



Jobs Growth Wales + Follow up review

July 2025

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Executive summary

This report focuses on improvement areas identified in Estyn's initial monitoring visit report (Estyn, 2023) and in the Welsh Government's formative evaluation of Jobs Growth Wales+ (Welsh Government, 2024). We evaluated:

- the referral processes and participants' experiences during this phase
- how well curriculum delivery meets the diverse needs of participants and prepares them for progressing into further learning or employment

To gather evidence for this report, we visited all five lead contractors, including 21 sub-contractor partners, across a total of 49 Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+) delivery centres across Wales. We observed sessions; spoke with participants; undertook desk research to review referral processes; analysed key performance information across the contract and met employers and other stakeholders.

Since the initial monitoring visits, the referral process has been strengthened considerably through effective collaboration between lead contractors, Working Wales and the Welsh Government. Revised referral documentation has enhanced the capture of necessary detail around participants' individual needs and helped place participants more accurately on the best strand of support. The process for sharing information about participants with additional learning needs (ALN) however has become less efficient, as the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 (Welsh Government, 2021) prevents Working Wales from sharing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) directly with contractors on referral into the programme.

The growing use of direct referrals has allowed providers to identify demand for the programme and to start participants more quickly. However, rising demand for places and participants remaining on programmes for longer have led to waiting lists in some regions, creating delays in participant start dates and increasing the risk of disengagement.

The majority of participants on the JGW+ programme were on the engagement strand, with many presenting significant barriers to progressing further such as mental health concerns and confidence issues. Providers offered strong well-being support, including sessions focused on anxiety management, healthy lifestyles, and personal development. Most providers employed support services such as resilience coaches and counsellors which participants valued and regularly accessed.

Providers generally encouraged participant progression through the programme

strands and into employment or further education and training, with identified progression pathways and expected timelines. However, a few participants on the engagement strand were not making the progress they were capable of due to a reluctance to progress on to work placement opportunities, preferring to remain in-centre where they felt more secure around their friends, tutors and coaches.

On the advancement strand, the availability of sector-specific provision was too variable across different parts of Wales. In some areas, participants had a wide range of choice of provision in sectors such as construction, care and retail, however in other areas, programmes were focussed on general employability qualifications. As a result, not all young people can access provision that is tailored to their individual preference. In a few cases, there was a lack of distinction between delivery on engagement and advancement which left a few participants unclear about their progression opportunities. Many participants on the advancement strand quickly accessed work placement opportunities, however, a few had to wait for placements due to challenges providers faced with accessing sufficient work placement opportunities across vocational areas.

The employment strand continued to be underused with providers reporting overly bureaucratic funding requirements and being able to source alternative employment opportunities for those ready to progress into work. As a result, most providers prioritise their resource allocation into satisfying demand for other programme strands.

Most participants expressed positive experiences of the programme, appreciating the supportive learning environments and personalised attention from staff. They reported high levels of pastoral support and valued the range of enrichment activities providers offer which they say helps to build their confidence, social and team working skills.

Introduction

This review of the Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+) programme was written as a follow-up to the findings from Estyn's monitoring visits to each of the regions delivering the programme in 2022-2023 and its national insights report (Estyn, 2023).

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, JGW+ providers, Working/Careers Wales, local authorities, and other key partner organisations who have a role in supporting young people to progress into JGW+ and work towards a positive outcome of further education, training or sustained employment.

Background

Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+) is a Welsh Government programme included in the Young Person's Guarantee (a guaranteed offer of support for under 25-year-olds in Wales to gain a place in education or training, find a job or become self-employed).

The programme is an individualised training, development, and employability support programme for 16–19-year-olds living in Wales who are assessed as being not in full-time education, employment or training (NEET). It aims to give young people the skills, qualifications and experience to get a job or progress into further training. It's a flexible programme which is designed around the young person. The key objectives of the programme are to reduce the number of young people who are NEET and to support young people to make the most of their potential.

The Welsh Government contracted a network of training providers to deliver the JGW+ the programme across four regions. In each region, lead contractors work with sub-contractor provider partners to provide programmes across the three strands. Regional lead contractors and sub-contractor provider partners are as follows:

South Central	South East
Associated Community Training Ltd -lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Llamau • Military Preparation College for Training (MPCT) • Tydfil Training ITEC Training Solutions Ltd – lead	Associated Community Training Ltd - lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspiration Training • Cwmbran Centre for Young People (CCYP) • Military Preparation College for Training (MPCT) • Newport Youth Academy

South Central	South East
contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitehead Ross 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People Plus Tydfil Training ITEC Training Solutions Ltd – lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coleg QS
South West & Mid	North
Associated Community Training Ltd - lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educ8 Hyfforddiant Ceredigion Training (HCT) Inspire Training Llamau Llanelli Rural Council (LRC) MPTC B-WBL Consortium, Pembrokeshire College – lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve More Training (AMT) Coleg Sir Gar HB Training ITeC Digital Pathways Training PRP Training Skills & Training ITEC Training Solutions Ltd – lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bethany Training Inspire Training LRC Futureworks Pembrokeshire 	Associated Community Training Ltd - lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military Preparation College for Training (MPCT) Coleg Cambria – lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caia Park Grŵp Llandrillo Menai – lead contractor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve More Training (AMT) COPA Training

Participants are referred onto the JGW+ programme by Working Wales advisers, Engagement and Progression Co-ordinators (EPCs) or directly recruited by the providers. Referrals include conducting an initial assessment of the support needs of a young person which helps inform the appropriate strand of the programme. The three strands are as follows:

Engagement – for young people assessed as experiencing barriers preventing them from engaging in a programme of study at Level 1 and/or needing to confirm an occupational focus

Advancement – for young people assessed as able to follow a programme of study leading to a Level 1 or 2 qualification and being occupationally focused

Employment – a wage subsidised job opportunity for young people assessed as being occupationally focussed and ‘job ready’.

This follow-up review of the JGW+ programme considered the findings and recommendations from the Estyn’s monitoring visits to each of the regions delivering the programme in 2022-2023 (Estyn, 2023). We also considered the findings and recommendations from the Formative Evaluation of Jobs Growth Wales+, undertaken by Wavehill for the Welsh Government (Allies et al, 2024). This follow-up review focussed on two key areas which were identified in both reports as areas that had scope for refinement and improvement, they were:

- An evaluation of the referral processes and participants’ experiences during this phase
- How well curriculum delivery meets the diverse needs of participants and prepares them for progressing into further learning or employment

To inform this report, the project team visited all five lead contractors – including 21 sub-contractor partners – across a total of 49 JGW+ delivery centres across Wales. During our visits, the team had the opportunity to:

- Observe sessions to assess participant engagement and content delivery
- Speak with participants to gather feedback on programme effectiveness and personal impact
- Review referral processes to evaluate efficiency and effectiveness
- Evaluate how effectively curriculum delivery addresses participant skills gaps
- Analyse key performance information across the contract, such as participant numbers, the split of each strand of the programme and positive progression outcomes
- Meet with employers when observing activity being undertaken in the workplace
- Meet with key stakeholders including contractor staff, Working Wales key account managers and local authority staff, specifically Education and Progression Co-ordinators (EPCs)

Further information on the methods and evidence base is given later in the report.

Recommendations

Contractors should:

- R1 Ensure a clear distinction between engagement and advancement curriculum, and that all participants understand their opportunities for progression
- R2 Stretch and motivate all participants to achieve to the best of their abilities, particularly in progressing from centre-based activity into work placement, further education & training or employment once they are ready
- R3 Continue to develop employer engagement strategies to ensure participants can access timely sector-specific work placements aligned with their career aspirations

The Welsh Government should:

- R4 Review the structure of strands, particularly the effectiveness of the employment strand, with consideration of an alternative strand for participants that have the most significant barriers to progression
- R5 Consider alternative measures other than programme destinations as a positive outcome, particularly for those furthest from progression into further education, training or employment
- R6 Ensure that contracted provision across all regions includes a choice of provider and appropriate choice of sector specific programmes
- R7 Consider how funding methodologies and allocations can best meet the increasing demands for the programme

All stakeholders involved in delivering JGW+ should:

- R8 Evaluate processes for sharing of information to ensure that contractors receive timely information on participants with additional learning needs (ALN) and an Individual Development Plan (IDP), allowing necessary support to be offered at the earliest opportunity

The effectiveness of the referral process

Initially, the JGW+ programme operated with a single referral system, where all referrals into the programme were mandated to be via Working Wales. In the summer of 2022, the Welsh Government responded to provider requests to increase the numbers of participants accessing the programme and now permit referrals to come via three routes, Working Wales referrals, EPC referrals and direct referrals.

Working Wales referrals

Working Wales continue to refer participants into the programme, where trained advisers complete and share with the provider an Assessment and Referral Report (ARR), which identifies:

- The learning or development needs of the young person
- Any barriers preventing the young person from participating in further learning and/or progressing into employment to be addressed as part of their Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
- The JGW+ Programme Strand for the young person, either engagement, advancement or employment

Since the last evaluation (Estyn, 2023), the process of referrals through Working Wales has improved significantly. The evidence from our visits and conversations with contractor staff and Working Wales staff demonstrated that their relationship has evolved well, with contractors and Working Wales account managers meeting regularly to address any concerns or areas for improvement. Many providers have developed strong relationships with their local Working Wales and Careers Wales advisers, who, as a result, have developed an increased understanding of the JGW+ provision available in the area. In the best cases, careers advisers attended centres regularly and often brought participants into providers' centres to show them around, meet key staff and help them transition smoothly into the programme.

Close working between providers and Working Wales

In the ACT Centre in Caerphilly, Working Wales staff work on-site two days a week. The co-location has improved the relationship and collaboration, making the referral process smoother and more effective.

In Aspiration Training in Newport, staff ensure the transition for participants from referral to start is smooth and is reinforced by a strong partnership with Working Wales.

Aspiration Training staff work with parents and carers from the outset, which gives them a richer source of information about the participants. Programme and behavioural expectations are set out clearly from the beginning with participants.

A few provider partners reported that relationships with Working Wales and Careers Wales advisers are not as well developed, or that reduced resources for careers advisers in the area limited the collaborative engagement. In these cases, referrals into the programme from Working Wales were limited, and providers were more reliant on recruiting participants through the direct referral route.

For the most part, Working Wales referrals align well with participant needs, with most providers reporting high accuracy in strand placement and very few occasions where they need to challenge the ARR strand decision. Where these challenges occurred, they were nearly always where the proposed strand was advancement and the provider believed engagement to be the most appropriate strand. Providers' understanding of the correct process to challenge in these instances was inconsistent, with various methods of changing strands being adopted across different contractors.

Contractors also reported that a key contributing factor in the improved referral process was their effective ongoing dialogue with Welsh Government programme leaders, who have listened to their concerns and, throughout the contract cycle, made reasonable changes to their expectations to allow for smoother referrals.

Capturing and sharing of individual participant needs

During the early stages of the JGW+ programme, as identified in our monitoring visits (Estyn, 2023), information being received by providers via ARR forms from Working Wales often lacked sufficient detail for providers to understand a young person's interests, ambitions and support needs. As a response, lead contractors have worked collaboratively with each other and with key Working Wales account managers to revise the format of the ARR form that advisers have subsequently adopted. The revised ARR form requires much more specific detail about the young person and has significantly improved the quality of referral information being shared with providers. Provider staff told us that this helps them to better understand participants' backgrounds, aspirations and support needs before they begin, enabling more meaningful discussions about learning and development planning earlier in their programme. However, a few providers told us that there remains some inconsistency in the quality of the information received in ARR forms and as a result, in a few cases, important participant background details only became apparent post-enrolment, delaying potential appropriate interventions.

Individual Development Plans

At the commencement of the JGW+ programme, providers reported that where Working Wales had identified a participant with an additional learning need (ALN), any existing Individual Development Plan (IDP) was routinely shared with JGW+ contractors to allow for interventions to be put in place early on in their programme. However, under guidance within the ALN Code (2021. Chapter 16), not all JGW+ contractors, specifically those not defined as an FEI (Further Education Institution) have a legal right to access IDPs. Also, when Learning and Skills Plans (LSPs) changed to the Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), Careers Wales were no longer permitted to share IDPs with JGW+ contractors as Careers Wales had not developed the IDPs. The guidance within the ALN Code is not clear enough on how those accessing JGW+ provision should be supported with an IDP or how information can be shared with contractors and, as a result, Working Wales no longer share any existing IDPs with contractors when referring a young person into JGW+. A young person can choose to share the IDP with their provider; however, this usually results in providers needing to contact schools, local authorities or parents directly to obtain IDPs, leading to delays in implementing tailored support. To mitigate this, Working Wales still share information that may be captured on an IDP within the ARR form, and will often copy what they see as the most relevant information into the ARR, however, providers report that this process is less efficient than was the case at the start of the programme.

Direct referrals

Direct referrals are where young people directly access the programme, usually because of responding to a provider's promotional or outreach work. Providers have strengthened links with wider partners, including youth services, Engagement and Progression Co-ordinators, schools and colleges, expanding their direct referral reach. Referrals also come via direct contact from participants who may have responded to advertising of the programme or word of mouth from family or friends. For direct referrals, trained staff within the provider undertake an assessment of which strand participants should start on, often using their own version of an ARR form. At the time of our visits, EPC referrals had mostly become incorporated within direct referrals.

Providers reported that direct referrals allowed for immediate start, reducing the risk of young people disengaging before starting their programme. Direct referrals have proven to be particularly valuable in identifying potential participants who were not engaged with Working Wales but needed the enhanced support offered by this programme.

College referrals

Coleg Cambria have developed effective systems for referring into and out of their own FE provision. Around 70 participants were referred into the JGW+ programme having engaged with the college's full time FE courses previously which did not work out for the young people involved. In many cases, participants progressed back into FE provision following their JGW+ programme

Increased demand and waiting lists

Many providers reported that they currently had, or had experienced in the last year, lists of young people waiting to start on the JGW+ programme. In most cases, providers reported that this was because of an increase in demand for places for which they did not have sufficient contract value to meet. Contractors highlighted that participant referrals spike at key points during the year: firstly in early July, when young people in Year 11 leave school, and then at the end of October, which coincides with the date that Careers Wales carries out a survey of the destinations of pupils who left school in July. An additional key contributing factor to the lack of available funding for new starts was that contractors reported participants staying on programme a lot longer than initially anticipated and subsequently using up more funding.

Waiting lists were most common in densely populated, urban areas such as city centres, with providers reporting waiting lists of up to 80 participants, usually resulting of a delay of between 4-8 weeks before a young person can start their programme. The issue was particularly pronounced in Swansea city centre, where both allocated lead contractors engaged with the same sub-contractor partner. In this case, where that partner experienced funding issues, a bottleneck of young people was formed with no other JGW+ provision available in the area as an alternative. In the most severe cases, participants waited up to four months to start the programme, with some disengaging altogether during this period and then not starting on JGW+.

Contractors have maintained an open and honest dialogue with the Welsh Government around funding capacity issues, who have in turn responded wherever possible with additional funding to alleviate waiting lists. At the time of our review, most waiting lists had been cleared, although they remained in areas of high demand, particularly some city centres. Contractors have taken various measures to manage the demand into the programme including setting up new delivery centres, not running summer programmes, or stopping their own direct referrals and focussing solely on Working Wales referrals. Providers also reported how they prioritise young people on waiting lists, giving priority to participants that may have an identified ALN or those that may already have an employer ready to take them onto a work placement.

At the time of our visits, the split of referral type was approximately 55% of starts accessing JGW+ through direct referral and 45% through Working Wales¹. The proportion of direct referrals has gradually increased since the summer of 2022. The split of referral type varied substantially between different providers and their sub-contractors and across different parts of Wales. Whilst some providers preferred the direct referral route, others relied wholly on Working Wales referrals. The proportion of Working Wales referrals was much higher in the South West (60%) and North (58%) than the South East (35%) and South (29%). Those providers that relied predominantly on Working Wales referrals reported that they preferred to have the information contained in the ARR as a starting point for their relationship with the young person, and that it also helped them manage the demand for new places where they had limited funding available for new starts.

Curriculum delivery and preparation for participant progression

Individual Learning Plans (ILP)

Most providers tailored their curriculum offer and learning approach to suit diverse participant profiles. Nearly all made sound use of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) to record the career aspirations of participants as well as their individual support needs. In the best cases, ILPs followed a person-centred approach, where participants agreed and negotiated the content of the ILP which was adjusted through regular assessments and progress reviews. Some lead contractors have aligned the ILP for all delivery partners to the ARR form; this ensures that the key information about a young person is captured in the ILP and available for all key staff involved in the participant's programme. However, in a few centres visited ILPs did not consistently feature personalised or progression-focused targets.

Additional learning needs (ALN)

Providers' systems and processes for identifying and supporting participants with additional learning needs (ALN) were generally effective. Providers told us that they identified ALN through referral data and diagnostic processes. ALN support typically involved embedded support, mostly delivered through tutors and job coaches and in a few cases, dedicated ALN support staff that were shared between centres. Many partner providers benefited from links with wider inclusion teams of the lead contractor, such as

¹ Data provided to Estyn by JGW+ contractors.

ALN Co-ordinators, who offered support and professional development for staff providing ALN support.

Providers can allocate specific funding for participants with a learning difficulty or ALN, although this uplift is embedded within providers' existing contract values, not as an additional fund. As such, the uptake of ALN funding has reduced as more providers have reached their overall contract value capacity, with providers having embedded the costs for ALN support within their mainstream resource. Providers' understanding of the specific ALN funding for participants varied. In a few cases, sub-contractor partners were under the impression that participants were not eligible to access specific support without an Individual Development Plan (IDP), which is not correct according to the JGW+ programme specification (Welsh Government , 2024, p. 75).

Engagement strand

The majority of participants, regardless of their referral route, start the JGW+ programme on the engagement strand². As was found during our previous monitoring visits (Estyn, 2023), many participants entered the programme with significant barriers to entering employment or further education or training, such as mental health concerns, anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence. Providers reported that poor behaviour issues amongst participants had also become a concern, far more so than at the time of the initial monitoring visits. One provider reported having to employ additional security measures in and around some of their central city centres due to severe incidents of anti-social behaviour involving participants and members of the public.

Providers placed a strong emphasis on well-being through structured engagement activities and targeted support. Provision included sessions focused on anxiety management, healthy lifestyles, and personal development. Most providers employed specific support services such as resilience coaches and counsellors as part of their support infrastructure which were available for participants to access. Nearly all participants attended regular, mandatory sessions to develop their understanding of issues such as safeguarding, radicalisation and extremism. Participants told us that providers often delivered useful sessions on topical subjects that helped raise awareness of how they can keep themselves safe on issues such as county lines and knife crime.

Some providers planned their engagement programmes to run to set milestones and key progression dates, whereas other providers offered a flexible approach to progression based on an individual participant's preference. At the time of our visits, the average length of programme for participants on the engagement strand was 26 weeks, although

² Reported by JGW+ contractors directly to Estyn.

there was substantial variation between providers. In one provider, participants' average length of time on the engagement programme had more than doubled since the start of the contract from 14 weeks to 30 weeks. The team met several participants that have remained on the engagement programme for over a year with no clear progression plan in place. Often these were participants that had come from the most deprived areas and faced the most significant barriers to progression.

Community-based provision

As a provider partner of Coleg Cambria in Wrexham, Caia Park Partnership's provision is in the heart of the Caia Park community and specialises in delivering engagement programmes for participants that are furthest away from the labour market. The provider has strong links with local careers advisers, who identify Caia Park Partnership as a provider that participants with significant barriers to progression find more accessible and suited to their needs. There is effective cross-referral between the college and Caia Park Partnership which allows participants to be referred to the correct provision depending on their individual need.

Most providers run a mandatory programme under their engagement strand which incorporates the development of core skills, with literacy and numeracy skills embedded throughout delivery. Wales Essential Skills Tests (WEST) are used extensively by providers to identify areas for development and monitor progress. In a few cases, skills are contextualised to the participants' interests and career goals, making them more relevant and accessible. Many participants developed their digital skills to a generally appropriate degree as part of their programme. There was currently no curriculum content related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) being delivered. Most providers reported being in the early stages of development around AI, with professional learning activities being delivered to raise staff awareness before being embedded as part of core delivery.

Individualised curriculum

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai delivery partner, COPA Training, offers a wide curriculum offer under their 'Bud' system. Participants choose their own modules based on their individual preferences from a suite of more than 80 options in sectors such as construction, leisure, sport, hospitality and tourism, which they study alongside mandatory modules on subjects such as safeguarding and a careers guidance programme.

Providers face a difficult balance of offering support to participants for the multiple barriers they face, whilst also stretching them to achieve their full potential. During our

visits, we met several participants on the engagement strand that were seemingly capable of progressing onto accessing a work taster or placement, but were reluctant to do so. They reported preferring to attend the centre where they can spend time with friends and have the security of the pastoral support from their tutors and coaches. Several participants raised concerns that progressing into employment would have a detrimental impact on the benefits that their parents or carers are eligible to claim.

In the best examples, participants on the engagement strand who have a broad idea of the type of work they would be interested in, were placed into sector specific groups such as hair & beauty, care, business administration, tourism or IT. In these cases, participants benefited from employer visits, guest speakers, and contextualised learning sessions which participants told us gave effective insights into their various industries. In a few cases, engagement participants also accessed work placement opportunities, related to their chosen sector. Participants told us that these opportunities helped them get a real life understanding of the world of work and supported them to progress onto the advancement strand or other positive progression destinations.

Vocational focus

At Pembrokeshire College, all participants on the engagement strand are grouped into sector specific groups when they join the programme, and work towards finding a work experience placement in settings such as hospitality, retail and education, usually in their second term or earlier if they feel ready. The college offers support for participants to access placements, but also allows those that are capable to take ownership of their own placement. As a result, many participants progress to further learning or employment before the end of the academic year.

At the time of our visits, around two-thirds of engagement strand participants had a positive progression into further learning or employment, with the majority progressing into higher level learning, including progressing onto the advancement strand³. A few engagement learners progress directly into employment. The positive progression measure of success does not fully capture the successes achieved by some participants on the engagement strand, particularly those that enter the programme furthest away from the labour market. For many, attending their sessions more regularly, developing their social skills or building confidence levels demonstrate progress from their individual starting points. These successes however are not necessarily captured by positive progression rates. More 'softer' measures of success, particularly on the engagement

³ Data provided by JGW+ contractors to Estyn.

strand for those participants that present with the most barriers to progression, could help provide beneficial milestones and a sense of achievement for those participants.

Advancement strand

At the time of our visits, around a third of participants were accessing the advancement strand. The split of engagement and advancement varied substantially. One provider had very few participants on the advancement strand whereas in another more than half were working on the advancement strand. Where this was the case, it was the result of a well-structured programme with clear milestones for participants to progress from engagement into advancement.

In many cases, participants on the advancement strand accessed a work placement within around six weeks of starting on the strand. In the best cases, participants were working in placements suited to their chosen vocational sector, usually attending placement up to four or five days per week and working towards sector vocational and essential skills qualifications at the same time in sectors such as vehicle maintenance or hair and beauty.

Range of vocational pathways

ACT offer a wide range of vocational pathways for advancement participants. In Cardiff, the ACT skills centre offers suitable industry specific learning facilities for sectors such as construction, motor vehicle and animal care. Their delivery partner, Hyfforddiant Ceredigion Training, offers similar pathways for participants in Ceredigion where employers value the advancement programme as an effective pathway into a paid apprenticeship, with participants attending the workplace for four days per week whilst working towards level 1 qualifications in their chosen vocational area.

The availability of sector-specific qualifications at Level 1 or below however, varies significantly across different contractors and regions. In some areas, participants have a wide range of choice of provision in sectors such as construction, vehicle maintenance, care, hospitality and tourism and retail. In other regions however, accredited programmes are more limited to general employability qualifications. Where vocational pathways are more limited, referral partners report that demand for these places can often exceed the availability, resulting in participants having to be placed on waiting lists.

Curriculum planning for vocational pathways is, for the most part, dependent on the availability and occupational competence of provider delivery staff. In a few cases, providers introduced new courses due to participant demand in areas such as construction and hair and beauty. Most contractors have links with their respective regional skills partnerships (RSP) through board or sub-group representation. However, at

the time of this review, JGW+ provision was not consciously planned to align with local or regional skills needs as identified by RSPs.

An ongoing challenge for providers was to be able to offer meaningful work placement opportunities for all participants. Most providers employed specific employer engagement teams who actively source work placements across a wide range of sectors. Whilst the availability of employers willing to take participants on placement had been increasing gradually, challenges remained in sourcing enough placements to offer all participants placement opportunities, particularly in some consistently challenging sectors such as IT, hospitality, and accountancy. Providers also told us that it is also becoming apparent that third sector placement settings such as charity shops, often the starting point for participant placement on JGW+, were offering fewer placement experiences than they previously had. As a result, in a minority of cases, participants on the advancement strand were not accessing a work placement and continued to attend their delivery centres full-time. In a few cases, whilst participants may be enrolled on level 1 employability qualifications, there was very little difference between the curriculum being offered under advancement and engagement programmes, and in a very few cases, there was no distinction at all.

At the time of our visits, just over two-thirds of advancement strand participants had a positive progression into further learning or employment, with the majority of those progressing into full-time employment, including apprenticeships. A few advancement strand participants progress into further learning at a higher level, from our discussions with providers and participants, this was often into vocational provision at a local further education college.

Employment strand

Since the start of the JGW+ programme, very few participants have accessed the six-month wage-subsidised placement under the employment strand. Providers reported a range of reasons for its lack of popularity, including overly bureaucratic requirements to access funding, employer reluctance to commit to sustained employment opportunities and participants that were not ready for this strand.

With availability of funding for other strands becoming more of a challenge for providers, the employment strand has become less of a priority and one provider had strategically stopped offering it altogether. It is notable that all five lead contractors of JGW+, and most sub-contracted partners, are also providers of apprenticeships in Wales. Therefore the under-utilisation of the employment strand has not necessarily had a detrimental impact on progression, with many participants progressing into further learning or directly into employment or level 2 apprenticeship rather than the employment strand of JGW+.

Participant experiences

Initial experience

Most participants reported that their referral process was effective and efficient and reported a positive overall experience. Many began their programmes within two weeks of their referral. Where they had accessed the programme via direct referral, they often started immediately or within a few days. In the best cases, participants reported that during the referral process, there was strong communication between their careers advisers, their provider and their parents or carers. Often providers would invite participants, their careers adviser and their parents into the centre to review the setting, chat to provider staff and get a full understanding of what they can expect from the JGW+ programme. A few participants, however, had to wait several weeks to begin their programme and a very few reported having very little contact from the provider during their waiting period.

Several participants noted that their awareness of the JGW+ programme was very limited prior to joining or being referred. They reported that the name of the programme was confusing for them and their parents regarding what the programme would entail and progression pathways.

Support for individual need

Nearly all participants appreciated the strong pastoral support they received from their provider, with many reporting improvements in confidence, resilience, and well-being. They said their provider gets to know them well and adapts their provision for their individual needs, including any ALN they may have. Participants welcomed the personalised and tailored approach they received from their tutors and support staff, particularly those who previously struggled at school or college.

Many participants said that their providers listened to their views through regular meetings, forums, surveys and progress reviews. In the best cases, they adapted their provision based on the feedback from participants.

Participant voice

ITEC uses a range of structured feedback mechanisms, including quarterly participant forums, participant surveys and regular digital wellbeing touchpoints that ask participants about their health and well-being. ITEC uses these insights to analyse how they can enhance centre-level experiences for participants and, as a result have introduced new activities and refined their curriculum content to better meet

participant need. A participant says, 'It's great knowing that our opinions actually matter. The changes we suggest are taken seriously, and we've seen real improvements in our centre.'

Skills development

Most participants explained how their programme has helped them improve their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. They discussed how they regularly work on tasks through WEST and use industry or real-life relevant contexts such as through financial planning and workplace simulations. The development of participants' Welsh language skills was variable and strongest in North West Wales, where cohorts of Welsh-speaking participants at COPA Training were encouraged to use their Welsh language skills and further develop their understanding of Welsh culture. Whilst most providers incorporated greetings and other simple phrases in Welsh into their core programme, very few participants we spoke to could recall having developed their Welsh language skills since starting on JGW+.

Many participants reported that their providers integrate modules on issues such as safeguarding, equality and diversity, and a range of well-being and social awareness sessions. In a very few cases, participants could recall discussing topics around anti-racism as part of wider inclusion and diversity sessions. However, a few participants felt there was an over-emphasis on well-being activities at the expense of employability skills, and would prefer a better balance between well-being support and career-specific learning that helps them progress toward being more work-ready.

Preparing for progression

Many participants felt the support provided by providers in planning their next steps and progression pathways was effective. Careers advice and guidance was delivered mainly through group sessions and one-to-one progress reviews, where participants learn how to develop CVs, hone interview techniques and carry out effective job searches. In the best cases, participants, particularly on the advancement strand, felt well-prepared for progression to their next step, often moving directly into employment or apprenticeships following extended work placements.

For those participants that have accessed and sustained a work placement, most reported them to be highly valuable. They said the time they spent on their placements provided them with critical hands-on experience and support and mentorship from their employers and workplace mentors. One participant described the time he spent on work placement as having 'changed his life' and he has since progressed onto an apprenticeship with the same employer. A few participants expected quicker access to work placements than were available. When asked about their programmes and their plans for progression, a minority

of participants were unable to identify which strand they were on, or were unaware of the opportunities to progress from one strand to the other.

Enrichment activities

Nearly all providers have made highly effective use of additional ‘renew and reform’ funding to fund off-site programme enrichment sessions to keep participants engaged.

These include visits to employers, participation in community-based projects, team building and active leisure activities. Nearly all participants placed high value on these experiences which they said help them overcome issues around social anxiety and disengagement and develop stronger team working and social skills. In the best cases, participants engaged in activities outside of their training centres almost weekly.

Renew and reform activity

BWBL providers have made good use of ‘renew and reform’ funding to offer enrichment activities for participants who go away on industry visits and well-being trips. For example, motor vehicle participants attend a karting centre where they get to learn about the make-up of the karts, health and safety requirements as well as having a fun, team building day out. A participant feeds back 'I have been more places on JGW+ programme than I have done with my family in my whole life'.

Methods and evidence base

To inform this report, the project team visited all five lead contractors, including 21 sub-contractor partners, across a total of 49 JGW+ delivery centres across Wales. These visits were undertaken in February and March 2025. During our visits, the team employed a variety of methods to gather evidence in support of this review:

- Observed sessions to assess participant engagement and content delivery
- Spoke with participants during focus groups and informally during sessions to gather feedback on programme effectiveness and personal impact
- Detailed scrutiny of referral processes
- Evaluation of effectiveness of curriculum delivery to address participant skills gaps
- Analysed key performance information from Welsh Government programme managers across the contract, such as participant numbers, the split of each strand of the programme and positive progression outcomes
- Met with eight employers when observing activity being undertaken in the workplace across sectors including education, vehicle maintenance, hospitality and retail.
- Met with key stakeholders including provider staff, Working Wales key account managers and local authority staff, specifically Education and Progression Co-ordinators (EPCs) through meetings onsite and via online meetings

The evidence collected was analysed to address the foci of the report:

- An evaluation of the referral processes and participants' experiences
- How well curriculum delivery meets the diverse needs of participants and prepares them for progressing into further learning or employment.

With thanks to all who took part in the research.

Glossary

ALN	Additional Learning Need
ARR	Assessment and Referral Report
Contractor	Refers to the five lead contractors that are contracted to deliver JGW+ across the four regions of Wales
EPC	Education and Progression Coordinator
FEI	Further Education Institution
IDP	Individual Development Plan
JGW+	The Jobs Growth Wales+ programme
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
Provider	Any provider delivering JGW+ programmes across the three strands. This could be a lead contractor or any of their sub-contracted delivery partners
RSP	Regional Skills Partnership
WEST	Wales Essential Skills Toolkit

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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