Often in WBL providers staff were employed because they were subject confident but did not necessarily have high levels of skills in Maths and English themselves'. This highlighted the importance of staff development and CPD.

Workplace Support

5.35 The different structures of WBL providers ranged from large colleges to relatively small private providers and resulted in different approaches to workplace support. For example in larger organisations the apprentice might have trainers and assessors that were separate individuals. Whereas, smaller providers had apprenticeship staff who act as both trainers and assessors, so one person does everything.

5.36 Some of the changes in learner profile and sectoral focus mentioned above meant that staff competency requirements changed significantly within some provider organisations. For example, staff with competencies in sectors like care had been made redundant, while providers were looking to recruit additional staff in areas such as ICT, professional services and accountancy.

Employer engagement

5.37 Providers and stakeholders tended to agree that employer responsiveness improved over the four year period: 'We've been more demand responsive under WBL4 than we were under WBL3'

5.38 There were examples of providers identifying and developing solutions in particular sectors. For example, demand for veterinary nursing emerged over the course of the programme and one provider established a new apprenticeships to meet this need.

5.39 Providers had different job roles that provided a form of account management to employers. For example, one consortium used dedicated Employer Liaison Officers, in addition to assessors and tutors to deal with any issues raised by employers.

5.40 Stakeholders felt that some clear trends emerged relating to sectors of training, but were also subsequently affected by the policy move to prioritise the younger age group. However, providers' experiences varied across sectors. Increases in demand had been experienced across the following areas according to providers:

- Training in social care had been 'particularly popular' over the programme period.

- A large demand for apprenticeships has been experienced in newly created areas such as the Creative Industries sector ('very successful'), Financial Services ('in which we have seen a dramatic increase recently'), L3 and L4 Business Administration and 'traditional' apprenticeships in Construction, Plumbing, Electric.

- In terms of where the growth (demand side) for higher level apprenticeships was coming from, then health and social care sector as one primary example.

- Schools were another example – where one provider said that higher level apprenticeships could now support teachers in their preparations to eventually become heads.

- There is perceived to have been a consistent demand for apprenticeships in the Hair and Beauty sector. In fact, as one provider noted, 'employers are actually looking for people to do apprenticeships'.

5.41 This indicates some newer sectors, especially related to higher apprenticeships, where approaches to career development were really changing.

5.42 Stakeholders also gave their views as to sectors that were in decline in terms of apprenticeship up-take. Views expressed here included that:

- L2 Business Administration and Health and Social Care, which although data indicates has been expanding, providers observed a reduction due to fewer people aged over 25 now permitted under the new contract.

- Demand decreased in the construction sector. One provider experienced a significant drop in demand for specialised heavy plant training linked to the recession.

5.43 Some sectors raised particular challenges according to providers, for example:

- Construction training proved a bit problematic in terms of drop out for some providers.

- Local employers in the construction sector were generally unable to commit to a two year apprenticeship. This was because they did not tend to work on large scale contracts and, if they did, they only acted as sub-contractors for a specific amount of time. This instability meant they were unable to commit to taking on an apprentice for such a length of time.

- In the care sector there was a lot of pressure, people often entered with the best intentions, but then tended to drop out from the pressure of the work and level of income.

5.44 There was a unique situation in the construction sector where a number of providers have contracts to deliver apprenticeships. The sector focused provider (CITB) had used up their allocation under the apprenticeship contract and were looking for other providers to pick up excess demand. However, employers were reluctant to use other providers due to additional benefits/'cash incentives' they anticipated from CITB linked to the levy operating in that industry. This inertia meant that other providers were struggling to recruit employers.

5.45 On the specific subject of higher apprenticeships a few stakeholders and providers expressed concern that HAs might be having the effect of trying to force some employees into more senior roles than they really want to undertake. So, for instance:

> *'Many of the apprenticeship participants we see are 'operator level' staff. To do a higher apprenticeship, these people would need to have an element of supervisory role within their jobs. Some people simply do not want to go down that route and so, care is needed to be taken before promoting higher level apprenticeships with such people.'*

5.46 This raises concerns about the effectiveness of how providers outline the challenges and benefits of HAs to employers and also questions the effectiveness of initial assessment and ILP completion.

Changing employers' attitudes

5.47 Providers identified a number of longer-term benefits in respect of employers' attitudes.

5.48 Providers felt that higher level apprenticeships had probably engaged some employers that would not have traditionally taken apprentices on. This suggests that progress has been made to encourage more employers to invest in training in the future.

5.49 One provider felt that even though there had been decline in demand in the care sector, there was a legacy of more commitment from employers, who recognised the need for the staff to have qualifications and to progress.

5.50 An example was cited by one provider that a large international company in South Wales had recently changed its recruitment practices to be based around apprentices rather than graduates.

Performance and progression

5.51 In terms of progression, some providers thought that 'technical' types of apprenticeships, such as those in electrical installation and plumbing, attracted candidates with more of an interest in progressing.

5.52 However, there was a sense that not all learners in all sectors wanted or needed to progress immediately between levels:

> *'Many learners in carpentry who, once they had successfully completed their L2 apprenticeship, were in no rush to progress. However, they often returned to complete their L3 apprenticeship after a few years working when they realised the qualification would be useful when setting up their own business.'*

5.53 This was re-enforced by another stakeholder: 'There are some sectors where Level 2 is all you really need and therefore the Level 2 apprenticeship is sufficient. This is true in sectors such as construction, catering and health and social care'.

Competition

5.54 There was a concern by stakeholders and some providers that competition between providers, even within consortia arrangements, might be complicating the landscape from an employer perspective. (This is explored further below).

Employer satisfaction

5.55 Providers generally felt that employers were satisfied with the provision. Where problems arose, providers felt this was generally related to communication, such as providers not notifying employers when participants did not turn up to college on day release, one provider admitted 'we're not as consistent as we could be on this'.

5.56 An important part of satisfying employers was to manage expectations. The following example illustrated how an agreement can help achieve this:

'In order to ensure a successful apprenticeship, and ensure employers provide effective support to participants, expectations are made clear from the start and all three parties (trainee, employer and provider) sign a programme agreement – it's like an SLA in effect'.

5.57 Some relationships that had been built up via the apprenticeship programme had led to some very positive outcomes, such as, a business receiving wider business support from a provider around improving research and development. In addition, some positive examples in both the engineering and food production sectors had evolved, where knowledge transfer partnership (KTP) activity had emerged as a direct result of relationships that had developed from the apprenticeship provision.

Rurality

5.58 There was a spread of views on the implications of rurality among those who provided delivery in rural areas. From those who believed that it was not a major issue to those that felt it had a major impact due to increased costs and constraints on the range of delivery:

- In rural areas learners were accepting of the fact they had to travel to get to work.

- In some locations apprenticeships also use a lot of e-learning resources, which are not affected by location.

- Rurality was not considered a major issue for three providers. However, for another it was considered a massive issue because of the distance you have to cover to reach remote areas. Key barriers relate to the lack of connectivity and poor public transport links. Moreover, if apprentices need to do off-site learning, a key question for any provider is where to locate their centre.

5.59 One provider explained that servicing rural areas was much more expensive than urban areas, and in reality, this meant that delivering on an all-Wales basis was the only way the contract as a whole could be viable (i.e. the lower cost of servicing urban areas being used to off-set the higher costs of servicing rural areas).

5.60 There was a concern expressed by one provider that other providers seemed to be 'concentrating their resources on where the demand was' meaning that in more deprived areas where more effort had to be put into 'selling' apprenticeships, there may be less of a concerted effort. They argued that Welsh Government should be keeping a 'very close eye' on spatial coverage and distribution of apprenticeships to assess whether and to what extent this intensified competition in areas of high demand might be distorting levels of up-take in other areas (and potentially disadvantaging some learner groups).

5.61 Some providers explained that it was difficult to recruit assessors in some areas – Powys in particular. That meant more travelling for assessors to get to learners, which was not a good thing because the preference was always to 'try and maximise the time assessors spend with learners'. Another said that Assessors had to travel further to see learners, which meant they had lower case-loads and were therefore less efficient than they would be in areas where learners and assessors are in closer proximity. One provider had experimented with e-portfolios to try to overcome this issue, but in practice the quality of broadband connectivity was not good enough to make this properly viable.

Welsh Language

5.62 Providers generally agreed that there was minimal demand for apprenticeships in the Welsh language. All providers said they promoted learning through the medium of Welsh. Many said their documentation was bilingual.

5.63 It was estimated by Welsh Government stakeholders that bilingual provision had grown from around 2 per cent of provision to around 4 per cent between 2011 and 2015; some stakeholders regarded this as good progress, others felt that, compared with 11 per cent of the population[9] speaking Welsh fluently, this was low.

5.64 The reasons given by providers for saying there was 'minimal demand' for Welsh language provision included their own perceptions and their perceptions of learners' reasons:

- Many work environments were English speaking.

- Lack of take up by learners.

- Learners' low confidence when it comes to Welsh language skills (particularly written).

- A lack of resources (although some did not think this was a problem).

- Lack of opportunity to practise use of Welsh outside of a college/work environment.

- Technical terms used in apprenticeships often have no Welsh equivalents, and thus participants and employers constantly have to revert to English and see no point in using Welsh.

- Lack of relevant jobs requesting Welsh speakers as an essential requirement.

- Not all awarding bodies make available their apprenticeship standards in Welsh.

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[9]Welsh language use survey http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-language-use-survey/?lang=en

5.65 One provider explained that 'even those [learners] who have done their secondary education in Welsh medium schools opt out of doing their apprenticeships in Welsh'. Another explained that in their view demand for Welsh was more about being able to accommodate the 'one to one' sessions between assessors and learners (i.e. verbal, conversational Welsh) than it was about apprentices wanting to complete written assessment material in Welsh.

5.66 Some of the consequences and responses to this situation were:

- The fact that many providers had limited number of bilingual assessors available sometimes dictated what training they were able to offer. While they all offered apprenticeships through the medium of Welsh, sometimes they had to pass a learner over to another training provider as they did not have a bilingual subject assessor in that subject area.

- Taking a blended approach to the Welsh language – promoting bi-lingualism through a combined use of Welsh and English rather than aiming to have all the provision delivered through the medium of Welsh. For example, enabling apprentices to talk in Welsh with their assessors if they so wished but to undertake their assessment/course work in English if this was their preferred option. A number of providers used this 'blended approach', but emphasised that the learner choice takes primacy.

- One provider sensed that 'apprentices often played down their Welsh language skills so as to avoid doing their apprenticeship through the medium of Welsh'.

- Investing in producing additional Welsh learning resources (i.e. podcasts, audio clips).

- An example in a retail context involved a provider paying for and deploying a simultaneous interpreter to assess someone in the retail sector because all the dealings would have been in Welsh. The English-speaking assessor needed to understand what was going on in order to be able to assess effectively.

- One provider undertook an internal assessment to consider whether existing staff with Welsh language skills could be trained up but this had not really helped increase numbers. In general, it was identified that Welsh speakers 'lacked confidence' in their Welsh language abilities.

5.67 Those providers that indicated the proportion of Welsh-speaking staff they employed tended to have proportions that exceed what might be expected compared with the local population. This suggests that they were able to recruit Welsh-speaking staff. However, other providers said it was difficult to recruit appropriately qualified Welsh speaking staff.

5.68 A lack of appropriately skilled staff (most providers had a limited number of bilingual assessors available) was linked to two main issues: difficulties in recruiting staff and lack of critical mass to justify recruiting bilingual experts. For example, 'it is very challenging to recruit Welsh speakers that have a combination of the necessary academic skills and competence in specific apprenticeship subjects ….they are very hard to get hold of'. Particular subject areas mentioned were bricklaying and IT.

5.69 Some providers felt that they encouraged learners to participate in Welsh and had to be very proactive. To the point that one provider said, 'in a few instances, there was probably a bit of pressure being applied by the employer to encourage the apprentice to undergo their training through the medium of Welsh when in practice their preference would have been to do it in English'.

5.70 One provider said that most of the demand for Welsh-medium learning was coming from public sector employers who had either Welsh Language Schemes in place or were being required to comply with the Welsh Language Commissioner's new Welsh Language Standards.

5.71 More recent development initiatives by the Welsh Government are recognised by some providers as helping to make improvements. For example, one provider explained that 'the effectiveness of the system in terms of Welsh language provision has been in the spotlight recently, which has led to improvements. The introduction of Welsh Government's WBL4 Action Plans is assisting with this.'

5.72 One provider felt that due to the lack of critical mass within individual providers, establishing mechanisms for support between providers was needed, through which best practice could be shared and resources pooled.

Addressing Gender Stereotyping

5.73 All providers were aware of the importance of addressing gender stereotyping, however, there was not a great deal of evidence of proactive responses or challenging employers.

5.74 Stakeholders observed that providers had been trying to address stereotyping. For example, using provider open days, creating open access to opportunities. Although, there remain 'many traditional patterns to be challenged'. One provider noted Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) resources that were available to employers as part of all apprenticeships.

5.75 One provider had been setting themselves targets for females and ethnic minority groups. They undertook activity within schools, with a careers team, and try to encourage a wider group of young people to consider working in sectors such as construction.

5.76 One provider accepted that they could probably do more, 'we've all been guilty of doing it tokenistically' and in reality, more advice and support was probably given to participants in non-traditional roles for their gender once they were in their placement in order to ensure an open environment. They went on to say 'it is promoted by training providers – just not a great deal'.

Contract management

Welsh Government

5.77 There were mixed views on the Welsh Government's management of the apprenticeship element of the WBL programme for 2011-2014 among providers. These ranged from those that thought the management of the programme had improved from the previous round to those who felt that it had not improved sufficiently.

5.78 In terms of the relationship between Welsh Government and providers, most thought that it had improved from a very remote/email based approach (providers understood this was linked to financial constraints) to one where some face to face and named contacts existed. Most recognised that the Welsh Government had been trying to improve the approach. However, a few still wanted more direct contact and some were critical of too many changes over time, due to staff turnover, and said they did not have a contract manager.

5.79 Those who were critical pointed out the following areas that required improvement:

- Notification of funding allocations for the forthcoming year always came too late, making it very difficult to plan activity when training providers had already set their budgets. It was suggested financial allocations should be made on a 24 or 36 month basis to allow for longer term planning by the training providers.

- One provider explained that their contract value is never sufficient and they could always deliver more.

- One provider explained that it is a bit too easy for other providers to say they can deliver certain route ways and then it turns out they cannot.

- Changes implemented by the Welsh Government from year to year can be passed on to providers 'very late in the day', and often require clarification so 'direct communication becomes important'.

- The main change seen in the 2011-14 WBL programme was the reduction in prime contractors and the expansion of the consortium approach, thus transferring a lot of the management workload from the Welsh Government to lead partners.

- The specification for WBL 4 did not adequately set out the monitoring and administration work that providers would have to undertake. One provider argued that this burden had increased significantly over the past few years

– mainly as a result of various rules and requirements driven by ESF funding being 'ramped up'.

- Sub-contractors found it inconvenient at times that they could not go direct to Welsh Government with any issues or queries, and had to go through the lead partner. This process tended to result in time delays.

- Loss of information – one provider said that they had several instances of information going 'missing' in the online portal used to submit their claims via the data centre in Bristol, that manages the claims and reporting activity. This had resulted in lost funds for the company, and remained an ongoing issue to be resolved.

5.80 Those that were positive noted the following areas:

- In terms of design and delivery, 'not much changed from WBL2 to WBL3, which was fine with us'.

- The central WBL team in the Welsh Government had been reduced over the course of the programme and was generally understaffed, but still 'we always find them very efficient'.

- Systems and structures in place had been 'fairly effective'. The central Welsh Government team had been 'really approachable' and were 'able to provide support if needed'.

- Consistency across different training providers, especially in terms of the standards they worked to, was perceived to have improved over time, partly due to support provided by the central WBL team in the form of training and CPD.

- Consistency over time. One provider that also delivers in England observed that the Welsh Government had been particularly successful because they had not changed what they called 'the mechanics' of the apprenticeship, such as the process and the paperwork. They thought this consistency was a positive for employers and learners in Wales.

5.81 Suggestions for improvements going forward included:

- Ongoing monitoring and audit of training provision across the board – 'it needs to be beefed up'.

- Greater transparency – it was felt that while the Welsh Government informed all providers of programme underperformance, they did not highlight which provider/consortium to others, which in turn made it 'very difficult to do anything to counteract this underspend' – effectively the providers felt that they 'had to figure it out amongst themselves'.

- Providers said they collectively needed to 'own up' to under-utilisation of resources promptly so that they could be re-allocated to other providers.

Provider level

5.82 Most providers who led consortia arrangements felt their systems had improved, but a number of challenges had needed to be address over the past four years.

5.83 Challenges included:

- The new approach had created 'an added issue in terms of keeping partners happy'.

- The consortia approach was perceived to make it harder to get rid of contractors who were underperforming, as one provider explained 'when the lead partner tries to manage the situation and implement a performance management system the contractor can simply appeal to the Welsh Government'.

- Lack of a real consortium feel: 'the relationship with the other training providers as very much a contractor and sub-contractor-type relationship'.

- The lead partner has to take on a large share of the contract management that had traditionally been done by Welsh Government.

5.84 Some of the identified benefits of the consortia approach included:

- Being able to offer 'a more diverse package' of training to participants, and enabling providers to meet the needs of differing learner groups due to its nature.

- A culture of 'interaction, collaboration and cooperation has developed'.

- Training providers had helped each other out to maximise the contract value and ensure no underspend, with the example given of three automotive engineering apprenticeship providers 'lending' each other learners to fill courses. This approach was also seen as beneficial for participants, and there had been no underspend in their WBL contract largely due to this transparency.

- The consortium approach was perceived by one WBL provider as an advantage in that, being led by a large, local college, they were seen as more 'local' with a strong 'heritage'.

5.85 Aspects of good practice identified included:

- Monthly meetings between all contractors.

- Quarterly reviews with sub-contractors.

- Quarterly meetings with representatives from all providers to discuss quality assurance, progress updates and to share good practice.

- Contact and support from NTFW.

- Proactive sharing of knowledge and good practice with regards to working with the 'harder' group that the policy focus on under 25s had entailed.

5.86 The NTFW operational management group was regarded by many providers as very helpful for getting a handle on communications and sharing best practice.

5.87 On the subject of competition there were mixed views. Some providers felt there was no internal competition within their group of sub-contractors, while others recognised there was. Some stakeholders were very aware of competition which they felt raised questions about efficiency, value of consortia and risks to employer relations. However, stakeholders also saw that benefits of competition might include more attention to service quality and delivery.

5.88 Probably the biggest issue was underspend. Some providers were not highlighting under-spend or under-utilisation at an early enough stage. This limited the opportunity of re-deployment within the consortium and across all providers. Almost all providers felt other providers were not doing this effectively. Some lead providers recognised that they needed to be better at managing this across their consortium while other lead providers felt that the Welsh Government had a responsibility at the all Wales level to avoid the problem between consortia. The key question for the Welsh Government is how to achieve the right balance between freedom to consortia and their overarching role to monitor and intervene.

5.89 Although a given provider wants the Welsh Government to sort out all the other consortia, we suspect they would be resistant and critical if they were the subject of such intervention.

5.90 However, on balance it would seem that the Welsh Government need to have a closer eye on monitoring and challenging consortia to avoid underspend. The problem is that changes need to be made early enough for other providers to respond to additional contract value. The main choices for Welsh Government are to go on past performance (which is not always a predictor of future performance), use some form of penalties to stimulate speedier release of allocation or to use some other method of ascertaining the likelihood of a given provider to deliver their allocation.

Other programmes

5.91 A number of issues had been experienced over the four year period relating to JGW[10] and YRP[11].

Jobs Growth Wales

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[10] Jobs Growth Wales is a 6 month fully funded, employed status programme for 16 – 24 years olds who are unemployed or working less than 16hrs per week.

[11] The Young Recruits Programme offers financial support to businesses offering apprenticeships to people aged 16-24 in the form of a contribution towards wage costs of apprentices.

5.92 Stakeholders identified some inefficiency in the route some participants were taking through the system:

> *'It is not uncommon to see graduates moving on to Jobs Growth Wales and then an apprenticeship as a route into employment. This is clearly not a good idea for the individual or for society in terms of excessive spending on the education of young people'.*

5.93 Some providers felt that JGW was skewing some potential participants away from apprenticeships while others perceived it to be filtering appropriately:

- One provider explained that linkages between JGW and apprenticeships were not that clear cut, 'quite a high proportion of JGW beneficiaries were post-graduates (i.e. they had first degrees) and for many of these (and their employers) the key focus was about gaining work experience and fulfilling the job' – not necessarily signing up to an apprenticeship.

- Another provider felt that JGW had often attracted learners who had been initially considering apprenticeships.

5.94 Conversely, another provider saw Jobs Growth Wales as 'complimentary' to apprenticeships, 'Jobs Growth Wales had really proven itself not least because it had engaged micro enterprises and convinced them to take staff on for the first time'.

5.95 A more general critique was that programmes such as JGW and YRP did not promote the development of skills sufficiently, 'you're not putting funding into skills - with these schemes the financial incentive to be able to take on staff at subsidised wage rates was the main attraction for many employers'. However, the interim evaluation of JGW found it had helped with skills development.

5.96   In an example from another provider, there was concern that the requirement for Jobs Growth Wales leavers to enrol on apprenticeships, within a certain timescale, in order for it to qualify as progression, created risks to programme delivery. In the opinion of one JGW provider: 'Inevitably learners were rushed onto courses, which could have knock-on effects in terms of attainment and progression'. However, it should be noted that participants are on JGW for six months during which there is time to arrange progression – so this should be managed during the programme.

Young Recruits Programme

5.97   Providers all valued the YRP. Some felt that it was an effective complement to apprenticeships or a valuable response to the recession, while others questioned whether the fit was ideal or that changes had negative consequences:

- YRP had been a major influence on the smaller employers, as 'smaller firms really have to consider the wage they pay apprentices'.

- 'The availability of all these schemes [such as YRP] did cause a bit of confusion for employers, especially when rules and eligibility criteria changed'.

- A certain proportion of participants had dropped out of training because of the YRP, plus some employers' released apprentices when their initial wage subsidy had ceased. As a result one provider felt the scheme's dropout rate was significantly higher than that of the normal apprenticeship.

- 'When YRP was pulled, there was a bit of a backlash and some of those employers turned around and said they weren't prepared to take any apprentices'.

5.98 Initially the YRP came into being during WBL 3 (August 2009) with all employers eligible. Providers found this a very good sales tool, especially following the recession. However, the various changes with employers offered £50 moving up to £100 and then back to £50 were perceived by providers to have confused employers.

5.99 There were concerns that changes to the YRP, making it available to people in JGW, but then not available if they wanted to progress to an apprenticeship, had a negative impact on some employers and led to the loss of some apprenticeship opportunities. Another provider regarded YRP as a 'next step' on from JGW, but saw it as 'essentially acting as a further subsidy to retain people in jobs'.

5.100 Some providers felt that the removal of YRP for a period of had hit smaller and micro businesses hardest.

5.101 Apprenticeship providers also observed some other distortive effects of YRP:

- Once the YRP funding was no longer available, many employers saw no reason to keep learners on, and as money was the primary motivation, 'there was little interest in the development of skills or progression of the learner'.

- Employers were 'claiming money and not developing the person'. In such instances one provider made the decision to not work with such companies any further.

Performance and outcomes

5.102 Most providers monitored the internal progression of apprentices but did not monitor leavers' destinations, as this was felt to be the responsibility of the Welsh Government. Some recognised that it was good practice to follow up on progression and had plans to improve this monitoring.

5.103 Among those providers that felt they knew, one said that the majority of apprentices entered full employment, largely with the company with whom they had completed their apprenticeship – 'the retention rate is high'. One provider said that their monitoring information showed that 85 per cent of their apprentices stayed on with their employer; they thought this high rate was due to 'selling' apprenticeships as long-term commitments to both employers and participants.

5.104 One provider pointed out that the economic recession impacted on both the retention of apprentices and therefore, achievement rates; 'some apprentices were made redundant during this period, and if participants did successfully complete their apprenticeship they were less likely to be kept on'.

5.105 In terms of added value, some of the employer relationships built up via the apprenticeship programme were identified by providers to have led to some very positive outcomes with businesses engaging in further training.

Summary

5.106 Overall, the demand for apprenticeships was regarded by all stakeholders and providers as consistently high and the programme was believed to be gaining credibility.

5.107 Providers and stakeholders tended to agree that employer responsiveness had improved over the four year period.

5.108 A number of benefits were identified that were associated with the emerging higher apprenticeships. Providers felt that higher level apprenticeships had probably engaged some employers that would not have traditionally taken apprentices on. This suggests that progress has been made to encourage more employers to invest in training in the future.

5.109 Providers generally agreed that there was minimal demand for apprenticeships in the Welsh language. Many said their documentation was bilingual.

5.110 All providers were aware of the importance of addressing gender stereotyping, however, there was not a great deal of evidence of proactive responses or challenging employers.

5.111 Probably the biggest issue was underspend. Some providers were not highlighting under-spend or under-utilisation at an early enough stage.

6 Employer Experiences Introduction

6.1 This section analyses the results of the employer research, including:

- A Telephone survey of 95 employers of apprentices; with 37 in non-convergence areas and 58 in convergence areas.

- Ten employer case studies including contact with apprentices where possible.

Nature of Employer Involvement in WBL Programme

6.2 The majority of surveyed organisations (71) had been providing foundation apprenticeships. Many had been providing apprenticeships (59). A minority of organisations had been providing Higher Level apprenticeships (12).

6.3 Of those that were still involved with apprenticeships, the majority of employers had been providing them for over 2 years.

6.4 The case study visits covered a diverse range of employers across engineering, childcare, education (school), manufacturing, IT and retail.

6.5 The case study employers had a variety of motivations for engaging from recruitment, to putting something back - especially for those who themselves were former apprentices (see inset box below which provides some context to a few of the case studies). Employers were at times frustrated after they had investment development time when apprentices subsequently left them.

[Engineering employer] had been delivering apprenticeships for between 12 and 15 years. They had three apprentices at the time fieldwork was undertaken. Apprenticeships were well established and were their main way of recruiting, they 'hire nine out of 10 apprentices when they finish.' One employee came from school to an apprenticeship and was moving on after 12 years to BMW; the employer was understanding, but did feel disappointed: 'you spend money on them by training them up and then they leave.'

A restaurant owner started delivering apprenticeships in 2012 and has had one apprentice in this time. They did not have a good experience with this apprentice – as they left after 3 months and their relationship with the training provider came to an end. There has been no follow up since. They said that the apprentice initially worked well, but after the first few weeks, became distant and disengaged, regularly missing

shifts, then didn't turn up at all. However, this has not dissuaded them from taking on another apprentice in the future.

A childcare manager became involved in delivering apprenticeships in 2013 and has had two apprentices through the Young Recruits programme since then. Of the two apprentices they have had, one left the business, and one has progressed to a Level 3 course.

A comprehensive school hosted their first IT apprentice 13 years ago and a second under the 2011-2015 apprenticeship scheme. The contact in the school felt that the calibre of apprentices 13 years ago was much higher than for the apprentices interviewed in 2013. This employer explained that an initial candidate they had offered an apprenticeship placement to had been constantly late for work, then went off sick in the second week. After attempting to support the learner and address these issues, the school took the decision not to retain them. They subsequently recruited a replacement apprentice who went on to successfully complete their training, but had since moved on to a suitable job at another secondary school in the area. The school had hoped to retain this apprentice. Despite the set-back with the initial candidate, the school remained committed to offering apprenticeship placements in the future.

A construction industry employer has been delivering apprenticeships since the 1980s and supports apprentices up to a Level 3. They currently have one individual in their third year of learning. The employer is very happy with their current apprentice – although the learner wasn't particularly motivated during their first year, 'like most 16 year olds', but something seems to have clicked and the learner is now working diligently and will become a competent carpenter. Overall, the employer has been very satisfied with all the apprentices over the years and most have gone on to start their own businesses in the area and tend to call on each other for favours. No apprentices have remained employed with the company, they have all gone on to become self-employed (a trend in the sector) and the employer hopes that this is as a result of the way he has taught them.

This manufacturing company's involvement had been decreasing over a period of 15 years until a recent management buy-out. The directors were familiar with apprenticeships and were keen to continue. They've had five apprentices since 2011, as well as six work experience placements. Currently, they have one apprentice. 85% of the company's employees have been apprentices. The quality of apprentices varies in terms of level of skills, attitude and motivation, but they work with the college in the selection of apprentices and the college are now working with the apprentices to make sure they have the basic skills that they require. Two previous apprentices became permanent.

This IT support and maintenance employer has had around eight apprentices over the last five years. The owner was an apprentice themselves and was very invested in the apprenticeship scheme. Their motivation was that they need a steady stream of apprentices to match his business growth; the employer described it as 'their life blood to recruiting' and they keep all of their apprentices on as employed staff.

This retail employer started looking at funding for training in 2002; the HR manager, who was familiar with apprenticeships before joining the company, saw it as 'a huge

gap that the business wasn't taking advantage of'. They started by putting several current employees through apprenticeships, and recently started recruiting candidates as apprentices. They tend to have six to eight apprentices at any one time. They offer apprenticeships up to Level 5.

Information, Awareness and Recruitment

6.6　The most common way employers found out about apprenticeships in the survey was through direct marketing from the training provider or being approached by the training provider/local college (32 employers). Twenty found out through staff within their organisation, while 16 had an existing relationship with the training provider/local college or previous involvement with apprenticeships. Eight employers didn't know how they first found out, while eight gave other responses including: TV, approached by Local Authority, local press, fliers to school, Jobs Fair and NVQ Assessor.

6.7　Among the case study employers one example included contact by a training provider, who happened to call when the nursery were looking for 'a spare pair of hands' and sold the apprenticeship as a way of training someone and having some extra help for the business 'at a cost that would be reimbursed by the Government'.

6.8　Three employers specifically said they managed the recruitment of the apprentices themselves. In particular a retail sector employer felt managing the recruitment herself was easier, as she wanted to be able to provide candidates with individual feedback and was conscious of the impression people got of the organisation.

6.9　Some case study employers were provided with or recommended apprenticeship candidates by their provider.

6.10　The majority of employers (55) did not try and get hold of additional information about apprenticeships after they first found out about them, while five didn't know. However, the majority of the 35 that did try and get hold of additional information got it from contact with the college or training provider (20) or via the internet (11).

6.11 The majority found it very easy (32) or quite easy (22) to get information about apprenticeships. Only one found it very difficult, while five didn't know. The majority found the information they were given or found out about apprenticeships was very clear (31) or quite clear (21). Three found it quite unclear, while five didn't know. The majority found that the information they were given about apprenticeships was very accurate (31) or quite accurate (21). Three found it quite inaccurate, while five didn't know.

6.12 The majority (55) had not worked with or received training from their training provider before being involved with apprenticeships.

6.13 The main reason cited for organisations getting involved in apprenticeships was 'to provide new opportunities for young people' (33). Other popular reasons included 'to increase the qualifications of the existing workforce' (16), 'to help with recruitment' (14) and 'to increase the workforce capacity of the business' (12). Other single responses included: 'Give them qualifications to develop a career', 'I was an apprentice myself - it was a great way of getting hands-on experience in industry' and 'development of the industry'.

6.14 Over two-fifths of organisations had no previous involvement with work-based learning programmes, prior to their current learner (40). Twenty-eight respondents had previous involvement with the apprenticeship programme, while 16 had previous involvement with another Welsh Government funded work-based learning programme e.g. Traineeships/Skillbuild.

6.15 Three quarters (72) of employers were still involved with apprenticeships at the time of asking. Twenty-two employers were not, while one didn't know.

Numbers and types of individuals

6.16 Since 2011, most employers responding to the survey indicated that they had between one and five apprentices. Figure 6.2 shows that just over two-thirds of employers (48 of 71) participating in foundation apprenticeships said that they had between one and five learners at this level. A similar proportion (8 of 12 respondents) who were participating in higher level apprenticeships said that between one and five individuals were learning at this level with them while (35 of 57 respondents) offering apprenticeships said that they had between one and five learners at this level.

Figure 6.1: Number of individuals within each company participating in apprenticeships since 2011
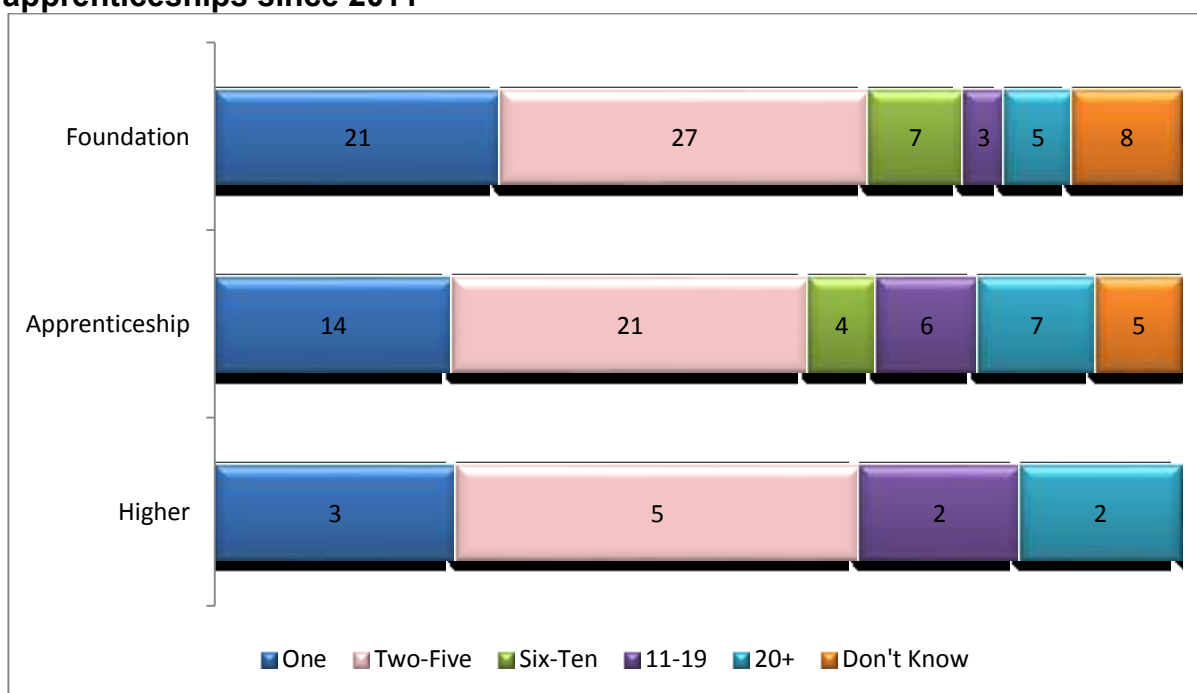
Source: Employer Survey, 2015.
Base: 71 (providing foundation apprenticeships), 59 (providing apprenticeships), 12 (providing Higher Level apprenticeships).
Respondents were asked: Since 2011, how many people in your organisation have participated in…? Open question.

6.17 Employers of individuals that had participated in foundation apprenticeships said that these individuals were mainly new staff (46) (Figure 6.3). Similarly, employers of individuals that had participated in apprenticeships said that these individuals were mainly new staff (33).

Figure 6.2: Status of apprentices before they started

External Ring =
Foundation (71)
Centre Ring =
Apprenticeship (59)
Internal Ring =
Higher (12)

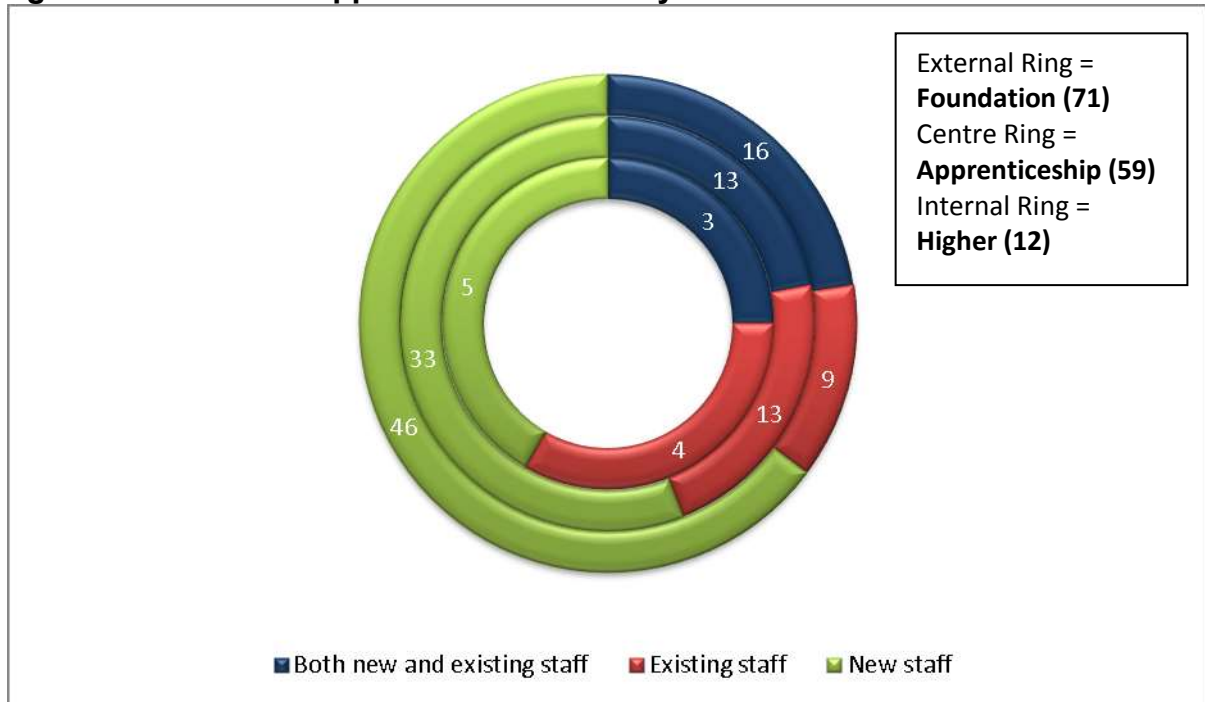■ Both new and existing staff   ■ Existing staff   ■ New staff

Source: Employer Survey, 2015.
Base: 71 (providing foundation apprenticeships), 59 (providing apprenticeships), 12 (providing Higher Level apprenticeships).
Respondents were asked: What was the status of the apprentices before they started on the foundation apprenticeship/apprenticeship/higher apprenticeship?
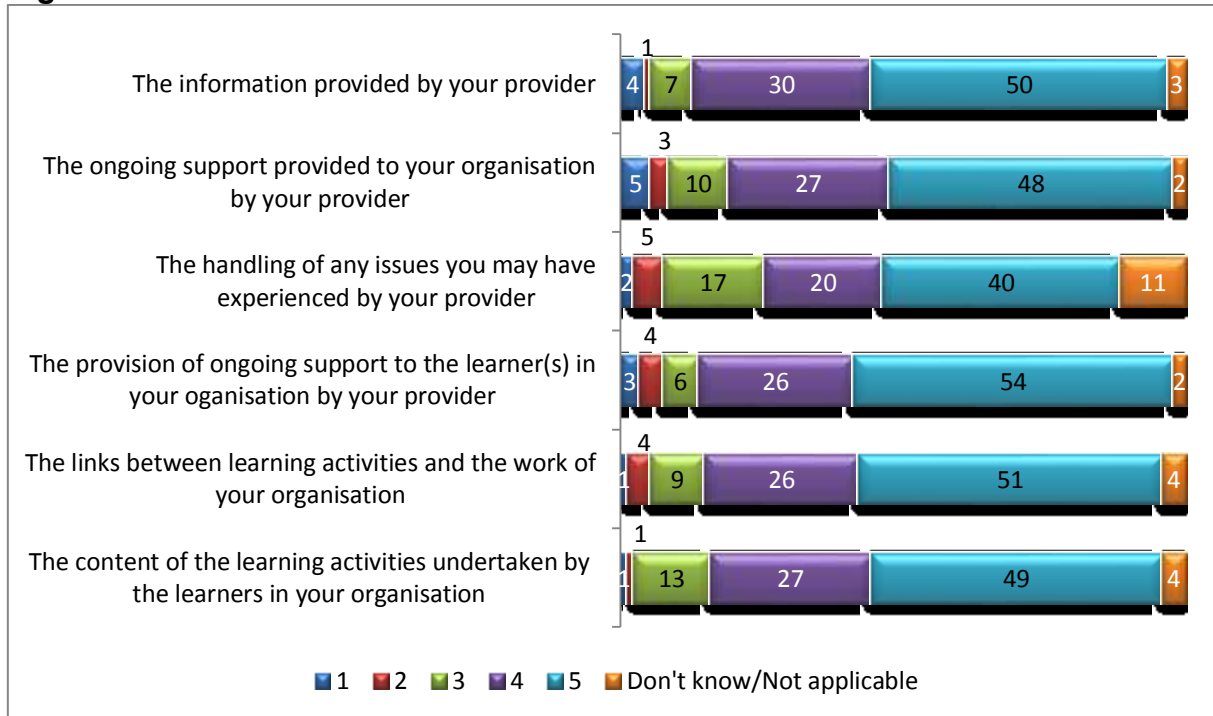Closed questions, single response.

Structure of the apprenticeship

6.18 The structure of most apprenticeships in the case studies involved one day a week at college, and the rest of their time was spent on the job. However, in two employers they increased this to two days per week in order to complete the apprenticeship and prepare for final assessments.

Training Providers

6.19 The majority of employers were satisfied with all aspects related to their provider (Figure 6.5). A minority for each were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, while even less were dissatisfied.

Figure 6.3: Satisfaction scales

Base: All (95).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = not at all satisfied and 5 = very satisfied, how satisfied are/were you overall with…?
Closed questions, single responses.

6.20 Employers said they were clear about what was expected of their organisation's involvement with foundation apprenticeships (40 very clear, 25 clear), apprenticeships (38 very clear, 16 clear) and higher apprenticeships (9 very clear, 2 clear) (Figure 6.5). Proportionately, there was slightly less clarity regarding foundation apprentices.

Figure 6.4: How clear were employers about what was expected of their organisation's involvement with foundation apprenticeships/apprenticeships /higher apprenticeships?

Foundation Apprenticeships: 40, 25, 3, 1, 2
Apprenticeships: 38, 16, 3, 2
Higher Apprenticeships: 9, 2, 1

Legend: ■ Very Clear ■ Quite Clear ■ Quite Unclear ■ Very Unclear ■ Don't know/Not applicable

6.21 Generally employers were happy with their provider although there was evidence of employers changing based on perceptions of quality and delivery.

6.22 Qualitative data from case study visits supported these findings. For example, as one employer explained; he had been working with his training provider for 'a few years'. He had switched from another training provider because they 'weren't very good.' He felt that his current training provider was very supportive and would come out and deal with any problem. He felt very informed and clearly understood what apprenticeships required.

6.23 Another employer had worked with his training provider for approximately 13 years. He felt well informed about the scheme before hosting the most recent apprentice, having hosted previously and been an apprentice himself. He felt fully informed about the requirements. He said that his provider was 'very good and very proactive', and he was particularly impressed with their flexibility; the school was in process of moving site at the start of the apprenticeship and it was agreed that the apprentice could help them with setting up the IT in the new school and catch up on college work later on. This demonstrates the potential for flexibility and adaptability to real work environments.

6.24 The next two examples highlighted some areas for improvement or areas that were being addressed:

- One employer had been using his training provider 'since the 1980s'. He did not feel that they provided him with a lot of information before taking on an apprentice, particularly not on paper, but did feel that he could pick up the phone to ask any questions/resolve any issues. He believed that the college ask him to take on an apprentice as a favour to them. The lecturers at the college used to work for him so had him at the top of their list of people to call when looking to place apprentices locally. He had never had any problems with the college as providers and felt that they tended to send him good candidates. He found them very flexible, but not particularly communicative.

- A manager in a manufacturing business had worked with his provider for many years. The relationship had been mixed. Initially, he felt that the provider was not doing what they wanted and were sending them 'young people without basic health and safety, welding skills', but after they had a conversation things had improved, although, 'the apprentices still seemed to lack basic fabrication skills'. He was working with the training provider to better understand what the training provider's role was and what the employer's role was; things had subsequently started to improve.

6.25 The following example demonstrates the value of management information and the potential for providers to add value for employers. A manager from the retail sector said that with the management information the provider sent through monthly, she could 'pick up on those [apprentices who were] falling behind or chase those that the provider couldn't get hold of'. She said that they work as a partnership, and the training provider was helpful in terms of getting an extension of funding for additional time needed.

Assessments

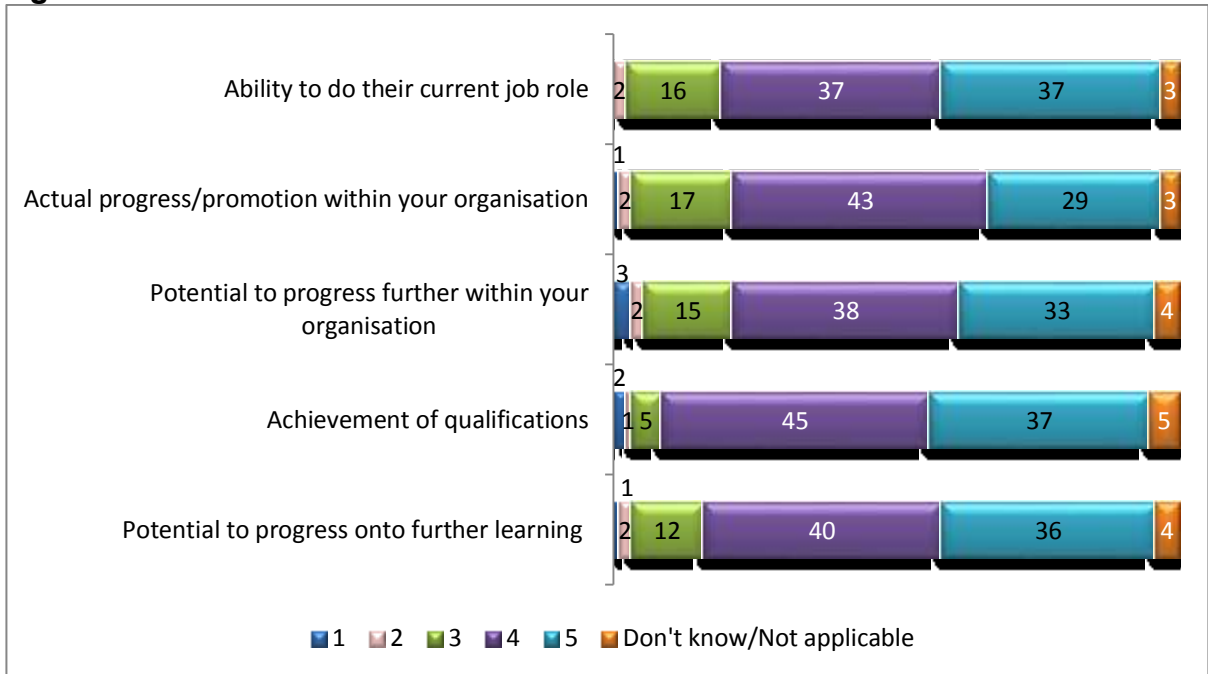6.26 Generally employers were positive about the assessment process:

- 'the nature of the assessment and how the apprentice was to be assessed was all clearly mapped out'

- 'the assessment process was effective and not intrusive'.

6.27 Although one employer disagreed; she did not feel that the assessment process was effective because the business was not given any feedback from the assessors.

Satisfaction, Impacts and Outcomes

6.28 The majority of employers were satisfied with: the apprentices' ability to do their current job role (37 very satisfied, 37 satisfied), the actual progress/promotion within their organisation (29 very satisfied, 43 satisfied), the potential to progress further within their organisation (33 very satisfied, 38 satisfied), the achievement of qualifications (37 very satisfied, 45 satisfied), and the potential to progress onto further learning (36 very satisfied, 40 satisfied) (Figure 6.6). A minority for each were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, while even less were dissatisfied.

Figure 6.5: Satisfaction scales

	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know/Not applicable
Ability to do their current job role		2	16	37	37	3
Actual progress/promotion within your organisation	1	2	17	43	29	3
Potential to progress further within your organisation	3	2	15	38	33	4
Achievement of qualifications	2	1	5	45	37	5
Potential to progress onto further learning	1	2	12	40	36	4

Legend: ■1 ■2 ■3 ■4 ■5 ■Don't know/Not applicable

Base: All (95).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very negative and 5 = very positive, what changes have you seen in the apprenticeship participants in terms of their…?
Closed questions, single responses.

6.29 Just under two thirds (56) of employers were very satisfied with their apprenticeship participants since 2011 (Figure 6.7). Twenty-four were satisfied, while less were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (12), and a minority were not satisfied (3).

6.30 This picture is reflected in the experience of the case study employers.

Figure 6.6: Overall satisfaction with apprenticeship participants
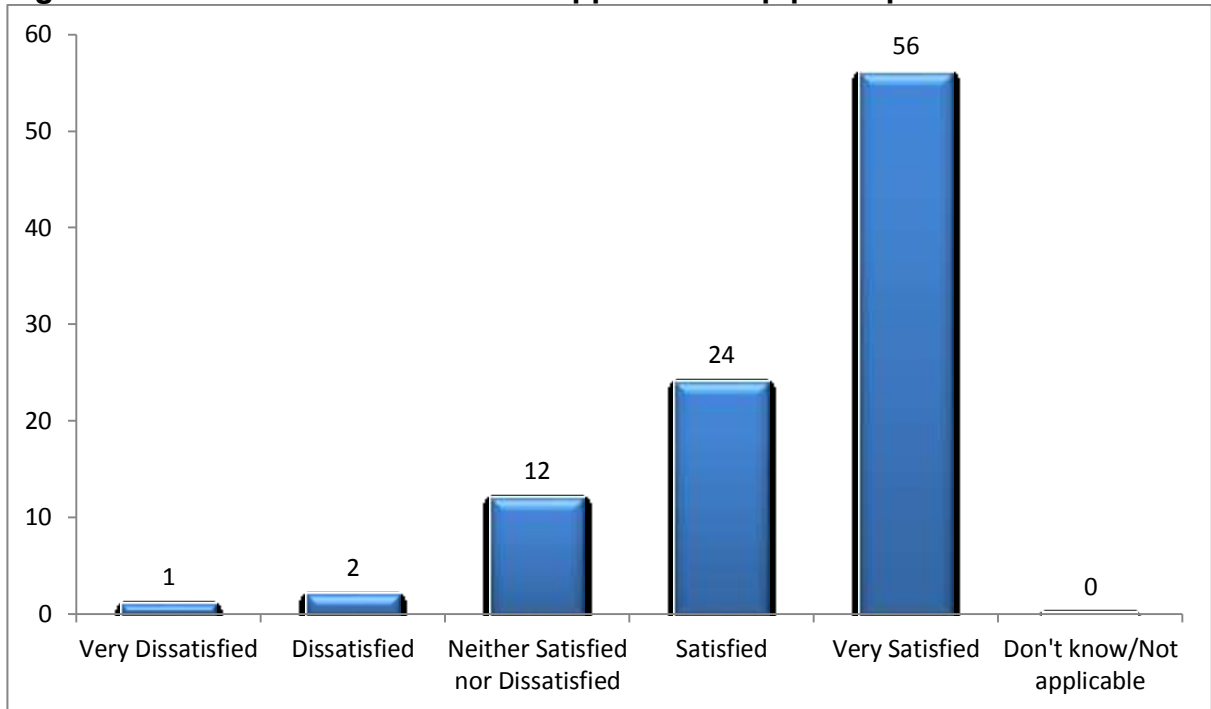
Base: All (95).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied, how satisfied are/were you overall with your apprenticeship participants since 2011?
Closed question, single response.

6.31 In around half the cases (36), staff on the foundation apprenticeship would not have been hired or kept on without their apprenticeship (Figure 6.8). Whereas the majority of respondents with staff on an apprenticeship (31) and staff on a higher apprenticeship (8) would have been hired or kept on without their apprenticeship.

Figure 6.7: Would staff have been hired or kept on without their apprenticeship

External Ring =
Foundation (69)
Centre Ring =
Apprenticeship (57)
Internal Ring =
Higher (12)

Yes, all ■ Yes, most ■ Yes, a few ■ No ■ Don't know/Don't recall
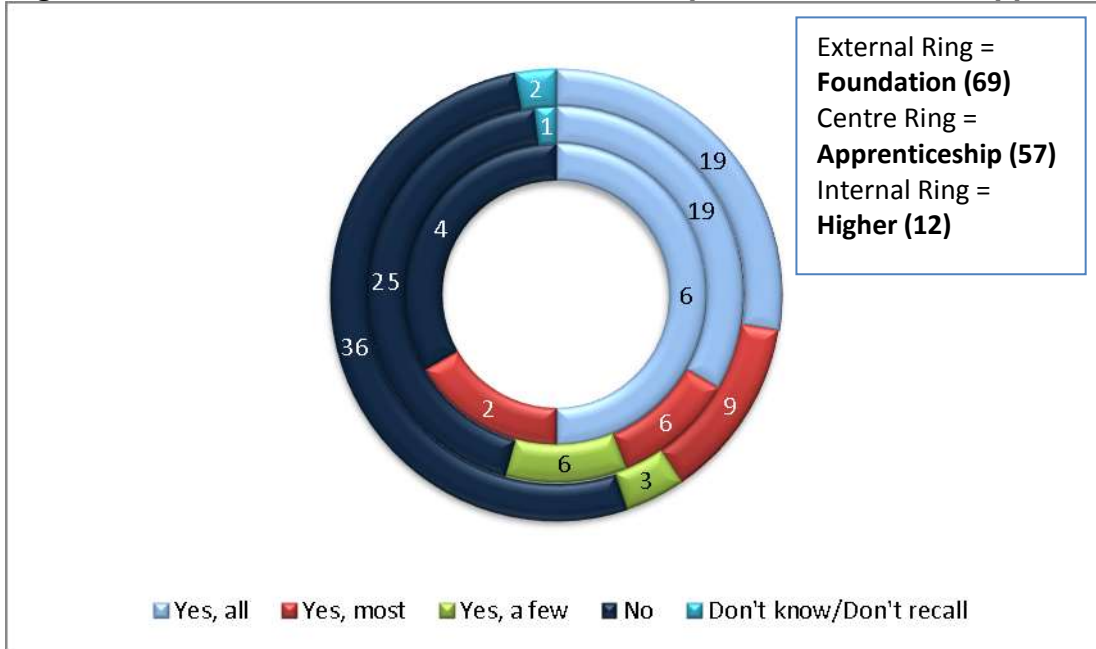
Source: Employer Survey, 2015.
Base: 69 (providing foundation apprenticeships), 57 (providing apprenticeships), 12 (providing Higher Level apprenticeships).
Respondents were asked: Would these staff have been hired or kept on without the foundation apprenticeship/apprenticeship/higher apprenticeship?
Closed questions, single response.

Issues and Concerns

6.32 The majority (44) of employers said that they had no issues or concerns about their organisation's involvement with apprenticeships. However, some employers responses could be categorised into 'Payment/Funding Issues' (17), including the structure of funding and ability to get funding, 'Lack of Communication/Support/Information' (15), from both the College and the Training Provider, and 'Modules On/Structure of the apprenticeship' (7), including modules not being relevant to employer needs and too much coursework.

6.33 Some issues and concerns were raised during the case study visits. For example, one employer felt that the NVQ was relevant to engineering, but not specific to their business and 'only larger companies could influence what the college taught'. Another employer said he didn't know how to inform the training provider that his apprentice had left early; as he wasn't provided with a number to call.

6.34 The main consistent critique from employers was around information and clarity regarding the taught element which employers felt uncertain about:

- 'I was never aware of what the learning outcomes of the apprentices were.'

- 'The college needed to provide a clearer framework at the outset, which mapped the nature and timetable of the training for the apprentice.'

- 'I was not sure what the apprentices were being taught or how technical it was.'

6.35 One employer felt that assessors regularly cancelled/changed visits at the last minute without much explanation, this was compounded by the fact that the 'same assessor was never around for long'.

6.36 Another employer felt that promised grants available to cover the full wage of the apprentice never materialised. This was likely linked to changes in related programmes such as YRP.

6.37 One employer felt that there needed to be a push in schools to promote apprenticeships, 'as the degree route is not appropriate for everyone', he went on to say, 'there is a considerable shortage of people working within the construction and engineering sector and if nothing is done to increase take-up; a generation of tradesmen will be lost. If engineers are not supported then the skills shortage will get worse and there will be a huge skills shortage in the sector.'

6.38 Some essential skills issues were highlighted by one employer which had in fact need addressed by their provider: 'there had been quite a few instances of apprentices struggling to read and write, which the college was helping with. Initially this was quite a barrier, as apprentices struggled with exams; however, the college had put things like readers in place and the employer then noticed an improvement'. This example demonstrates a positive response to the issue from the provider.

Strengths and Benefits

6.39 The most common strength of the apprenticeship programme identified by employers through the survey included:

- 'Relevant/practical/hands on experience' (12 respondents).

- 'Apprentices can develop their skills/career/learn/gain qualifications' (9).

- 'Improving the calibre of the workforce' (7).

- 'Offers opportunities to young people' (5).

- 'Supportive/good communication from college/training provider' (4).

6.40 Other responses mentioned by three respondents each included: 'apprentices can be moulded to suit the needs of the company', 'develops confidence', 'good foundation of learning and experience', 'candidate ready to go straight into work following the apprenticeship', and 'it's a viable way for companies to bring young people into their workforce/grow/expand'.

6.41 Benefits identified by employers through case study visits covered:

- Link between practical, tailored training and learning:

   'We can control what they learn and make sure they learn what is relevant to us.'

'I was looking for help in the kitchen, but recruiting people from a college course was not working; I wanted to start from a blank canvas to train someone up within the restaurant.'

'Practical learning is the best way to get people with the right skills for the job.'

- Return on investment in training and development:

'We put money and time into them at first, but it pays off in the end.'

'I hoped to gain an extra pair of hands and a staff member who could grow with the business.'

- Future recruitment

'You get good staff members, all skilled up to the same level.'

'If I needed to employ a full-time staff member, I would have two potential candidates who were already trained and able to hit the ground running.'

- Additional resources:

'It helped with cash flow and enabled us to have someone at hand to cover other staff when they needed time to plan play sessions.'

'There was no funding available for an additional member of staff due to cutbacks – the apprenticeship programme is seen as an effective way of maintaining the standard of IT in the school.'

- Injecting new ideas into an organisation:

'Younger staff bring youth, fresh ideas and enthusiasm – its positive development of the business.'

'I was happy with the different angle provided by the apprentice – he looked at issues in a different way and was more knowledgeable about social media and the latest technology.'

- Corporate social responsibility reasons:

  'I want to give young people in the area the opportunity.'

  'It's my way of giving back to the community and helping young people to progress.'

- Conveying external messages to prospective clients:

  'Getting involved in the delivery of apprenticeships ticks another box for us – clients in the public sector like to see that we offer training.'

- Influencing a learning culture and networking:

  'From the staff side, apprenticeships are a development tool; they improve the theoretical knowledge and allow them to network.'

  'It develops a learning culture and gets the apprentices to think differently.'

  'With college based courses, it's networking with people, too.'

  'The apprentices get a qualification and that makes them feel good.'

Areas for Improvement

6.42 The most common suggestions for improvement of the apprenticeship programme from the survey were:

- More funding [needs to be] available.

- Better information readily available.

- Organisation/sector-specific learning.

- Better support/communication from training provider.

- Training providers should ensure candidates apply for apprenticeships they are passionate about.

- Simplification of paperwork.

6.43 Other responses mentioned by two respondents each included: 'improve apprentices' salary', 'more apprenticeships needed', 'more hands on work', 'more interaction/reviews with the training provider', 'more opportunities/funding for over 25s', 'less coursework/more time to complete coursework', and 'schools need to identify those better suited to apprenticeships'.

Lessons learnt

6.44 Lessons learnt by case study employers included a desire for more information, consistency in training and assessment, greater commitment from apprentices and more meetings with providers.

- One employer planned to use a different training provider when he takes on another apprentice, and planned to ask for more information than he received prior to the last apprentice, especially in terms of the protocol if someone leaves: 'I will feel happier if everything is in place beforehand.'

- 'I wanted to see their scheme of work in order to understand what they're working towards; I wanted to ensure they [the provider] had everything in place I want to see more consistency in terms of trainers and assessors.'

6.45 One construction employer planned to increase the duration of the apprenticeship in order to ensure a greater commitment from participants.

6.46 A manufacturing employer wanted the college to arrange annual review meetings to give them the opportunity to say what was going well and what needed to change or be added so that it was all relevant and good for the business.

Impacts

6.47 Nearly all (72) apprenticeship employers said that the overall efficiency of the workforce had been positively impacted because of the organisation's involvement with the apprenticeship programme (Figure 6.9). Over three-fifths said that their involvement had positively impacted on the organisational approach to training and development (63), organisational attitudes towards the recruitment and employment of young people (61), and cost of production or service delivery (58). Over half said that their involvement had positively impacted on retention of staff (55), and recruitment of new staff (52).

6.48 Fewer employers were sure that their involvement had positively impacted on employment growth (42) and the development of new business relationships or networks (42).

Figure 6.8: To what extent has the organisation's involvement in the programme led to any of the following impacts?
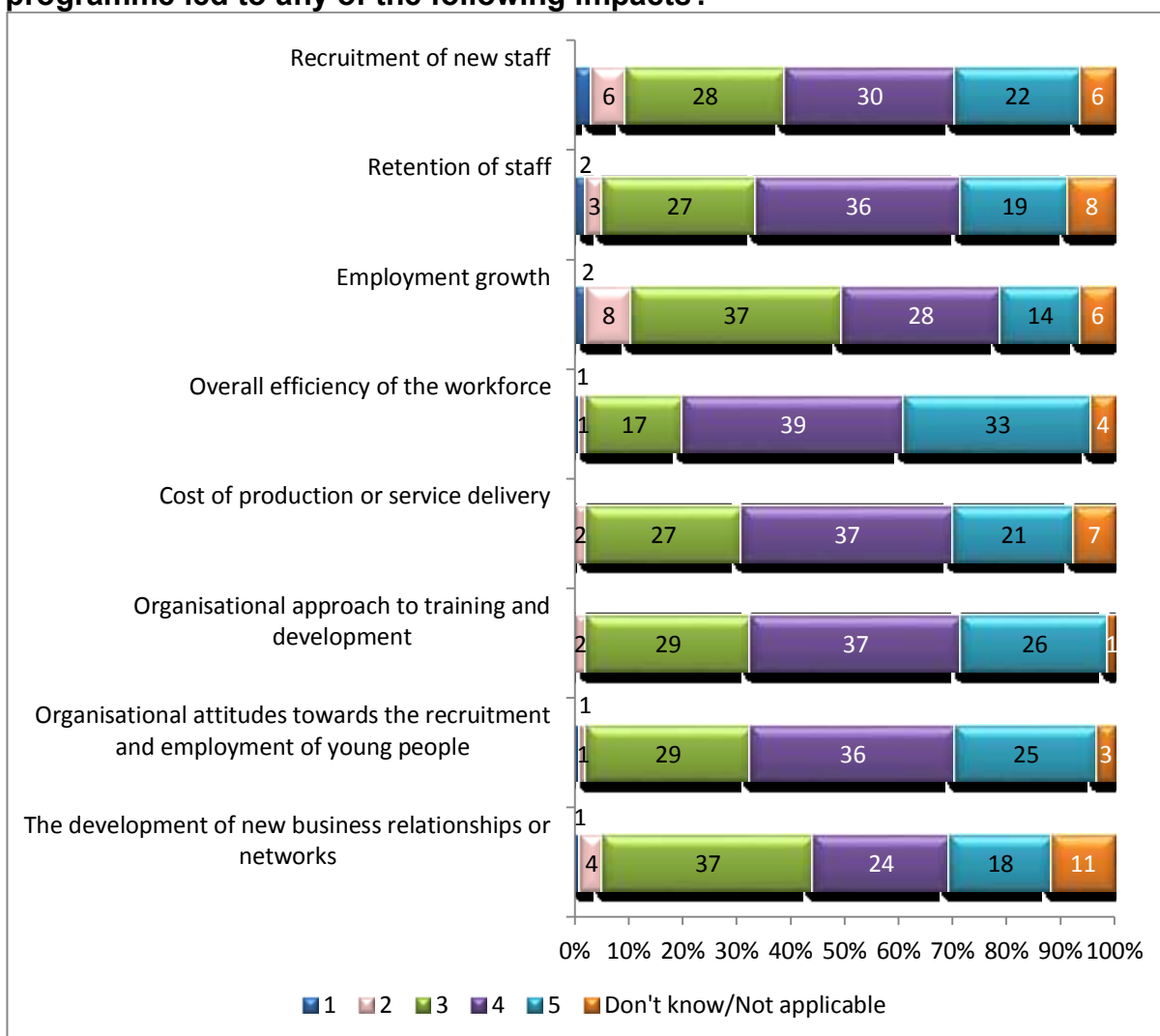
Source: Employer Survey, 2015.

Base: All (95).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very negative and 5 = very positive, to what extent has your organisation's involvement in the programme led to any of the following impacts…?
Closed questions, single responses.

6.49 The majority (74) of employers said that training providers did not do anything to encourage them to take on learners in roles that are not traditional for their gender. Eight employers were unsure whether the training provider had done anything along these lines, while 13 said that they had. This broadly fitted with providers' own views of the extent to which they focused on gender stereo-types.

6.50 The majority (65) of employers said that their training provider did not discuss with them whether they would benefit from having a learner with Welsh language skills on placement with them OR whether they had any Welsh language skills requirements for the learners they had on placement; nine didn't know, while 21 said that their training provider had discussed this with them.

6.51 The following example suggests that there was some demand by employers for more bilingual learning. A construction employer requested that all his apprentices must be Welsh speaking. He had maintenance contracts with local schools, care homes, social housing providers and when going into these places, felt that if a builder could speak Welsh, it was valued by customers and put people at ease. However, the business did not receive any bilingual paperwork from the college and the apprentice did not do any learning through the Medium of Welsh. He felt that an attempt should be made to teach bilingually, as, on site, workers all communicated in Welsh and he would not have liked to see the apprentice being unfamiliar with a term used, as he had not been taught it in Welsh.

6.52 The majority (75) of employers said that they had environmental sustainability measures in their business; 13 didn't, while seven didn't know.

6.53 The majority of employers were very satisfied (51) or satisfied (34) with their recent experience of the WBL programme (Figure 6.10). A small number were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (8), and a minority were not satisfied (2).

Figure 6.9: Satisfaction with recent experience of the WBL programme
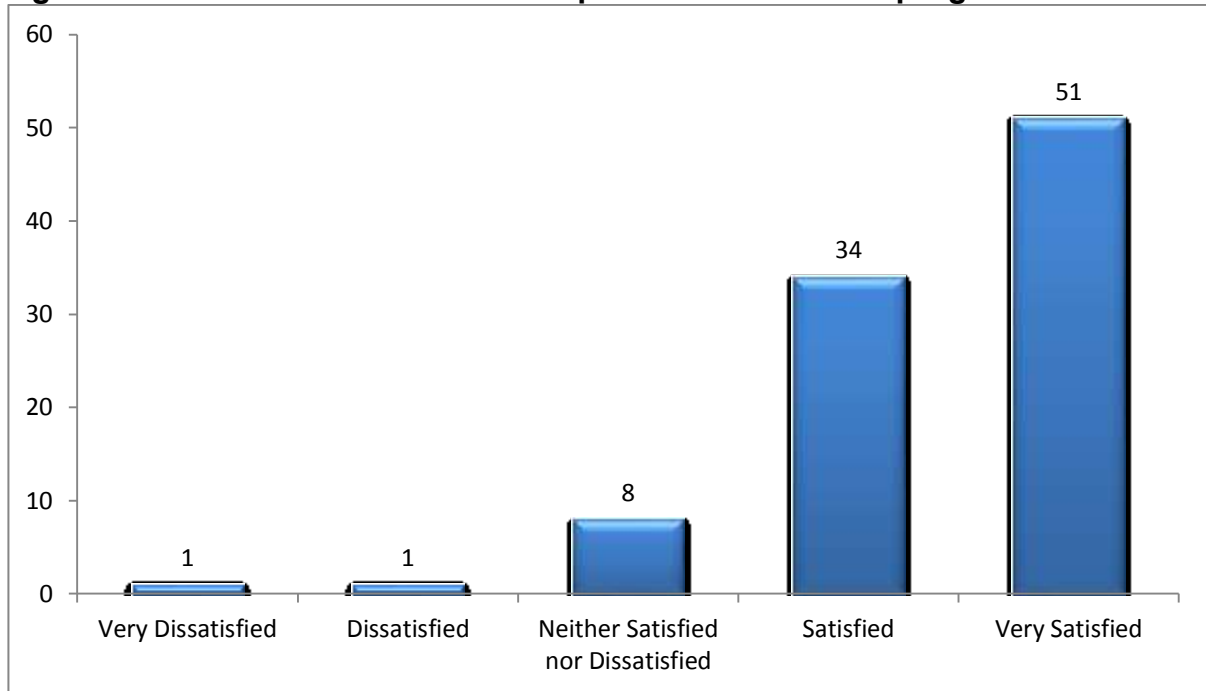
Source: Employer Survey, 2015.

Base: All (95).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied, how satisfied are you with your recent experience of the work-based learning programme?
Closed question, single response.

6.54 The majority of employers said that it was very likely (58) or likely (18) that they would offer placements in the future, given their recent experience. A minority were unsure/didn't think/didn't know whether it was likely (19).

Figure 6.10: Likelihood that employer will offer apprenticeships in the future, given their recent experience
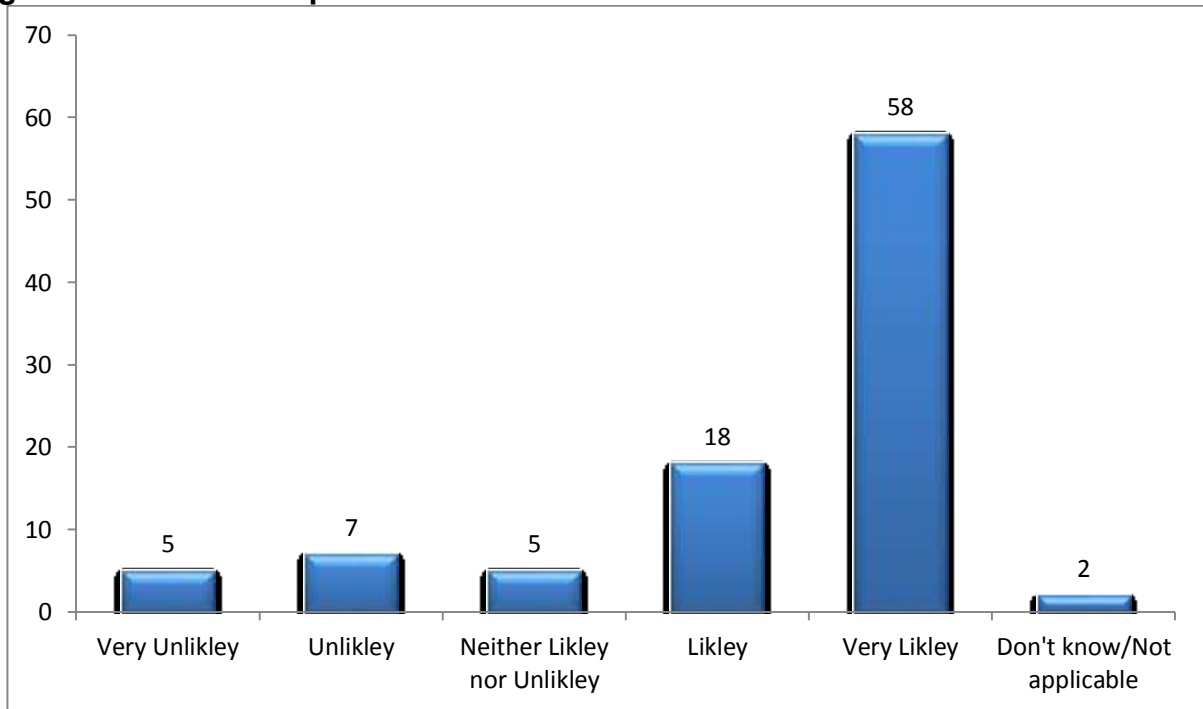
Source: Employer Survey, 2015.

Base: All (95).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very unlikely and 5 = very likely, how likely are you to offer placements in the future given your recent experience?
Closed question, single response.

6.55 The views of case study employers support this quantitative data:

- 'I have plans to have apprentices for many years to come.'

- 'I would do it again tomorrow – I have sown the seeds in the minds of the management team about hosting another apprentice'.

- 'The scheme is integral to the business, [although] I would like to introduce our own, personal, tailored, in-house apprenticeship training scheme'.

6.56 Even the employer who had a negative experience with their last apprentice remained positive about the potential of recruiting apprentices in the future, 'I still feel that an apprentice could be an effective way for us to gain new staff members and to develop them to fit the needs of the business.'

Summary

6.57 Most of the 95 employers surveyed had been providing foundation apprenticeships (71). Over half (59) had apprentices, and fewer still had higher apprentices (12).

6.58 The majority (56) of employers were very satisfied with their apprenticeship participants since 2011, and nearly all (72) apprenticeship employers said that the overall efficiency of the workforce had been positively impacted because of the organisation's involvement with the apprenticeship programme.

6.59 Direct marketing from the training provider or being approached by the training provider/local college played a key role in employers finding out about apprenticeships, with the majority of employers (32) finding out through these channels.

6.60 The majority of employers were satisfied with most aspects of their relationship with their provider. However, there were some specific requests for more: information, consistency of teaching and assessment, and regular communication.

6.61 Employers were clear about what was expected of their organisation's involvement with apprenticeships.

6.62 The most common strength of the apprenticeship programme was offering apprentices 'relevant/practical/hands on experience' (12), while the most common suggestion for improvement of the apprenticeship programme was offering apprentices 'more funding' (6).

6.63 The majority (65) of employers said that their training provider did not discuss with them whether they would benefit from having a learner with Welsh language skills on placement with them OR whether they had any Welsh language skills requirements for the learners they had on placement

6.64 The majority of employers were very satisfied with their recent experience of the WBL programme (51) and said that it was very likely that they would offer placements in the future, given their recent experience (58), while 18 said that it was likely.

7 Current apprenticeship Learner Experiences

Introduction

7.1 In this section we analyse the 559 valid responses to an e-survey[12] of current apprentices and case study data. Key areas include: their situation before the apprenticeship, experiences of the apprenticeship and levels of satisfaction.

Before the apprenticeship

7.2 Two-fifths of respondents (42 per cent) were completing a Level 3 apprenticeship; this was closely followed by a Level 2 foundation apprenticeship (38 per cent). 82 respondents were completing a Level 4 higher apprenticeship. Nearly two-thirds of respondents were on yearlong or two-yearlong apprenticeship courses (30 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively).

7.3 All of the six current apprentices that we spoke to during case study visits were completing either a Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeship.

7.4 Most respondents (81 per cent) noted that their apprenticeship involved training or placements in the workplace. The majority (89 per cent) spent 25 hours or more here. Nearly 300 respondents (292) spent time in formal training, with the majority in college part-time (67 per cent). The majority of respondents spent 9 or less hours in formal training a week; nearly half of respondents (46 per cent) spent 0-4 hours in formal training, while just over a third (37 per cent) spent 5-9 hours.

7.5 One learner particularly liked the way the start of the apprenticeship was structured; English and Maths key skills tests were done right at the start, and, along with preparation of how the apprenticeship would run, he *'got to know others and hear what they were doing job wise'*.

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[12] E-survey undertaken between 21 April 2015 and 17 August 2015

7.6 Case study apprentices talked about their access to online software during their apprenticeship, which they were all positive about. The software enabled them to check outstanding assignments, complete all coursework and assignments. One learner said: 'I could identify how much additional focus I needed to put into each unit to pass them.' Another said that the software listed the modules he selected with a date and time stamp to show when the work needed to be completed, and he could also access a self-test engine for his exam on networking.

7.7 Just under three-quarters of respondents strongly agreed that their apprenticeship provider had been supportive (72 per cent), while nearly a quarter of respondents agreed (24 per cent). Only 23 respondents were neutral or negative in their opinion on the supportiveness of their apprenticeship provider. Similarly, nearly two-thirds strongly agreed (64 per cent) and just under a third agreed (30 per cent) that their employer had been supportive during their apprenticeship. Only 30 respondents were neutral or negative in their opinion on the supportiveness of their employer.

7.8 The most cited reason for doing the apprenticeship was 'to develop a broader range of skills and/or knowledge' (97 per cent), closely followed by 'to develop more specialist skills and/or knowledge' and 'to improve or widen your career prospects' (both at 95 per cent) (Table 7.1). Less popular reasons were 'your employer requested or required you to do it' (42 per cent) and 'an advisor recommended that you should complete an apprenticeship as it was relevant to your needs' (32 per cent).

Table 7.1: Reasons for doing the apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
To develop a broader range of skills and/or knowledge	541	*97*
To develop more specialist skills and/or knowledge	530	*95*
To improve or widen your career prospects	533	*95*
To help you progress in your preferred sector/occupation	489	*88*
To improve your pay, promotion or other prospects at work	416	*74*
To learn something new for personal interest	406	*73*
To help you get a job	319	*57*
To help you progress onto another education, training or learning course	297	*53*
Your employer requested or required you to do it	232	*42*
An advisor recommended that you should complete an apprenticeship as it was relevant to your needs	179	*32*
Other	10	*3*

Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.
Base: All (559).
Respondents were asked 'Were any of the following reasons for doing the apprenticeship?'
Closed question, multiple response.

7.9 For some learners, the apprenticeship was presented to them as a progression opportunity. One had it presented to him as an opportunity to learn while he earned. For another, it was the opportunity to be more practical and gain real world experience.

7.10 Approximately two thirds of respondents (62 per cent) chose the apprenticeship they wanted (Table 7.2). When comparing Competitiveness and Convergence areas, a higher proportion of Competitiveness respondents than Convergence respondents said 'it was the only apprenticeship available' when asked how they selected their apprenticeship (15 per cent vs. 8 per cent).

7.11 In terms of the units involved in the apprenticeship, most case study apprentices had input on the units, but were heavily influenced by their employers.

Table 7.2: How respondents selected the apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
I chose the apprenticeship I wanted	346	*62*
My employer told me to start the apprenticeship	124	*22*
It was the only apprenticeship available	55	*10*
Other	34	*6*
Base	*559*	*100*

Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.
Base: All (559).
Respondents were asked 'How did you select the apprenticeship?'
Closed question, single response.

7.12 At the time of choosing to do their apprenticeship, the majority of respondents (81 per cent) did not think about doing a different course to the one they ended up doing. Those who had thought about doing a different course were fairly evenly split when indicating whether this alternative course was in the same (56 per cent) or a different (41 per cent) sector. The majority of those considering a different course chose their apprenticeship over the alternative course because they preferred to earn while they were learning (40 per cent) or the apprenticeship was more suited to their needs (42 per cent).

7.13 No apprentice that we spoke to during the case study visits felt that there were any barriers that they had to overcome in order to taking part. However, one had some concerns over money; he wondered whether to go into a job that would pay more, but felt that the apprenticeship was 'sold to him' as an opportunity to progress.

7.14 Most respondents (96 per cent) agreed that apprenticeships are good for getting experience and skills, while most (93 per cent) agreed that apprenticeships were a good stepping stone for their career (Table 7.3). In terms of respect for apprenticeships, over three-fifths of participants agreed that they were respected by young people (62 per cent) and employers (79 per cent), in general.

Table 7.3: Respondents feelings about apprenticeships

	Disagree Strongly Count (*Per cent*)	Disagree Count (*Per cent*)	Neither agree nor disagree Count (*Per cent*)	Agree Count (*Per cent*)	Agree Strongly Count (*Per cent*)	Don't Know Count (*Per cent*)
Apprenticeships are good for getting experience and skills	4 (*1*)	5 (*1*)	15 (*3*)	211 (*38*)	**323** (***58***)	1 (*0*)
Apprenticeships are a good stepping stone for my career	6 (*1*)	5 (*1*)	23 (*4*)	228 (*41*)	**293** (***52***)	4 (*1*)
Apprenticeships are respected by young people in general	10 (*2*)	29 (*5*)	135 (*24*)	**203** (***36***)	146 (*26*)	36 (*6*)
Apprenticeships are respected by employers in general	6 (*1*)	21 (*4*)	69 (*12*)	**267** (***48***)	175 (*31*)	21 (*4*)
Total	*26*	*60*	*242*	*909*	*937*	*62*

Base: All (559).
Respondents were asked 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements…'
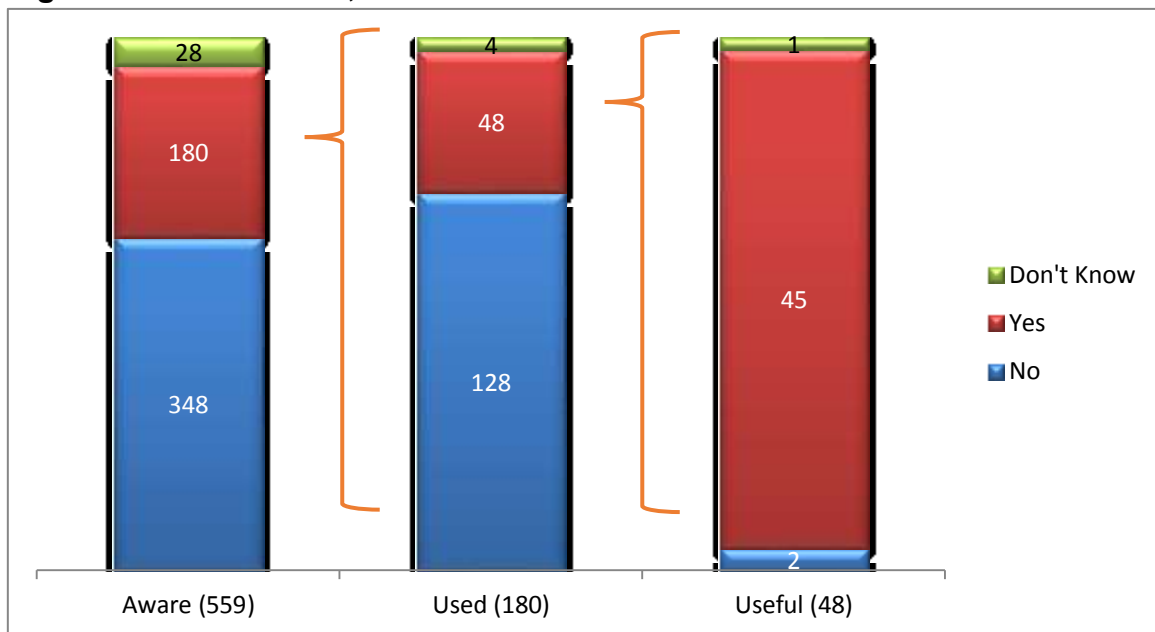Closed question, single response.

7.15 The apprentices we spoke to during the case study visits gave a range of reasons for taking part.

- 'I want to learn more, develop, and hopefully make a career out of it.'

- 'I did an neuro linguistics programming course, which I really enjoyed, and I wanted to do further learning like that; I wanted to learn about learning styles I was interested in at the time.'

- 'I wanted to find a job where I could get qualifications and work.'

- 'I just thought it would be a good way to get qualified.'

7.16 Just under a third of respondents were aware of the Apprenticeship Matching Service (32 per cent), but, in general, it was not used; just over a quarter (27 per cent) of the 48 respondents who were aware used it when they were thinking about doing an apprenticeship. Most of those that did use it thought that it was a useful tool (94 per cent).

Figure 7.1: Awareness, use and usefulness of the AMS

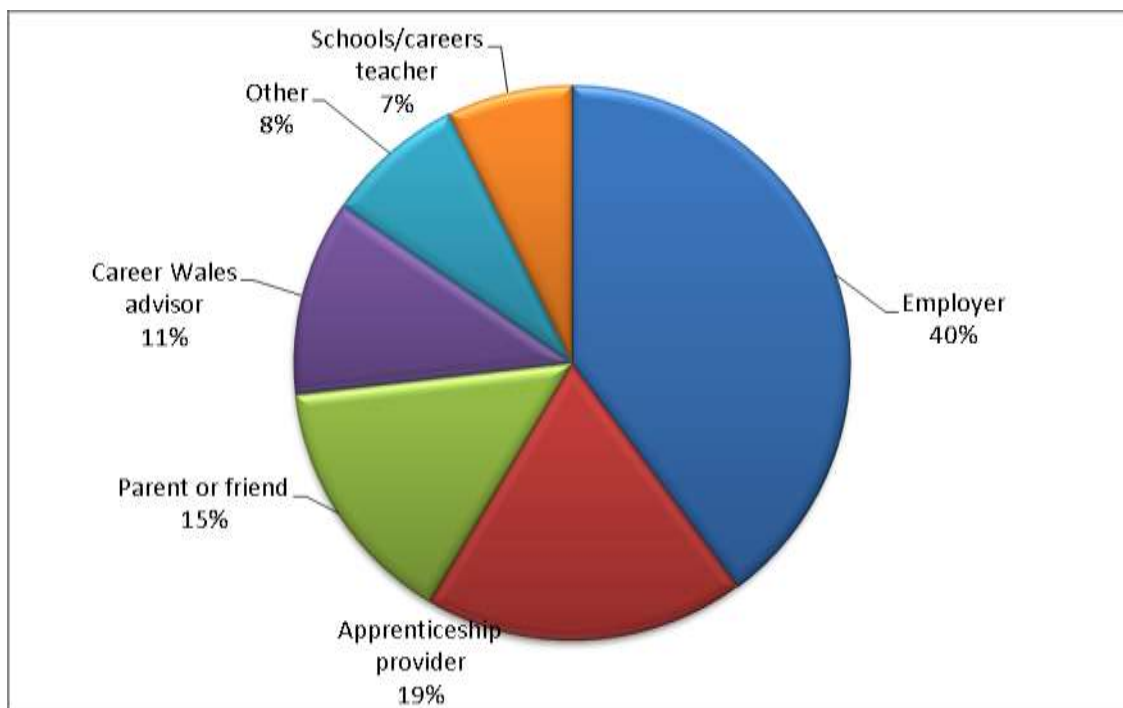Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.

Base: All (559, 180, 48).
Respondents were asked: 'Were you aware of the AMS?', 'If aware, did you use the AMS?', 'If used, did you find the AMS useful?' Closed questions, single response.

7.17 None of the apprentices that we visited during the case studies had used the Apprenticeship Matching Service, and some had not heard of it.

7.18 Two-fifths of respondents (40 per cent) identified that they found out about apprenticeships through their employer (Figure 7.2). 18 of those respondents listing 'other' mentioned online sources, with the Careers Wales website cited directly by four of these respondents.

Figure 7.2: How respondents found out about their apprenticeship

Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.

Base: All (559).
Respondents were asked: 'How did you find out about apprenticeships?'
Closed question, single response.

7.19 Before starting, the majority of participants understood what their apprenticeship involved (81 per cent) and why it would be beneficial (94 per cent).

7.20 Three out of six current case study apprentices felt that there was a lack of discussion and information provided about their apprenticeship. The other apprentices that we spoke to during the case study visits were given more detailed information on the structure and expectations. One learner felt that he didn't require much information, as he had already done a qualification with a similar structure to an apprenticeship. All the apprentices felt that they could access more information if they needed it.

7.21 Just under two-thirds (58 per cent) of respondents were in full time employment before starting their apprenticeship. Job roles included Support Worker, Administrator, Care Worker, Customer Service Advisor, Nursery Nurse, Sales Assistant, Training Coordinator and various roles within the Catering Industry and Trade. Of those that listed themselves as working, either full time or part time, three quarters (75 per cent) were working for the employer that they were doing their apprenticeship with. When looking by age, all apprentices aged upwards of 37 were in work before their apprenticeship. Younger apprentices were mainly either in work or in education.

7.22 Ninety-three respondents listed that they were in education (17 per cent). Prior to their apprenticeship a fifth of respondents (20 per cent) listed A/AS-Levels as the type of education course they were studying.

7.23 Thirty-six respondents were unemployed (6 per cent). Half of these respondents (50 per cent) listed 'just left full time education' as a reason for being unemployed. This was followed by 'lack of relevant work experience' (28 per cent) and 'lack of appropriate jobs where they live' (22 per cent).

7.24 Of the apprentices we spoke to during case study visits, two were doing full-time paid work as employees with the same company that they then started their apprenticeships with. They became involved having been asked by a manager whether they wanted to complete the apprenticeship. Three joined as apprentices and found out about the opportunity through college. One learner was at the organisation he began his apprenticeship with as work experience, but switched to the apprenticeship after learning about it through his colleagues and the college.

7.25 Twenty-six respondents were on a Government funded employment or training programme (Table 7.4). The majority of these respondents were on the Jobs Growth Wales Programme (9), followed by Pathways to apprenticeships (9) and Traineeships (4).

Table 7.4: Respondents situation before starting the apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
Doing paid work as an employee – Full Time	324	*58*
In education	93	*17*
Doing paid work as an employee – Part Time	52	*9*
Unemployed and looking for work	34	*6*
On a Government funded employment or training programme	26	*5*
Working on a self-employed basis	10	*2*
Not in or looking for paid work	2	*0*
Can't remember	11	*2*
Other	7	*1*

Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.
Base: All (559).
Respondents were asked: 'Which of the following best describes your main situation just before you started the apprenticeship?'
Closed question, single response.

7.26 Prior to starting their apprenticeship, the highest level of qualification obtained by respondents was fairly evenly spread between NVQ/GNVQ (26 per cent), GCSE (29 per cent) and A-Level/AS-Level (27 per cent).

7.27 Seven respondents reported that they had a Welsh Baccalaureate. Of these, 4 didn't know what level it was (57 per cent). While, 144 respondents reported that they had an NVQ/GNVQ. The majority of these (49 per cent) had a Level 2. This was closely followed by Level 3 (38 per cent).

During the apprenticeship

7.28 The most gained or improved skills-based benefit of the apprenticeship to respondents is job-specific skills related to their specific occupation (91 per cent) (Table 7.5). This is followed by organisational skills, communication skills, problem solving skills and team working skills (at 85, 84, 83 and 81 per cent, respectively). The least cited skills were CV writing or interview skills and job search skills (at 37 and 35 per cent, respectively).

Table 7.5: Skills that apprentices feel that they have gained or improved whilst being on the course

	Yes Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
Job-specific skills related to your specific occupation	506	*91*
Organisational skills	475	*85*
Communication skills	469	*84*
Problem solving skills	464	*83*
Team working skills	451	*81*
Literacy skills	398	*71*
Numeracy skills	385	*69*
IT skills	356	*64*
Leadership and strategic management skills	356	*64*
English language skills	330	*59*
CV writing or interview skills	209	*37*
Job search skills	193	*35*
Other	25	*5*

Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.

Base: All (559)
Respondents were asked 'Do you think that you have gained or improved on any of the following skills whilst being on the course?'
Closed question, multiple response.

7.29 When comparing Competitiveness and Convergence, a higher proportion of Competitiveness respondents than Convergence respondents said they had improved on CV writing/interview skills whilst being on the course (44 per cent vs. 35 per cent).

7.30 So far, the majority of respondents (90 per cent) felt that the apprenticeship had benefitted them by making them feel more confident in their abilities (Table 7.6). Following this, respondents felt that the apprenticeship had given them better prospects (85 per cent), the range of opportunities available to them was clearer (81 per cent), they felt better about themselves generally (81 per cent) and they were more enthusiastic about learning (80 per cent). However, fewer respondents felt that the apprenticeship had encouraged them to think about setting up their own business or work self-employed (39 per cent), take up new interests or hobbies (36 per cent) or take part in more voluntary or community activities (32 per cent). When looking by age, those apprentices aged 23 upwards were less likely to be; clearer about the range of opportunities available to you, made new friends as a result of the apprenticeship and given you better pay.

Table 7.6: Ways in which the apprenticeship has benefitted respondents so far

|	Yes Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
More confident about your abilities	505	*90*
Given you better prospects	473	*85*
Clearer about the range of opportunities available to you	452	*81*
Feeling better about yourself generally	450	*81*
More enthusiastic about learning	449	*80*
Clearer about what you want to do in life	404	*72*
Made new friends as a result of the apprenticeship	383	*69*
Given you better pay	258	*46*
Feeling more healthy	236	*42*
Thinking about setting up your own business or working self-employed	216	*39*
Taken up new interests and hobbies as a result of the apprenticeship	200	*36*
Taking part in more voluntary or community activities	179	*32*
Other	20	*4*

Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.
Base: All (559)
Respondents were asked 'Do you think that the apprenticeship so far has benefitted you in any of the following ways?'
Closed question, multiple response.

7.31 The majority of respondents felt that the apprenticeship had either directly lead to (23 per cent) or helped (65 per cent) them gain the benefits they had felt so far (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3: How much can you attribute these benefits to the apprenticeship?
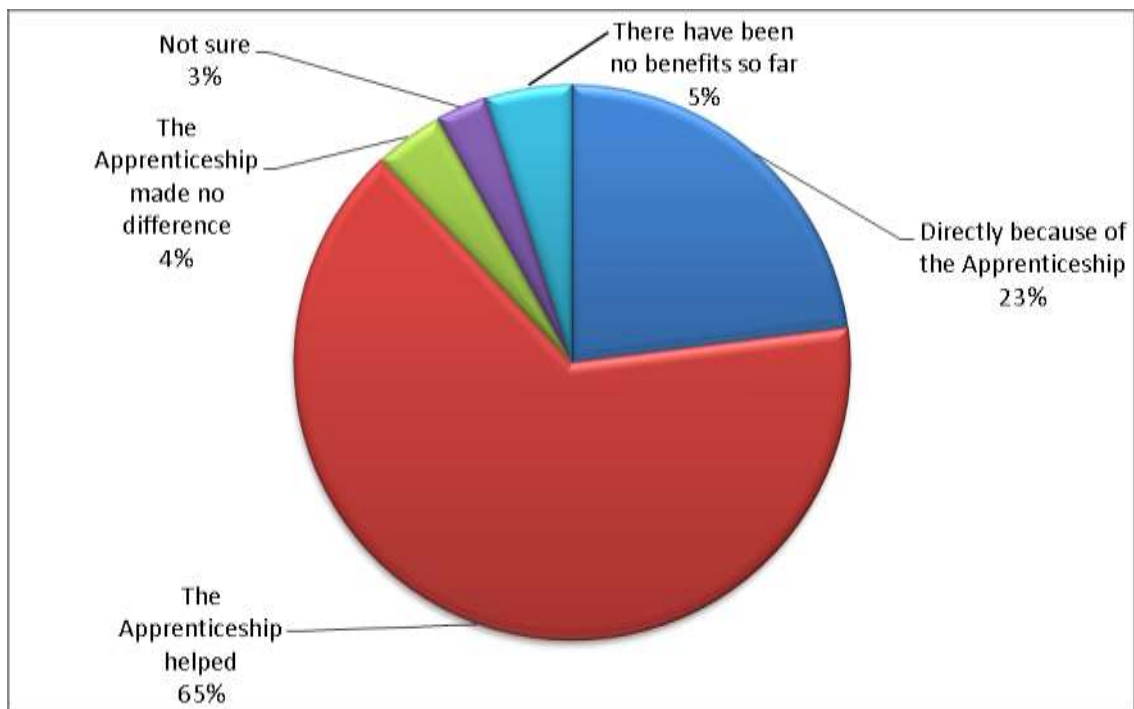
Base: All (559).
Respondents were asked: 'Do you think the benefits that you had were…'
Closed question, single response.

7.32 Some of the benefits given qualitatively by the current apprentices we spoke to during the case study visits related to being challenged, investing in their future, importance of qualifications, confidence and recognition.

- 'It is challenging, but in a good way; I enjoy the challenge.'

- 'I'd rather take less pay and get something that's got an obvious progression ladder.'

- 'With this, it's all one age in [training provider]… people around you are doing similar things and you meet new people.'

- 'I have the paper side of the qualifications, not just the experience.'

- 'It's nice to have industry recognition.'

- 'I feel a lot more confident in making decisions.'

- 'I've learnt more than I could have imagined before I started.'

- 'My work has become easier because I'm understanding more.'

7.33 The majority of respondents (84 per cent) felt that the apprenticeship mostly matched or exceeded their expectations they had before starting. Positively, over a quarter felt that it matched exactly (28 per cent), while just under a fifth felt that it had exceeded expectations (18 per cent) and just over a third said it matched mostly (37 per cent).

Following the apprenticeship

7.34 Nearly half of respondents (49 per cent) wanted to go on to the next level of apprenticeship. However, approximately one third (34 per cent) were unsure about whether they wanted to progress. Fifty-one respondents did not want to progress to the next level; the main reasons were that respondents wanted to continue/find/have been offered full time employment (9), the next level was not required or could not be completed in their current job role (8) or they had no time (6).

7.35 One case study learner stated he wouldn't want to do the Level 4, unless encouraged to do so by his employer. He felt that he had *'got all I could from the college side and learnt a lot more on the job'*.

7.36 Just over two-fifths of respondents (41 per cent) reported that they would not be looking for (continued) employment when they finished their apprenticeship. However, of the 76 respondents that would be looking for employment, approximately two thirds (62 per cent) would like employment with their current employer (Figure 7.4). The majority of respondents who said they would be looking for (continued) employment (81 per cent) believed that their current employer would continue to employ them after their apprenticeship had finished, while 71 respondents (13 per cent) said they didn't know and only 16 (3 per cent) said that their current employer would not continue to employ them.

Figure 7.4: Who would you like employment with?
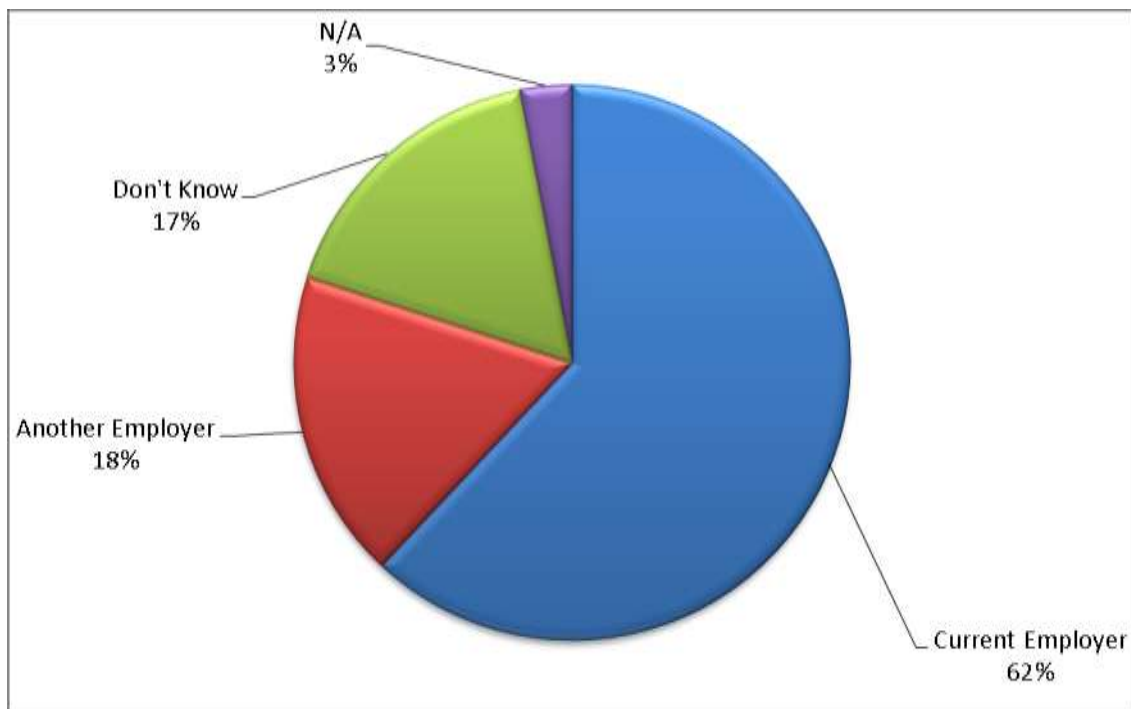
Base: 76 (those that were looking for employment).
Respondents were asked: 'Would you like employment with…'
Closed question, single response.

7.37 Four case study participants said that they would continue to be employed by their current employer, and this was corroborated when speaking to their employers. These four apprentices felt loyal to their current employer. Two apprentices at an engineering employer did not want to gain employment with their current employer at the end of their apprenticeship. They felt that the apprenticeship they were doing was relevant to their career path, but not to their current workplace: '[this employer] is quite old fashioned in the way it does things; a lot of the NVQ is about the modern way of doing things.' They felt that only 10 per cent of their NVQ could be applied to their current workplace.

7.38 Nearly all respondents (94 per cent) felt that their apprenticeship would improve their chances of finding a job in a future; nearly three-fifths (58 per cent) believed that it would give them significantly more chance.

7.39 The majority (85 per cent) were enjoying their apprenticeship, with just under half (46 per cent) agreeing, and just over a third (39 per cent) strongly agreeing.

7.40 Just under two thirds of respondents (63 per cent) were offered the opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh (Table 7.7). Just over half (53 per cent) were offered the opportunity to use Welsh during their course. Just over a third (34 per cent) were offered the opportunity to use Welsh in the workplace, while one quarter (25 per cent) were offered the opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification. Less than a third (29 per cent) were offered none of the above.

Table 7.7: Welsh language offered as part of the apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
The opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh	352	*63*
The opportunity to use Welsh during their course	294	*53*
The opportunity to use Welsh in the workplace	191	*34*
The opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification	142	*25*
None of the above	160	*29*

Source: Current apprentices Survey, 2015.
Base: All (559).
Respondents were asked 'As part of your apprenticeship have you been offered any of the following?' Closed question, multiple response.

7.41 Of the 122 Welsh Speakers, just over two-fifths (42 per cent) had the opportunity to use Welsh in the workplace; nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) had the opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh; just over two-thirds (67 per cent) had the opportunity to use Welsh during their course; nearly three in ten (28 per cent) had the opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification.

7.42 Of the apprentices we spoke to during the case study visits, two were offered teaching in Welsh, but didn't need it, while one did his apprenticeship bilingually.

Summary

7.43 The most cited reason for doing the apprenticeship was 'to develop a broader range of skills and/or knowledge' (97 per cent), closely followed by 'to develop more specialist skills and/or knowledge' and 'to improve or widen your career prospects' (both at 95 per cent).

7.44 Just over three fifths of respondents (62 per cent) chose the apprenticeship they wanted. At the time of choosing to do their apprenticeship, the majority of respondents (81 per cent) did not think about doing a different course to the one they ended up doing. Those who had thought about doing a different course were fairly evenly split when indicating whether this alternative course was in the same (56 per cent) or a different (41 per cent) sector.

7.45 Just under a third of respondents were aware of the Apprenticeship Matching Service (32 per cent). However, in general, it was not used; just over a quarter (13 of the 48 respondents who were aware) actually used it when they were thinking about doing an apprenticeship. Most of those that did use it thought that it was a useful tool (94 per cent).

7.46 Before starting, the majority of participants understood what their apprenticeship involved (81 per cent) and why it would be beneficial (94 per cent). Just under two-thirds (58 per cent) of respondents were in full time employment before starting their apprenticeship; with 17 per cent in education and 6 per cent unemployed.

7.47 The majority of respondents (84 per cent) felt that the apprenticeship mostly matched or exceeded their expectations they had before starting.

7.48 Of the 122 Welsh Speakers, just over two-fifths (42 per cent) had the opportunity to use Welsh in the workplace; nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) had the opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh; just over two-thirds (67 per cent) had the opportunity to use Welsh during their course; just under a third (28 per cent) had the opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification.

8   Apprenticeship Leaver Experiences

Introduction

8.1   This section analyses the results of telephone survey of 520 apprenticeship leavers, to understand what has happened since completing their learning, and two past apprentices interviewed as part of the employer case study visits.

Before the apprenticeship

8.2   During the period following compulsory education and starting their apprenticeship, approximately two-fifths of respondents (38 per cent) were continuously in paid work. Approximately one third (31 per cent) were in paid work for most of the time between leaving compulsory education and beginning their apprenticeship. Less than one-fifth (19 per cent) were continuously in education or training.

8.3   The majority of respondents were in work immediately before starting their course (83 per cent), while few described themselves as 'learning' (12 per cent). Only 19 respondents (4 per cent) were unemployed and looking for work.

8.4   Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74 per cent) were working for the same employer before starting their apprenticeship. More females than males were working for the same employer before starting their apprenticeship as during (88 per cent of females vs. 61 per cent of males). More 45+ year olds were working for the same employer before their apprenticeship (95 per cent compared with 55 per cent (18-24), 84 per cent (25-34), 83 per cent (35-44)).

8.5   Approximately one-tenth of respondents were either working for a different employer before starting their apprenticeship (8 per cent) or were in full-time education or training before starting their apprenticeship (11 per cent).

8.6   Nearly one-third of respondents (29 per cent) had been working for two years or more, but less than five years, prior to starting their apprenticeship. Following this, 83 respondents (19 per cent) had been working for a year or more, but less than two years, while, 75 respondents (17 per cent) had been working for five years or more, but less than 10 years.

8.7 Of the respondents working prior to starting their apprenticeship, the majority of these were permanently employed (84 per cent), working 30 hours or more per week (80 per cent). More females than males were in permanent employment before starting their apprenticeship (90 per cent of females vs. 77 per cent of males). The majority of those in work (67 per cent) did not have formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees. There was a strong positive correlation between level of apprenticeship and having a formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees in their job prior to the apprenticeship (24 per cent (Foundation), 38 per cent (apprenticeship), 74 per cent (Higher)).

8.8 Nearly all of those employed before starting their apprenticeship (87 per cent) were satisfied with their previous job overall. The majority were satisfied that their work took place in a safe and healthy environment (93 per cent) and were satisfied with the actual work they were doing (91 per cent) (Table 8.1). Just over four-fifths were satisfied with relations with their supervisor or manager (84 per cent), their job security (82 per cent), the number of hours they worked (82 per cent) and that they had the opportunity to use their own initiative (86 per cent). Four-fifths (80 per cent) were satisfied with their capacity to fulfil their potential at work. Three-fifths (60 per cent) were satisfied with their overall pay, including overtime or bonuses.

Table 8.1: Number of respondents satisfied with the following aspects of their job prior to apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
The work took place in a safe and healthy environment	403	*93*
The actual work itself	395	*91*
All things considered, how satisfied were you with your previous job overall	379	*87*
Opportunity to use your own initiative	375	*86*
Relations with your supervisor or manager	366	*84*
The number of hours you work	358	*82*
Job security	358	*82*
Your capacity to fulfil your potential at work	349	*80*
Your overall pay, including overtime or bonuses	259	*60*

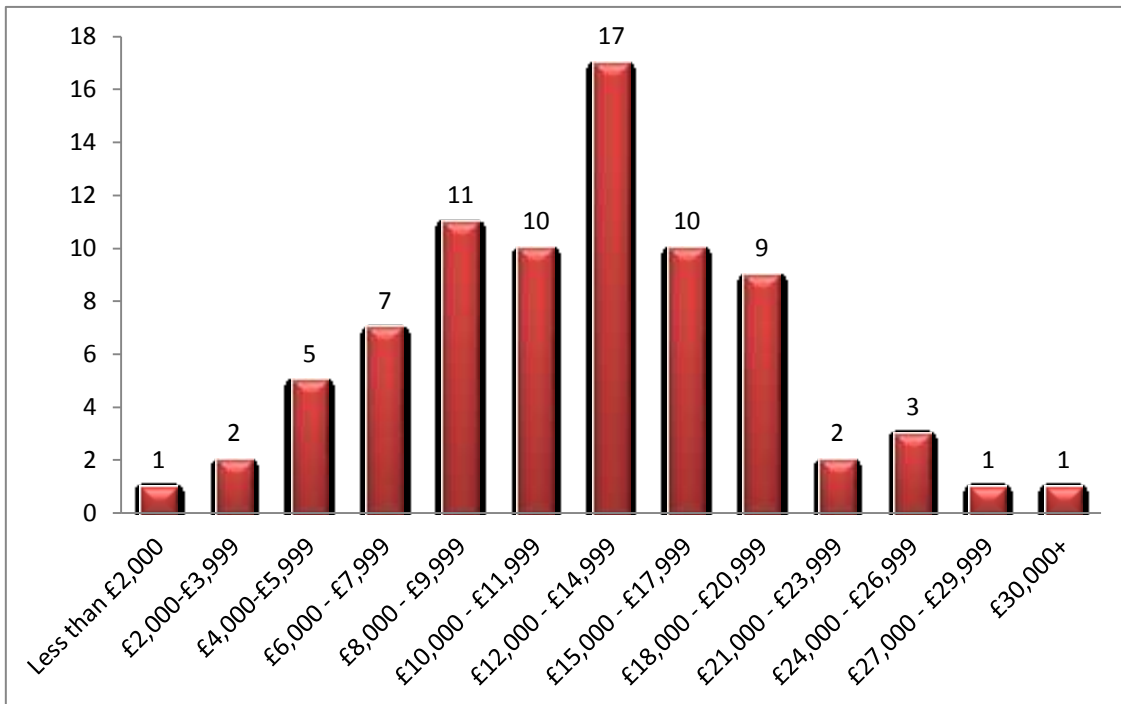Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 434 (those working prior to starting their apprenticeship).
Respondents were asked 'How would you rate your job prior to the apprenticeship on the following aspects...?'
Closed question, single response.

8.9   The majority of those employed before starting their apprenticeship (57 per cent) were earning between £8,000 and £20,999 (Figure 8.1). Just over a tenth (14 per cent) didn't know what they were earning, while 33 respondents (8 per cent) refused to say. One fifth (20 per cent) saw an increase in their pay as a direct result of starting their apprenticeship, but the majority (68 per cent) said it stayed the same. Twenty-four respondents (6 per cent) said that it had decreased, while another 24 (6 per cent) said that it had changed, but not as a direct result of starting their apprenticeship.

Figure 8.1: Gross annual pay in job prior to apprenticeship (per cent)

Base: 434 (those working prior to starting their apprenticeship).
Respondents were asked: 'What was your gross annual pay in your job prior to the apprenticeship?'
Closed question, single response. Note: chart shows percentages of all those working prior to starting their apprenticeship, although 21 per cent who did not know or refused are not included in the chart

8.10 When allowed to select multiple responses, the top three reasons for doing their apprenticeship were 'to develop a broader range of skills and/or knowledge' (94 per cent), 'to improve or widen their career prospects' (90 per cent), and 'to develop more specialist skills and/or knowledge' (82 per cent) (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2: Reasons and main reason for doing the apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents	Main Reason Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
To develop a broader range of skills and/or knowledge	487	*94*	133	*26*
To improve or widen your career prospects	467	*90*	139	*27*
To develop more specialist skills and/or knowledge	426	*82*	71	*14*
To learn something new for personal interest	412	*79*	33	*6*
To improve your pay, promotion or other prospects at work	385	*74*	39	*8*
To help you get a job	297	*57*	41	*8*
To help you progress onto another education, training or learning course	284	*55*	10	*2*
An advisor recommended that you should complete an apprenticeship as it was relevant to your needs	265	*51*	4	*1*
Your employer requested or required you to do it	191	*37*	31	*6*
To gain qualifications – improve CV	25	*5*	8	*2*
To improve/update existing skills	10	*2*	4	*1*
It was compulsory (Inc. Job Centre required it)	4	*1*	4	*1*
To better myself and improve my life – personal challenge	4	*1*	1	*<1*
Other	16	*2*	-	-

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 434 (those working prior to starting their apprenticeship).
Respondents were asked 'Were any of the following reasons for doing the apprenticeship?'; 'Which of the following reasons was the main reason for doing the apprenticeship?'
Closed question, multiple responses; closed question, single response.

8.11 More males than females cited 'to help you get a job' as a reason for starting their apprenticeship (68 per cent of males vs. 46 per cent of females). There was a steady negative correlation between age and those listing 'to help you get a job' as a reason for doing an apprenticeship (74 per cent (18-24), 54 per cent (25-34), 45 per cent (35-44), 31 per cent (45+)). There was a strong negative correlation between level of apprenticeship and those that cited 'to help you get a job' as a reason that they undertook an apprenticeship (61 per cent (Foundation), 54 per cent (apprenticeship), 39 per cent (Higher)).

8.12 This was to be expected as older participants and those doing HAs were more likely to be in secure employment already.

8.13 When asked to give their main reason for doing their apprenticeship, the most cited was to 'improve or widen their career prospects' (27 per cent), closely followed by 'to develop a broader range of skills and/or knowledge' (26 per cent). More 35-44 year olds than any other age bracket listed 'to improve their careers prospects' as their main reason for doing an apprenticeship (14 per cent vs. 6 per cent (18-24), 8 per cent (25-34), 6 per cent (45+)). More 45+ year olds listed 'my employer requested I do it' as their main reason for doing an apprenticeship (11 per cent vs. 5 per cent (18-24), 4 per cent (25-34), 6 per cent (35-44)).

8.14 Views of case study respondents supported the above: when asked why they decided to take part, one past apprentice said: 'I wanted to improve my abilities to manage and back this up with theory. I wanted to confirm my current ways of working and have other options in terms of ways to manage.'

8.15 The majority of respondents (86 per cent) did not think about doing a different course to the one they completed. Of the 74 respondents that did consider an alternative course, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) chose the apprenticeship they did as opposed to an alternative because the content was better and more suited to their needs (Table 8.3).

Table 8.3: Reasons for choosing their apprenticeship over an alternative

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
The apprenticeship content was better and more suited to your needs	54	*73*
The time or location was more convenient than the other courses	42	*57*
The apprenticeship was free, or was cheaper than the alternative courses	22	*30*
It was the only one offered/available to me (Inc. couldn't get onto the course I wanted)	3	*4*

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 74 (those that considered an alternative apprenticeship).
Respondents were asked 'What was your reason for choosing the apprenticeship rather than others?'
Closed question, multiple response.

Learning about the apprenticeship

8.16 Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) were not aware of the Apprenticeship Matching Service. Of those that were aware, 43 of them (30 per cent) used the Apprenticeship Matching Service when thinking about doing an apprenticeship. Of these 43 respondents, nearly all of them (98 per cent) found the service a useful tool. More 18-24 year olds than any other age bracket were aware of the online apprenticeship Matching Service (39 per cent vs. 19 per cent (25-34), 17 per cent (35-44), 19 per cent (45+)). This is unsurprising as they were the primary targets for the AMS.

8.17 The main way respondents found out about apprenticeships was through their employer (55 per cent). In an example from one case study one past apprentice was asked by a manager whether he wanted to complete the apprenticeship. For him, it was an opportunity to do a qualification as part of his continuing professional development.

8.18 More females than males found out about their apprenticeship through their employer (70 per cent of females vs. 41 per cent of males). However, more males than females found out about their apprenticeship through a parent/friend (19 per cent of males vs. 6 per cent of females). When comparing two ends of the age spectrum, more 45+ year olds than 18-24 year olds found out about the apprenticeship through the apprenticeship provider (19 per cent vs. 6 per cent), while more 18-24 year olds than 45+ year olds found out about the apprenticeship through a parent/friend (20 per cent vs. 3 per cent). There was a positive correlation between age and those citing their employer as where they found out about the apprenticeship (38 per cent (18-24), 64 per cent (25-34), 69 per cent (35-44), 73 per cent (45+)).

During the apprenticeship

8.19 Approximately one-quarter of respondents (24 per cent) were recruited specifically as an apprentice or to undertake an apprenticeship. More males than females were specifically recruited as an apprentice/to undertake an apprenticeship (36 per cent of males vs. 15 per cent of females). More 18-24 year olds were specifically recruited as an apprentice or to undertake an apprenticeship (45 per cent vs. 19 per cent (25-34), 9 per cent (35-44), 9 per cent (45+)).

8.20 The majority of respondents said that their apprenticeship took place at their workplace/employer premises (86 per cent), during the working week (93 per cent), with 25 hours or more spent per week on the apprenticeship, including working hours and on the job training (85 per cent).

8.21 Just under three-fifths (58 per cent) said that they spent an additional 0-4 hours per week receiving off the job training or studying independently, while just under a third (27 per cent) said they spent an additional 5-9 hours per week.

8.22 Just over three-fifths of respondents (61 per cent) said that their apprenticeship took a year or more. Just under a third (27 per cent) said that it took between six months and a year.

8.23 The majority of respondents agreed that apprenticeships are good for getting experience and skills (94 per cent), a good stepping stone towards getting employment (93 per cent) and help you progress in employment (90 per cent) (Table 8.4). Over three-quarters of respondents agreed that apprenticeships are respected by people in general (79 per cent).

Table 8.4: Number of respondents that agreed with the following statements

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
Apprenticeships are good for getting experience and skills	488	*94*
Apprenticeships are a good stepping stone towards getting employment	483	*93*
Apprenticeships help you progress in employment	467	*90*
Apprenticeships are respected by people in general	412	*79*

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: All (520).
Respondents were asked 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?'
Closed question, single response.

Welsh Language

8.24 Just over four-fifths of respondents were offered the opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh (82 per cent) and to use Welsh during their course (83 per cent). Just under half of the respondents (48 per cent) were offered the opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification.

8.25 Just under a quarter of respondents (142) said that they could speak Welsh; of these:

- Over fourth-fifths were given the opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh (85 per cent) and to use Welsh during their course (86 per cent)

- Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) were given the opportunity to use Welsh in the workplace

- Almost three-fifths (58 per cent) were given the opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification

8.26 The majority of respondents were satisfied with their provider overall (88 per cent), the support from their provider while they were on the apprenticeship (88 per cent) and the support from their provider to deal with problems/challenges (89 per cent) (Table 8.5). The majority of respondents (85 per cent) were satisfied with their employer overall, while four-fifths (80 per cent) were satisfied with the support from their employer to deal with problems/challenges and just under four-fifths (79 per cent) were satisfied with the support from their employer while they were on the apprenticeship.

8.27 Those that left early were more dissatisfied with their employer and training provider for all aspects (overall, support and support to deal with problems).

Table 8.5: Number of respondents satisfied with the following aspects

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
Provider support to deal with problems/challenges	462	*89*
The provider overall	460	*88*
The support from your provider while you were on the apprenticeship	460	*88*
The employer overall	440	*85*
Employer support to deal with problems/challenges	417	*80*
The support from your employer while you were on the apprenticeship	411	*79*

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: All (520).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied
'How would you rate your apprenticeship provider/employer on the following aspects...?'
Closed question, single response. Count=sum of 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied'.

8.28 Nearly all respondents (98 per cent) said they gained either qualifications or units/credits towards qualifications as a result of being on the apprenticeship.

Following the apprenticeship

8.29 Just over four-fifths of respondents completed their course (83 per cent), while 85 respondents (16 per cent) left early. This is broadly in line with overall apprenticeship success rate data.

8.30 Of the respondents that did not complete their apprenticeship, one-quarter (25 per cent) left to start a different job. Just under one-fifth (19 per cent) felt that their apprenticeship did not meet their expectations or changed their job/were made redundant. Other reasons included: lack of time/too busy (13 per cent), family/personal circumstances (12 per cent), ill health/disability (11 per cent), lack of support/help (8 per cent) and apprenticeship cancelled/closed down (8 per cent).

8.31 The ends of the spectrum in terms of level of apprenticeship (foundation apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship) had a greater percentage of people leaving early in comparison to those on an apprenticeship, with the greatest percentage of those leaving early coming from higher apprenticeships (17 per cent (Foundation), 13 per cent (apprenticeship), 27 per cent (Higher)).

8.32 The key reasons as to why those on foundation apprenticeships and apprenticeships left early were to start a different job (25 per cent (Foundation), 32 per cent (apprenticeship)) or a change of job/made redundant (16 per cent (Foundation), 32 per cent (apprenticeship)). The key reason for why those on higher apprenticeships left early was that the apprenticeship did not meet expectations (56 per cent); this was also a major reason for those on foundation apprenticeships (20 per cent).

8.33 Having completed their apprenticeships, nearly all of the respondents (93 per cent) were in work, while 9 respondents (2 per cent) were in learning. Only 12 (2 per cent) respondents were unemployed and looking for work.

8.34 Three-fifths of respondents (60 per cent) were now doing paid work as an employee for the same employer as during their apprenticeship. There was a positive correlation between age and those now doing paid work for the same employer that they did their apprenticeship with (49 per cent (18-24), 62 per cent (25-34), 70 per cent (35-44), 75 per cent (45+)). The majority of those on higher apprenticeships were working with the same employer that they had during their apprenticeship (88 per cent).

8.35 This pattern was seen in our case study respondents where one former apprentice said explicitly that he felt loyal to his employer, and had no intention of moving elsewhere.

8.36 Just under three in ten (28 per cent) were also doing paid work as an employee, but for a different employer than during their apprenticeship. More 18-24 year olds than any other age bracket were now working for a different employer than the employer they were with during their apprenticeship (39 per cent compared with 25 per cent (25-34), 20 per cent (35-44), 13 per cent (45+)). A minority (5 per cent) were now working on a self-employed basis. Twelve respondents (2 per cent) were unemployed and looking for work), while 9 were either in full-time education/training or on a Government-funded employed/training programme.

8.37 Of those doing paid work as an employee, the majority (89 per cent) were working on a permanent basis, while a minority were working on a seasonal/casual/temporary basis (5 per cent) or under a contract for a limited period (4 per cent).

8.38 Of those employed, including on a self-employed basis, the majority (89 per cent) were working 30 hours or more per week, while 46 respondents (9 per cent) were working 16 to 29 hours per week. More females than males were working between 16 and 29 hours per week (15 per cent of females vs. 4 per cent of males).

Impact on job responsibility

8.39 Following their apprenticeship, just over two-fifths (44 per cent) had formal responsibilities for supervising the work of other employees. However, the majority (56 per cent) did not. There was an increase in those with formal responsibilities for supervising the work of other employees after the apprenticeship (from the 33 per cent that had formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees prior to their apprenticeship).

8.40 There was a strong positive correlation between level of apprenticeship and having a formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees in their job now (36 per cent (Foundation), 52 per cent (apprenticeship), 63 per cent (Higher)).

8.41 Interestingly, when comparing this with those that had formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees in their job prior to the apprenticeship, there was an increase in percentage points for those on foundation apprenticeships (24 per cent before - an increase of 12 percentage points) and apprenticeships (38 per cent before - an increase of 14 percentage points) before and after their apprenticeship, but a decrease in percentage points for those on higher apprenticeships (74 per cent before - a decrease of 11 percentage points).

Job satisfaction

8.42 Employed respondents, including those self-employed, were more satisfied with all prompted aspects of their job following their apprenticeship, than before their apprenticeship (Table 8.6). The biggest difference was seen in overall pay, including overtime of bonuses, where the percentage of those satisfied increased from 60 per cent before their apprenticeship to 75 per cent after (+15 percentage points). The number of hours worked also increased (+10 percentage points), as well as their capacity to fulfil their potential at work (+9 percentage points) and the opportunity to use their own initiative (+8 percentage points).

Table 8.6: Number of respondents satisfied with the following aspects of their job

	Before App. Count	Before App. Percentage of Sample Respondents	Post-App. Count	Post-App. Percentage of Sample Respondents	Difference in Percentage Points
Your overall pay, including overtime or bonuses	259	*60*	365	*75*	*+15*
The number of hours you work	358	*82*	449	*92*	*+10*
Your capacity to fulfil your potential at work	349	*80*	434	*89*	*+9*
Opportunity to use your own initiative	375	*86*	455	*94*	*+8*
Relations with your supervisor or manager	366	*84*	421	*92*	*+8*
All things considered, how satisfied were you with your previous job overall	379	*87*	451	*93*	*+6*
Job security	358	*82*	427	*88*	*+6*
The work took place in a safe and healthy environment	403	*93*	474	*98*	*+5*
The actual work itself	395	*91*	453	*93*	*+2*
Base	***434***	***100***	***486***	***100***	***-***

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 434 (those that were employed, including those self-employed, before the apprenticeship), 486 (those that were employed, including those self-employed, after the apprenticeship).
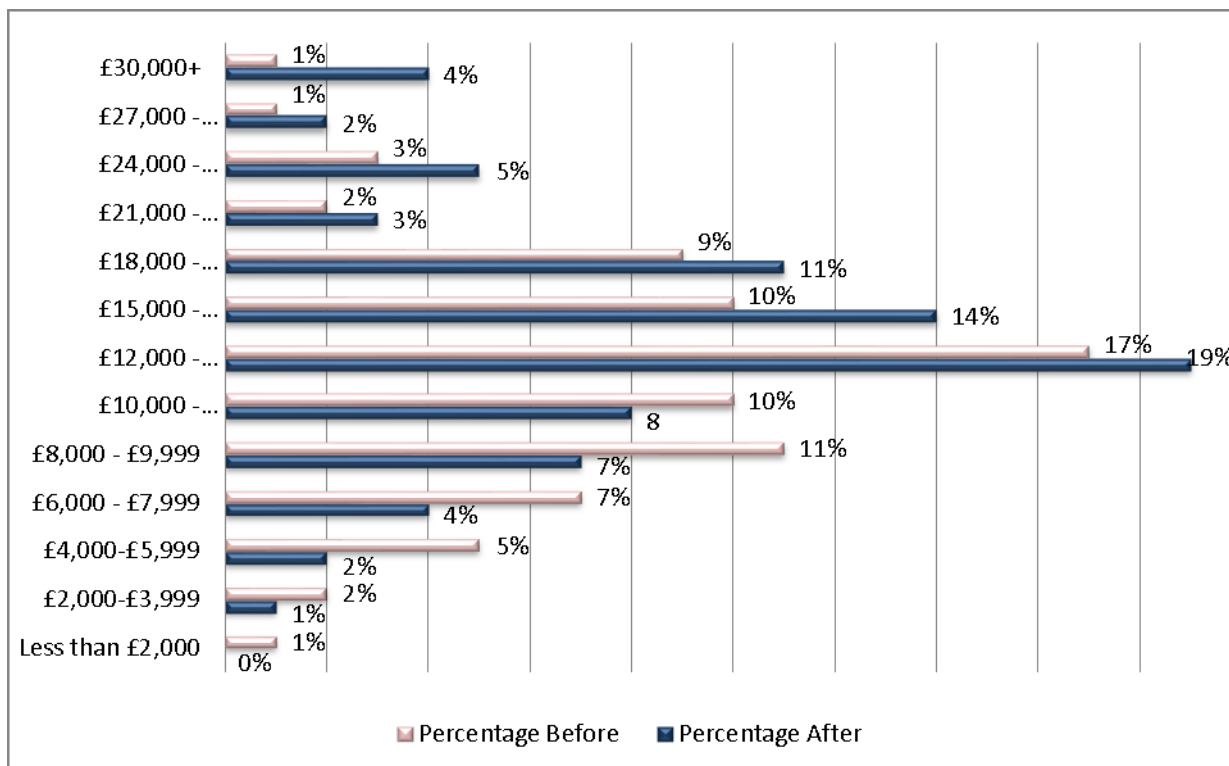Respondents were asked: 'How would you rate your job prior to the apprenticeship on the following aspects...?'; 'How would you rate your current work on the following aspects...?'
Closed questions, single response.

Salary

8.43 There was an overall increase in gross annual pay following the apprenticeships of wage brackets from £12,000 upwards (Figure 8.2). Fewer respondents were being paid £10,000 and less. Fifty respondents (10 per cent) didn't know what they were earning, while 47 respondents (10 per cent) refused to say.

Figure 8.2: **Gross annual pay in job following apprenticeship**

Wider benefits of the apprenticeship

8.44 Respondents cited most (89 per cent) that they felt more confident in their abilities following the apprenticeship (Table 8.7). Respondents also felt better in themselves generally (86 per cent), that they had improved employment or career prospects (84 per cent) and that they were clearer about the range of opportunities open to them (83 per cent). Fewer respondents had taken up new interests or hobbies (17 per cent) or taken part in more voluntary/community activities (31 per cent) as a result of the apprenticeship.

Table 8.7: Benefits of the course

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
More confident about your abilities	464	*89*
Feeling better about yourself generally	448	*86*
Feeling you have improved employment or career prospects	437	*84*
Clearer about the range of opportunities open to you	430	*83*
More enthusiastic about learning	409	*79*
Clearer about what you want to do in your life	367	*71*
Feeling more healthy	336	*65*
Have you made new friends as a result of the apprenticeship	323	*62*
Thinking about setting up your own business or working self-employed	181	*35*
Taking part in more voluntary or community activities	163	*31*
As a result of the apprenticeship have you taken up new interests or hobbies	90	*17*
None of the above	12	*2*
Base	*520*	*100*

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.

Base: All (520).
Respondents were asked: 'Which of the following were benefits of the course…?'
Closed question, multiple response.

8.45 More males than females listed 'setting up their own business or working self-employed' (46 per cent of males vs. 21 per cent of females) and 'made new friends' as a result of the apprenticeship (79 per cent of males vs. 45 per cent of females). Furthermore, more males than females stated that they had taken up new interests or hobbies as a result of the apprenticeship (22 per cent of males vs. 13 per cent of females).

8.46 Older participants (45+ year olds) were less likely than any other age bracket to take part in voluntary/community activities because of their apprenticeship (19 per cent vs. 33 per cent (18-24), 34 per cent (25-34), 34 per cent (35-44)). There was a steady negative correlation between age and those thinking about setting up their own business or working self-employed because of the apprenticeship (50 per cent (18-24), 32 per cent (25-34), 22 per cent (35-44), 10 per cent (45+)). More 18-24 year olds than any other age bracket felt, due to the apprenticeship, more healthy (78 per cent vs. 60 per cent (25-34), 50 per cent (35-44), 49 per cent (45+)) and had made new friends (77 per cent vs. 53 per cent (25-34), 59 per cent (35-44), 43 per cent (45+)).

8.47 Although 85 respondents left early, they do still appear to recognise that they had benefitted from their time on the programme:

- Exactly, or just under, three-quarters were: more confident in their abilities (75 per cent); clearer about the range of opportunities open to them (73 per cent); and, felt better about themselves generally (73 per cent).

- Over three-fifths were more enthusiastic about learning (65 per cent), felt more clear about what they wanted to do in life (65 per cent) and felt they had improved employment or career prospects (61 per cent).

- Just over half had made new friends (53 per cent).

- Taking part in more voluntary/community activities (34 per cent), thinking about setting up their own business or working self-employed (34 per cent), feeling more healthy (62 per cent) and taking up new hobbies or interests (15 per cent) were rated similarly to those who had completed their apprenticeship.

8.48 Examples of benefits identified by case study participants, included:

- 'As the apprenticeship is vocationally based, I could mould it however I wanted.'

- 'It's been a very positive experience.'

- NVQ modules were tailored around making them work for the participant

- 'I enjoyed going back to study – it involved using your brain in a certain way.'

- 'I didn't feel I was stretching myself in my job role, but felt the apprenticeship was mentally rigorous.'

8.49 One learner was told about the next level of apprenticeship available to him – Level 7. However, he felt that his training provider had 'tried to put him off'; the provider had told him that many people drop out of the Level 7, as it is very intense, particularly when working.

8.50 A concern raised in a case study relating to essential skills was that it felt 'clunky' to the past participant:

'Essential skills was based on a low, fundamental level, but the assessment criteria was set at a higher level. For the final part, to do with ICT skills, particularly, I had to jump through hoops to match the criteria they wanted, which weren't clear – I had to resubmit work in order to tick boxes'.

8.51 Communication skills were cited by most respondents (82 per cent) as improved or gained as a result of the course, followed by organisational skills (80 per cent) (Table 8.8). The majority of respondents listed problem solving skills (78 per cent), team working skills (78 per cent) and job-specific skills related to a specific occupation (77 per cent) as skills improved or gained as a result of the apprenticeship. Less than half of respondents said that they had improved or gained job search skills (48 per cent) or CV writing/interview skills (47 per cent).

Table 8.8: Skills improved or gained as a result of the course

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
Communication skills	424	*82*
Organisational skills	417	*80*
Problem solving skills	404	*78*
Team working skills	407	*78*
Job-specific skills related to a specific occupation	400	*77*
Numeracy skills	352	*68*
Literacy skills	336	*65*
Leadership and/or strategic management skills	306	*59*
English language skills	309	*59*
IT skills	273	*53*
Job search skills	252	*48*
CV writing or interview skills	244	*47*
Confidence/self esteem	20	*4*
Interpersonal/people skills	7	*1*
Health and safety Inc. manual handling skills	2	*<1*
Other	11	*2*
None of the above	32	*6*
Base	***520***	***100***

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.

Base: All (520).
Respondents were asked: 'Which of the following are skills that you have improved or gained as a result of the course…?'
Closed question, multiple response.

8.52 Although 85 respondents left early, they appear to have gained or improved on the various skills at a similar level, despite not completing the course.

8.53 The majority of respondents (86 per cent) felt that they had been able to apply what they learnt on their apprenticeship.

Attribution of changes to the apprenticeship

8.54 Of those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship (267 respondents), just under a third (31 per cent) had had a promotion since doing their apprenticeship (Figure 8.3). The majority of the 82 respondents that had had a promotion, felt it was either directly due to the apprenticeship (17 per cent) or that it had helped (49 per cent). More males than females said that they had had a promotion at work since completing their apprenticeship (38 per cent of males vs. 26 per cent of females).

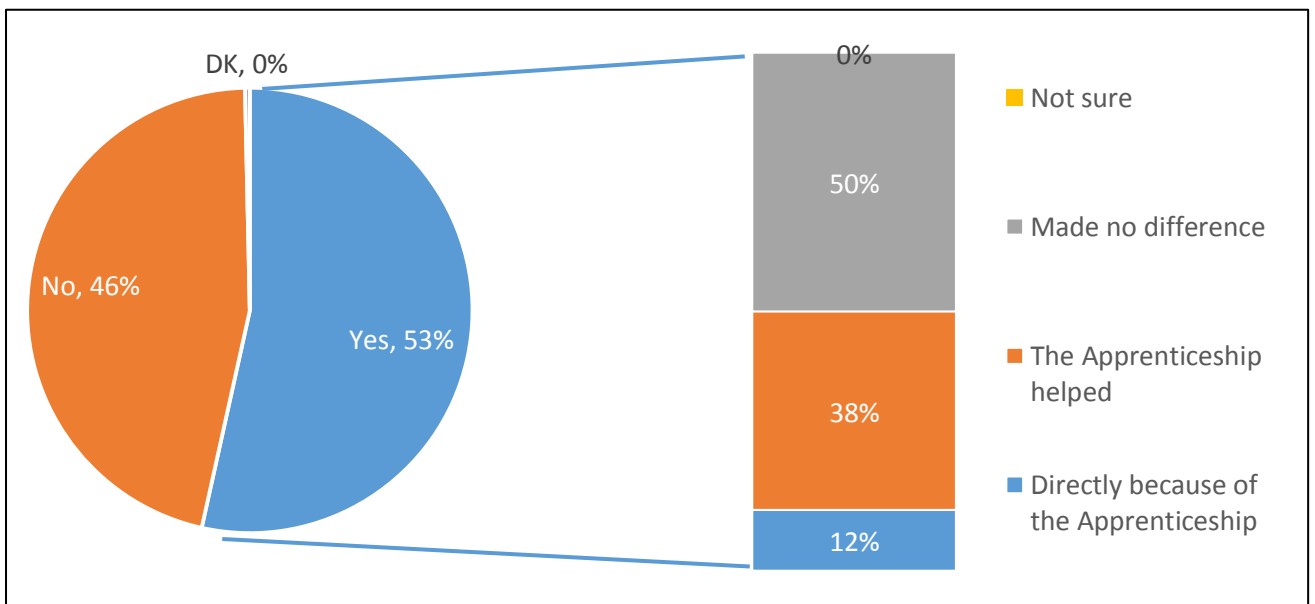**Figure 8.3: Have you had a promotion? Do you think this improvement was…?**
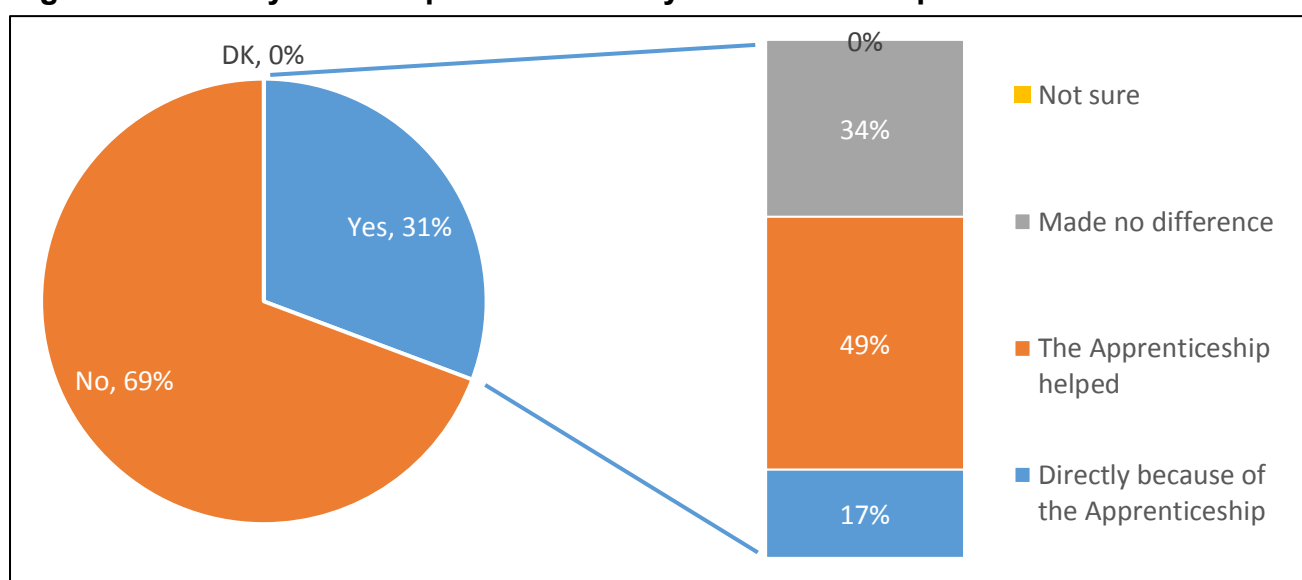
Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.

Base: 267 (those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship), 82 (those that answered 'Yes').
Respondents were asked: 'Have you had a promotion?'; 'Do you think this improvement was…?'
Closed question, single response.

8.55 Of those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship or those that were self-employed now and had been self-employed or working before the apprenticeship (288 respondents), just over half had had an increase in their pay rate/salary/income (53 per cent) (Figure 8.4). Opinion was split evenly between these respondents about whether the apprenticeship directly resulted in/helped with this or not. More males than females said that they had had a pay rate, salary or income increase since completing their apprenticeship (62 per cent of males vs. 47 per cent of females).

Figure 8.4: Has your pay rate, salary or income increased? Do you think this improvement was…?
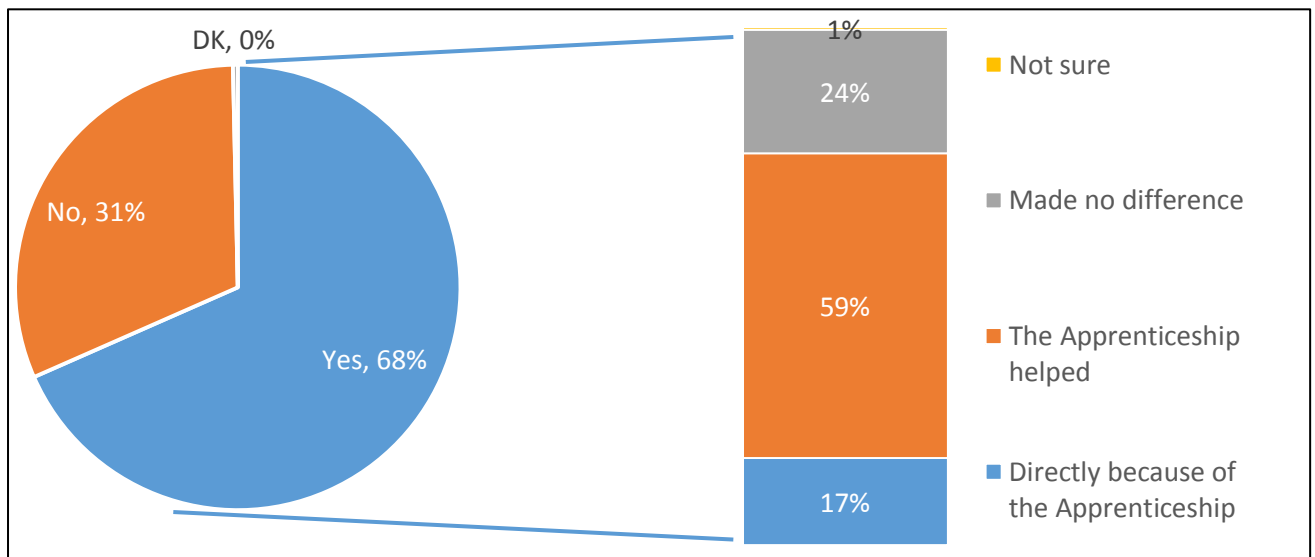

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.

Base: 288 (those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship or those that were self-employed now and had been self-employed or working before the apprenticeship), 154 (those that answered 'Yes').
Respondents were asked: 'Has your pay rate, salary or income increased?'; 'Do you think this improvement was…?'
Closed question, single response.

8.56 The majority of the 288 respondents felt that their future pay and promotion prospects had improved (56 per cent); with most of these respondents stating that this was directly due to the apprenticeship (21 per cent) or that it had helped (47 per cent) (Figure 8.5). More males than females said that their future pay and promotion prospects had improved since completing their apprenticeship (69 per cent of males vs. 47 per cent of females).

Figure 8.5: Have your future pay and promotion prospects improved? Do you think this improvement was…?

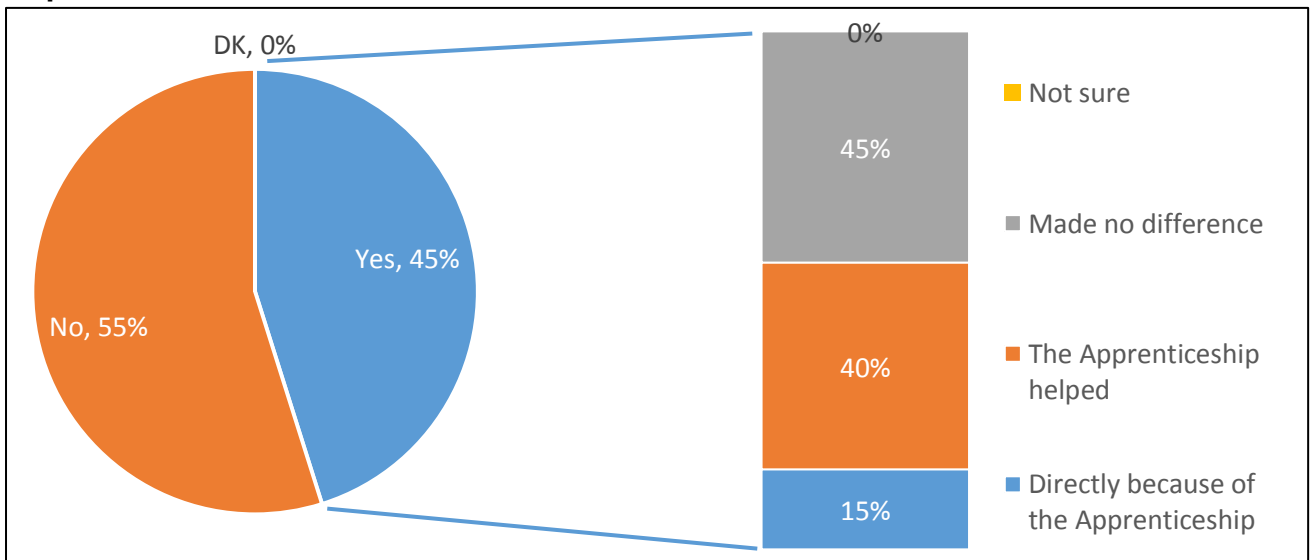Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 288 (those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship or those that were self-employed now and had been self-employed or working before the apprenticeship), 161 (those that answered 'Yes').
Respondents were asked: 'Have your future pay and promotion prospects improved?'; 'Do you think this improvement was…?'
Closed question, single response.

8.57 Of the 288, just over two-thirds felt they were getting more job satisfaction (68 per cent) and the majority of these respondents felt that this was either directly due to the apprenticeship (17 per cent) or that it had helped (59 per cent) (Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6: Are you getting more job satisfaction? Do you think this improvement was…?

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 288 (those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship or those that were self-employed now and had been self-employed or working before the apprenticeship), 197 (those that answered 'Yes').
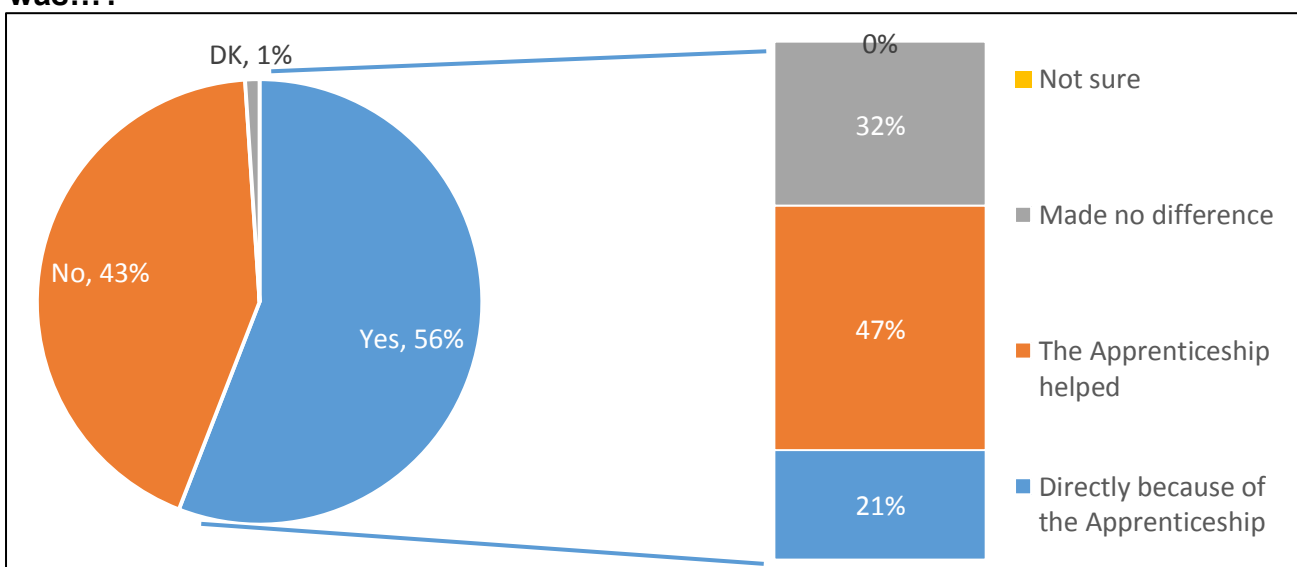Respondents were asked: 'Are you getting more job satisfaction?'; 'Do you think this improvement was…?'
Closed question, single response.

8.58 Of the 288, just over two-fifths (45 per cent) felt they had better job security, and just over half of these respondents (55 per cent) felt that this was either directly due to or that the apprenticeship had helped (Figure 8.7). More respondents in Convergence areas (65 per cent) felt that this was either directly due to or that the apprenticeship had helped, than in Competitiveness areas (50 per cent).

8.59 More males than females said that they have had better job security at work since completing their apprenticeship (56 per cent of males vs. 38 per cent of females). There was a negative correlation between level of apprenticeship and those that cited 'better job security' as an improvement at work following the apprenticeship (54 per cent (Foundation), 41 per cent (apprenticeship), 15 per cent (Higher)).

Figure 8.7: Do you have better job security? Do you think this improvement was…?
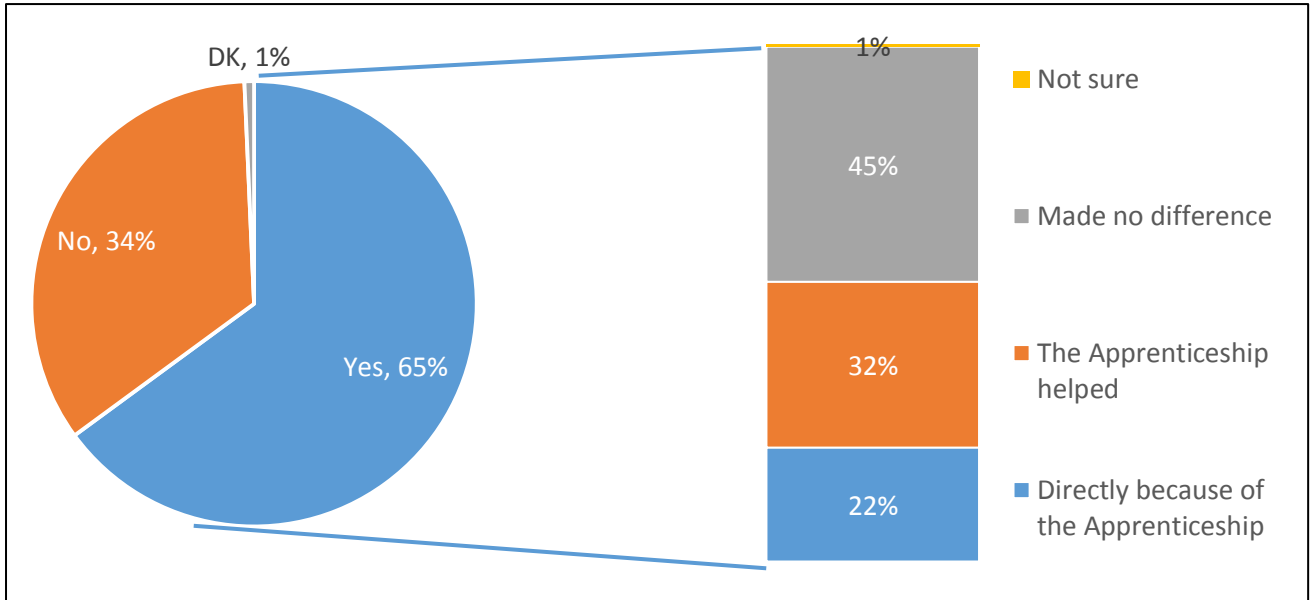

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 288 (those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship or those that were self-employed now and had been self-employed or working before the apprenticeship), 130 (those that answered 'Yes').
Respondents were asked: 'Do you have better job security?'; 'Do you think this improvement was…?' Closed question, single response.

8.60 Of the 288, just under two thirds felt that they had more opportunities for training in their job (65 per cent), and just over half of these respondents (55 per cent) felt that this was either directly due to or that the apprenticeship had helped (Figure 8.8).

Figure 8.8: Do you have more opportunities for training in your job? Do you think this improvement was…?

Base: 288 (those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship or those that were self-employed now and had been self-employed or working before the apprenticeship), 187 (those that answered 'Yes').
Respondents were asked: 'Do you have more opportunities for training in your job?'; 'Do you think this improvement was…?'
Closed question, single response.

8.61 Overall, more 18-24 year olds than any other age bracket had, since completing the apprenticeship:

- A promotion (46 per cent vs. 35 per cent (25-34), 26 per cent (35-44), 12 per cent (45+))

- Improved pay rate/salary/income (69 per cent vs. 63 per cent (25-34), 53 per cent (35-44), 24 per cent (45+))

- Better job satisfaction (84 per cent vs. 73 per cent (25-34), 67 per cent (35-44), 47 per cent (45+))

- Better job security (63 per cent vs. 45 per cent (25-34), 44 per cent (35-44), 26 per cent (45+))

- Improved future pay and promotion prospects (76 per cent vs. 66 per cent (25-34), 51 per cent (35-44), 24 per cent (45+))

- More opportunities for training (83 per cent vs. 66 per cent (25-34), 60 per cent (35-44), 49 per cent (45+))

Experiences of those who moved into a new job

8.62 Nearly a quarter of respondents (23 per cent) moved into a new job since their apprenticeship.

8.63 Over four-fifths of respondents (81 per cent) in a new job having completed their apprenticeship said that the new job was more satisfying than the job they were in before their apprenticeship (Table 8.9). Just over three-quarters said that their new job offered better pay and promotion prospects (78 per cent) and better job security (76 per cent). Just over two-thirds (67 per cent) said that the improvements in their new job were either directly because of the apprenticeship or that it had helped.

Table 8.9: Features of their new job, in comparison to the job they had before their apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Sample Respondents
More satisfying	95	*81*
Offering better pay and promotion prospects	92	*78*
Offering better job security	90	*76*
At a higher level than your old job	86	*73*
Offering more opportunities for training	86	*73*
At an increased pay rate, salary or income	84	*71*
Base	*118*	*100*

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015
Base: 118 (those in a new job following their apprenticeship).
Respondents were asked: 'Compared with your job before the course, is the new job…?'
Closed question, single response.

Meeting expectations

8.64 Just under half of the apprentices surveyed felt that their apprenticeship had exceeded the expectations they had before starting (46 per cent). Sixty-seven respondents (13 per cent) said that their apprenticeship had not lived up to their expectations. Just under two-fifths of respondents (39 per cent) felt that the apprenticeship had met, but not exceeded their expectations.

8.65 Overall, just over four-fifths (83 per cent) were satisfied with the apprenticeship. Despite leaving early, just over three-fifths (61 per cent) of those that left early still felt satisfied with their apprenticeship course.

8.66 Three-fifths (60 per cent) would do the same apprenticeship at the same place, while 84 respondents (16 per cent) would do the same apprenticeship at a different place. Eighty-three respondents (16 per cent) would do a different apprenticeship or learning course altogether.

8.67 Although they left early, a quarter (25 per cent) of these respondents would still do the same apprenticeship course, but in a different place, while just under a third (32 per cent) would do the same at the same place and just over a quarter (28 per cent) would do a different apprenticeship altogether; less than a fifth would not do an apprenticeship at all (15 per cent).

8.68 If they had not done the particular apprenticeship they had chosen, just over three-fifths (61 per cent), would have either definitely or probably done similar training, anyway. Just under two-fifths (38 per cent) would have either probably or definitely not done similar training.

Comparisons of Earnings Growth with the Wider Population[13]

8.69 Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) techniques were used to compare the labour market experiences of respondents to the apprenticeship leaver survey with the experiences of similar groups of people in the wider labour market. The results are described in more detail in Appendix L and discussed further in the next section.

8.70 Using Propensity Score Matching (PSM), respondents to the apprenticeship leaver survey were matched with respondents to the Annual Population Survey (APS)[14].

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[13] This section used data from the Annual Population Survey which was produced by the ONS and was accessed via Special Licence from the UK Data Archive, University of Essex, Colchester. None of these organisations bears any responsibility for the analysis or interpretation undertaken here.

8.71 The results of the analysis did not reveal any significant difference in earnings growth between respondents to the apprenticeship Survey and the wider population.

Summary

8.72 Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74 per cent) were working for the same employer before starting their apprenticeship that they were working for during their apprenticeship. Approximately one-quarter of respondents (24 per cent) were recruited specifically as an apprentice or to undertake an apprenticeship.

8.73 Of the 144 respondents that said that they could speak Welsh: over fourth-fifths were given the opportunity to complete some or all of their learning and assessment in Welsh (85 per cent) and to use Welsh during their course (86 per cent); nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) were given the opportunity to use Welsh in the workplace; and almost three-fifths (58 per cent) were given the opportunity to work towards a Welsh medium qualification.

8.74 The majority of respondents were satisfied with their provider overall (88 per cent) and with their employer overall (85 per cent).

8.75 Having completed their apprenticeships, nearly all of the respondents (93 per cent) were in work Three-fifths of respondents (60 per cent) were now doing paid work as an employee for the same employer as during their apprenticeship. Just under a third (28 per cent) were doing paid work as an employee, but for a different employer than during their apprenticeship.

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[14] The earnings growth exhibited by respondents to the apprenticeship leavers survey were compared with those made by otherwise comparable people identified in the APS who were assumed to act as a control group so that an assessment of the potential impact of apprenticeships on earnings outcomes could be made.

8.76 The key reasons as to why those on foundation apprenticeships and apprenticeships left early were to start a different job or a change of job/made redundant. The key reason for why those on higher apprenticeships left early was that the apprenticeship did not meet expectations; this was also a major reason for those on foundation apprenticeships.

8.77 Of those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship, just under a third had had a promotion since doing their apprenticeship.

9   Impact Measurement

9.1   This section considers the different forms of impact measurement undertaken as part of this evaluation. It contrasts their relative strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, it identifies how these methods could be extended to provide further insight in the future.

9.2   The three methods included:

- Self-reported impact by apprenticeship leavers.

- Self-reported impact by apprenticeship employers.

- Counterfactual impact evaluation using propensity score matching.

Self-reported impact by apprenticeship leavers

9.3   Between 50 per cent and 83 per cent of those apprenticeship leavers employed with the same employer as before they started their apprenticeship reported that the apprenticeship contributed to a range of improvements (Table 9.1). The improvement that was most attributed to the apprenticeship, according to 83 per cent of respondents, was 'getting more job satisfaction'.   At the other end of the spectrum, only half of respondents (50 per cent) attributed improvements in their 'pay rate, salary or income increased' to the apprenticeship.

Table 9.1: Number of apprenticeship leavers saying improvements could be attributed* to their apprenticeship

	Count	Percentage of Respondents
Have you had a promotion? Those who answered 'yes' (n=82)	54	*66*
Has your pay rate, salary or income increased? Those who answered 'yes' (n=154)	77	*50*
Have your future pay and promotion prospects improved? Those who answered 'yes' (n=161)	100	*62*
Are you getting more job satisfaction? Those who answered 'yes' (n=179)	149	*83*
Do you have better job security? Those who answered 'yes' (n=130)	72	*55*
Do you have more opportunities for training in your job? Those who answered 'yes' (n=187)	101	*54*

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: 288 (those that were working as an employee for the same employer as before the apprenticeship or those that were self-employed now and had been self-employed or working before the apprenticeship).
*Attributed = those who said 'directly because of the apprenticeship' or 'the apprenticeship helped'. Closed question, single response.

9.5 The self-reported nature of how the responses were collected is a weakness due to validity problems. For example, participants may not respond truthfully, either because they cannot remember or because they wish to present themselves in a particular socially acceptable manner. Social desirability bias can be a big problem with self-report measures as participants often answer in a way to portray themselves or the programme in a good light. The fact that these are responses from those who were with the same employer is also a limitation as some apprentices will have moved employer after completion and therefore might have realised some of these benefits but they are not captured here. Furthermore, we do not know for certain whether the respondent has really understood the question.

9.6   That said self-reported questions are a recognised form of social research and can provide some indication of impact, but are not regarded as robust compared with more objective measurements.

9.7   Sample size also can affect the confidence we have in particular data. The sample for the attribution questions is larger for the individual respondents at 288 than for employers (although individual respondents are typically considered more diverse or heterogeneous than employers). The sample size provides a reasonable level of confidence in terms of statistical significance.

9.8   The results give us a weak but positive indication that at least a half of respondents attribute improvements they have experienced to their apprenticeship. For some improvements this might be as high as four-fifths of respondents.

9.9   Within the limitations described above this question worked effectively. If a larger sample size was possible then greater subset analysis would have been possible, for example, to compare the relative experiences of the three levels of apprenticeships.

Self-reported impact by apprenticeship employers

9.10   Key positive impacts identified by employers (Table 9.2) ranged from three quarters indicating a positive impact for 'overall efficiency of the workforce', through to just over two fifths indicating a positive impact for 'employment growth' and 'the development of new business relationships or networks'.

Table 9.2: To what extent has the organisation's involvement in the programme led to any of the following positive* impacts?

	Count	Percentage of Respondents
Recruitment of new staff	52	*55*
Retention of staff	54	*57*
Employment growth	42	*44*
Overall efficiency of the workforce	72	*76*
Cost of production or service delivery	58	*61*
Organisational approach to training and development	63	*66*
Organisational attitudes towards the recruitment and employment of young people	61	*64*
The development of new business relationships or networks	42	*44*

Source: apprenticeship leaver survey, 2015.
Base: All (95).
Respondents were asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very negative and 5 = very positive, to what extent has your organisation's involvement in the programme led to any of the following impacts…?
*Positive = 4 or 5.
Closed question, single response.

9.11 The employer survey was also a self-reported survey with similar problems associated with a self-reported methodology described above. This may be further compounded by the degree to which the respondent truly understands the organisation's experience of employing apprentices, despite efforts by researchers to ensure they were speaking to the correct individual.

9.12 The employer survey sample was smaller at 95 respondents from the apprenticeship leaver survey - although employers are typically more similar or homogeneous in their range of responses - so we would be less concerned about a relatively smaller sample.

9.13 The results give us a weak but positive indication that organisations' involvement in the programme led to positive impacts for most areas for over half of employers.

9.14 This question derived from the ESF Leavers Survey questionnaire. There may be merit in the future to reviewing the answer options in light of the expected impact of apprenticeships. There may be merit in checking employers' understanding of some of the items to ensure it is consistent. If a larger sample size was possible then greater subset analysis would have been possible in the analysis.

Counterfactual Impact Evaluation

9.15 Using Propensity Score Matching (PSM) techniques, respondents to the apprenticeship leaver survey were matched with respondents to the APS. The analysis focused upon the relative earnings growth exhibited by those who had participated in apprenticeships. The earnings growth exhibited by respondents to the apprenticeship survey were compared with those made by otherwise comparable people identified in the APS who were assumed to act as a control group so that an assessment of the potential impact of apprenticeships on earnings outcomes could be made.

9.16 A simple comparison of the earnings growth from the apprenticeship leaver survey with respondents to the APS revealed that estimates of earnings growth from the apprenticeship leavers survey were higher than average estimates of earnings growth derived for the wider population from the APS. However, simple comparisons of earnings growth between these two sources were confounded by differences in their composition. Most significant in this respect was the relatively young age profile of respondents to the apprenticeship leaver survey compared to the wider employed population.

9.17 Indeed, it was only among those aged 21-25 years that respondents to the apprenticeship leaver survey exhibited a noticeably higher level of earnings growth compared to the wider population of APS respondents

9.18 To take into account such differences more systematically, 'like for like' comparisons were derived from statistical matching techniques (PSM) which can simultaneously account for a variety of differences that may emerge between the apprenticeship leaver survey and APS samples[15].

9.19 The results of the analysis did not reveal any significant difference in earnings growth between respondents to the apprenticeship leaver survey and the wider population. Such findings are perhaps not surprising given that most respondents completed their apprenticeships less than a year prior to responding to the survey. It may not be realistic to expect that benefits of participation in a training programme of 2.25 years duration will be realised within 12 months of its completion.

9.20 The results of this analysis should be treated with caution. Firstly, the available sample sizes derived from the apprenticeship survey for inclusion in this analysis were small (less than 300)[16]. Secondly, the apprenticeship leaver survey required respondents to recall what they were earning prior to participating on their programme of learning (similar to the self-reporting problems described earlier). The average time elapsed between the commencement of their course and the time of the apprenticeship leaver survey was approximately 2.25 years, which could result in significant recall bias to due to the inability of respondents to accurately remember details of both their hours and pay.

9.21 One of the challenges of exploring impact for apprenticeship participants is that we are trying to measure labour market progression rather than an absolute change in state from unemployment to employment; as is often the case for other training programmes.

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[15] For a more detailed description of Propensity Score Matching as applied to the ESF Leavers Surveys, see http://wefo.gov.wales/publications/guidance-and-publications/Publications14-20/monitoringevaluation/programmeevaluations/esfsurvey2011/?lang=en

[16] Annual earnings growth from the apprenticeship Survey is estimated on an equivalised basis, taking in to account the length of time elapsed from the start of the course to the survey. Their estimation requires non-missing values of earnings and hours for jobs held before the apprenticeship and at the time of the survey. Hourly earnings from the apprenticeship Survey calculated by dividing gross annual earnings by weekly hours multiplied by 52.

9.22 Key considerations for future analysis of relative performance of the apprenticeship leaver group with the wider population include:

- Waiting for more time to pass after apprentices complete their learning before exploring labour market effects such as salary change.

- Ensuring questions in any survey about salary change are asked in as much detail as possible. Questions about salary that underpin the APS are derived from the Labour Force Survey which has a number if separate questions which isolate the different elements that make up an individual's salary. This is compared with a single question used in the ESF Leavers Survey from which the apprenticeship leaver survey was derived.

- Increasing the sample of respondents to nearer 1000 would give greater statistical power and ensure a larger number of matched records result from the PSM analysis.

9.23 Approaches using administrative records of salary would be more reliable than those generated through self-reported surveys. For example, we understand that WEFO are exploring an analysis of the ESF Leavers Survey for the 2007-2013 round linked to HMRC/DWP data via the administrative data research centre (ADRC). This will be more robust, accurate and have a timescale where impacts (if they exist) might be detected.

10 Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Between 2011 and 2014 the apprenticeship element of the WBL programme has delivered learning provision to just under 100,000 unique participants. This was funded by a total budget of £124 million.

10.2 In the final year there were 48,300 programmes, with 21,800 foundation apprenticeships, 18,600 apprenticeships (L3) and 7,900 higher apprenticeships.

10.3 The apprenticeship programme is generally regarded to have been successful over the period 2011-14. Particular attributes of the success include:

- High levels of demand (providers say they could have delivered training to more learners if the funding had been available).

- High levels of satisfaction among employers and apprentices.

- High success rates.

- Evidence of progression for participants following their apprenticeship, whether with their apprenticeship employer or with a new employer.

10.4 The programme exceeded all ESF targets with the exception of Level 2 qualifications (only narrowly missed) and older people.

10.5 Comparison of apprenticeship participants' progression in the labour market against those on the wider population (from the APS) using propensity score matching, to control for differences in population characteristics, did not reveal any significant difference in earnings growth between respondents to the apprenticeship Survey and the wider population.

10.6 Providers were generally regarded as working well together (through NTFW) although there was some evidence (from stakeholders, employers and providers) of competition, resulting in wasted resource and a combination of irritation and confusion for employers.

10.7 Issues relating to some thematic areas included:

- Welsh language. Low take up of Welsh language learning combined with some issues about provider capability creates some cause for concern. However, Welsh speaking learners generally regard themselves to have been offered opportunities to use and learn though the medium of Welsh. More providers are starting to use more blended approaches, which balances learner reticence with their first language in a way that suits them.

- Gender stereotyping. Generally providers admit they have probably made limited progress on this area and tend not to challenge employers preconceptions.

- Environmental sustainability. There was evidence of providers incorporating ESDGC provision into their delivery to support awareness and understanding of learners.

10.8 Areas of concern were:

- Higher apprenticeships, where the following issues may be impacting on their value and success (recognising that they are still ramping up in terms of delivery). The extent of fit to some individuals' needs (with questions about some participants levels of job responsibility) and the misalignment of their understanding versus the demands of the course.

- Relatively high levels of prior qualifications of some apprentices raising questions about the duplication of public funding. However, this must be set against the extent to which apprenticeships have helped participants to maintain gainful employment and contribute through higher productivity to employers' businesses and wider economic growth. Evidence from employers (76 per cent said organisational efficiency had improved and the same percentage were satisfied with their apprentice's ability to do their job role) and participants (55 per cent attributed job security to the apprenticeship) supports this idea.

- Risks of employer dependency on public funding of apprenticeships.

- Apprenticeship Matching Service. Low use by apprentices overall (although high satisfaction rating by the 8 per cent (often younger age groups) who used it), low perceptions by providers.

- Management and balancing of provider allocation of learner numbers.

- Promotion of apprenticeships in schools.

Recommendations

10.9 A number of recommendations are presented below as a result of this evaluation work:

- Given the high level of demand for apprenticeships there would be merit in considering more careful targeting of the funded support in the future. Key target areas might include: smaller employers, learners with lower prior qualifications and priority sectors.

- A review of the AMS should be undertaken to assess its value for money, given the relatively low proportion of apprentices using it. We understand it was designed in a way that it should be relatively low cost to administer. However, providers indicate that the cost of maintaining the data outweighs the benefits. Although it has a marketing effect, as it may act as a 'lightening rod' to support awareness of apprenticeships, especially among young people and their parents, there needs to be a clear motivation for providers to use it.

- Developing more effective forms of communication about apprenticeships in general and specific opportunities in particular should be explored. These should consider youth-friendly forms of communication such as Facebook and similar social networking mechanisms.

- More detailed research and understanding is required specifically about higher apprenticeships. The HA share of all apprenticeships is rising but concerns about widely varying success rates and some differences in expectations among employers, providers and participants indicates that more attention is required to ensure effective development. This should be

considered in the context of a strand of the programme that has been ramping up.

- Identify improved management of learner numbers to avoid the compound risks associated with providers hanging on to planned learner numbers and then releasing them at too late a stage to enable other providers to react.

- From a research point of view improving the levels of consent to participate in research would enable more robust evaluation analysis to be undertaken.