

Introduction

The Passport programme aims to reduce the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) by providing work experience, mentoring and support, to prepare them for work, before being 'passported' into employment opportunities. The model is not for people who have significant barriers to work but for those who, with support, can start positions immediately.

According to the proposal, the programme will:

'assist LSB partners address workforce planning issues, ensure that local skills gaps are addressed, provide employment opportunities for young unemployed people and ensure that the potential workforce are equipped with the tools they need for employment'.

The programme relies upon significant collaboration between a number of partners which includes Caerphilly County Borough Council, Job Centre Plus, Communities First, Aneurin Bevan Health Board Health Board, Careers Wales, Educ8 (work based learning provider) and the Caerphilly Business Forum. The programme also relies upon the Welsh Government's Jobs Growth Wales fund. While the council is the largest employer in the area, the problem it faces of getting young 'work ready' people into work is common across public sector partners and the business community.

The programme started in November 2012 and is due to finish in December 2014. The large majority of the £372,220 funding from ESF covers the salaries of staff to facilitate the model.

Context

Caerphilly CBC has the fourth highest rate of unemployment in Wales and there are particularly high rates of economically inactive 16-24 year olds - the NEET population is high at around 2,200 people. The demography of the Council workforce also reveals a 'succession time-bomb' as 30% of the population are aged over 50, so it is important to have an educated workforce who can be ready for work.

A mapping exercise conducted in advance of the application for ESF-LSB revealed more than fifty different support interventions in place to support young people. These were mainly focused upon skills and training with no end product in terms of sustainable employment. A representative from the Caerphilly Business Forum remarked that it was difficult to understand all these programmes. Some companies were having trouble filling vacancies and existing programmes were not delivering for them.

Passport is a holistic and integrated employment support programme for young people aged 16 to 24 which bring together both the employer perspective and employment support together. Rather than duplicate any other project, it focuses upon the outcome of getting young people into work. One interviewee explained that

'What is the point of focussing on skills and training if there are no jobs out there? So you need the job creation element with the incentive to employers to create jobs and then on the back of that you need the other side of the coin which is the employment support... we are like a recruitment company'.

The Passport programme is complementary to other projects within Caerphilly. There are projects which look at the barriers to work, another focused upon 'Bridges Into Work' while Passport is aimed at the back-end of the process supporting young people into work. It aims to solve the conundrum facing some young people whereby they can't get a job without work experience but are unable to gain that work experience.

It is also different to other projects in that it aimed to dovetail with the council's £200m investment programme into their housing stock. Rather than just deliver physical improvements to housing, the council also intended to use the investment to transform lives and communities through changing its procurement structure. The council aimed to realise wider benefits through incorporating clauses into contracts which provided increased opportunities for local people to access WHQS (Wales Housing Quality Standard) related employment, training and apprenticeships. So the council was using capital investment to deliver social outcomes.

The designers of the programme had examined other ESF-funded projects in this area but found that these weren't holistic or integrated enough. They either had difficulties involving the private sector or there was no facility to engage with the 'hard to reach' because the Communities First element wasn't there. The Job Centre's Voluntary Work Placement Programme which provided between two and eight weeks of work experience influenced the design of Passport. Research was also conducted in England to see if there were similar projects in place.

'We've got rising youth unemployment... rising number of NEETS. We've got the business sector saying that they can't recruit people. We've got all these projects that are not quite delivering. What we can do to change our practices to make it easier for people to get a foot on the ladder. That's how the project came about'.

Methods

A total of nine face-to-face interviews were conducted in July 2014 with representatives from all the key stakeholders in the programme which included Caerphilly CBC, Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Job Centre Plus, Caerphilly Business Forum, and Careers Wales. We were also provided with all background documentation (e.g. project proposal, reports to the LSB, cabinet, scrutiny and evaluation reports).

The Passport programme was selected to be a case study because it is a large-sized grant which is primarily local authority-based, in the south of Wales with high policy salience.

The findings below are presented using the framework provided by the theory of change.

Inputs

The Passport programme was funded by a variety of sources. Caerphilly Council's cabinet provided a commitment in 2011 of £485,000. This was targeted towards funding apprenticeships/trainees and graduate entry jobs, but in order to deliver work experience placements up to eight weeks, the £372,220 ESF funding was needed to pay the staff to deliver this – around three-quarters of the funding. In addition, the

Jobs Growth Wales funding (which came on-stream in December 2012) provided placements for an additional six months. Finally, £121,000 was received from the Job Centre Flexible Support Fund (December 2012) which supports the model as a whole (including support for the Management Information System, marketing, training etc.)

Job Centre Plus has provided a secondee for one day a week. They provide the link between the three Job Centre offices and the programme and help by referring young people and checking rules and regulations on benefits etc. This secondment was seen by both sides as working well.

Activities

The programme provides a progression route for unemployed young people into employment.

- Tier 1 – Short-term work experience placements up to eight weeks;
- Tier 2 – Placements up to six months (JGW);
- Tier 3 – Apprenticeships / Trainee Opportunities; and
- Tier 4 – Graduate entry.

Young people are referred to the programme in a number of different ways. Referrals come from Job Centre Plus, Communities First, job clubs, Careers Wales, or from young people themselves. The large majority of referrals come from Community First areas.

The team conduct a diagnostic with individuals to ascertain basic factors like their expectations of work, their ability to do team work, how they would get into work on a daily basis. A skills assessment is also carried out as part of the induction process to see whether they are suitable for the scheme. If accepted onto the programme, the young person undertakes some training. This used to be conducted over a four week period but led to some young people dropping out. The training now takes place over two weeks to make it more attractive to the participants.

The programme takes an employers' perspective in attempting to ensure that participants are 'work ready', but determining this level was difficult as expectations

varied. Early experience showed that the young people going through the programme were not as close to the job market as believed and there were barriers to work which needed to be overcome. These have included basic skills training, confidence levels and access to work challenges.

The team realised a few months in that the process wasn't working as well as they wanted. They changed their processes so that the Communities and Regeneration team (funded by Communities First) took responsibility for the early diagnostic. These support workers had significant experience of working with young people in their most deprived areas.

An unpaid placement is carried out for up to eight weeks and the young person is able to claim benefits during this time and travel expenses to get to and from their placement. A member of the Passport team meets regularly with each individual during this period to assess whether they can progress into the Jobs Growth Wales placement which is paid at the national minimum wage. Agreement was given by Welsh Government early in the project, to allow the Jobs Growth Wales opportunities not be advertised on the Careers Wales website. Each Passport participant therefore, does not have to go through a competitive recruitment process and are automatically guaranteed the opportunity if they successfully complete their unpaid work placement. They are then supported through this recruitment process by their mentor to ensure they are able to provide all the relevant documentation, which is often seen as another barrier for young people.

What has facilitated the programme?

There are a wide range of factors which have acted as facilitators for the programme. These include:

- Partnership working;
- The programme's location within the organisation;
- The role of Welsh Government;
- Flexibility of funding;
- Officers working at the front line; and
- Leadership.

Partnership working

All partners are signed-up to the common aim of reducing the number of NEETS. Organisations are not focusing upon single organisational interests. For example, Job Centre Plus is keen to work with any organisation that can help to fill employer's vacancies and supporting vulnerable disadvantaged people into work. Their grant-funding of £121,000 has helped them to have a direct relationship with the programme and some influence on decision-making during Working Group and Project Board meetings. One stakeholder suggested that, 'It was a genuine partnership with the local authority'.

Working closely with Educ8 - the local Work Based Learning Provider that holds the Jobs Growth Wales placements on behalf of the Passport Team - has also worked well and both teams meet regularly to ensure that participants are supported and outcomes are delivered.

The council has a good relationship with the Business Forum and they have acted as a conduit to getting businesses involved and having confidence in the programme. Local businesses do not want additional bureaucracy of taking part in an initiative, so the council's Human Relations (HR) department provides support directly to Caerphilly businesses by doing their payroll and undertaking risk assessments etc. For small-medium size businesses, this support has been quite critical.

The programme's location within the organisation

The programme sits within the HR department within the council and this is seen to be a particular strength. This department has the benefits of being attached to all parts of the organisation. This 'organisational reach' is important compared to other projects which are often constrained within one department.

Staff have skills in recruitment, coaching, mentoring and technical knowledge of a number of HR processes including payroll, pensions and health and safety. This means that levers can be pulled to make it easier for young people to get a foot on the job ladder. As HR deals with managers on a daily basis, they are able to ask the question – 'Why not consider one of our trainees'?

For the Business Forum, the ability of HR to manage the payroll and utilise disciplinary grievance procedures quickly helped to give them confidence in the programme.

The programme was a LSB priority and therefore a decision was made that it should sit at the top of the organisation. Officers were able to operate across the council and hold good conversations with partners as HR professionals could talk directly to other HR professionals. Of course, 'the commitment of the team who really own it' was also a significant factor.

The role of Welsh Government

Jobs Growth Wales, which provides six months paid work experience at the national minimum wage, has been critical to the programme. It provides confidence to the business community that they can take a young people on. For young people, it provides a reasonable long period of 'real' work.

The Welsh Government's flexibility in two main ways has helped the programme to deliver. Firstly, after difficult negotiations with Welsh government, additional JGW places were allocated to the council rather than to a work-based learning provider. This was the first time that the Welsh Government had done this. Secondly, the requirement of the Fund was that a JGW placement would lead to a sustainable employment opportunity within that field. The Passport team wanted a different approach whereby young people could receive their placement and then they would match the young person to *any* suitable employer. This could mean that after six months working in one area, the young person could work somewhere else in the organisation or go to another employer. This flexibility has been crucial to make the programme work.

Flexibility of funding

The council has bought together different funding streams for the Passport programme. As mention previously, the majority of the ESF resource is spent on salaries. When the Passport model needs revising in the light of changing circumstances, the remaining funding is flexible so they don't have to submit change requests. So, where things aren't working, they can quickly change them.

Parts of the programme could have been implemented without the ESF as council resources were allocated to tier 3 and 4. The ESF money has allowed the council to develop a more cohesive project.

Officers working at the front line

Having dedicated Community First funded staff has been critical to the programme. These support workers engage young people at the front-end of the process. These people are often the hardest to reach in the community and the staff provide 1:1 support and engagement with the young people. The coaching and mentoring they received was said to be invaluable. Equally important is the fact that they filter young people into the programme. If they are not suitable for Passport, they are referred to other support mechanisms. If 'work ready' people are not fed in at the front end, the programme would not work. The staff have also been able to iron out small issues that the placement providers may have.

Leadership

There is political (and senior managerial) support for the programme. The importance of this should not be underplayed as 'you can achieve anything if you've got people who are brought into something and have a commitment to drive it through'. The team was described as being really committed and made good use of people's experiences across the organisation e.g. a colleague in finance who had previous experience of ESF helped with the financial aspect of the bid. Part of the success is built upon relationships - using persuasion, negotiation, compromise and knowing who the right people are.

Barriers to the programme

While partnership working has been a strength, there has been less involvement from some partners than was expected at the beginning. Gwent Police have been affected by downsizing as a result of the budget cuts and are not in a position to take on young people. In health, while they 'come to the table on a regular basis', but they already have a progression route in place. It is important to remember that both the police and health cover all five Gwent authorities, so Caerphilly is only part of their

patch. Careers Wales also cover larger area than just Caerphilly and this has caused some difficulties.

The programme has suffered from changes in personnel and capacity issues. The person initially involved from the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) was made redundant and the voluntary sector has struggled because of cuts to its funding.

Citizens Advice Bureau were involved at the early stages as a training provider on financial literacy, but that element actually hasn't gone as well as they would have liked and the Money Advice Service is now used instead. This part of the programme is crucial as providing young people with a route to employment needs to be matched with information on financial literacy so that money can be managed.

Other barriers have largely been overcome over time. The pilot phase helped the team to determine the sort of people who are 'work ready' and they worked with employers to set reasonable expectations of the young people they were recruiting. There has been some suspected abuse of the JGW element, but businesses are interviewed to make sure that they are using the scheme properly. The negotiations over JGW allocations took time at the start of the programme.

Collaborative capacity

Governance structure

There are clear and extensive governance arrangements in place and they are said to work well. In addition to six weekly team meetings and the HR strategy group, there is a project working group comprising representatives from all partner agencies and a Project Board upon which the LSB partners sit which meets quarterly.

The Project Board was described as being 'operationally focused' and this was meant in a positive way as it was not a strategic 'talking shop'. All partners were said to have a handle on both strategic and operational matters and were able to raise issues e.g. 'whether the programme is adding value and are the engine rooms working?' The council was inevitably the strong partner in this relationship - 'They led

and others followed'. One partner suggested that the Board made decisions and it is a shame that this doesn't happen on other projects.

The team have provided progress reports to the council's scrutiny committee and to cabinet. The LSB operates only by exception. So if there's a particular issue or blockage which officers are finding it difficult to overcome, then the LSB will be involved. While the LSB is clearly signed-up to the programme, one stakeholder thought that their involvement has not been as strong as it could have been. It was involved at the inception but has not taken much of a steering role.

Collaboration agreements

The council has delivered more than they promised in their application on key indicators. Four collaboration agreements between public service bodies and seven secondments are in place. A large array of organisational learning and development activities has been conducted and there have been 51 dissemination initiatives. Terms of reference have been used at the project board. No service level agreements have been put in place.

The project manager

The HR Service Manager and the Passport Programme Manager have led the project. The HR Manager has experience of running a recruitment agency which has helped in terms of matching people with opportunities and liaising with the private sector. The Programme Manager has a HR background with expertise in training and development.

Both officers play a significant role in a number of collaborative management activities, with strategy making being led by one and implementation activities being managed by the other. While there have been delays in recruiting staff to join the team, there has been a low turnover of staff.

Monitoring

There are various risks to the programme which have been monitored and reviewed over time. As a result of learning from the early stages of the project, the team put in place measures to assess young people so that they were suitable and to ensure all

partners had the same expectations. Staff have monitored the volumes of referrals into the programme and determine the appropriate level of JGW placements which are likely to be required.

The WEFO indicators were described as being 'pointless – it's ticking the box'. Respondents were unsure about what they were intending to achieve. They are already focused upon equality and sustainability issues, so there is no added value. They were not used to monitor the progress of the programme.

The Passport Programme Manager produces quarterly reports to the ESF-LSB team and performance is also reported to CMT and to scrutiny.

Learning

Learning has occurred at different levels. At an individual level, staff have attended training events organised by the ESF-LSB team. Learning has also occurred at a team level where various improvements have made to the process over time e.g. re-introducing case meetings between Job Centre Plus, Community First and Educ 8 to try and match people to opportunities, refining health and safety checks etc.

The programme has received some press coverage and has used examples of young people who have moved into employment as case studies. A sign of national recognition can be seen by the relatively large number of ministerial visits which have been made.

Officers have in the last six months looked to disseminate the lessons from the programme to neighbouring local authorities. They have visited Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Cardiff who are interested in piloting Passport. This potential regional dimension is likely to be important for future funding opportunities from ESF.

There is potential for the Welsh Government to do more to share the learning from this project with others across Wales, but it is unclear at this stage whether there is a strategy to collect the learning from this, and other projects.

Support by the ESF-LSB national team

The programme has received lots of advice and support from the ESF-LSB team including undertaking a mini-audit of their work. Staff have also attended some training events (e.g. on change management, coaching and mentoring).

The SET officer has been helpful in giving advice on processes and requirements for audit and on administrative matters relating to project closure.

The programme has its own evaluation which is due to report in the autumn of 2014.

Public service improvement (outcomes)

The programme set out clear outcomes which were expected to be achieved from the ESF resource. Previous performance in their existing work experience programme was examined and targets were designed that were 'realistic and deliverable' given the context and the partnership that they had to build on. There was a complaint that 'some of the targets that feature within mainstream ESF projects are completely unachievable'.

Passport aimed to:

- Create a minimum of 150 work experience opportunities per annum;
- Create a minimum of 25 apprenticeship opportunities per annum;
- Create a minimum of 40 employment opportunities per annum;
- Reduce the number of people aged 16-24 claiming Job Seekers Allowance by 3% over the lifetime of the project;
- Reduce the number of people aged 16-24 unemployed for more than 26 weeks by 3% over the lifetime of the project; and
- Incorporate Targeted Recruitment and Training as a core requirement into at least 10 new public sector contracts (per annum).

Between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014, 533 young people were referred into the programme. More than six in ten of these people have been referred from Job Centre Plus. During that period, 176 placements have been facilitated, 150 JGW placements have been filled and 77% of those young people undertaking a Jobs

Growth Wales placement have found sustainable employment or returned to full-time education. 52% of these young people have come from Community First areas.

It will be important to assess whether the young people have been sustained in their jobs and to compare the figures between those in JGW who have been through the Passport programme and those who haven't to see whether there is a significant difference in outcomes.

The evaluation of the programme included interviews with 157 individuals who were referred to Passport. 46% of these have received further support following referral and the results are very supportive. They conclude from this relatively small sample (n=72) that:

- 89% have found the initial assessment work useful or very useful;
- 85% found the Employability training useful or very useful;
- 80% of those who have worked with the programme say they have been changed by their Passport experiences;
- 85% say they gained job specific skills; 68% improved social skills for work (self-confidence, turning up on time etc.); 60% improved their sense of what they want to do; 53% report improved job search skills;
- 85% say they feel more enthusiastic about work;
- 90% are more confident about their own abilities;
- 91% say they were helped by the coaching/mentoring they received; and
- 71% say that without Passport they would still be unemployed.

Achieving cost savings was not an aim of the programme but interviewees suggested that it has been excellent value for money and lean for an employment support programme. In theory, it should also be saving the council on recruitment agency fees as they are matching jobs with clients. Research has shown that the average individual life-time public finance cost of a person NEET is £56,300 (Coles et al. 2010). In addition, there are costs associated with young people who are NEET such as youth offending. The costs to sustain Passport for an additional year is less than the equivalent of the cost of four young people being NEET (£56,300 x 4 = £225,200)

Reducing the number of NEETS would save money for Whitehall plus the indirect savings achieved by reducing crime levels and health costs. One partner asked 'why the decision-makers have not done more?' This is one that Ministers need to take a look at and examine the return on investment'.

Passport has allowed young people to secure a Jobs Growth Wales placement which would have been unlikely in a competitive process. Young people have gained valuable work experience which has helped them to move into work. It is difficult to measure some of the softer aspects. According to one interviewee, the programme had taught young people expectations about the workplace. A proportion had not worked since school and Passport had helped to change behaviours.

The council intended to include clauses in their procurement contracts to target young people from this programme. These clauses have been included in WHQS, but not for social care.

The programme has helped to improve relationships with the local business community. An employer who has used Passport was proud of the fact that he had taken five young people on from seven candidates and all of them are now in full-time employment. It didn't matter to him that none of them were working for his organisation but that he had helped in getting young people into employment.

One significant unintended consequence has been that due to the UK Government automatic enrolment on pensions, the work placements from Jobs Growth Wales are entitled to go on to the Local Government Pension Scheme if they meet certain criteria. This has resulted in a liability of £120,000 for Caerphilly CBC.

The future

The plan was for 'the LSB Partnership to ensure that the model evolves to become self-financing and hence sustainable' (Application 2011), but this has not proved possible to date. The ESF funding ends in December 2014 and although the programme has an under-spend, it has not been granted an extension until March 2015 like other projects. This will cause some difficulties because the Jobs Growth

Wales placements go beyond December 2014. The Passport team has secured further grant funding from the Job Centre Flexible Support Fund that will sustain the programme until March 2014.

If future European funding streams do not come on-line until January 2016, so there will be a gap in funding even if a bid is successful. There is the problem, common with many European projects, that knowledge and skills developed over eighteen months will be lost when the project finishes as staff will go back to their original jobs. A number of systems and processes have been established which will also be lost if no funding can be found. The momentum and enthusiasm for the programme is likely to ebb away. It is important, therefore, that the good relationships built with LSB partners, the Caerphilly Business Forum and others can continue to be fostered.

The council believe that there are three potential options for Passport in the future:

1. To continue to run Passport as a part of a bigger Caerphilly model which seeks to support young people who have more significant barriers to work and Passport becomes the back end of that model. (Based on the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework model);
2. To run Passport as a sub-regional project with two or three other Councils to support young people across a wider region; and
3. For Passport to be delivered across a wider region across South East Wales either as a stand-alone or as the back of a model that supports young people through barriers and onto work experience and employment.

There is potential for Passport to be delivered on other council's behalf if further funding from available or for councils to learn lessons from the experience of Caerphilly and introduce their own Passport model. As councils are not structured in the same way - e.g. where Community First sits in relation to the council – they will not be able to simply 'copy and paste'. Councils may also have different levels of engagement with the business community but Caerphilly could ask their business forum to talk to other business forums to build up relationships.

The experience of the Passport programme illustrates that while training schemes are helpful, young people need to be provided with a route to sustainable employment. There is a concern that future funding bids in the region will be 'funding led and not strategy led'. Each organisations is likely to have its' own agenda and will want to see their projects continue regardless of whether or not they have delivered outcomes. A large number of projects and Community First funded initiatives have aimed at making improvements for NEETS, but it is not clear what impact they have had. This potential parochialism goes against the push from WEFO for councils to work together regionally.

Conclusions

Passport is different to other schemes which aim at getting young people into work. It is an integrated system which supports young people through their journey into work. It's the quasi- recruitment agency work at the end of the process and good partnership working with all key partners which seems to have made the difference.

The programme has managed to join up the various funding streams available from Welsh Government (Community First, JGW, and WHQS) and ESF to deliver more than the sum of its parts. It would not have gone ahead in the same way without the ESF funding. Equally, it could not have delivered without the Welsh Government's Jobs Growth Wales element. JGW provides a 'win-win' for all parties. Employers get a free worker to help their business make money and the public sector reduce the number of young people who are NEET.

There are concerns about the future. The programme has shown evidence that a large number of young people are not ready for work after leaving school. In the past, any year 11 pupil could see Careers Wales for an interview, but now the focus is on those most at risk of becoming NEET. There is therefore support for the introduction of a pre-Passport programme for young people 14-16, but this is dependent upon finding funding.

Recommendations

Caerphilly CBC council should:

- Write up the key lessons from the programme so that the learning points are clear and can be shared with others who are interested in introducing this model
- Consider making further changes to improve the programme such as bringing together businesses which have had placements to learn from their experiences and reviewing what can be done to reduce the number of young people dropping out.

The Passport programme has been used as a case study in the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework document (2013). The report states that 'We are keen to extend this type of strategic approach more widely across the public sector in Wales'. If this is the case, then the rhetoric needs to be matched with action. As one interviewee suggested:

'I would like to see Welsh government recognising when something is good and delivering outcomes which benefit the people that we and they are trying to serve. I'd like to see Welsh government come in and say we really like this project. It's been proven to deliver. This is what it's going to be across the region. You all then need to work together to make it happen'.

The Welsh Government should:

- Provide a strategic overview of the projects receiving different types of grant funding to ensure that there are no overlaps and that all projects are outcomes-focused
- Gather and interpret evidence from evaluations to determine if projects should receive additional funding and perhaps be rolled-out further across Wales, or be stopped because they are not producing outcomes
- Consider whether they could better align programmes so that there is a coordinated approach across directorates.

References

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