



October 2023

Jobs Growth Wales+ youth programme:

Autumn 2023 insights

This report is also available in Welsh.

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Executive summary

This report summarises the findings from four regional Jobs Growth Wales+ monitoring visits conducted between October 2022 and June 2023. The report is based on the information gathered from the Welsh Government, lead and sub-contractor providers, participants, employers, Working Wales, and key staff in local authorities.

The programme offers three strands: engagement (including pre-engagement), advancement, and employment. Engagement is the most popular strand. The numbers accessing the employment strand have remained low, with young people not recognising the benefits the strand might bring compared to them going into a full-time job not linked to the programme. The current branding and marketing is not effective enough in reaching the target audience with providers recognising the need for a more personal approach to engage those suited to the programme. Young people identified that the brand 'Jobs Growth Wales+' didn't give them a good idea of what the programme entailed. Recruitment via Working Wales has not resulted in the anticipated numbers and consequently providers have taken on responsibility for direct recruitment to ensure programme viability.

Provision is widespread, but remote areas face travel challenges. The programme benefits from dedicated and skilled teaching staff, but participants desire a greater personalised focus on the areas of work they are interested in. Work placements are limited in certain sectors, and employer relationships vary.

Participants, many of whom have wellbeing issues, report positive experiences resulting in improved confidence and skills. The programme offers robust support through provider services as well as external partnership working.

A "missing cohort" of potential participants may result from factors such as staying in school due to centre determined grades, accessing other level 1 provisions, or choosing employment. Data sharing limitations hinder understanding of the scale of need for this type of provision amongst young people.

Providers manage the programme well, adapting to challenges. Regional collaboration varies, and some schools lack awareness of JGW+. Collaboration across regions has led to positive changes, including extending the upper age limit and increasing participant allowances. Providers use support cost funding well to tailor support to the needs of the participants, for example through free breakfasts, lunch vouchers, travel costs, and enrichment activities.

Overall, the JGW+ programme positively impacts participant well-being and employability. Addressing challenges like limited work placements, branding, and data sharing is essential for continued success and expanding support to a broader group of young people.

About the Jobs Growth Wales+ Youth Programme

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 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 programme is delivered by lead providers across Wales under contract from Welsh Government.

Participants are referred onto the programme by Working Wales advisers or directly recruited by the providers. Referrals include conducting an initial assessment of the support needed as well as identifying the appropriate strands of the programme.

The three strands are as follows:

- **Engagement** (including pre-engagement) – This strand helps young people to decide what career path they would like to follow
- **Advancement** – This strand provides support or programmes offering qualifications to help the young person to progress to further study, training or employment
- **Employment** – This strand provides subsidised work opportunities for young people

Young people on the programme, referred to as participants, have an individual learning plan (ILP). This plan is developed and delivered by providers who support them to attain the skills, qualifications, and experience to progress into further learning, employment (including self-employment) or an apprenticeship.

The expectation is that lead providers devise and deliver flexible and creative individualised support which involves a wide range of activity alongside training and skills development. This may include, but is not limited to, the use of employer work placements, work trials, community projects, voluntary work, centre-based learning opportunities and wage-subsidised employment.

Further information about the programme specification can be found on the Welsh Government website:

[Jobs Growth Wales+ programme specification | GOV.WALES](#)

Regional contracts

The Welsh Government has contracted a network of training providers to deliver this programme across four regional areas from April 2022 to March 2026. In each region, lead contractor providers work with sub-contractor partners to provide integrated programmes of learning and/or development. The regions and providers are as follows:

South Central	South East
<p>Associated Community Training Ltd – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridgend college • Llamau • MPCT • People Plus • Tydfil Training <p>ITEC Training Solutions Ltd – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitehead Ross 	<p>Associated Community Training Ltd – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspiration Training • Cwmbran Centre for Young People (CCYP) • Motivational Preparation College for Training (MPCT) • Newport Youth Academy • People Plus • Tydfil Training <p>ITEC Training Solutions Ltd – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coleg QS
South West & Mid	North
<p>ITEC Training Solutions Ltd – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bethany Training • Inspire Training • Llanelli Training Centre • Futureworks – Pembrokeshire Council <p>Associated Community Training (ACT) Ltd – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educ8 • Hyfforddiant Ceredigion Training (HCT) • Inspire Training • Llamau • Llanelli Rural • Motivational Preparation College for Training (MPCT) <p>B-WBL Consortium, Pembrokeshire College – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRP Training • HB Training • Coleg Sir Gar • Achieve More Training • ITeC Digital • Pathways Training • Skills & Training 	<p>Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (GLLM) – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Wales Training • Achieve More <p>Associated Community Training (ACT) Ltd – lead provider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivational Preparation College for Training (MPCT) <p>Coleg Cambria – lead provider</p>

The evidence base

During the first year of the programme, inspectors conducted monitoring visits in all four regions to review the programme. During our visits, we had the opportunity to:

- observe participants in sessions
- talk to participants
- review participants' individual learning plans and referral information
- observe tutors and other staff involved in delivery
- review the quality and appropriateness of accommodation and resources
- meet with leaders and key staff across the organisations
- meet with Working Wales leaders and advisers
- meet with key staff in local authorities to review the participant referral process
- meet with Welsh Government contract managers

Reports and recommendations from regional visits available as follows:

South Central Wales

South East Wales

South West & Mid Wales

North Wales

Main findings

Background and context

The JGW+ programme, which was planned prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, aims to provide an alternative employability programme to previous similar opportunities. The programme includes three distinct strands that young people are referred into depending on their skills, qualifications, educational experiences, support needs, and aspirations. It builds upon the previously delivered programme in many ways including ensuring a clear focus on supporting individual participants to reach their goals of employment or higher-level study. The programme is designed to include meaningful work taster and experience sessions where appropriate. Participants are also able to secure tailored support for additional learning needs if appropriate.

The Welsh Government contracts were awarded on a regional basis with the expectation that all providers in the region work together to ensure a collaborative approach to planning and delivery. This is formalised via a JGW+ regionalised collaboration agreement which all lead providers sign up to.

In the first year, the programme had 5,330 participants¹. Official target participant numbers were not set by Welsh Government, however providers across all four regions reported that numbers were lower than anticipated.

Programme structure

JGW+ originally included three strands: engagement, advancement, and employment. Following provider feedback in the early stages of the programme, an additional pre-engagement, 'get ready' option was added to the engagement strand to accommodate those who are not ready for the commitment required by the engagement strand. This flexibility from the Welsh Government enables providers to include a cohort of participants who have significant barriers and vulnerabilities, giving them the support they need to engage with the programme and progress.

At the time of our visits, the majority of participants were enrolled on the engagement strand, a minority on advancement, and very few on the employment strand. Our findings suggest that the employment strand is not attractive to participants as their preference once employment-ready is to get a job. Young people did not recognise the benefits the employment strand might bring compared to them going into a full-time job not linked to the programme. As part of the programme, it is possible for young people to access a 10-week employability option as part of the employment strand, while they wait for the provider to identify an appropriate employer and job contract. Due to the very small participant numbers on the employment strand, we weren't able to engage with young people taking up this opportunity. Equally, it is not appealing to most employers who would rather have the full-time commitment of an employee who is not undergoing a training programme and who does not require the same level of support as a placement participant.

¹ [Jobs Growth Wales+ statistics: April 2022 to March 2023](#)

Branding

Although Welsh Government tested the name and brand for the programme with young people, based on those we spoke to said that the name of the programme does not give clarity to potential participants, parents, guardians or carers regarding the approach to learning, the programme content, the support available, or the progression opportunities. Likewise, it is often the case that employers do not fully understand the programme, or indeed what their role would be if they were involved.

The Welsh Government-led national marketing is not effective enough in reaching the target audience or raising awareness with the wider education workforce. Providers complement the national marketing campaign with their own strategies to reach the young people. This includes linking with those who work with potential participants alongside developing their own promotional materials. However, there is scope to develop this further in all regions given the lower than anticipated numbers.

Recruitment and referrals

The original intention was that all referrals to the JGW+ programme would be via Working Wales. However, it became apparent early in the programme that the very low number of referrals from Working Wales would mean the programme was not sustainable. Welsh Government responded positively to requests from providers to recruit directly which resulted in increased numbers, and currently most participants are recruited through direct referrals. Providers have employed a range of strategies to reach the target audience including leaflet drops, social media campaigns, and refer-a-friend incentive schemes. Providers also work directly with local authority teams, schools, and other support agencies to reach young people who might be suited to the programme.

Where referrals are made through Working Wales, information relating to the participant is generally detailed and robust. However, the Working Wales diagnostic toolkit does not always fully identify barriers to learning, and the information participants are given can vary depending on the knowledge of individual advisers. Providers informed us that, in a few cases, Working Wales refer participants based largely on grades achieved in qualifications. Given the unreliability of grades during the COVID-19 period, and the considerable mental health barriers and social anxiety that many of the current cohort of young people face, this is not always a reliable method of ascertaining whether a young person is suited to the programme. Participants often share that they know that their grades are unreliable, adding that this makes them even more anxious about whether they can cope successfully with the next steps in relation to employment or education and training.

Working Wales referrals are not always considered enough in relation to understanding a participant's interests, ambitions, and support needs. As a result, Working Wales advisers do not always refer participants to the most appropriate strand of JGW+. There is not consistent understanding amongst providers about whether they are able to agree a change of strand once a participant has been assigned, even in cases where a participant may be better suited to another strand. This misunderstanding has meant that in some cases participants do not always making the progress they are capable of, or leave programmes early. However, in a

few cases, providers have gone ahead and made changes in the best interests of the participant.

Challenges remain with direct referrals as the information is not always immediately apparent and often providers learn about an individual's needs and barriers once they are enrolled. Typically, once providers gain the confidence and trust of the young people, two or three weeks into the programme, participants reveal their barriers and aspirations. At this stage, providers often tailor their delivery and content to better suit the individual needs of participants.

For direct referrals, the associated bureaucracy which results from the funding source requirements is a hindrance. For example, the requirement for identity documentation can lead to delayed start times as some participants don't have this information readily to hand. Where participants face considerable barriers and need strong initial support, they are often lost to the provision during the wait for their paperwork to be completed. Welsh Government did respond to this and allow participants to start while some documentation or evidence is being collected.

Although providers share data on starts, leavers and progression with Working Wales, Working Wales and local authority Engagement and Progression Co-ordinators (EPCs) shared their frustrations around not being kept informed by providers about a young person's journey once they have joined the programme, unless they are needed for further support. They are keen to keep abreast of outcomes and any success stories to support them in understanding and further promoting the programme.

Provision

Provision is delivered in a range of locations across Wales with providers identifying the areas of greatest need. Each participant will have an individual learning plan, which reflects their individual circumstances, including preferences for face-to-face or online provision. There are some challenges in more remote areas where travel times, along with infrequent and unreliable public transport, are a barrier for some participants. In a few cases, this has resulted in provision being withdrawn in more rural areas due to low participant numbers. In a few instances, providers have attempted to engage learners by remote learning activities. However, learners on this programme benefit mostly from face-to-face learning and support. As a result, participants who live in more remote areas are often not effectively engaged in the programme and not receiving the training and personal support they need.

Venues used for training activities are accessible taking into consideration the barriers participants may face in relation to unfamiliar environments. Most of the venues are welcoming and appropriate for the programme, and in the best cases include stimulating resources, break-out rooms, and outside spaces.

Teaching, learning, and support is strong across the provision with programme delivery teams who are familiar with the challenges that the participants face in relation to previous learning experiences, vulnerabilities, behavioural issues, and in some cases, complex home lives. The wraparound support is comprehensive, with providers linking well with internal and external support services such as advisors, coaches, and counsellors.

The professionalism of the delivery staff is evident. Teachers are knowledgeable. They effectively manage the learning environment and are skilled at meeting the needs of participants on this programme. Most sessions are lively, interesting, and include a range of stimulating and relevant resources that keep the young people engaged and challenged. However, participants share that they would welcome more content that relates directly to their areas of interest as opposed to general employability and life skills. In a minority of cases, there are missed opportunities to personalise activities, connect them to participants' areas of interest, or to offer appropriate work taster opportunities. For example, participants in a focus group session share that they are hoping to establish careers in plastering, electrical engineering, and animation and would welcome an opportunity to explore these areas of work in more detail within their provider-based sessions and gain practical workplace experience related to these areas of interest.

Participant individual learning plans do not consistently identify the types of work participants are interested in, or schedule planned work experience into their training programme. Participants across all strands would benefit from workplace taster sessions and programmed work experience. However, these activities would need to be carefully planned by providers to make sure participants are fully prepared for these challenging activities. Employers need to be carefully selected and supported to make sure they understand the needs of participants and the mentoring participants may require. Although it is a key component of the programme, too few participants access meaningful work experience opportunities where appropriate.

Although the Welsh Government provide an uplift in funding for delivery through the medium of Welsh, there is very little programme delivery through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, and only a very few examples of the Welsh language being integrated into sessions. In a very few cases, tutors communicate with first language Welsh speakers in Welsh. Participants with Welsh language skills often choose to undertake all aspects of their written work in English even when encouraged to undertake bilingual learning and assessment by their tutors.

Employment opportunities

We saw very few participants in the workplace during our visits. This was in part due to so many young people being on the engagement strand, but also providers share that work placement opportunities in some sectors are sparse. For example, sectors such as hospitality, and health and care are facing significant challenges in terms of recruitment so do not have the resource to support those on work placements. In other areas, such as IT, much of the work is now home-based which means placements are challenging to find. In more traditional areas, such as hairdressing, business owners have had to make savings so have resorted to a chair rental approach in shared spaces which also hinders taking on work placement participants. Construction placements are problematic as insurance requirements stipulate a minimum age of 18.

Providers often use their existing contacts to try to secure meaningful work experience for participants. However, these employers may not always be the most suitable environment for JGW+ participants, especially if they have an additional learning need or wellbeing needs. Work placements need to be carefully vetted to ensure a suitable match to each individual participant. The regional skills

partnerships may be an underused resource to seek the support of likeminded employers who will give workplace experience to participants in a supportive environment.

Discussions with employers suggest a mixed picture in terms of the relationships with providers, and how well supported they feel. In the best cases, employers have a good understanding of the programme, are familiar with the needs of participants, and have a conduit for sharing and raising concerns with providers. However, there are also instances of poor communication and a lack of support.

A key challenge for providers is to make sure they have a comprehensive range of employers available to offer valuable work placement experiences while also being able to provide the support participants may need.

Participant experiences

Most participants talk positively about their experiences on the programme, and they particularly value being in an environment where they are treated as adults. They are appreciative of the supportive approach in sessions and many comment on how much they value being able to learn in smaller groups. They compare the programme to previous educational experiences where they were in larger groups, and many explain that in the past their behaviour was poor in education settings, adding that they lacked focus and found it difficult to engage with learning. Many describe how they became more isolated during COVID-19 lockdowns, and prior to joining JGW+ had found it difficult to mix with others or engage with society.

Many participants talk positively about their progress since joining the programme, providing examples of the new skills and knowledge they have gained. They outline how their confidence and self-esteem have developed as a result of their learning experiences, including the wider opportunities available, such as day trips, enrichment activities and charitable work.

The positive rapport with staff is evident in almost all sessions observed, and discussions with participants further support this. They describe how well supported they feel in terms of their welfare as well as their learning. Almost all know how and where to access additional support if needed and they value the opportunities available to them.

Participant profile

Many young people on previous similar programmes presented with behavioural issues, whereas on this programme there is a higher prevalence of young people struggling with well-being issues, anxieties, and other vulnerabilities. Providers and other key stakeholders believe this may be attributed to the pandemic and the associated impact on socialisation. This results in a hugely diverse cohort ranging from those who are motivated and have a strong grade profile but are more suited to this type of programme than college or school as a result of anxieties and/or barriers to being in busy environments, to those who exhibit significant behavioural issues. Providers recognise that many of these young people are a significant distance away from being employment ready.

Providers have welcomed the increased enrolment age eligibility from 18 to 19, but several express a need for it to be raised further as they believe there are young people who would benefit from this type of provision, but do not meet the age criteria. Many providers suggest that the upper age limit be increased to 24 to align with the wider Young Person's Guarantee, however procurement processes prevent a further increase in age range.

The missing cohort

Providers across Wales share concerns over a missing cohort of young people who would have typically accessed similar programmes previously. They recognise that this may be due to a range of factors including more young people:

- staying on in school, or going to college, as a result of centre-determined grades
- accessing level 1 provision in colleges
- opting for employment given the increased opportunities and cost-of-living crisis; this is supported by the fact that youth unemployment is at its lowest since records began in 2006 based on the annual population survey
- seeking alternative hidden economy and cash-in-hand opportunities
- being reluctant to venture out into the world having experienced isolation during the pandemic

When bidding for the Welsh Government contract to deliver the programme providers anticipated a significantly higher number of participants to be recruited to the programme though there was no official target. The low numbers entering training on the programme is a concern. During our visits there were at least two examples of provision being withdrawn completely from an area due to low numbers.

Despite the fact that the Welsh Government and contractor providers have worked together to develop a range of interventions to engage with the target audience, there is not a shared understanding of the scale of need, or indeed success in recruiting the potential missing cohort. This is largely due to the lack of robust or accessible data on the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). A lack of data sharing protocols and suggestions that General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) impedes any sharing further exacerbates the situation and creates more difficulties in terms of programme viability. For example, stakeholders do not have protocols in place for sharing information about potential participants including those who drop out of college programmes.

Providers and other stakeholders who work with the target audience recognise that the most effective approach to engage with these young people is to establish relationships. EPCs in local authority teams fulfil this role through door-knocking, offering support, and providing continuity of contact. However, they also recognise that many of these young people are not in fact ready for the JGW+ programme, with some being at least two years away from being so as a result of anxieties and barriers to engagement. The EPCs are familiar with the many barriers and complex situations that these young people face, and they aim to support and provide continuity up until the point when they are ready to engage with the programme, and in some cases, on an ongoing basis if there is a need.

Leading and partnership working

Providers manage the programme well, ensuring most participants have positive and meaningful experiences that support them in their learning and progression. Providers have responded well to the challenges they have been presented with such as the lower than anticipated numbers, and the breadth and depth of participant support needs.

The way in which providers work varies across the regions. In a few cases, organisations are finding ways to work together that align with the regional approach and this includes the sharing of information and data, good practice exchanges, and referring participants across providers where this is appropriate. However, in other regions, the JGW+ programme is viewed as an extension of the existing work-based learning apprenticeship provision, and although partnership working is effective between lead providers and their delivery partners, there are missed opportunities to take a more regional approach despite the regional collaboration agreements that are in place.

Links with schools range from being positive with providers being invited in to talk to pupils during assemblies and careers events, and relationships being maintained after leaving school to ensure participants are supported in their ongoing journey. In other cases, schools are reluctant to raise awareness of the programme and in the worst cases, senior leaders in schools don't understand what the programme is, or who it is aimed at.

Leaders from providers across Wales have come together to discuss some of the challenges of the programme and have been united in their messages to Welsh Government. Examples where this has had a positive impact on the national approach have included the need for the pre-engagement addition to the engagement strand, extending the upper age limit to 19, and increasing the weekly allowance for participants. They are very appreciative of Welsh Government's responsiveness and talk positively about the impact these changes have had on the provision.

Resource and funding

In addition to the induction and delivery funding, providers use the additional support cost funding that is available to ensure support is appropriate and tailored to the needs of the participants. Examples include free breakfasts, lunch vouchers, travel costs, and enrichment activities. However, there have been some challenges too, including the absence of sparsity funding for those delivering in the more remote areas of the country. Linked to this, is the fact that funding is aligned to a participant as opposed to a cohort meaning small provision in rural areas is at risk in terms of viability. Finally, having the funding cycle run over a financial year as opposed to an academic year has added another layer of bureaucracy for organisations that are used to funding cycles based on academic years.

Self-reflection questions

For the Welsh Government:

1. How can verified data for those not in education, employment or training (NEET), including programme target numbers, enrolments, outcomes, participant profiles (including protected characteristics), and referral sources, be effectively collected and shared with providers?
2. How can this or other support programmes meet the needs of older young people with similar needs who are not currently eligible for the Jobs Growth Wales+ youth programme?
3. How might the branding and marketing be adapted to better engage the target audience and raise overall awareness of the programme across education and training providers and with employers?
4. How can the impact of the employment strand be improved?

For providers:

5. How can providers identify and engage communities with limited or no participation in the programme to raise awareness and increase recruitment?
6. What strategies can be employed to better engage and support employers in the region to provide more opportunities for participants?
7. In what ways can a more regional approach to planning, delivery, and sharing of information and good practices be implemented effectively?

For Working Wales:

8. What additional training and information can be provided to advisers to ensure consistency in sharing information with potential participants?
9. How should Working Wales leads liaise with Welsh Government to ensure providers have clarity in relation to participants moving across strands?

For Welsh Government, providers, Working Wales, and local authorities:

10. How can effective data sharing protocols be established, including mechanisms for sharing participant information post-enrolment, to improve programme coordination and support?