

DTLLS Level 5 Action Research

Does skills development and work related skills interventions as a collaborated approach, support more claimants into employment on Work Programme.

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Introduction

Having been involved in Welfare to Work programs since 2009 I have identified an area within my professional field which I want to research further. This relates directly to claimants re-entering the labor market following a variety of interventions.

The Work Programme (WP) was launched throughout the UK in June 2011 and is part of a number of welfare to work reforms aimed at getting unemployed people into employment. The WP uses private and public companies, called providers, to find work for claimants transferred to them from Job Centre Plus (JCP) at specified points in their claim. The providers are primarily paid for defined outcomes related to employment and the length of employment. During the first two years of WP; Department of Work and Pensions' (DWP) focus was moving a claimant into work with little focus on sustainable targets; however this changed in 2013 when DWP put more emphasis on six month sustainability targets. As a sub-contractor we were tasked with increasing work skills for claimants and engagement levels as this was identified as the main reasons for claimants not sustaining employment past three months.

As the sole trainer on WP it is my responsibility to identify a scheme of work that best fits the claimants and increases their work skills and employability. Due to the business model there are specific intervention sessions that are programmed for all claimants however there is no specific sessions that are aimed at fine tuning and enhancing practical work skills and knowledge. Therefore, I intend on designing sessions that focus on the development of practical work skills and how these skills are linked with competencies in the workplace.

I aim to compare the two main types of intervention I use currently as a trainer under the umbrella term of 'skills development' (which includes sessions focused on CV writing, Cover Letters, Application Form Completion and Interview Techniques) and 'work related skills' (which includes sessions focused on Hard Skills (Technical Skills) and Soft Skills (Personality and Character Traits)).

This research will increase my efficiency as a trainer by scheduling my delivery timetable with training sessions that are of greater benefit to my client base and support our business model by increasing entry to employment and sustainability statistics.

Action Research (AR)

How action research is appropriate for this study

'Action Research is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted *by* and *for* those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the "practitioner" in improving and/or refining his or her actions' (Sagor, 2000, pg3)

The origin of action research was first referred to by Kurt Lewin (1934) and by Adelman (1993) as a process that offers credibility to the development of powers in reflective thought, decision and action. Practitioners who engage in action research inevitably find it to be an empowering experience. Action research has this positive effect for many reasons. Obviously, the most important is that action research is always relevant to the participants. Relevance is guaranteed because the focus of each research project is determined by the researchers, who are also the primary consumers of the findings.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that action research helps educators be more effective at what they care most about; their teaching and the development of their students. Seeing students grow is probably the greatest joy educators can experience. When teachers have convincing evidence that their work has made a real difference in their students' lives, the countless hours and endless efforts of teaching seem worthwhile. Therefore, I believe action research is an integral form of methodology to ascertain the effectiveness of the training solutions I am providing my clients on WP.

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The Action Research Process - Action Research Cycle



I am going to apply the action research model to evaluate the effectiveness of the training solutions I provide my clients on WP. During this research, I intend on using a survey to collate data from clients that have recently secured employment since engaging on WP to assist with the inquiry and will prepare an analysis of the data collected to either prove or disprove my theory that a ‘combined approach of skills development and work skills development is more effective in supporting claimants back into employment’. I will also use statistical analysis to compare entry into employment rates during 2014 which will reflect the implementation of the new training offer and compare this with the entry to employment rates for 2013.

I have decided to use a Seven Step process as outlined in a book entitled ‘Guiding School Improvements with Action Research’ by Richard Sagor. This seven step process is used to guide the researcher through defined stages to assist them to prove or disprove a theory. These stages are:

1. Selecting a focus:The action research process begins with serious reflection directed toward identifying a topic or topics worthy of a busy teacher's time. Considering the incredible demands on today's classroom teachers, no activity is worth doing unless it promises to

make the central part of a teacher's work more successful and satisfying. Thus, selecting a focus, the first step in the process, is vitally important. Selecting a focus begins with the teacher researcher or the team of action researchers asking: *What element(s) of our practice or what aspect of student learning do we wish to investigate?*

2. Clarifying theories:The second step involves identifying the values, beliefs, and theoretical perspectives the researchers hold relating to their focus. How will this be beneficial to the researcher and the researchers practice.?
3. Identifying research questions:Once a focus area has been selected and the researcher's perspectives and beliefs about that focus have been clarified, the next step is to generate a set of personally meaningful research questions to guide the inquiry.
4. Collecting data:Professional educators always want their instructional decisions to be based on the best possible data. Action researchers can accomplish this by making sure that the data used to justify their actions are *valid* (meaning the information represents what the researchers say it does) and *reliable* (meaning the researchers are confident about the accuracy of their data).
5. Analysing data: Although data analysis often brings to mind the use of complex statistical calculations, this is rarely the case for the action researcher. A number of relatively user-friendly procedures can help a practitioner identify the trends and patterns in action research data. During this portion of the seven-step process, teacher researchers will methodically sort, sift, rank, and examine their data to answer two generic questions: 1. *What is the story told by these data?* and 2. *Why did the story play itself out this way?*
6. Reporting Results: Each year more and more teacher researchers are writing up their work for publication or to help fulfil requirements in graduate programs. Regardless of which venue or technique educators select for reporting on research, the simple knowledge that they are making a contribution to a collective knowledge base regarding teaching and learning frequently proves to be among the most rewarding aspects of this work.
7. Taking informed action:Taking informed action, or "action planning," the last step in the action research process is very familiar to most teachers. When teachers write lesson plans or develop academic programs, they are engaged in the action planning process. What makes action planning particularly satisfying for the teacher researcher is that with each piece of data uncovered (about teaching or student learning) the educator will feel greater confidence in the wisdom of the next steps. Although all teaching can be classified as trial and error, action researchers find that the research process liberates them from

continuously repeating their past mistakes. More important, with each refinement of practice, action researchers gain valid and reliable data on their developing virtuosity.

Part 1: Research the existing literature on your area of research

Work Programme

WP is the coalition governments Welfare to Work initiative designed to support economically inactive claimants back into the world of work. DWP published a report namely Work Programme Job Outcome Volumes (Actual and Forecast) in July 2014 which highlights that the program has supported 296,000 claimants into work the period of June 2011 and March 2014 across the United Kingdom (UK) with the aim to support another 302,000 claimants during the period of April 2014 to April 2020. These figures are not broken down into area so I cannot directly relate this to the effectiveness of WP in Wales, however these figures do prove the program supports 2,000 claimants per week into work UK wide which does support that a personalised approach can be effective.

In November 2013, House of Commons published a report based on the performance of WP in Wales as it had concerns about the level of performance across the country; as Wales has been performing below average compared with the UK as a whole. In Wales 69,590 people were referred by JCP onto the WP during its first 25 months (compared to 1.3 million in Great Britain). Of these, 7,550 people completed 13 or 26 weeks of sustained employment during that period which equates to 10.8% of those referred onto the Programme. Although this seems high, in comparison with the other areas of the UK, Wales came last on the performance table.

Unemployment Figures

The population of Newport who are unemployed is 7,000 of which less than 700 are currently being managed by Newport City Council on the WP. The breakdown of these claimants currently stands at 200 claimants claiming Employment Support Allowance (ESA), 115 are 18-24 claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) with the remaining being JSA claimants being 25+. With targets of 30 job starts per month it is essential that preparing these claimants for the labour market meets the local demands

and tracking the recruitment trends for the city is vital in supporting these claimants to secure employment.

In 2012, the BBC reported that Newport was voted as one of the cities most likely to be vulnerable to rises in unemployment due to smaller numbers of knowledge workers, lower qualifications and reliance on public sector employment. This is very concerning as the educational figures for the city currently stand at 78% of people have a NVQ Level 1 or above with 13,000 people with no qualifications. 6.9% have other qualifications which are lower than the average across Wales (7.7%) and UK (8.8%). The current caseload of claimants on WP falls into the bracket of no qualifications or have other qualifications; this makes meeting the needs of employers a major barrier to employment.

In September 2014, employment rates in Wales fell by 1.3% according to Office of National Statistics (ONS). People claiming JSA fell by 2,300. Employment in Wales stands at 68.8% (Sept 2014).

What this means to WP is an increased emphasis on developing claimants smartly; using funding from Communities First where possible to increase the qualification levels of the claimants, networking with local government and businesses. Linking with developments in the city and securing employment opportunities for claimants whilst focusing on the personal development needs of the claimants, should ensure they have the skills and knowledge to move from benefits to an income.

Barriers to employment

A report published in 2011 by DWP namely Families and Work – Revisiting barriers to employment highlights key barriers to employment which includes returning to work, searching for work, easing the transition into work and experience of work. The report concludes that many factors influence a claimant when preparing to re-enter the labour market with the main areas being childcare costs, lone parent restraints, access to jobs offering hours of work that meets the demands of the family and financial restraints mostly relating to length of time out of employment.

A report published in 2013 namely *the missing million: illuminating the employment challenges of the over 50's* looks at the reasons for unemployment in people in the UK who are 50-65 years old. It identifies that a large proportion of this age group are affected by redundancy, ill health and early retirement which becomes the biggest barrier to employment. It interestingly illustrates that out of 11.6 million people aged 50-64, 3.3 million are economically inactive with reasons like supporting family members and long-term sickness as their main reasons for not re-entering the labour market.

In the report mentioned earlier published by House of Commons to evaluate the performance of WP in Wales, there was an emphasis on funding and the issues surrounding double funding for claimants living in European Social Funded (ESF) areas. Due to legislation in Wales, claimants are restricted by funding streams unlike the equivalent in England. This restricts claimants accessing additional funding and therefore prevents a claimant from achieving work related qualifications and/or accessing additional support in the event this identified as essential to their personal development plan.

Forthcoming Government Initiatives

Universal Credit (UC) is the new welfare to work system designed at supporting a believed 11 million claimants of which approximately 5 million will be in some sort of employment. The benefit is designed to incorporate several benefits into a single payment for a single household therefore reducing costs to the government and putting this saving back into the system. UC will challenge the culture of living on benefits and breed a culture of work related attitude and understanding that working is best. The report published by DWP in June 2013 aimed to gather intelligence from various departments of government, private organisations and charities to help build a catalogue of ideas and strategies which would support the roll out of UC. This report included ideas for claimants in work and not supporting them into work however many of these ideas are already principles that are part of the service offered on Work Programme.

Work Programme 2.0 (WP2) is the new welfare to work policy which takes the positives from WP and incorporates improved strategies of supporting claimants into employment. Although this program is yet to be rolled out which a change in government would certainly slow this up if not stop the implementation of WP2, there are many lessons to be learnt from the current WP; this includes a greater focus on job seekers moving into part time jobs that better serve their personal

circumstances and a greater emphasis on skills development which is employer led. Another key aspect of WP2 is how this program challenges the current payment model which is dependent upon claim grouping for example JSA 18-24 payment (PG1) or JSA 25+ (PG2). The current system has a 'one system for all' approach however WP2 identifies this as a failing as individual claimants are at different stages in their journey into employment. For example two claimants on JSA (PG1) are worth the same amount of money once they start work under the current WP model however WP2 would take into consideration their personal circumstances which could affect the amount of challenges they have to enter employment. A single person who has recent employment history and lives alone is more likely to secure employment than a single parent with financial hardship and is reliant upon public transport. Therefore the level of intervention and amount of financial support needed for these claimants would inevitably vary and therefore WP2's suggested model would better suit the variations in the claimants circumstances and reward the provider more appropriately for the level of support given.

Part 2: Methodologies for researching this hypothesis

Leedy and Ormrod (2001), "Research is a viable approach to a problem only when there are data to support it" (p. 94)

Quantitative v Qualitative

Qualitative Research defined by Denzin & Lincoln (2005) is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. Qualitative Research is also used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem. Qualitative data collection methods vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations. The sample size is typically small, and respondents are selected to fulfil a given quota.

Quantitative Research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into useable statistics. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables – and generalize results from a larger sample population (Given, 2008). Quantitative Research uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research. Quantitative data collection methods are much more structured than Qualitative data collection

methods. Quantitative data collection methods include various forms of surveys – online surveys, paper surveys, mobile surveys and kiosk surveys, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, online polls, and systematic observations.

As my survey will be structured mainly to gain quantitative data I have incorporated questions that will ask for opinions which touch base lightly on qualitative data. As the job starts are already in work, it would be impractical to arrange any face to face meetings and interviews, however in the event I was to do a further AR, I would aim to incorporate qualitative data more.

Collecting Data

Face to Face Interviews: this method has a distinct advantage of enabling the researcher to establish rapport with the participant. These interviews yield highest response rates in survey research. This is also an advantage if researching smaller groups or numbers are using this method can be time consuming and expensive. (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001) This method is difficult to manage during my current working week and therefore is ineffective for my research project.

Telephone Interviews: Less time consuming and less expensive than face to face interviewing, however this can limit the amount of responses due to participants not having access to a telephone. This method is difficult to manage during my current working week and therefore is ineffective for my research project.

Questionnaires – Paper Based: This method can be sent to a large number of participants; however the majority of people who receive questionnaires this way do not return them. This then becomes an ineffective method for my research project.

Questionnaires – Web Based: This is a new and inevitably growing methodology as it uses the internet to carry out the research. This method seems a more suitable method for my research as it requires me to build a survey or questionnaire using a web based application and sending this as a link via email to the participants who in turn click on the link to access the survey. The additional advantages to using a web based survey tool is that the application can also analysis your results for you and presents them in a useful format to assist with further analysis. (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001)

Ethical Considerations

Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for research ethics has six key principles to assist the researcher when carrying out their research. These include the following:

- You are ensuring quality and integrity of your research
- You will seek informed consent
- You will respect the confidentiality and anonymity of your research respondents
- You will ensure that your participants will participate in your study voluntarily
- You will avoid harm to your participants
- You can show that your research is independent and impartial

I have taken these points into consideration when structuring my questions to ensure that the participants feel at ease when answering the questions. I have incorporated questions based on their attitudes and opinions to ensure these ethics are at the forefront of my research.

My Research Project – Web Based Survey

Having considered the various methods to carry out the details associated with my research I decided that a web based survey would be the best method due to the following:

- Easy to manage the structure of the survey content by using the built in templates, rating scales and monitoring functions
- Easy to add participants to the survey which in turn sends an email with the link to the survey. This is monitored by the built in function which notifies the owner once a participant completes the survey
- Built in analysis function, assists with viewing the data collected and calculates automatically and in real-time to ensure accuracy throughout the surveys lifetime
- Access the survey from anywhere which allows me to monitor participants progress on the go
- Built in deadline for completion. This function restricts any late submissions and does not affect the final data and analysis

My research will use both quantitative and qualitative data collection; I believe the blend will offer me a greater understanding of personal opinion in addition to measuring the continuum between qualitative and quantitative data collection. I have incorporated the ethics when writing my questions, a deadline for submission and ensured all participants confidentiality.

I will use the data collected from the web based application to create graphs which will help to visualise the findings and hopefully support my theory; that a blended approach to intervention will support clients into employment.

I will also use this research to identify the most impactful course/s that has been on offer to date. I hope this statistic will support the wider training offer in association with the Community Learning Centre's and other Community Development programs that are currently on offer.

Part 3: Collection of information and data analysis

In March 2015, I produced a survey using Survey Monkey to support this research project. I looked at various ways of sourcing data but decided that to gain data that was opinion based would provide a truer result than that of reporting and attendance records. Survey Monkey has been a tool I have used previously within my role as Ladies Club Captain at our hockey club, I found the system to be easy to use, effective in asking members to partake in the survey and as the built in statistic function produces graphs and percentages following the results it had an all-round benefit to this research project.

I sent the survey to 24 clients who secured employment during the months of January 2015 and February 2015 and gave them two weeks to reply to the survey. Initially, I did not set a deadline but on reflection I realised that this would hinder my project, so I resent the requests with a deadline of 27th March 2015. I have received 16 responses and have used these to form my analysis to support my theory.

How to use analysis

Analysis refers to breaking a whole into its separate components for individual examination. Data analysis is a process for obtaining raw data and converting it into information useful for decision-making by users. Data is collected and analysed to answer questions, test hypotheses or disprove theories. Data can be about people, place or objects better known as experimental unit and data can be captured as numerical or categorical dependent upon the needs of the researcher. This data will need to be collated from the sources used to capture the information and organised or processed in readiness for analysis.

Data can be displayed in graphs, charts or any other form of visual breakdown to illustrate the findings and used to communicate the information to an audience. Hypothesis testing is used when a particular hypothesis about the true state of affairs is made by the analyst and data is gathered to

determine whether that state of affairs is true or false. This is the type of analysis I will be using in my action research.

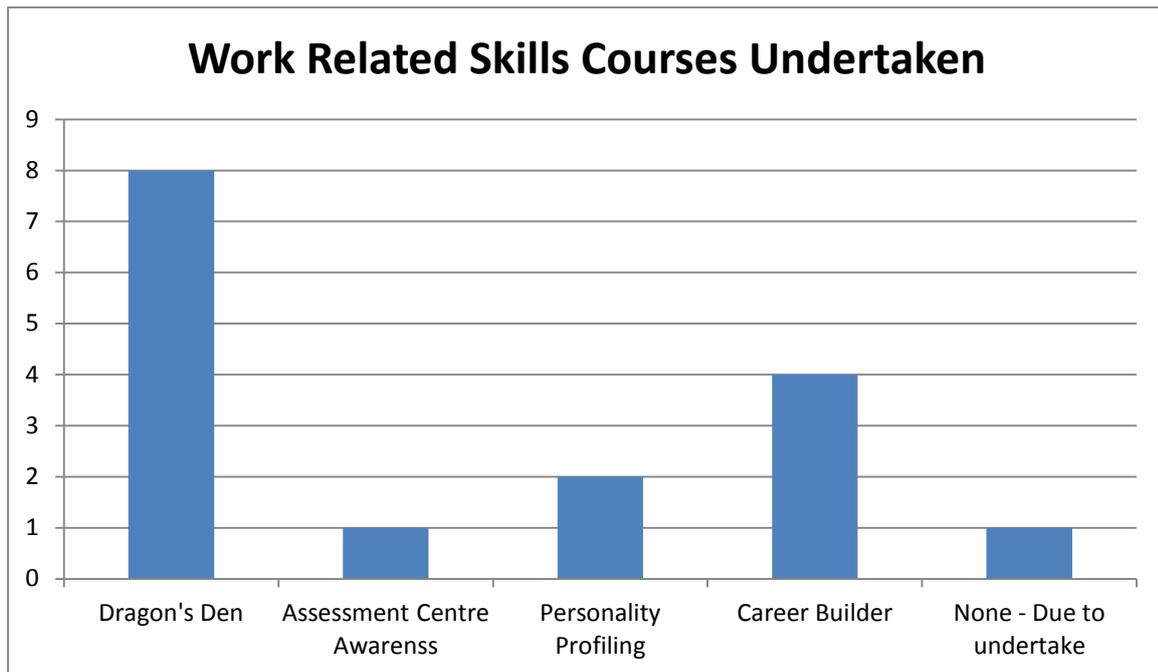
The hardest part of creating the survey was wording the questions. I wanted the questions to reflect the client's view of the interventions on offer and which interventions have been of benefit to them securing employment. In addition, I was keen to see the length of time a client moved into employment following these interventions and have carried out additional analysis to present to Senior Management at our Annual Delivery Progress Review on 20th April 2015. I hope to demonstrate that our financial commitment to moving clients into employment can be shared across multiple funding sources and that a combination of skills development and work related skills intervention must play an integral part of our delivery model to secure WP2. Our performance over the next six months will play an essential part in Newport City Council securing WP2 and an Offender contract and I hope to include this research in my presentation. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the questionnaire questions used in this survey.

Part 4:Gathering the data

Once the survey was completed and the deadline had passed, I received an email from Survey Monkey to notify me that the survey had closed and all of the results had been collated in readiness for viewing. Once accessing the platform, I was able to copy the data to a word document and in turn formulate the data into a spread sheet to make it easier to interpret the data. See Appendix 2.

Out of 24 clients who were invited to partake in the survey, I received 16 responses prior to the deadline (66% response rate). I firstly reviewed all of the responses to ensure there were no discrepancies with the amount of response (ensuring they added up to 16).

The breakdown of data highlighted many interesting results however it also clearly indicated a set of results that would be unworkable to incorporate with the final findings. This question related to the length of unemployment time and based on the results, this showed that the question was misinterpreted by the clients. Although this result is not essential to the AR I will omit these results from my AR on the grounds that the data is not represented truly.



The above graph illustrates the clients opinions on the effectiveness of training courses offered under the Work Related Skills Intervention section of the training offer for WP clients. I am pleased to see that the Dragon's Den session was the most popular as this is a course I designed a few years ago which has produced some excellent work from the attendees. This course is self-managed and relies heavily on the group working together to achieve the outcome. This course has been a turning point for some attendees who have then gone on to adapt their attitude to work and secure employment in job roles that previously they have never considered. However, I was pleasantly surprised that Career Builder was the next highest and although this is a new course which focuses on the pathway to employment that is quite specific i.e. Purchase Ledger would need a European Computers Driving Licence (ECDL) to demonstrate they can use Microsoft Office to a good standard, SAGE Level 1 which is a recognised accounting software and Customer Service Level 2 which further supports the knowledge of working in business. To get a greater understanding of the opinions of our active client base, I could conduct a further study to look at this in more detail.

Below is the breakdown of results:

1. 93.75% of job starts surveyed did not have employment secured prior to engaging in WP with 81.25% of them receiving a collaborative blend of intervention which included 1:1 Intervention, Skills Development and Work related Skills Development support. This is a positive result as the new system was only introduced to staff in November 2014 and as

these job starts came in January 2015, it clearly demonstrates that the staff bought into the new model immediately.

2. 93.75% of job starts surveyed said that Skills Development, Work Related Skills Development and Work Placements were considered most needed when the Action Plan was designed. This is a positive result as increasing engagement from clients who have been out of work for more than 12 months has proved difficult in the past. However, this result does not confirm the volume of activity undertaken prior to starting employment.
3. 68.75% of jobs starts surveyed said they had achieved Work Related Qualifications since engaging on WP with 18.75% were due to undertake Work Related Qualifications (this would have been funded either by WP or Communities First and therefore the client would still be eligible to undertake the qualification regardless of starting work).
4. 81.25% of job starts surveyed achieved a Level 2 qualification since engaging on WP however there is no further evidence that these qualifications helped them secure the employment that was started in January 2015. In the event this question had been added into the survey, I believe it would have made a clearer representation of the direct relationship between achieving qualifications and securing employment. For example: 4 job starts achieved a CSCS & CITB Level 2 qualification which is the minimum legal requirement for a tradesman to work on site. In the event this additional question had been asked I would have been able to directly illustrate that achieving this qualification resulted in securing employment in the construction sector.
5. 100% of the job starts surveyed had completed some Skills Development training with the clear favourite being Application Form Assessment at 50% with Mock Interviews at 25%, CV Revision at 18.75% and Job Search Assessment at 6.25%. These results support the importance of a CV and Application Form in securing employment of which due to demand this training is already offered weekly to all WP clients.
6. 93.75% of job starts surveyed had completed some Work Related Skills Development training with the clear favourite being Dragon's Den at 50% with Career builder at 25%, Personality Profiling at 12.5% and Assessment Centre Awareness at 6.25%. One 1 client did not complete this training although he/she secured employment. This definitely causes a rethink into the work related skills development schedule currently being offered and potentially further investigation on the effectiveness of the Call Centre training we source externally, as I would have expected to see a higher result for assessment centre awareness training as this is in direct association with the sector and the call centre training.

7. The speed in which we move clients into work is always a hot topic of conversation; with unofficial timescales aiming for a job start following induction onto WP as being within 13-26 weeks. What was most encouraging is the survey supported 56.25% of job starts secured employment within 26 weeks with 18.75% securing employment even though they had been engaged on WP for 12-18 months, and yet had secured employment within 6 weeks of the new model. This result is also of interest as previous unofficial figures do not support a lot of movement into employment at this late stage of WP.
8. The relationship between advisor and client has proved; in the past, as being of vital importance when supporting clients into employment. The results which link when the different interventions started is a clear indication that changes to a client's advisor can have a positive impact on activity levels and these results support this theory. I am aware of this as all clients were moved to different advisors prior to implementing the new training schedule to coincide with a new delivery model. This links to the previous point relating to clients being on WP for 12-18 months being more likely to not securing employment; however the survey shows that 18.75% of job starts came from this term on WP. This in itself supports the theory that with quality intervention identified at early engagement stage and a pro-active advisor arranging provision, even clients who have been on WP for 12-18 months can still secure employment. This is also reflected in the group of clients who have been on WP for 6-12 months, with the survey demonstrating that 43.75% of job starts came from this category.
9. Very positive results came from the section that valued the effectiveness of the training provision:
 - 81.25% of job starts saying that 1:1 intervention made them feel very positive
 - 62.5% of job starts saying that skills development sessions made them feel very positive
 - 81.25% of job starts saying that work related skills development made them feel very positiveExternal Provision results were split between 12.5% feeling very positive, 12.5% feeling it helped a little with 56.25% being undecided and 18.75% feeling the provision was not much benefit.

Typical external provision ranges from drug and alcohol support, domestic violence, debt management, English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL), Introduction to computers, call centre, CSCS and self-employment support.

Part 5: Outcomes and Actions

As mentioned above, the overall results were positive and illustrated a direct coalition between a collaborative approach to intervention supporting WP client's into employment and the provision being made available to all. This AR project has highlighted areas for further investigation mostly relating to the actual qualifications leading to employment in a sector that requires them as a minimum standard. I know from looking on our internal Central Relations Management (CRM) system that some of the clients identified to partake in the survey did achieve qualifications which were a minimum requirement by the sector they secured employment with, however as I only received 16 responses it is only possible to confirm that the clients who did or did not respond were incorporated in these additional results.

Newport City Council (NCC) has incorporated a new department within Community Development called Work Based Learning Academy (WBLA) which deals directly with local employers and offers employment opportunities to claimants being managed or supported by NCC. This has increased the amount of employment opportunities in the city and has helped to work with clients and employers to arrange suitable training and/or qualifications which could lead to employment. A recent example of this is in association with the new shopping centre being built in the city centre namely Friars Walk. This project has an agreement with WBLA to offer a percentage of jobs to the local residents of the city. As NCC and WBLA have access to potential workers, training provision and funding, being able to provide trained and qualified staff to the contractors on this site has seen an increase in job starts for WP. This is evident in the AR results (confirmed using CRM) with 4 job starts achieving CSCS & CITB qualifications who are now employed on the Friar's Walk project.

Having seen the success of this project and the AR supporting the theory that a collaborative approach of intervention can support more clients into employment, I believe there is a huge potential to expand the relationship between NCC, WBLA, WP and Communities First to reshape the recruitment demands across the city. This would also have a positive impact on securing WP2 and the Offender contract later in the year whilst demonstrating to other cities that working in partnership and utilising the provision and funding across multiple contracts can be advantageous to all.

Comparison figures from previous years showed that there has been an increase in January 2015 on the previous January 2014 and January 2013. Although this increase is of 2.4% for January 2014 the increase for January 2013 was 2.1%. These figures were obtained from CRM on 22nd May 2015.

Recommendations

My action research has highlighted a few key areas that would be beneficial to any future WP or other welfare to work initiative of which the key points have been mentioned below.

- The relationship between WP and Communities First: This has demonstrated its value to the clients on WP by accessing funding to pay for work related qualifications which lead to sustainable jobs across the city and surrounding areas. For the clients that are not funded through Communities First, the WP can better spend its funding for personal development on these clients which ensure equality for all.
- Developing a Framework for Skills Development: This has illustrated the benefits of a blended development approach. For clients who are employable, ensuring they have the basic skills to search for work, apply confidently for the position and perform well at interview is supported by their assurances that they are equipped with the personal attributes, knowledge and skills to perform in the job.
- Creative learning: The most popular intervention was a session designed around the principles from the hit TV shows Dragon's Den and The Apprentice. The theme of this training was to design a product or service and pitch it to a panel. The team selected their management based on their individual personality profiling results, assign job roles, duties and responsibilities to each member and prepared their pitch within a 2 day deadline. This exercise was self-managed and overseen by the trainer but focused on a variety of skills from budgeting, graphics design, motivation and time management. This type of training delivery is very different to the types of traditional training a client would receive on WP and feedback from a recent group stated *"This training was brilliant. It didn't feel like training but I can now see how broad my skills are and I feel more confident in applying for work I wouldn't have thought I could do before"*.

Conclusions

This research has identified that an increase of 2.4% of job starts received a collaborated approach of skills development and work related qualifications increasing the amount of clients re-entering the labour market in comparison to the two previous years.

This research has helped me to reflect on my current training offer and has highlighted the importance of partnerships with NCC, WBLA, Communities First and Community Learning. The

actions I can take forward following this research will inevitably assist me in valuing training provision that addresses more than just the basic skills to find work.

Action research has demonstrated that it is a powerful tool for in this particular case a trainer and the importance of feedback from clients is essential in maintaining quality provision and effective use of funding and resources.

The change in delivery model (See Appendix 3) evidences the increase in focused attention on incorporating an enhanced training offer front end. The advisors are able to monitor the activity levels with a greater control over the type of provision and the frequency of provision being undertaken. This has supported the advisors to follow a structured approach to managing a client's journey and has forced an increase in appropriate courses to address issues to address barriers to employment that has been identified from the front end appointment. I believe this new model plays an integral part in this AR being a success, whilst highlighting the need for further investigations to highlight why clients have benefited from the provision.

Self-Evaluation and Development Opportunities

The knowledge I have gained since undertaking the AR has offered a greater insight into need to continuously monitor the training offer for WP clients. The main objective for this research was to answer a question I have been asking myself for some time about the type of training courses and intervention combinations that would best suit the clients managed on WP.

I have learnt that offering a mixture of skills development training and work related skills training and qualifications has a positive impact on supporting clients into employment. The quality of the intervention and the consistency from advisors to maintain the actions on the clients Personal Action Plan clearly has played its role in this AR and something I believe will be welcomed by the staff when working with our client base.

I now realise on reflection, that the questions I have asked in my survey could have delved deeper into the relationship between achieving a work related qualification and then securing employment into the sector that requires it as a minimum standard. This I believe would have given this AR another important angle; for example when working on a new proposal for contracts and more importantly ensuring that funding is being spent wisely and not for the sake of offering accreditation.

From a development point of view, I feel that I would be more inclined to undertake another AR to look at the provision being offered to our lower level clients who are furthest away from the labour

market. As these clients are managed differently to the majority of our job start clients, I feel there is definitely an opportunity to review the provision in place and measure its effectiveness. This would allow me to enhance the service offer and ensure all clients have progression pathways to employment.

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Appendix 1

These are the questions used within my AR survey:

Q1. Did you secure employment before your induction on Work Programme was completed?

Answer options: Yes and No

Q2. What type of intervention has been more beneficial to your journey on WP?

Answer Options: Initial Engagement Appointment, 1:1 Intervention, 1:1 & Skills Development Group Intervention and 1:1, Skills Development & Work Related Skills Group Intervention

Q3. When your Action Plan was designed, what was considered the most needed activity?

Answer Options: 1:1 Intervention, Skills Development Group Sessions, Skills Development & Work related Skills, External Agencies Support Services and Work Placement – 4 Weeks

Q4. Have you achieved any Work Related Qualifications since engaging on WP?

Answer Options: Yes, No, Have funding arranged for qualifications

Q5. Please list your Work Related Qualifications achieved since engaging on WP?

Answer Options: CSCS & CITB, Call Centre Operative Level 2, Customer Service Level 2, Health & Safety Level 2 Manual Handling Level 2, Teaching Assistant Level 2, Paediatric First Aid Level 2, Food Safety Level 2

Q6. What Skills Development training has been of greatest benefit to your journey on WP?

Answer Options: CV Revision, Application Form Assessment, Mock Interview, Job Search Assessment, None

Q7. Which Work Related Skills course has increased your confidence the most in applying for work?

Answer Options: Dragon's Den, Tent Building, Assessment Centre Awareness, Cave Rescue, Transferrable Skills, Personality Profiling, Career Builder, None

Q8. Please indicate how long you have been unemployed for.?

Answer Options: Prior to WP0-6, 6-12, 12-18, 18-24, 24

Answer Options: Since engaging on WP0-6, 6-12, 12-18, 18-24, 24

Q9. Please indicate the stage your activity on WP started.

Answer Options: Initial Engagement Appointment, Skills Development, Work Related Skills Development

Q10. Please rate the effectiveness of the training development since engaging on WP.

Answer Options: 1:1 Intervention, Skills Development Group Sessions, Work Related Skills Development Group Sessions, External Agency Support

Appendix 2

Q1	Did you secure employment before your induction on WP was completed..?	
	Yes	1
	No	15
Q2	What type of intervention has been more beneficial to your journey on WP..?	
	Initial Engagement Appointment	1
	1:1 Intervention	1
	1:1 & Skills Development Group Intervention	1
	1:1, Skills Development & Work Related Skills Group Intervention	13
Q3	When your Action was designed, what was considered the most needed activity..?	
	1:1 Intervention	0
	Skills Development Group Sessions	3
	Skills Development & Work Related Skills (to include work related qualifications)	10
	External Agencies Support Services (to include ESOL)	1
	Work Placement – 4 weeks	2
Q4	Have you achieved any Work Related Qualifications since engaging on WP..?	
	Yes	11
	No	2
	Have funding for qualifications (to be undertaken as listed on my Personal Action Plan)	3
Q5	Please list your Work Related Qualifications achieved since engaging on WP	
	CSCS & CITB	4
	Call Centre Operative Level 2	1
	Customer Service Level 2	3
	Health & Safety Level 2	1
	Manual Handling Level 2	1
	Teaching Assistant Level 2	1
	Paediatric First Aid Level 2	1
	Food Safety Level 2	1
Q6	What Skills Development training has been of greatest benefit to your journey on WP..?	
	CV Revision	3
	Application Form Assessment	8
	Mock Interview	4

	Job Search Assessment	1
	Non as I have not completed any since engaging on WP	0
Q7	Which Work Related Skills course has increase your confidence the most in applying for work..?	
	Dragon's Den	8
	Tent Building	0
	Assessment Centre Awareness	1
	Cave Rescue	0
	Transferrable Skills	0
	Personality Profiling	2
	Career Builder	4
	Non as I have not completed any since engaging on WP	1
Q8 Please indicate how long you have been unemployed for		
	0-6 mnths	6-12 mnths
	12-18 mnths	18-24 mnths
	24 mnths	
Prior to WP	0	10
	2	2
	2	0
Since engaging on WP	9	4
	3	0
	0	0
Q9 Please indicate the stage your activity on WP started		
	0-6 mnths	6-12 mnths
	12-18 mnths	18-24 mnths
	24 mnths	
Initial Engagement Appointment	16	0
	0	0
	0	0
Skills Development	9	7
	0	0
	0	0
Work Related Skills Development	6	7
	3	0
	0	0
Q10 Please rate the effectiveness of the training development since engaging on WP		
	I now feel very positive	It has helped me a little
	I am undecided	I do not feel there has been much benefit
1:1 Intervention	13	3
	0	0
Skills Development Group Sessions	10	6
	0	0
Work Related Skills	13	3
	0	0

Development Group Sessions				
External Agency Support	2	2	9	3

Appendix 3

Scheme of Work for WP clients 0-13 weeks – Model 1

Week	Activity	Provision
1	Induction (2hours)	Induction Trainer
2	Initial Engagement Appointment	Nominated Advisor
3	Action Planning	Nominated Advisor
4-8	Journey Management	Soft Skills Training
9-12	Journey Management	External Training
13	Journey Review Appointment	Nominated Advisor

Scheme of Work for WP clients 0-13 weeks – Model 2

Week	Activity	Provision
1	Induction (2 hours) Front End Intervention	Induction Trainer Induction Trainer (1:1)
2	Initial Engagement Appointment Referral to Tier 1 (Hub) Tier 2 (Academy)	Nominated Advisor Hub Advisor Academy Advisor
3	Action Planning	Nominated Advisor
4-8	Skills Development and Work Related Skills Development Activity	External Provision Community Learning Communities First In-house Provision
9	Journey Management Review	Nominated Advisor
10-12	Skills Development and Work Related Skills Development Activity	External Provision Community Learning Communities First In-house Provision
13	Journey Review Appointment	Nominated Advisor