

Shaping Employability to Achieve the Vision of the CCR Employment & Skills Plan

A Discussion Paper from the RSP Cluster Group

In 2019 the Cardiff Capital Regional Skills Partnership adopted its **Employment and Skills Plan**. This sets a clear vision of the future skills needs of the City Region and the activities that regional partners need to deliver to achieve this.

Employability features strongly. The value and importance that employers place on 'employability' skills is clearly reflected. So too is the need to help individuals address their personal barriers to employment to avoid communities being "left behind" in a very competitive labour market. With the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic now being felt in the economy and labour market, employability is more important now than ever.

There is recognition too of the important role and impact of Local Authority employability projects. With expertise built up over 20 years, the projects epitomise the benefits of subsidiarity and devolution. They are delivered as close as possible to the citizen. They are flexible making them highly responsive to local labour market changes. They are focussed on the personal needs of the client and not the need to generate profit. They create a long-term relationship with thousands of clients, helping people into work, to remain in work, and to progress into better paid work at various stages in their lives. They work together, solving problems in partnership with each other and with other early intervention and prevention services. They are respected and trusted by residents.

The end of EU funding is an opportunity to learn lessons: to remove some of the artificial barriers, constraints and bureaucracy. It is an opportunity to shape a new long-term local authority-led employability programme. But with EU funding ending in 2022, there is a need to do so quickly.

In this context, this discussion paper considers:

- The lessons learnt from employability delivery during the EU programmes
- The achievements and impact of locally-led employability programmes
- CCR labour market challenges and the "new context" for future employability

And concludes with the principles of a future employability approach:

- Local Authority-led delivery using...
- ... a common approach to "**pre-assessment & engagement**" and...
- ... a common "**Triage system**" and...
- ... a common "**Assessment Toolkit**" and ...
- ... a common but flexible "**menu of support & interventions**"

What is Employability?

At its core, employability is about removing an individual's barriers to finding, maintaining or progressing in sustainable employment whatever that barrier may be. This could be **skills** (general or occupationally specific), it could be **job readiness/awareness**, or it could be the availability of **support**.

Employability programmes *target* the individual but they *impact* on families, communities, employers and the economy too. From an employer's perspective, staff with the right skills, knowledge and attitude can "hit the ground running" and can introduce new thinking on products and processes adding significant value for the company. At a macro-economic scale, employability programmes can help prepare the workforce to move from lower demand to higher demand (or higher value) occupations.

Consequently, employability programmes have a positive impact on various economic policy objectives including:

- Early intervention & prevention
- Child poverty
- Young people at risk of becoming NEET
- Preparation for work and long-term unemployment
- Youth unemployment
- Short-term unemployment
- Economic integration of refugees (e.g. REACH)
- Under-employment and work-limiting health conditions
- Maximising income, in-work poverty & progression
- Workforce development and employee retention
- Preparation for entry into RSP priority sectors



With such wide impacts, employability is well-reflected in several national strategies and policy documents:

- **CCR Industrial and Economic Growth Plan:** *"We must... target our most deprived and isolated communities and support regenerative growth... GVA per capita remains low, like other regions in the UK. Participation rates - the proportion of the population that is economically-active - could be higher"*
- **UK Industrial Strategy:** *"We need to narrow disparities between communities in skills and education and remove barriers faced by workers from underrepresented groups in realising their potential."*
- **WG Employability Plan:** *"It is one of the prime responsibilities of Government to educate, train and prepare people for the world of work and to remove barriers which prevent people from accessing work so that they can make a contribution to society."*

"We are creating a new service, the Employment Advice Gateway, to provide employment-related advice and guidance to people in Wales... Careers Wales will be given an enhanced role to operate the Employment Advice Gateway"

- **WG Programme for Government:** *“Low skill levels are the single biggest barrier to building the Welsh economy we want, and often the biggest barrier for individuals in securing meaningful work. It is critical we tailor skills support to individuals’ needs, while addressing other barriers such as poor health, transport and caring responsibilities to drive up prosperity levels for all.”*

We will deliver the Young Persons Guarantee, giving everyone under 25 the offer of work, education, training, or self-employment.”

- **WG: Regional Framework in Wales After Brexit:** *[What works] “Unemployed participants on EU-funded employability projects are 46 per cent more likely to find work over twelve months than non-participants. Economically inactive participants are 84 per cent more likely to find work than similar economically inactive people who have not benefited from this support”*
- **WG: A More Equal Wales: Preparing for the commencement of the Socio-economic duty.** *Socio-economic disadvantage leads to inequality of outcome including lower paid work and poorer skills and attainment.*
- **WG: Wellbeing of Future Generations Act:** *“Applying the well-being goals can help tackle poverty as it helps you identify where the main determinants of poverty exist, how they work together and what opportunities there might be.”*
- **One Million Welsh Speakers:** *“The evidence received suggests that there is a demand for a bilingual workforce to meet business and customer needs; this can be addressed by developing the linguistic skills and confidence to meet the requirements of businesses.” “Employers in the Childcare sector were the most likely of all sectors to consider Welsh language skills important. 84 per cent considered such skills important, and 42 per cent ‘very important’.*
- **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework:** *“The recently published Tackling Poverty plan clearly identifies that reducing the number of young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) will have a long-term impact on the lives of not just today’s young people, but generations to come. The cost of not addressing this issue is not just economic, but impacts on levels of unemployment, under employment, crime, well-being, substance misuse, premature death and early motherhood.”*

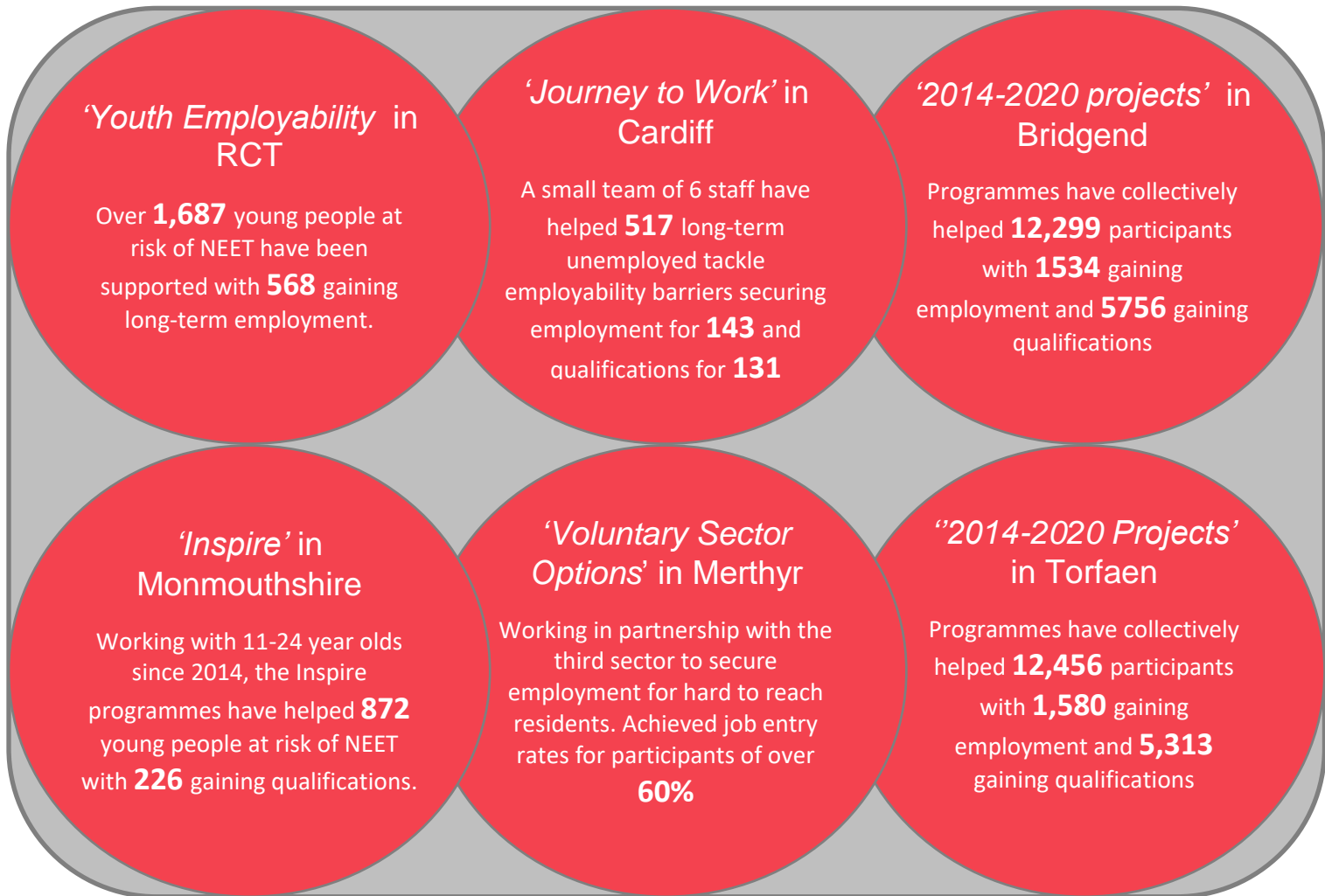
What have Employability Programmes Achieved?

It is well-established that reducing unemployment and economic inactivity, improving skills levels and equipping workers with the ambition to progress in their careers is one of the principal drivers of regional productivity growth. Employability programmes in the Cardiff City Region have helped thousands of people to improve their skills, gain new qualifications and enter / progress in employment.

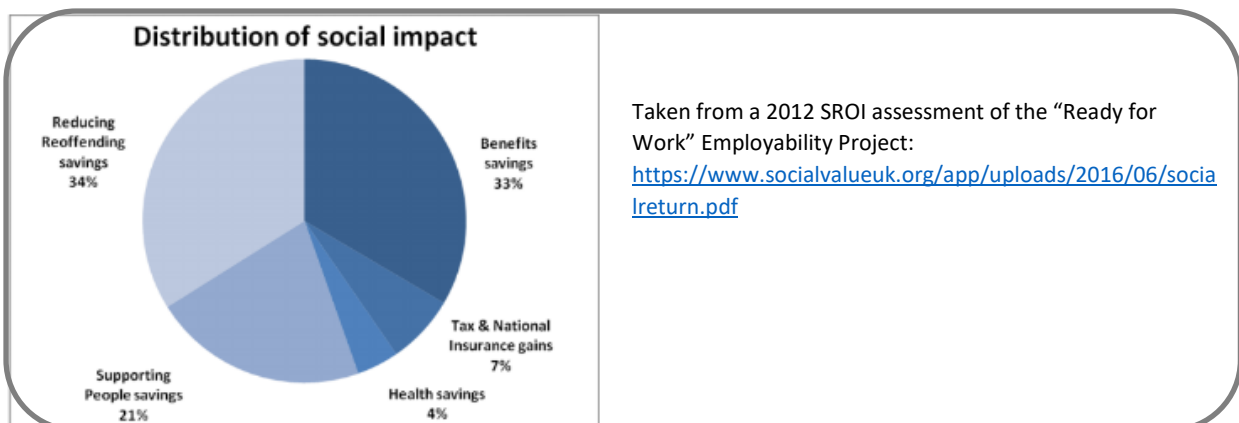
‘2014-2020 Structural Funds’ in the CCR

The projects supported **14,522** long-term unemployed into employment and **51,127** to gain qualifications

For over 20 years local authority led programmes have had success in deprived communities; success working in partnership with the third and private sectors; success working with young people and with vulnerable adults. Highlights include



But the statistics do not show the full impact of these interventions. It is well-established that employability programmes have a high social return on investment. A 2012 evaluation of employability programmes showed cashable impacts across various government departments:



Closer to home, a 2019 **social return on investment** study for RCT showed a net social impact of £2,080,078 on the £405,000 Inspire to Work project alone. A social return on investment of £5.10 for every £1 spent.

“RCT I2W: A social return on investment of £5.10 for every £1.00 spent”

Nor do they show the impact on individuals:

Monmouthshire Inspires to Achieve

In Spring 2016, Monmouthshire Inspire to Achieve (I2A) was asked to intervene to support a year 9 boy (“X”) who was not attending school. He had a turbulent family background, no contact with his dad and had recently seen his older sister sectioned under the Mental Health Act leading a severe decline in his own mental health. “X” withdrew from all facets of life and was becoming increasingly violent. His school attendance fell to 30% with 56% unauthorised absence. At this point I2A was asked to intervene.

“X” continued to work towards core subjects in school whilst receiving pastoral support for his emotional needs and employability skills support from I2A. Through intense 1:1 support, “X” and his case worker have developed a trusting and effective relationship which has identified his barriers to employment and has significantly reduced his anxiety and improved his confidence. He is now close to completing a BTEC L2 Qualification in Work Skills (ahead of his peers) and his attendance has increased to almost 90% (a 200% increase). He now has the ambition to progress into a career in advertising and design.

Torfaen Bridges into Work helps land Dream Job

In Winter 2020, Torfaen Bridges into Work (BiW2) supported Andrew Wilkinson into his dream job. Andrew was paralysed from the chest down following a road traffic accident 18 years ago. Prior to his accident he worked as a full-time scaffolder. Considered as long term unemployed and having no formal qualifications, he contacted BiW2, where he received support from Employment Mentors who helped him to build his confidence, develop his CV, complete online qualification and ultimately to secure a job as an assistive technologist at Rookwood Hospital – the hospital that provided him with treatment following his accident.

How employability has been delivered in CCR

The project-based nature of EU structural funding led to a plethora of employability programmes, each based on the principles above, but targeting a different **clientele**, **geography**, or **employability outcome** and using slightly different models, assessment tools and interventions.

To add to the complexity, there are many wider programmes that have an employability component, including: DWP Restart, DWP Kickstart, and Communities 4 Work+. This is alongside the Working Wales service that provides an independent careers information, advice, coaching and signposting service that incorporates referrals to the full breadth of employability and other provision

Summary of Recent EU-Funded Employability Programmes

| | Clientele | Geography | Outcome |
|--|--|---|--|
| Bridges into Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployed • Age 25+ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BGCBC, TCBC, CCBC, BCBC, MTCBC • Non-CF* areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployment • Economic Inactivity |
| Working Skills for Adults | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Employment • Age 16+ • QCF2 or lower | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BGCBC, TCBC, CCBC, BCBC, MTCBC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In work poverty / career progression |
| Nurture, Equip, Thrive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Employment • Age 16+ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BGCBC, TCBC, CCBC, BCBC, MTCBC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underemployment & Work limiting health conditions • Workforce development |
| Journey 2 Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployed • Age 25+ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCC, NCC, MCC • Non-CF areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployment • Economic Inactivity |
| Skills @ Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Employment • Age 16+ • QCF2 or lower | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCC, NCC, MCC • Non-CF areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In work poverty / career progression |
| Building Resilience, Prosperity & Wellbeing (SWAW) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Employment • Returning to Work • WLHC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCTCBC • Non-CF* & CF areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployment • Underemployment & Work limiting health conditions |
| Communities 4 Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 16+ • AND QCF2 or lower; OR • WLHC; OR • BME; OR • Jobless Household | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole CCR • CF areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployment • Economic Inactivity |
| PACE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economically Inactive • Parents • AND NEET 16-24 OR 25+ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-CF • Whole CCR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployment • Economic Inactivity |
| ReAct | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redundant less than 3 months • <16+ hours /week since redundancy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole CCR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term unemployment • Careers advisory role |
| Traineeships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 16-17 • NEET | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole CCR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Unemployment • Careers advisory role |
| Active Inclusion Fund | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 25+ AND • 54+ econ. inactive; • OR BAME & long-term unemployed; OR • Carer & econ. inactive; • OR QCF2 or lower; • OR WLHC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole CCR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployment • Economic Inactivity • Underemployment & Work limiting health conditions |
| Upskilling at Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees QCF2 or lower | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole CCR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing priority sectors • Career progression |
| Inspire to Achieve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 11-16 • At risk of NEET | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole CCR (East & West projects) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At risk of NEET • Careers advisory role |
| Inspire to Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 16-24 • NEET | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole CCR (East & West projects) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Unemployment |

*CF – Communities First

Each employability project relies on staff resource to deliver or procure the appropriate mix of interventions that address their participants' barriers and achieve the project outcome. In some cases this involves specialist referrals to other programmes. These staffing roles / interventions / specialist referrals are summarised below:

| Staff Resource | Interventions / | Specialist Referrals |
|---|--|---|
| Design & Deliver Qualifications (e.g. Agored) | | Specialist referral: Prison leavers |
| Employer Liaison Officers | Delivery of courses via accredited centres (e.g. Pearsons, Highfields) | Specialist referral: Learning difficulties |
| Financial Inclusion Officers | | Specialist referral: LAC |
| Counsellors | Volunteering | Specialist referral: work limiting health condition |
| Health & Wellbeing Support | Work Placements | |
| Post-16 Youth Worker Support | Job Prep / Employment Support | |
| Pre-16 Youth Support Workers | FE Referrals | |
| | Barriers Fund | |

Lessons Learnt from the EU Programmes

What has Worked Well?

- **Subsidiarity works:** Local Authority delivered projects have great penetration into their target communities. LA employability teams have been embedded in communities for over 20 years and so have a strong understanding of residents' barriers, good networks with local support organisations, and are delivered by well-established (and well-known) practitioners.
- **Local knowledge is crucial:** Local Authority delivered projects have developed good knowledge of local labour markets, and good relations with local and regional employers built over many years. Collectively we have networks of thousands of employers who engage employability as part of their recruitment. Importantly, Local Authorities also have a strong understanding of the emerging employment opportunities in their local area.
- **A trusted brand:** Local authority delivered projects are trusted by participants. Without trust, it is impossible to engage those furthest from the labour market.
- **Prevention over profitability:** Local Authority led delivery has been motivated by tackling the root causes of participants barriers, however complex and however long that intervention takes. They have been successful at working as part of a wider Early Intervention & Prevention coalition of support agencies, employer networks and early intervention teams (e.g. money advice, benefits, foodbanks, ESOL provision, volunteering agencies, adult learning, children's services, education welfare, housing and health & wellbeing advisory services) to help participants.

- **Continuity of provision is valuable *and* cost-effective:** Under current EU programmes Local Authority employability teams employ 100s of support workers, counsellors and employment liaison officers. Many have developed networks in their local area over 20 years. Collectively there are hundreds of years of experience and local knowledge that would be lost if employability programmes were to end. In a profession that relies on building long-term 1:1 relationships with clients, the loss of this expertise could take decades to recover. Add to this the financial cost of decommissioning existing services (office costs, redundancy costs, re-branding) and it is clear that continuity between programmes significantly improves the short and long-term cost-effectiveness for the region
- **Shared learning adds value:** Over the past two decades strong networks have emerged between employability programmes, training providers, higher and further education institutions, the voluntary sector and the business community. Local Authority led provision is effective at working in partnership to deliver in areas where partners' have greater expertise, experience of knowledge.
- **Decades of progress towards real change:** Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, regional qualifications levels were rising, unemployment was low. Youth employability teams were able to implement a 10-year preventative approach (through successive programmes like Prevent, Lift and Inspire) which is benefitting a generation of young people. As a result of intervention, NEET figures were amongst their lowest ever.
- **Simplified Costs has reduced bureaucracy:** The FR40 simplified costs model used during the 2014-2020 programmes has had a significant impact on efficiency. This essentially creates a barriers and training fund for project participants. Local Authorities can now design interventions around a participant's needs and not around a pre-conceived list of compliant purchases.

What could be improved?

- **Assess participants for their "employability" journey, not their "project" journey:** Currently a participant is assessed when they enter each project. Each uses a different approach to determine eligibility and to assess what support to provide to a participant. To some extent this is necessary – the questions asked of an 11 or 16 year-old will be different from those asked of a 30 or 50 year old. But there should be more commonality between and coordination of assessment tools so that a client can move seamlessly in and out of support at key stages in their employability journey.
- **Flexible outcomes:** Whilst FR40 has made project delivery more flexible, the current ESF-funded programmes are still rigid in their outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic has again highlighted the need for employability to adapt quickly to changing labour market conditions and priorities (e.g. the flexibility to switch from economic inactivity to unemployment; from long-term unemployment to short-term unemployment; or from unemployment to under-employment). The end of EU funding requirements means that apprenticeships, further learning and volunteering could all become more acceptable progression outcomes.
- **One Framework, but not necessarily one Programme:** Some programmes (particularly C4W/+) are wider than just employability. Others (particularly the Inspire 2 Achieve reduction of risk of NEET programme) require specialist interventions. Whilst these interact with an employability programme, they may also sit alongside rather than within it.

- **Hide ‘even more’ of the wiring:** Each project currently has strong brand identity amongst their clients, but the sheer number of brands can create confusion. There are examples of good practice in “hiding the wiring” (creating a seamless experience for a participant) within individual local authorities, but as a region there are still too many brands for employability alone (let alone complementary national programmes like Communities 4 Work/+, Jobs Growth Wales or Restart). There should be a clearer brand hierarchy, fewer brands, and a more consistent and universally accepted approach to triage across all employability interventions in the CCR.
- **Closer alignment with industry:** We want to move from projects which focus on ‘how do I support an individual into a job’ to ‘how do I support an individual into a *sustainable* job’ There is substantial change taking place in the economic base of the CCR, accelerated by Covid-19. The employability ‘skills’ needed to work in this emerging economy are also likely to evolve. With the adoption of a regional Employment and Skills Plan, and cluster groups in priority sectors, we face a unique opportunity to improve the alignment between our programme design and the demands of industry. There are some good innovative ideas:
 - E-learning modules for employability staff so that they are better placed to understand and therefore direct support towards priority sectors.
 - “Try before you qualify” model, supporting employability candidates into the workplace in priority sector roles before they make a decision on which qualification route to pursue.

The Future Context for Employability

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the scale of the employability challenge. Structural changes are taking place in the economy at a rate not seen for decades with some well-established sectors declining rapidly.

The following represent opportunities / threats to the delivery of employability support:

- **Brexit:** The impact of Brexit on the industrial base of the CCR remains uncertain. Pre-departure assessments highlighted a high risk to the South Wales economy with its relatively high proportions of manufacturing employment and personal/financial services. Brexit impacts do not yet appear to be impacting on the labour market, but any decline in manufacturing employment will impact on the number of opportunities for employability clients.
- **Retail & Customer Service:** Even before Covid-19 restrictions the retail sector was transitioning away from bricks and mortar premises in town and city centres. Retail is one of the most popular and accessible routes from our employability programmes and any decline in retail employment will impact on opportunities for employability clients. The shift online (accelerated by Covid-19) will create other opportunities – in delivery and warehousing occupations in particular – but the propensity of these workplaces to cluster near to major transport routes will impact on the accessibility of any vacancies to employability clients. This is a particularly acute risk for young people at risk of becoming NEET.
- **Automation and Industry 4.0:** The CCR Industrial Strategy recognises a regional strength in advanced manufacturing and seeks to promote growth and innovation within key manufacturing sub-sectors (including medical devices and diagnostics, compound semi-conductors and transport engineering). The extent to which automation will reduce employment in South Wales’ largely SME manufacturers is unclear, but there is clearly a need to prepare employability programmes for the impact of a reduced number of lower-skilled occupations within these sectors. This will require better employability pathways, improved perceptions of the sector amongst clients and a stronger link between employability and technical skills.

- **Human Foundational Economy:** The Human Foundational Economy includes several priority sectors for the CCR RSP and has continued potential as a strong source of vacancies for employability clients. But there is a risk that these roles may perpetuate a low-wage economy and a need for employability programmes to engage with the sector to promote fair work, improve job security, improve the reputation of the sector and stimulate progression opportunities.
- **Covid-19: labour market tightening:** The Covid-19 pandemic has forced many businesses to either cease trading temporarily or adjust their business model. Schemes like the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) and relief funds have to date limited the number of redundancies, but there remain risks to the labour market as this support is gradually withdrawn. At the peak of the pandemic, the ratio between claimants and vacancies rose substantially, and further such peaks may be seen. Any tightening of the labour market is likely to reduce opportunities for employability clients. In addition, employability teams are likely to be working with a more diverse range of clients, many of whom may not have previously been unemployed and may need to reskill / upskill. The extent to which demand on employability services will increase post Covid is, as yet, unknown
- **Covid-19: The psychological barriers:** Research conducted with children and young people by the Children’s Commissioners Office shows that young people’s emotional and psychological wellbeing has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is highly likely to ‘present’ as an additional barrier to employment amongst the most vulnerable and may affect their ability to achieve their potential in education and/or to sustain employment.

An Employability Framework Fit for the Future

The priorities for future delivery

Reflecting on the context, on what has worked well, and on the lessons from earlier programmes, any future employability approach for the CCR should:

- Use a single long-term employability “model” which can rapidly respond to changeable policy priorities, but is flexible enough to cater to individual barriers and needs.....
- as the basis for designing common programmes together and with our partners across the region which address our three principal employability themes: “flexible employability support”; “anti-poverty interventions” and “early intervention for young people at risk of becoming NEET”
- which would include a common triage process, a “single front door” that ‘hides the wiring’, and common participant assessment tools
- and which would be delivered by teams in each of the 10 LAs with the flexibility to directly deliver, procure or refer participants onto a range of approved interventions
- funded through the Levelling Up Programme or other similar funds.....
- alongside activity to work with the RSP cluster groups to design pre-employment pathways for priority sectors.
-with the aim to give the region the direction, stability and maturity to collectively engage with or bid for other emerging contracts (e.g. Kickstart, CAEHRs, Jobs Growth Wales+, apprenticeship programmes).....

The Pre-Assessment Process

The pre assessment engagement process is about reaching out to individuals, supporting them into regular activity and positive routines, and helping them to connect with others.

Many economically inactive and unemployed individuals are not actively engaged with employability services. This may be because they are not interested in working, have had poor experiences of employability services in the past, or are unaware of the range of services available.

To overcome this lack of engagement, a number of mechanisms will be used to reach out to individuals and engage them in employability services. These include:

- Pro-active marketing.
- Effective location of services
- Community outreach workers
- Partnership working with community organisations.
- Co-location of services.
- Adopting area-based approach and client group-based approach

Upon engagement, Triage officers will begin the Triage process to identify the most suitable provision for the client.

The Triage Process

A triage process is an integral feature of employability programmes to successfully refer a client to the project which can best support the skills, needs and circumstances of the client and for which the client is eligible. Under the proposed framework, all 10 authorities, and partner organisations, will design a common, collective, consistent approach to triage.

In practice the client or referral body completes, with the client's agreement, an expression of interest which is sent to a Triage Officer. The Triage Officer must fully understand all the provision in the area, what that provision can achieve for the client and then assesses the details of the client that have been provided. If there are areas which need further clarification the Triage Officer would contact the client to ask for more details. When the Triage Officer is confident they have that level of detail which allows them to make a sound judgment they refer to the most suitable provision for the client in that locality.

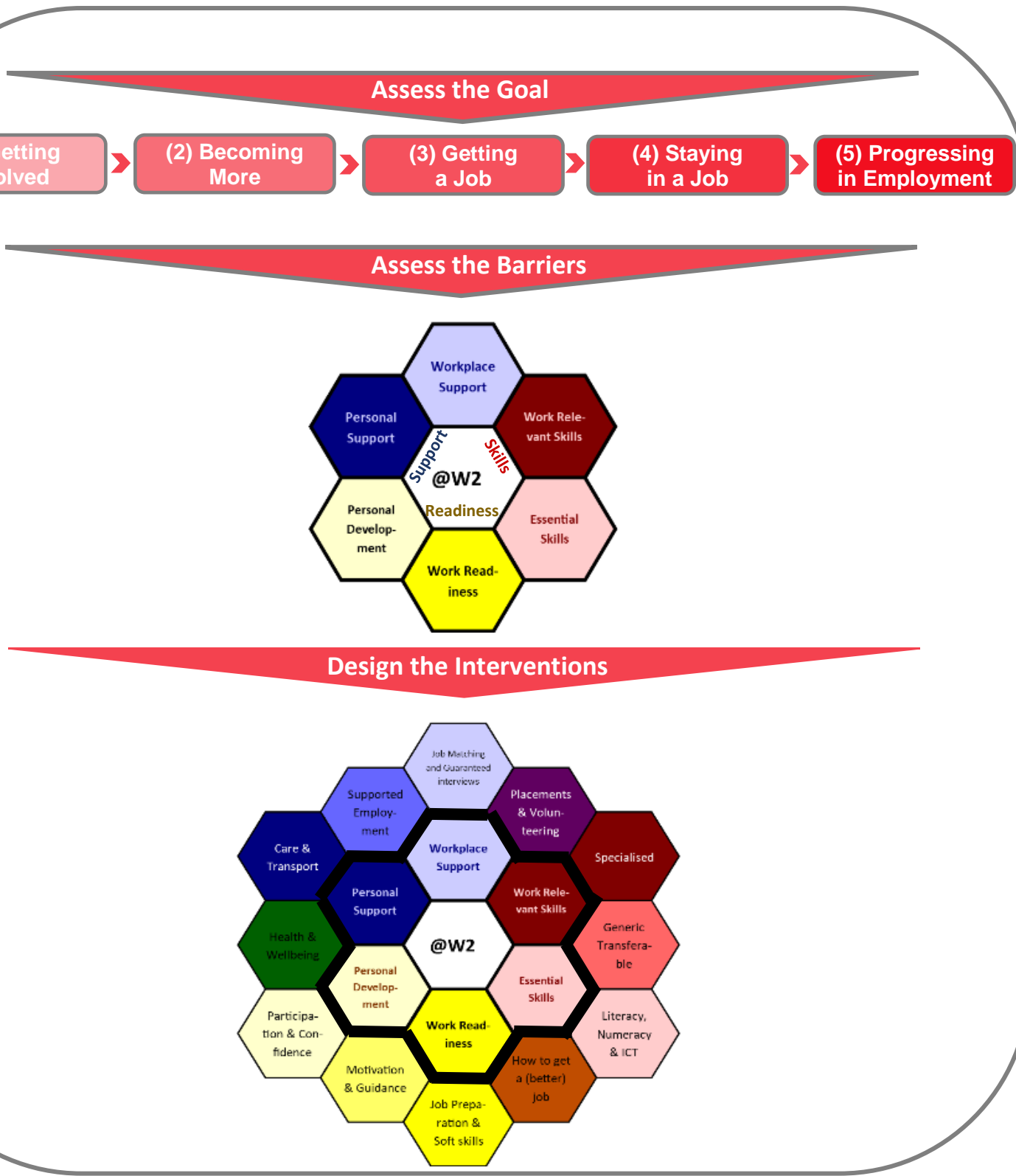
The Triage Officer would notify the referrer that the client had been triaged to the particular project. The receiving agency would be asked to notify Triage when the client is successfully enrolled on the provision. Should the Mentor on that project undertake assessment with that client and determine that the provision is unsuitable for that clients needs they would refer back to the Triage Officer with any new information which would able the Triage Officer to make a new provision.

When clients complete their time on a particular project, for example they get a job, and would leave that project a judgment must be made if there is other provision which could continue to meet the clients needs, for example in work support, a referral back to Triage or at least informing Triage that a referral is made to another project is key so the clients employability journey can be tracked.

Many clients are re-referred to provision and seeing what schemes they have successfully or unsuccessfully completed helps inform Triage Officers when making the next referral and ensures that the client is eligible for that provision.

The Client Assessment Process

The model below provides a comprehensive and complete range of employment and skills interventions coordinated by the RSP. The ability to seamlessly link the client's journey, whatever their age, from their first engagement with employment and skills provision, demonstrates a model of local integration and delivery of services, which maximises benefits for clients. The various stages of the model below allow a client to re-engage at various stages of their employability journey. This section provides further information about the pipeline, and the different stages and interventions within it.



Alignment to Other Provision

An employability programme should not be developed in isolation from the wider skills provision in the CCR to ensure that participants can readily and seamlessly access specialist support, and, importantly, to provide opportunities for participants to progress into more technical skills development activities in priority sectors.

The following conversations should be prioritised during programme design:

- **Communities 4 Work(+):** National anti-poverty programmes have wider objectives which can complement the employability proposals in this discussion paper. In some LAs the projects may be delivered under the same management structures. Discussions should focus on a shared/consistent approach to branding, triage, and assessment.
- **NEET prevention:** Any successor programme to Inspire 2 Achieve will be an important feeder into the employability programme. Discussions should focus on the referral process from Inspire 2 Achieve into the employability programme.
- **RSP Priority Sector Cluster Groups:** Learning the lessons from previous EU programmes, the successor employability framework will need to establish a clear pathway into each sector for employability clients. This will need to consider the requirements of entry level job roles as well as technical skills requirements. This work – looking at starter roles – is now underway jointly between the local authorities and the RSP team.
- **Working Wales & School's Employer Engagement:** The creation of Working Wales and the launch of Jobs Growth Wales+ creates an opportunity to join up “careers & aspirations” workstreams with employability programmes. There are already pockets of good practice focussed on STEM in schools (BGCBC) and coordination of opportunities for young people (Cardiff Commitment).
- **Further Education Provision & Technical Skills:** Upskilling / reskilling is likely to remain an important part of the employability offer and technical skills will play an increasing role in that. Discussions with FE should focus on the assessment/intervention model and how it can act as a seamless feeder into existing/proposed FE provision.
- **Work-based Learning & Specialist Apprenticeship Provision:** The end of EU funding restrictions provides an opportunity to embrace apprenticeships as a progression route from employability programmes. There are opportunities for joint promotion, and the co-design of the assessment/referral process. There are also opportunities to align to local-authority / third-sector led specialist apprenticeship provision like Y Prentis and Aspire. This collaborative programmes brings together education, industry and the local authority to provide skilled opportunities in the advanced manufacturing sector. With its strong industry links and track record of supporting industry with recruitment, training & work placements, the Aspire programme could represent a link from employability provision into technical skills development. Y Prentis can do likewise into construction routes.
- **Public Sector Shared Apprenticeships and InFuSe:** A public sector testbed is likely to stimulate new service provision and new occupational routes in the public sector. This could be a strong source of future opportunities for employability clients and should be considered at an early stage of InFuSe's development.
- **CCR Investment Pipeline:** The CCR City Deal is developing a strong pipeline of upcoming investments in infrastructure (creating opportunities for construction vacancies) and innovation

(creating opportunities for technological vacancies). If a clear “early warning” system could be created to notify employability programmes when an investment proposition looks likely to receive support, it will help the employability teams to begin to prepare the workforce to reskill for these opportunities.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The adoption of a new framework for employability and a commitment from the RSP to seek funding to sustain the teams required to deliver this framework would usher in an exciting new era for employability in the CCR.

Learning lessons from the EU programmes, our proposed framework would create a system based on coordination not competition; a system based on flexibility and responsiveness to structural changes in the regional labour market; a system aligned to the priority sectors with distinct employability pathways into each one.

The case is strong for locally delivered employability. It provides excellent value for money and social return on investment. It is based on over 20 years of experience, and relationships with local communities that would take years to recover if that expertise was lost.

Adopting the proposed framework for employability would give the Regional Skills Partnership a mechanism to:

- Rapidly adapt to changing regional employability priorities in response to structural changes in the economy and labour market (i.e. getting the right mix between short-term unemployed, long-term unemployed, NEETs, under-employment etc).
- Improve the integration of employability with the other elements of the Regional Employment and Skills Plan, like careers and aspiration, technical education and cluster development.

And it would provide direction to local authorities (working with the Cardiff City Deal) to seek funding from the Levelling Up fund to establish a long-term, regionally-minded, locally-delivered employability approach. It would provide a launchpad for further collaboration with other emerging contracts like Kickstart, Jobs Growth Wales+ or other programmes coming from the CAEHRS.

Immediate Next Step

Subject to approval on the principles within this paper from the RSP, the LA cluster group will commence work with partners on an employability project proposal for submission to Shared Prosperity Fund.