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Evaluation of Shared Apprenticeship Pilots

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Evidence¹ suggests that small businesses are often dissuaded from engaging with the Apprenticeship programme by their perception that Apprenticeships are bureaucratic, costly and involve risk – of taking on a young person and of committing to their training for a fixed period in which workload and company income is uncertain.

A ‘Shared Apprenticeship’ model in which a central management organisation takes care of administration and in which the Apprentices moves between different employers who share the responsibility for the Apprentice’s on-site training removes these problems.

The then-ELWa² proposed a pilot scheme for Shared Apprenticeship in its Work Based Learning Improvement Plan³ which was approved by the then Welsh Assembly Government’s [now Welsh Government (WG) and referred to as such throughout] Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in January 2006.

Subsequently, the Shared Apprenticeship pilots were developed and implemented with funding from the then Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) [now Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and referred to as such throughout] of the WG and the support of two Sector Skills Councils (SSCs): ConstructionSkills and SEMTA⁴.

The pilots were intended to test the viability of operating a Shared Apprentice approach for a total of 75 Apprentices in the construction sector and of 90

¹See for example: *Research into Expanding Apprenticeships*, LSC, 2008; Press Release, Federation of Small Businesses, February 2011; *Building Business Through Apprenticeships*, City and Guilds, February, 2011; www.southdevon.ac.uk/business-news/1054; March 4th, 2011; *Education and Skills Survey*, CBI/Edexcel, 2008; *You’re hired! More Apprentices for Business*, CBI, July 2010; *LPC 2008 Survey of Employers*, Institute of Employment Studies, Report 466, 2009

² ELWa (Education and Learning Wales) was a public body funded by the Assembly Government to plan and fund all post-16 learning and training in Wales except for Higher Education. Set up in 2002, it was merged with the Welsh Assembly Government in April 2006

³ *The Work Based Learning Improvement Plan*, prepared by ELWa and approved by the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in January 2006

⁴ ConstructionSkills is the SSC for the construction sector. SEMTA is the SSC for the engineering and marine technologies sector. For more information on SSCs generally go to the SSC Alliance website <http://www.sscalliance.org>. For more information on ConstructionSkills go to www.cskills.org and on SEMTA go to www.semta.org.uk

Apprentices in the engineering sector. In each case, it was intended that approximately a third of each sector's total number of Apprentices should undertake their Apprenticeships in three annual cohorts starting in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

Each SSC piloted its own model, with the ConstructionSkills pilot operating from one geographic location; and the SEMTA pilot operating from three geographic locations, one in each of North, Mid and South West Wales.

Delivery commenced in September 2007 for the first cohort of ConstructionSkills Shared Apprentices. In the event, SEMTA was unable to start its Shared Apprentice pilot until a year later, with their first cohort beginning training in September 2008.

In 2010 DfES commissioned BMG Research to undertake an evaluation of the Shared Apprenticeships Pilots. This study forms part of an overarching evaluation of the WG's Work Based Learning programmes 2007-11.

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to report on progress in realising the aims and objectives of the pilots and to provide recommendations for their future roll-out.

The evaluation study commenced with an inception phase, followed by:

- desk based research;
- stakeholder and delivery partner consultations;
- depth discussions and focus groups with learners;
- depth discussions with employers; and
- follow-up interviews with learners who have completed their Shared Apprenticeship.

Implementation and delivery of the pilot

Overall, implementation and delivery have been very successful. Outcomes for Apprentices in the pilots, as far as is measurable to date, appear to be stronger than for Apprentices in standard Apprenticeships. Some key findings are that:

- set-up times differed between the pilots. The ConstructionSkills pilot began quickly as it was based on established employer links and partnerships. The SEMTA pilot took longer because these had to be developed
- pilots established robust recruitment procedures to ensure that high calibre Apprenticeship candidates were recruited
- employer engagement has been an on-going activity to ensure that there are ample placements available for Apprentices and to build sustainability into the Shared Apprentice approach
- the role of training officers and training managers has been critical in ensuring good communications between Apprentices, employers, and off-site training providers, and in providing additional support to Apprentices experiencing problems
- adaptations have been made to the sharing of Apprentices between employers. A flexible approach has been applied to meet both employer and Apprentice requirements
- the shared approach has been of great value in supporting Apprentices who were displaced when their employers ceased trading or lost contracts or experienced reduced workloads
- retention rates have been good for the construction pilot and have improved over time for the engineering pilot

Apprentices' experiences

Discussions with Apprentices confirmed these mainly positive findings. They were generally happy with their experiences, proud of their achievements and confident of the future.

- Gaining experience of working with different employers was viewed by Apprentices as being a particular strength of the Shared Apprenticeship pilot.
- The higher probability of achieving an Apprenticeship framework and associated qualifications was a strong motivating factor for most of the

construction Apprentices. They saw Shared Apprenticeship as virtually guaranteeing that they would be able to complete all the elements and assessments required by their Apprenticeship framework.

- Apprentices are highly satisfied with their learning and employment experiences on the pilot.
- Work-based elements of the Apprenticeship were highly valued by all Apprentices, with construction Apprentices recommending that they would like to spend more time with employers during the earlier stages of their programme.
- Construction Apprentices who had completed their Apprenticeship reported that the programme had enabled them to achieve skills and qualifications of which they were very proud.
- Completers also advised that participation had helped them to secure employment in their chosen construction trades.
- achievement of qualifications is reported as being good, and possibly faster, than by mainstream Apprentices. Of 24 construction Apprentices in the only completed cohort to date, 22 completed their programme, with 20 achieving a full Level 3 Apprenticeship and 2 achieving a full Level 2 Apprenticeship
- the first construction cohort to complete has been successful in securing employment. All of those who completed their Apprenticeship subsequently gained employment with 19 of these securing employment with CCTAL employers in their chosen trade in the sector
- though based on very small numbers so far, these figures suggest a better completion rate and a better employment rate than for Apprenticeship as a whole⁵.

⁵ The overall Apprenticeship completion rate in Wales is reported as being 75%; ConstructionSkills suggests the typical completion rate in the sector is 'over 75%'; a post-Apprenticeship employment rate in England (for Apprentices who complete) was reported as 79% (see, respectively: Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, conference of the National Training Federation Wales, November, 2010; ConstructionSkills website; *The Benefits of Completing an Apprenticeship*, Learning and Skills Council, 2009). The very small sample noted here has a completion rate in excess of 90% and an employment rate for completed Apprentices of 100%.

Employers' experiences

Similarly, employers interviewed for the evaluation were satisfied with their involvement with the programme – seeing it as a valuable addition to, though not replacement for, the standard model of Apprenticeship.

- Construction employers had a high level of engagement in the pilot since they were all members of CCTAL (a local employer association for the construction sector) and thus had a high level of understanding of the pilot.
- Engineering employers were also very engaged with the pilot, with some taking on Apprentices for the first time ever or for the first time in recent years.
- Employers reported that they had established good and effective working relationships with the providers delivering the off-site training element
- Support from training officers and training managers was highly valued in limiting the amount of paperwork that employers needed to complete.
- The calibre of Apprentices was felt to be of a high quality. This was felt to be a particular strength of the pilot.
- All employers advised that the range of learning opportunities available through the pilot was an attractive element, enhancing Apprentices' awareness and knowledge of the sector.
- Engineering sector employers reported that the wage subsidy for their engineering Apprentices strongly incentivised their participation.
- Most employers who have experience both of the Shared approach and of traditional Apprenticeships believed that the Shared Apprenticeship programme thus far compares very well with the traditional route, although they do not see it replacing that route.

Overview

As previous sections of this summary show, there is no doubt that Shared Apprenticeship has succeeded, and is succeeding, as a training programme. It has been successfully delivered. It has outcomes which appear to be at

least as good and (though based on a small number of Apprentices in the programme) perhaps better than those of standard Apprenticeship. A number of particular conditions conducive to, or attributes of, this broad picture of success are recognised.

- It was established most readily where there was an existing sector network of employers willing, indeed keen, to host Apprentices in the programme.
- The programme had a strong process for Apprentice selection and secured particularly able and motivated candidates.
- It was particularly fitted to difficult economic circumstances because it allowed Apprentices to be readily re-located when workloads fell off, or, in some cases, when businesses in the programme closed down.
- It appears to have a somewhat stronger fit with the construction sector – which is generally mobile, has fluctuating workloads, and quite varied site conditions – than with the engineering sector.
- It has higher costs, because of government subsidy to Shared Apprentices' training allowances or wages, and because of the greater amount of management time which the programme requires, than has standard Apprenticeship. On a per-completed Apprentice basis, because of possibly higher completion rates for Shared Apprenticeships, these higher costs may be mitigated but this factor is unlikely to make up all the difference.

Recommendations

Some key recommendations which derive from this analysis for any future extension or development of Shared Apprenticeship in Wales are:

A full costing exercise, to ascertain the true cost of Shared Apprenticeship for each completed Apprenticeship compared with the equivalent cost of a completed 'standard' Apprenticeship in the same sector, should be undertaken and made available.

We understand that the major costs of operating the shared Apprenticeship programme (wage costs and training costs) will be recognised by DfES

managers⁶. However, we are unsure whether known costs account fully for all management time involved (for example, of the CCTAL and SSC staff operating the programme), whether costs have been related to outcomes (to calculate cost-per-completion), and whether costs of Shared Apprenticeships have been compared with costs of standard Apprenticeships in the same sector. Thus, whilst Shared Apprenticeship can be recognised as relatively costly, the scale of difference is not widely available (and was not made available to the evaluation team). It will be important to any future deployment or development of the Shared Apprenticeship approach that the cost implications should be clearly visible to all parties involved in decisions as to whether or not to take the shared approach forward. A straightforward balance sheet, explicitly comparing the costs of Shared and standard Apprenticeship models, would be a valuable companion to this report.

A wage subsidy in Shared Apprenticeship needs to be factored into any future Shared Apprenticeship programme.

Both pilots operated with a training allowance or wage paid to Apprentices which, whilst fed through the SSCs involved, was an additional government subsidy over and above the normal government payment of off-site training costs in standard Apprenticeship. It seems improbable that employers in the pilots (or any successor programme) will generally agree to pay a significant wage to an Apprentice who is not ‘theirs’ and who may be with them for only a short period of time (particularly if this is at an early stage of the Apprenticeship when Apprentices’ value to the business may be quite low or negative).

Seek to roll-out Shared Apprenticeship (if a cost analysis shows that to be viable) in locations where there are existing employer networks which are committed to supporting the Shared Apprenticeship programme.

The evaluation clearly showed that the model worked most readily in the construction case where an employer network was already in place. In the

⁶ Shared models are costly (in terms of administrative costs plus, in some cases, an expectation that WG will cover at least part of the salary costs of Apprentices) and to be effective need to aim to be self-financing.

engineering case, that network had to be constructed at some cost in time and effort and with significant delay in getting the programme up and running.

Consider carefully whether Shared Apprenticeship has wide application across all sectors.

It seems that the construction sector – a mobile sector with episodic or fluctuating workload and considerable variety in the nature of work offered between sites – fitted most closely with the Shared Apprenticeship concept. Other sectors may or may not provide conditions in which an Apprentice's ability to demonstrate competence in different parts of their NVQ is necessarily enhanced by movement between employers and may, conceivably, be set back or delayed by such movement. SSCs may be best placed to advise on this matter.

To achieve a good success rate, Shared Apprenticeship needs to select from the most able and committed Apprenticeship candidates.

It appears that the Shared Apprenticeship pilots were successful – with positive experiences for both Apprentices and employers and, so far, high completion rates and post-programme employment rates – at least in part because there was a high degree of selectivity of the strongest Apprenticeship candidates. It seems probable that less able and motivated candidates would not have achieved as well and would have been less able to cope with the transitions from employer to employer. If Shared Apprenticeship is extended it may need to recognise that a process of 'creaming off' will be required to maintain the success and satisfaction levels exhibited in the pilots.

Shared Apprenticeship needs to be seen as a minority variant of standard Apprenticeship, to be applied in particular circumstances which warrant that application.

Given the previous recommendations (concerning additional costs, and the needs for Shared Apprenticeship ideally to fit with prior employer networks, perhaps in a restricted set of sectors, and with the most able candidates) it seems unlikely that Shared Apprenticeship (particularly in difficult times for public finances) can become a mainstream delivery mode of Apprenticeship. It may be that alternatives which have the key advantages of Shared

Apprenticeship (the reduction of costs, bureaucracy, and risk for small businesses) but which do not have its complexities⁷, may be preferred. The 'Group Training Association model' by which an external or umbrella organisation employs the Apprentice and then places the Apprentice with a placement business for a fee is the obvious example. Shared Apprenticeship may best move forward by developing synergies with such approaches.

⁷ Including the willingness of employers in some industries to rotate Apprentices and difficulty for young people in moving employers at frequent intervals.

1 Introduction

1.1 The then Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) [now Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and referred to as such throughout] of the then Welsh Assembly Government [now Welsh Government (WG)] commissioned BMG Research to undertake an evaluation of the Shared Apprenticeships Pilot. This study forms part of an overarching evaluation of the WG's Work Based Learning programme 2007-11.

Policy context and background to the pilots

1.2 The difficulty which some small businesses experience in engaging with Apprenticeship is well recognised. A number of reports and organisations have pointed out the various barriers they face in taking on Apprentices. A Learning and Skills Council (LSC)⁸ report⁹ in England noted that the extent of engagement was strongly linked with company size. The research reported that some small and medium-sized enterprises (those with fewer than 50 staff) struggled to provide the levels of support necessary for a successful Apprenticeship programme¹⁰ and perceived the programme's administration as too complex.

1.3 This problem continues to affect the participation of small firms in the programme. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has recently noted¹¹ that although two-thirds of Apprenticeships are offered by employers with fewer than 50 workers 'a significant proportion of smaller firms face serious obstacles to running Apprenticeship courses' and the FSB's national chairman further argued that 'Apprenticeships are valued

⁸ The Learning and Skills Council was, between April 2001 and March 2009, a non-department public body responsible for planning and funding all post-16 education and training in England except for Higher Education

⁹ *Research into Expanding Apprenticeships*, LSC, 2008

¹⁰ An Apprenticeship programme consists of a period of vocational training and education, typically of between 1 and 3 years' duration. The main elements of the training are periods of work-based learning and of off-site study and training at a college or the premises of a private training company. Successful completion of the Apprenticeship usually requires Apprentices to achieve certification of competence (usually an NVQ), of related theoretical knowledge (a 'Technical Certificate') and of adequate literacy, numeracy, and IT skills ('Key Skills Certificate'). More detail of Apprenticeship frameworks is set out in Appendix 1.

¹¹ Press Release, Federation of Small Businesses, February 2011

very highly by small businesses, but government must recognise that it is the burden of employment law combined with a lack of information and guidance that stops small firms from taking an Apprentice on.’

- 1.4 Similarly, City and Guilds, a leading vocational education organisation, has also highlighted the barriers – of bureaucracy and risk – which make significant numbers of small businesses reluctant to commit to the Apprenticeship programme. Launching the report¹², the organisation’s Director General said that ‘many businesses, large and small, know that Apprenticeships can transform their organisation, but unless the barriers preventing more employers, particularly SMEs, from hiring an apprentice are addressed, there will continue to be a gap between supply and demand.’
- 1.5 The Employer Services Manager for the National Apprenticeship Service in England made a similar comment. Launching a local drive for Apprenticeships in the South West of England she observed¹³ that: ‘The main barriers stopping small employers from engaging apprentices is the initial set up costs, apparent bureaucracy, and misunderstanding about the employer’s role and responsibilities.’
- 1.6 In a survey report in 2008¹⁴, the CBI proposed that ‘reform is essential to ensure that key barriers (including lack of in-house capacity, recruitment problems, costs and bureaucracy) need to be overcome so that more employers can get involved.’ The CBI has made the same argument more recently¹⁵: ‘Too many smaller firms ... fear the cost of getting involved. Smaller firms will need support to cope with the time, costs and administration of taking on an Apprentice.’
- 1.7 The ‘risk’ element – that is, taking on a young, untried Apprentice and committing to a significant period of training – was identified as a major barrier in a further survey report¹⁶ which observed that:

¹² *Building Business Through Apprenticeships*, City and Guilds, February, 2011

¹³ www.southdevon.ac.uk/business-news/1054; March 4th, 2011

¹⁴ *Education and Skills Survey*, CBI/Edexcel, 2008

¹⁵ *You’re hired! More Apprentices for Business*, CBI, July 2010

¹⁶ *LPC 2008 Survey of Employers*, Institute of Employment Studies, Report 466, 2009

‘The risk factor of taking on Apprentices was also mentioned by many. Employers felt that the commitment to recruiting younger workers who may be unsuitable, unskilled, lack maturity or the capacity to develop necessary aptitudes, represented a big risk. If apprentices were “not up to scratch”, some employers felt that there was little flexibility in the options available and that the duration of apprenticeships meant that this could be a difficult issue to manage.’

- 1.8 Overall, thus, a range of evidence, mostly in a UK-wide or English context, suggests that, for smaller businesses, a number of actual or perceived obstacles – including bureaucracy, employment law, risk and cost – limit the penetration of Apprenticeship into the small business sector.
- 1.9 These issues were recognised at a point some years ago in Wales. A plan for Work Based Learning¹⁷ published January 2006 recognised that ‘small and medium-sized employers often find it difficult to cope with the cost and administrative burdens entailed by participation in Work-Based Learning programmes. This could be addressed by encouraging Group Training Associations (GTAs) which bring together employers in a locality to share the costs and administrative burdens of running (Apprenticeship) programmes.’
- 1.10 The Plan went on to report that:

‘Several small scale “Shared Apprenticeship” schemes (a similar model to GTAs) have previously operated in Wales, and some of these have proven effective in certain settings. ELWa¹⁸ will work with the Confederation of Group Training Schemes, SSCs and Sector Bodies that express an interest, to develop new “Shared Apprentice” pilots building on the experience of successful models here and abroad. These developments will

¹⁷ *The Work Based Learning Improvement Plan*, prepared by ELWa and approved by the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills in January 2006

¹⁸ ELWa (Education and Learning Wales) was a public body funded by the Assembly Government to plan and fund all post-16 learning and training in Wales except of Higher Education. Set up in 2002, it was merged with the Welsh Assembly Government in April 2006

open up opportunities to make apprenticeships available to companies of all sizes, particularly focussing on SMEs.'

- 1.11 At this time, this intent, to establish pilot Shared Apprenticeship programmes, was virtually unique in the UK though related arrangements involving Group Training Associations were widely used in Australia and some small localised Shared Apprenticeship programmes have since been started in England¹⁹.
- 1.12 Having established the principle of government support to Shared Apprenticeship, discussions between DfES and the ConstructionSkills Council and, later, between DfES and SEMTA²⁰ enabled pilots to be designed.
- 1.13 It was established that each Sector Skills Council (SSC) would pilot its own model, with the ConstructionSkills pilot operating from one geographic location and the SEMTA pilot operating from three geographic locations, one in each of North, Mid, and South West Wales. Delivery commenced in September 2007 for the first cohort of ConstructionSkills Shared Apprentices, with the first cohort of SEMTA Shared Apprentices starting in September 2008.
- 1.14 Each pilot was developed with an individual set of aims and a model of operation.

The ConstructionSkills pilot: rationale

- 1.15 The ConstructionSkills pilot was developed in partnership by ConstructionSkills Wales and Carmarthenshire Construction Training Association Limited (CCTAL). Both partners wanted to develop a Shared Apprenticeship programme to see if this approach could improve retention and attainment of Apprentices whilst also meeting local

¹⁹ See, for example: a Shared Apprenticeship Scheme in construction in Liverpool (www.constructionnewsportal.com/constructionarticle7421.html); a Shared Apprenticeship programme in construction in Salford (www.salford-col.ac.uk/news/shownews.asp?newsid=453); a Shared Apprenticeship programme in construction in Coventry (www.whitefr:arshousing.co.uk/module.news/.../newsdisplay-arpx?); and a Shared Apprenticeship programme in construction in Hertfordshire (www.constructingcommunities.com>media?news)

²⁰ ConstructionSkills is the SSC for the construction sector. SEMTA is the SSC for the engineering and marine technologies sector. For more information on SSCs go to the SSC Alliance website <http://www.sscalliance.org>. For more information on Construction Skills go to www.cskills.org. and on SEMTA go to www.semta.org.uk

employers' skills needs. CCTAL initiated the pilot through discussions with partner employers which identified a number of concerns in respect of:

- levels of retention of Apprentices, both during the period of training and upon their completion of the Apprenticeship
- attainment of NVQs at level 2 and 3
- the level of competency of Apprentices being recruited into the programme.

1.16 These discussions also identified that small businesses²¹ were increasingly finding that they were not in a favourable position to offer an appropriate learning environment. This was for a number of reasons²².

- Individual employers did not have the specific activities available at the time at which Apprentices needed the particular work experience or evidence to 'fit' with their NVQ programme.
- Employers could not always guarantee long term commitment to Apprentices due to fluctuations in forward orders.
- The expectation that Apprentices would make a financial return for employers was detrimental to Apprentices' training, with the former sometimes taking precedence over the latter.

1.17 Thus, the pilot was established with the following aims²³.

- To attract a higher calibre of Apprentice in terms of their motivation and capability.
- To test the concept of sharing responsibility for, and 'ownership' of, a group of Apprentices between a number of companies.
- To produce a higher calibre tradesman on completion of the programme.

²¹ Broadly those businesses having 20 or fewer employees but often comprising of micro-businesses with as few as one or two staff.

²² Unpublished ConstructionSkills document

²³ Unpublished ConstructionSkills document

- To achieve 80 per cent progression to Advanced Modern Apprenticeship.
- To attract SMEs previously disenfranchised by traditional Apprenticeship programmes.
- To test a more intensive and flexible learning programme aimed at generating a higher level of competence from Apprentices whilst, at the same time, meeting the needs of local employers.

The ConstructionSkills pilot: structure and delivery

- 1.18 The ConstructionSkills pilot has been based with one provider, Coleg Sir Gar²⁴, which has developed a partnership approach to developing and delivering the programme with Carmarthenshire Construction Training Association Ltd (CCTAL), a consortium of construction employers. ConstructionSkills in Wales has overseen the project, providing management support. Carmarthenshire County Council joined the partnership in 2008.
- 1.19 Day-to-day management of the pilot is undertaken by a delivery team employed by and based at the college, comprising of a training manager, administrator and a support co-ordinator. The training manager oversees all aspects of the Shared Apprenticeship pilot, liaising with employers to organise work placements. On-going mentoring support to Apprentices is also primarily led by the training manager with support from Coleg Sir Gar tutors and assessors, with the support co-ordinator providing additional capacity by undertaking assessments and employer site visits. Apprentices' attendance and achievement is monitored by the CCTAL delivery team to ensure that payment of the Apprentices' allowance is in line with expectations.
- 1.20 The ConstructionSkills pilot has aimed to be 'demand-led'. Thus, each intake of Apprentices has focused on trades for which the partners have identified skills needs. The following table details the trades delivered by

²⁴ Coleg Sir Gar is a large, general-subject and multi-site FE College with provision at locations including; Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli. Further details of the college can be found at www.colegsirgar.ac.uk/

the pilot in each year along with the number of Apprentices in each trade.

	Number of Apprentices by trade commencing each cohort					Total	Target
	Carpentry	Bricklaying	Electrical	Plumbing	Plastering		
Cohort 1 2007- 2010	14	10	0	0	0	24	25
Cohort 2 2008- 2011	8	6	6	0	0	20	25
Cohort 3 2009- 2012	14	0	0	7	10	31	25

Source: Data has been compiled from ConstructionSkills quarterly reports up to and including November 2010-January 2011

1.21 ConstructionSkills Apprentices are enrolled onto a three year programme where they work towards completing both Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications in a specific occupational area such as bricklaying²⁵. The first year of the programme is predominantly college-based, with Apprentices undertaking practical skills training and learning of underpinning construction theory. This is delivered through a five-day week, over 35 weeks based at the college, with Apprentices receiving a training allowance of £60 per week. The Apprentices have employed status with CCTAL as the employer (rather than with an individual construction company as the employer).

1.22 Enabling Apprentices to gain an understanding and appreciation of construction sites has been built into the early stages of the pilot through Apprentices participating in site visits to large projects (for example, spending a week at the 2012 Olympic construction site) and through short work placements. Initial work placements are scheduled towards the end of the first year with CCTAL employers. One block lasts two weeks and a further block lasts five weeks in the summer.

²⁵ See Appendix 1 for an outline of Apprenticeships

- 1.23 Longer work placements are undertaken in the second year, although Apprentices still spend the majority of their time at the college. Apprentices then undertake the main bulk of their work experience in the third and final year, when they are placed with an employer whilst also attending the college for one day a week.
- 1.24 In terms of implementing a shared approach, during the first two years of the pilot, Apprentices are 'shared' between a range of employers, undertaking placements with different CCTAL employers to enable them to develop their skills and gain an insight into different types of work. The CCTAL project team co-ordinates these placements, allocating Apprentices to employers based on the employers' needs and capacity and on Apprentices' needs for development of specific competencies.
- 1.25 In the final year, Apprentices are matched with employers where there appears to be the most appropriate fit between Apprentices' skills and interests and employers' skill needs. It is anticipated that this final placement should, where possible (depending on the performance of the Apprentice and capacity of the employer), result in the employment of the Apprentice. If employment does not result, tracking and follow-up is undertaken by the Coleg Sir Gar /CCTAL team. This identifies the individual's needs and seeks to secure alternative positive outcomes either in learning or employment.

The SEMTA pilot: rationale

- 1.26 The development of a national Shared Apprenticeship pilot in the engineering sector evolved from an informal arrangement already established at Coleg Sir Gar. This arrangement was such that Apprentices were placed with employers other than their principal employer so that they could gain experience that was not available to them (with the principal employer) to enable them to complete their Apprenticeship. This approach was found to have benefits beyond just satisfying the qualification framework requirements, and employers began to request more opportunities to 'share' Apprentices to facilitate both Apprentice knowledge and the needs of the businesses concerned.

1.27 SEMTA Wales produced its action plan as part of the Sector Skills Agreement for the aerospace, automotive and electronics sub sector in 2008²⁶, outlining aims to optimise company and public investment in skills through:

- contribution of shared resources
- demand-led training
- introduction of bite-sized, just in time training with programmes delivered in the workplace for all employees
- the right person receiving the right training at the right time.

1.28 The agreement goes on to state that SEMTA envisages that the Shared Apprenticeship pilot will contribute to the Sector Skills Agreement through creating a programme that benefits both employers and Apprentices through a shared approach to training, leading to²⁷:

- Apprentices with skills for life
- companies with a more flexible workforce
- both Apprentices and companies enhancing their prospects for the future.

1.29 The pilot was established with the following specific aims²⁸.

- To develop the Shared Apprenticeship programme (year 1).
- To manage the Shared Apprenticeship programme (years 2-5).
- To test the practicalities, advantages, disadvantages and financial viability of training Apprentices through a number of different employers.
- To develop partnership/collaborative working.
- To engage with new and existing employers.
- To engage with learners.

²⁶ SEMTA's Action Plan for Wales

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Unpublished SEMTA document

- To evaluate the pilot as to its suitability for expansion across Wales.

The SEMTA pilot: structure and delivery

1.30 The SEMTA Pilot commenced delivery in September 2008. Apprentices follow frameworks in either mechanical or electrical engineering²⁹. The pilot is being delivered by three providers in different geographic locations as follows:

- Coleg Sir Gar – South West Wales
- Mid and North Wales Training Group – Mid Wales³⁰
- Deeside College – North Wales³¹.

1.31 The table below outlines the number of Shared Apprentices commencing with each provider.

	Number of Apprentices by location commencing each cohort			Total	Target
	Deeside College	Mid and North Wales Training Group	Coleg Sir Gar		
Cohort 1 2008- 2011	9	4	10	23	24
Cohort 2 2009- 2012	9	5	10	24	30
Cohort 3 2010- 2013	9*	8**	11***	28- 36	36

Source: SEMTA quarterly report December 2010

* 3 additional Apprentices still to be confirmed

** 4 additional Apprentices still to be confirmed

*** 1 additional Apprentice still to be confirmed

1.32 SEMTA oversees the management and delivery of the pilot overall whilst each provider has a Training Officer who co-ordinates the delivery of the pilot locally (a role which includes the recruitment of Apprentices,

²⁹ See Appendix 1 for an outline of Apprenticeship framework.

³⁰ Mid and North Wales training Group Ltd is a private training company specialising in engineering training, based in Montgomery, Powys. For further information see <http://www.myricktraining.co.uk/>

³¹ Deeside College is a major provider of general Further Education (and some Higher Education) courses based at Connaught Quay in Flintshire. For further information see <http://www.deeside.ac.uk>

employer engagement, placing Apprentices with employers, and tracking progress).

- 1.33 The SEMTA pilot was designed to 90 enrol Apprentices over its lifetime, with each cohort of Apprentices participating in a three-year programme towards a Level 3 qualification in a SEMTA sector area. Prior to commencing the programme, Apprentices need to have completed Performing Engineering Operations (PEO) at NVQ Level 2 whilst at college. Thus, Apprentices were to be recruited from PEO courses and (following recruitment into the pilot) should then progress into an employment placement which would include day release at college and work towards the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship framework qualifications.
- 1.34 Once recruited onto the pilot programme, Apprentices are employed by a primary company which is responsible for the main on-the-job aspects of the training. The primary company pays the Apprentice's wage, and receives a wage subsidy of £4,200 for the first year. A secondary company would 'share' the Apprentice, and would fill in the gaps where appropriate so that the Apprentice achieves all the required aspects of their Apprenticeship framework.
- 1.35 The first year of the SEMTA pilot was focused on project development, setting up the programme provision with Work-Based Learning providers, and recruiting learners and employers. The first Apprentices in the pilot commenced their training in September 2008.

2 Research objectives, method and report structure

Research objectives

- 2.1 The primary purpose of this evaluation is to report on progress in realising the aims and objectives of the pilots and to provide recommendations for their future roll-out.
- 2.2 To achieve this, the research has sought to answer the following questions (which are a synthesis of a longer list of research questions posed by the client). These questions are answered in the 'Conclusions and recommendations' chapter which concludes this report:
- How has delivery progressed to date?
 - What are the practicalities involved in delivering the pilot?
 - What are the motivations for employers becoming involved in the pilot?
 - How has the role of Training Officers/Project Managers contributed to the pilot?
 - What role have employers played in the pilot?
 - How does the sharing element work in practice for Apprentices and employers?
 - What are the benefits of the pilot for Apprentices and employers?
 - How has the economic downturn impacted on the pilot?
 - How do Shared Apprentices' levels of achievement compare with those of traditional Apprentices (that is, those in the normal government-supported Apprenticeship programme)?
 - What impact has there been to date?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot?
 - What issues need to be considered for future roll out?

Research method

2.3 The evaluation considered a range of evidence including management information and the views of stakeholders, employers and Apprentices engaged in the pilots. Thus, the main inputs to the evaluation were:

- a review of project update reports (including learner achievement data) provided by ConstructionSkills and SEMTA to DfES on a quarterly basis over the period of the pilot up to December 2010
- interviews with management and delivery partners including SSCs and host providers involved (namely CCTAL, ConstructionSkills, SEMTA, Deeside College, Mid and North Wales Training Ltd)
- site visits and interviews with 15 employers who hosted Apprentices
- interviews with 8 SEMTA Apprentices on work placement and two focus groups with ConstructionSkills Apprentices during their training
- follow-up discussions with 14 Construction Apprentices who completed their training in summer 2010 (no SEMTA Apprentices had completed at the time of the evaluation).

Report structure

2.4 The report which follows sets out and interprets findings from the research process and is structured as follows.

- Chapter 3 reviews the implementation and delivery of the pilots.
- Chapter 4 provides an overview of learners' experiences and achievement.
- Chapter 5 provides an overview of employers' experiences.
- Chapter 6 provides conclusions alongside recommendations for any future development of this model of provision.

3 Implementation and delivery of the pilots

Key findings

- Established employer links and partnerships enabled the ConstructionSkills pilot to get up and running quickly whereas the SEMTA pilot took longer as extensive employer engagement had to be undertaken
- Pilots have sought to establish robust recruitment procedures to ensure that high calibre candidates are recruited into the pilot
- Employer engagement has been an on-going activity to ensure that there are ample placements available for Apprentices and to build sustainability into the Shared Apprentice approach
- Training officers and training managers have been critical in ensuring good communication between Apprentices and employers and in supporting Apprentices experiencing problems
- Adaptations have been made to the arrangements for sharing of Apprentices with a flexible approach being applied to meet both employer and Apprentice requirements
- The shared approach has been of great value in supporting Apprentices who have been displaced due to their employers ceasing trading or losing contracts

Introduction

3.1 This chapter reviews the implementation and delivery of the pilots from the perspectives of stakeholders and training officers/project managers. Thus the findings in this chapter largely derive from the discussions described in paragraph 2.3.

Pilot set-up experiences

3.2 The pilots had differing set-up experiences. The ConstructionSkills pilot was set up with relative ease since it was a concept that had been in development for some time by the CCTAL employers and Coleg Sir Gar. CCTAL and Coleg Sir Gar discussed their proposed plans for running a

Shared Apprenticeship programme with ConstructionSkills Wales. This resulted in ConstructionSkills Wales leading in the development of a funding proposal to WG. Project approval was secured in 2007, leading to the establishment of a pilot delivery team based at Coleg Sir Gar (but employed by CCTAL) and the recruitment of the first cohort of Apprentices, who commenced their training in September of that year. Thus, in the view of Construction Skills and CCTAL, the existence of an established partnership between a provider and a group of highly engaged employers enabled the construction pilot to commence training Apprentices once approval had been gained.

- 3.3 SEMTA advise that the engineering pilot was also approved in 2007 but took longer to become operational, with its first cohort of Apprentices commencing their Apprenticeships in September 2008. Establishing delivery arrangements between the three providers required extensive development work by SEMTA to ensure that each provider had a robust infrastructure in place to support Apprentices and employers. This included the recruitment of training officers who have the responsibility for identifying and selecting Apprentices and employers to participate in the pilot and for overseeing the day-to-day running of the pilot. The work involved in ensuring that providers had a thorough understanding of their role and responsibilities, and in ensuring that Shared Apprenticeship activities ran smoothly alongside mainstream Apprenticeship activities was time-consuming. Additionally, respondents managing and delivering the SEMTA pilot reported that it needed to undertake extensive awareness-raising activities with employers since it did not have an existing group of engaged companies on which to draw. In summary, additional time (above that in the construction pilot) was required for the SEMTA pilot to get an infrastructure in place to deliver the pilot.

Recruitment of Apprentices

- 3.4 The pilot delivery teams both report having undertaken extensive activities to identify and recruit Apprentices onto the pilot, with their approaches to sourcing and recruiting Apprentices evolving over time. Promotion of Shared Apprenticeships to schools, to college students on

construction and engineering courses, and to Careers Wales staff was reported as being central to raising awareness of the pilots. Distribution of publicity material and adverts in the press also formed part of pilot marketing.

- 3.5 Construction Skills report that their pilot had high response rates to these promotional activities, though no statistics on enquiry levels were made available to the evaluation. They also report that, with plentiful applicants, a structured selection process was necessary. This was directed at the selection of the most appropriate participants via application forms, panel interviews, and aptitude tests. Additionally, the CCTAL delivery team linked with Careers Wales to identify suitable candidates from the Skillbuild programme, particularly those who had undertaken ‘taster’ activities on construction courses and had expressed an interest in undertaking a full Apprenticeship. This joint working was reported as being effective in recruiting Apprentices who had developed a good awareness of the skills and knowledge required to work in construction trades prior to their Shared Apprenticeship.
- 3.6 Further, the CCTAL delivery team undertook additional recruitment activities within Coleg Sir Gar to recruit learners from construction courses into the Shared Apprenticeship pilot. This approach was reported as having worked well, and Construction Skills believes that it fits well with the Pathways to Apprenticeship³² approach that is currently being implemented more widely across Wales.
- 3.7 The selection and recruitment process applied by the ConstructionSkills pilot was perceived as being robust by the pilot partners involved (CCTAL, ConstructionSkills and employers). One key factor ensuring robustness was (as already noted) that the recruitment activities involved

³² The Pathways to Apprenticeship (PTA) programme is a college-based programme introduced in September 2009 which provides a flexible route for young people to acquire the underpinning knowledge and skills that would be required for successful completion of the full apprenticeship framework. Under PTA, individuals spend up to 1 year on a full-time intensive training programme, specified by the relevant Sector Skills Council (SSC), to ensure that they have the requisite sector specific skills to progress to a full Apprenticeship once the initial training has been completed. Five Sector Skills Councils have developed Pathways to Apprenticeship including SEMTA, and Construction Skills.

written and practical tests for candidates along with a panel interview. Further, the panel was made up of representatives from the college, employers and the pilot delivery team. This approach was described as being effective in ensuring that all partners had an active role in the pilot. Additionally, according to all partners, it also ensured that there was a good understanding of Apprentices' backgrounds and learning support needs at an early stage.

- 3.8 Training officers co-ordinated recruitment activities for the SEMTA pilot. These focused on engaging with learners undertaking Performing Engineering Operations (PEO) courses at Level 2. According to training officers in the colleges and to SEMTA, this worked well for the two college-based pilots where a range of engagement activities were undertaken, including inviting pilot employers to give talks to prospective Apprentices and running short work placements for learners. However, this approach was more problematic for the non-college-based provider (Mid and North Wales Training Group). Initially, links had been made with a college within the Mid Wales region to 'feed' learners into the Shared Apprentice pilot. However, this arrangement did not work out as planned, with the college opting to direct its learners to its own Apprenticeship programme. Training officers for the provider had, therefore, to make links with other colleges within the region to promote the pilot. This required additional time and resources due to the large geographic region to be covered. Lower numbers of learners (four rather than ten) were recruited than anticipated in the first cohort in this area. However, these problems have now been overcome (through the links made with other colleges) and recruitment has, more recently, made progress in working towards its projected profile.
- 3.9 In terms of the calibre of the Apprentices recruited, both pilots reported that the individuals recruited were of a good standard. Most had achieved at Level 2, either at school or through college courses such as NVQ 2 PEO or plumbing, with SEMTA Apprentices moving into the pilot being perceived, by employers and training officers, as having gained

very good levels of skills and experience from their initial year in college with many having already undertaken short work placements.

- 3.10 It was also felt that recruited Apprentices demonstrated good levels of skills through the task-based activities set in the selection stages. However, delivery partners advised that some of the recruited Apprentices required additional personal and life skills support since they had disadvantaged home backgrounds (for example, lacking parental support). Delivery partners advised that they were possibly more aware of these issues (than in the recruitment of 'standard' Apprentices) due to the more comprehensive recruitment processes involved in Shared Apprenticeship.

Employer engagement activities

- 3.11 Gaining the active involvement of employers in the pilot was critical in ensuring the availability of a wide range of work placements. However, this proved to be a challenging aspect of the pilot as a consequence of the impact of the economic downturn on employers' business confidence. Additionally, there was a need to promote the benefits of Apprenticeship to companies that had not employed Apprentices before or which had had negative experiences in the past.
- 3.12 SEMTA has been particularly mindful of the costs which engineering employers incur when employing an Apprentice. Apprentices in the sector represent a net cost to the employer in their first two Apprenticeship years³³. Thus, the provision of a wage subsidy of £4,200 for Apprentices' first year in employment has been used as a 'hook' to encourage employers to participate. SEMTA advised that the availability of the wage subsidy has been very helpful in allowing them to gain employers' interest and in rewarding employers' significant level of commitment to their Apprentices.
- 3.13 In these circumstances, SEMTA training officers believe that their industry knowledge and employer networks established over many years

³³ *The Net Benefits to Apprenticeships: Case study evidence from the UK*, C. Hasluck and T. Hogarth, Institute of Employment Research, the Canadian Apprenticeship Journal, Summer, 2010

allowed them to engage with a wide range of employers to promote the pilot and to explain the availability of the wage subsidy. Training officers generated work placements by undertaking awareness-raising activities with employers, such as visiting them on site and providing them with advice and guidance about the pilot at employer events. Significant time and resources were applied to such activities, with training officers reporting that employers need timely, clearly-presented information about the structure of the pilot and the requirements of Apprenticeship frameworks to enable them to make an informed decision about opting into the pilot. Training officers also advised that a series of employer contacts was generally required before an employer would commit to providing an Apprenticeship placement.

- 3.14 Although the ConstructionSkills pilot already had a foundation of engaged employers through CCTAL's members, it was still considered vital to engage additional employers to ensure that there would be ample placements for Apprentices and also being mindful of planning for the future sustainability of the Shared Apprentice approach.
- 3.15 CCTAL employers have been closely involved with planning the Shared Apprenticeship programme from its inception. Projected skills needs³⁴ have been reviewed by all partners each year, with trades being selected where demand has been identified as greatest. This approach is perceived by the college partner (Coleg Sir Gar) as working very well in enabling the pilot to be truly 'demand-led'.
- 3.16 CCTAL has increased its employer base from 28 employers at the start of the pilot to a current level of 43. This includes Carmarthenshire County Council which came on board in 2008. The inclusion of the Council was reported by all the partners in the delivery partnership as having strengthened the partnership in a number of ways. Firstly, it is a key construction employer in the area due to its social housing stock which it needs to maintain. Secondly, it is a significant contractor of construction services. It therefore has links with a wide range of sub-

³⁴ These are informal projections based on employer perceptions of market trends and on their forward order books.

contractors. Thirdly, the Council undertakes capital building projects which are ideal environments for Apprentices to develop a range of skills. Finally, the inclusion of the Council in the partnership occurred as CCTAL and Coleg Sir Gar reported that other local construction employers were scaling back their activities due to the economic downturn. Additional placements thus became available for Apprentices at a point where they were most needed.

- 3.17 Generally, on-going employer engagement has been found to be even more essential by both pilots during the economic downturn. Employers' situations have been particularly volatile as they adapt to changing conditions, or, in some cases, have gone out of business. SEMTA training officers report that at least two employers initially engaged in the pilot were obliged to withdraw because of the downturn. This required pilot delivery staff to seek new placements for five Apprentices who have been displaced. These have subsequently been supported by providers in completing the academic aspects of their Apprenticeship framework.

Practicalities of implementing a shared approach

- 3.18 Each pilot envisaged a structured approach to employers sharing Apprentices.
- 3.19 SEMTA sought to implement an approach in which Apprentices spent the majority of their time with a primary employer, with further time then being spent with a secondary employer to gain additional skills and experience that would not be available at their primary employer. This approach has not been fully implemented in the delivery stage, mainly due to the limited number of employers participating in the pilot. However, some elements of sharing have taken place with some Apprentices undertaking block placements with partner employers to gain experience in particular skill areas such as Computer Numerical Controlled (CNC)³⁵ programming and welding. This approach was reported as working well since it was flexible and responsive for both

³⁵ Computer Numerical Controlled programming. This technology gives speed and precision to cutting materials including metals and fibres.

Apprentices and employers and required only limited administrative effort.

- 3.20 The ConstructionSkills pilot's approach to sharing has progressed more or less to the original plan with Apprentices undertaking four block placements in their first and second years with different employers and then being placed with one employer in their final year for the majority of the time. CCTAL delivery staff advised that some flexibility has been required in this approach. For example, on occasion, some Apprentices stayed with the same employer for more than one placement due to employer requirements. Other Apprentices needed to be moved on earlier than planned if a placement was not working out (for example, because the travel distance was too far or the type of work was not suitable).
- 3.21 Both pilots have strived to ensure that the shared element causes as little disruption as possible to employers and requires minimal bureaucracy in order to ensure that employers remain engaged with the pilots. In the construction case, this has been done by CCTAL taking on the programme administration part of the paperwork. In the engineering case, SEMTA has a similar role and its training officers have been concerned to ensure that the project runs as seamlessly as possible for the employers. Both Construction Skills and SEMTA advised that the pilot had an appropriate level of flexibility to enable them to adapt the shared approach to meet employer and Apprentice needs. Key aspects of this are the ability to move Apprentices to respond to falling or rising workloads and to get particular work experiences in line with assessment needs.

Apprentice progress and development

- 3.22 Pilot delivery staff report that Apprentices are progressing well in completing and achieving the required components of their qualifications. Delivery staff advised that Shared Apprentices were progressing particularly quickly with their practical skills due to the additional time that they spend in college in the first year compared with

traditional Apprentices, with Shared Apprentices progressing through their assessments at a faster rate.

- 3.23 The PEO NVQ 2 qualification was reported by employers, training officers and Apprentices themselves as providing engineering Apprentices with a good foundation of skills and knowledge to enable them to progress well once they moved on to the full Apprenticeship.
- 3.24 The role of training officers and project managers for each of the pilots was reported as being important in providing ongoing support to Apprentices. They also had a trouble-shooting role, intervening quickly if problems arose. This role has helped to limit the time employers have needed to spend on resolving issues, with pilot delivery staff sometimes undertaking a mediation role; for example, seeking ways in which employers can support Apprentices with their course work without undue disruption to normal work schedules.
- 3.25 Drop-out rates vary across the pilots, with minimal drop out from the construction pilot. For example, only two construction Apprentices left from the first cohort of 24 Apprentices. Whilst there have been higher drop-out levels for the engineering pilot, with seven leaving from the first cohort of 23 Apprentices, the rate has declined with subsequent cohorts. Training officers report that this may be due to additional time being taken to match Apprentices with employers, especially in limiting Apprentices' distance to travel to work. Apprentices have withdrawn for a range of reasons (including difficulties with completing assignments for their qualifications, transport difficulties or moving away from the area). The table below shows the numbers of learners withdrawing from the pilot before completion.

Number of Apprentices withdrawing prior to completion		
Cohort	Construction	Engineering
1	2	7
2	2*	4
3	0	0

*Although 2 Apprentices have withdrawn from the pilot their places have been reallocated to 2 new learners

Source: *Construction Skills and SEMTA quarterly reports up to January 2011*

3.26 Delivery partners described how Apprentices on the pilots have benefited from learning experiences and opportunities that would not generally be available to mainstream Apprentices. These opportunities include engineering Apprentices participating in additional short courses [such as Fork Lift Truck (FLT) training, manual handling, and first aid]. Additionally, Apprentices have participated in events such as Skills Cymru³⁶ where construction Apprentices demonstrated their skills in a plumbing Apprenticeship challenge. Construction Apprentices have also undertaken heritage skills³⁷ training on restoration projects.

³⁶ Skills Cymru was a one-off national event held at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff in September 2010 to promote vocational skills and careers.

³⁷ Heritage skills are those construction skills used particularly in the restoration and renovation of historic buildings.

4 Apprentices' experiences and achievements

Key findings:

- Gaining experience of working with different employers was viewed by Apprentices as being a particular strength of the Shared Apprenticeship pilots.
- The higher probability of achieving an Apprenticeship framework and associated qualifications was a strong motivating factor for most of the construction Apprentices. They saw Shared Apprenticeship as virtually guaranteeing that they would be able to complete all the elements and assessments required by their Apprenticeship framework
- Apprentices are highly satisfied with their learning and employment experiences on the pilot
- Work-based elements of the Apprenticeship were highly valued by all Apprentices, with construction Apprentices recommending that they would like to spend more time with employers during the earlier stages of their programme
- Construction Apprentices who had completed their Apprenticeship reported that the programme had enabled them to achieve skills and qualifications of which they were very proud
- Completers also advised that participation had helped them to secure employment in their chosen trades.
- Achievement of qualifications is reported as being good, and possibly faster, than by mainstream Apprentices. Of 24 construction Apprentices in the only completed cohort to date, 22 completed their programme, with 20 achieving a full Level 3 Apprenticeship and 2 achieving a full Level 2 Apprenticeship.
- the first construction cohort to complete has been successful in securing employment. All of those who completed their Apprenticeship subsequently gained employment with 19 of these securing employment with CCTAL employers in their chosen trade in the sector

- Though based on very small numbers so far, these figures suggest a better completion rate and a better employment rate than for Apprenticeship as a whole

Introduction

4.1 This chapter provides an insight into Apprentices' views and experiences of the pilot. These were gathered by:

- focus groups with construction Apprentices from the second and third cohorts
- in depth on-site interviews with engineering Apprentices from all three cohorts
- follow-up telephone depth interviews with construction Apprentices.

Motivations

4.2 Apprentices were asked what had motivated them to enrol on the Shared Apprenticeship programme. All Apprentices reported that they had wanted to secure an Apprenticeship in their chosen field, with most reporting that they had held a long-term interest in either engineering or construction trades with some having undertaken work experience placements whilst at school. Many Apprentices described how they had sought places on traditional Apprenticeships, making multiple applications directly to employers, but had found it difficult to secure a place, with most being advised by employers that they were not supporting Apprentices or that they had already recruited Apprentices.

4.3 Apprentices reported that they had had a strong interest in their chosen occupational area whilst still at school. Many described how they had been seeking the best way to get into their chosen career area, with some undertaking college-based courses whilst also seeking a place on an Apprenticeship, or, in some cases, on Pathways to Apprenticeship.

4.4 Some Apprentices on the engineering pilot advised that they had undertaken engineering courses with work placements whilst at school. These Apprentices described how these courses had helped them to decide to follow an Apprenticeship in engineering.

- 4.5 Apprentices' motivations for following the Shared Apprenticeship route were explored, with most reporting that they were very keen to gain experience with employers, and valued the Shared Apprenticeship because it would enable them to be placed with an employer for greater lengths of time than college-based courses. However, Construction Apprentices also advised that they were required to undertake more college-based work in the initial stages of their Shared Apprenticeship than in a traditional Apprenticeship.
- 4.6 On further exploration of Apprentices' motivations, it appeared that Construction Apprentices were more likely to be motivated by the shared element of the pilot than the engineering Apprentices. For example, construction Apprentices described how the programme allowed them the opportunity to gain experience of working with employers who varied in size and the nature of construction work undertaken – and, thus, offered wider work experience than would have been available with a single employer. This was reported by Apprentices as being a good way of enabling them to gather a broader range of experience than they would have gained in either a traditional Apprenticeship or a college-based construction programme.
- 4.7 The higher probability of achieving a full Apprenticeship framework was a strong motivating factor for most of the construction Apprentices. Many spoke of the difficulty in retaining staff being experienced by construction industry employers. Some had first-hand experience of having to move between employers whose workloads had reduced. Shared Apprenticeship in these cases allowed the Apprentice to continue on the Apprenticeship – and to complete their frameworks – when a non-shared or 'standard' Apprentice might have been laid off.

Experiences of participating on the pilot

- 4.8 Apprentices were generally positive about their experiences on the pilot to date, providing examples of how their programme was helping them to achieve qualifications and experience. In particular, construction Apprentices reported that they felt that they were able to develop their

skills to a high level through the additional time that they had spent in college compared with mainstream Apprentices. However, some of these Apprentices reported that they would like more work experience in their second year as they were very keen to go out to employers and apply the skills that they had learned in a real life environment:

'We didn't get out on site quickly enough or often enough. First year maybe, okay, you need to do it - the theory and all that, but the second year you got so much time in college it was repetitive and boring.'

'The hands-on practical work out on site, that's where you learn – the stuff in college is ok and they tell you things but when you see it done and then do it yourself - on the site for real - that's when you see how it all goes together.'

4.9 Engineering Apprentices reported that they felt that undertaking a college-based PEO course prior to commencing the pilot was a good foundation, enabling them to gain a good overview of the trades available in engineering and thus helping them to decide which trade to follow.

4.10 Engineering Apprentices were also positive about being predominantly work-based since this is where they felt that they learnt most; although they also saw the value of attending college on a day release basis to learn the more theoretical aspects of their jobs:

'Once you've been at work for a while you get to understand better why you need to do the college-based work. It shows you why you have to do certain things.'

4.11 Apprentices were positive about their experiences of working for more than one employer in order to gain a good level of awareness and knowledge about their trade. Some engineering Apprentices described how they were also able to share what they had learnt with their own employers. For example one young person discussed how he was able to take a lead role in operating a new CNC unit for his employer following his placement with a secondary employer.

'I wanted to learn more about CNC machine work as [my employer] did not do much. So I went on placement to [employer] which had very modern equipment. I was able to help out when we got new machines here and got to show other people in the team how to use it.'

'Being on the different placements let you see what it is like – you learn to work with a lot of different people and different jobs.'

4.12 Construction Apprentices spoke positively about their experiences of participating in the Skills Cymru event³⁸, advising that it was a good opportunity to demonstrate their skills to other young people who were attending the event.

4.13 Site visits and employer talks were also deemed to be a useful aspect of the Shared Apprenticeship programme, with learners advising that these helped them to get to know what a site was like, and they were also helpful in contributing to the completion of the health and safety part of their induction process. Additionally, employer talks were also reported as being of value in giving Apprentices an idea of career progression routes.

Training allowance and wage subsidy

4.14 In 'standard' Apprenticeships in Wales, the Apprentice makes no financial contribution. Their off-the-job training is financed by the WG and the Apprentice receives a wage from the employer of a minimum of £95 per week.

4.15 In the case of Shared Apprenticeships, construction Apprentices received a weekly allowance of £60 per week, paid by WG through the WBL contract uplift, whilst engineering Apprentices received a wage from their employer. In the engineering case this wage was subsidised by funding from WG given to the provider as an uplift via the WBL contract. Since engineering Apprentices were on different wages and did not come together as a cohort, they had limited awareness of how their

³⁸ op cit, page 33

pay compared with that of other Apprentices so were unable to comment about its impact on their motivation to pursue, and succeed, in Apprenticeship.

- 4.16 However, construction Apprentices were keen to discuss their views on their training allowance. Encouragingly, most felt that the training allowance was a very helpful feature of the pilot and it was often described as an incentive. Although the first year allowance was often felt to be rather low it was better than not receiving any financial assistance whilst at college. However, by year three, the allowance was considered to be much more helpful, since in some cases, it was increased by employers at varying rates of pay.

Experiences of Apprentices who completed in June 2010

- 4.17 Looking back, construction Apprentices who completed in June 2010 were very positive about their experiences on the pilot and without exception cited the practical aspects - in particular being able to develop their practical skills at college and then applying these on different sites - as being the most beneficial aspect. Some of those Apprentices also reported that having been on flexible placements with several employers gave them an element of job security and meant that, even when there was no appropriate work available with the employer they were assigned to, they could still continue their training with another employer. The role of the CCTAL delivery team was central to ensuring that Apprentices were moved to a different employer when required, with the CCTAL training manager co-ordinating all work placements and being the central link to Apprentices and employers:

‘You are there for three years, so its three years’ security and guaranteed job placements.’

‘It was a bit more secure...sometimes there would be no work and you would have to do anything for a bit but you would soon get another placement and be able to carry on.’

- 4.18 Completed Apprentices also described how the variety of placements had given them opportunities to experience, first-hand, differences in

work environments: and to understand what it would be like to work with a number of different people on different jobs:

‘The most helpful has to be the practical stuff – out on the site doing the job for real like. Okay, we were training but in a real situation on proper work.’

‘The five or six placements gave me a wide range of experience. Certainly more than I would have got as an employee just doing what the boss had got me to do.’

4.19 However, completed construction Apprentices did identify some downsides to having rotated placements. For example, sometimes because of timescales, it had not always been possible to see a job through from start to finish, and travel to some placements had been difficult at times for some learners:

‘Just as the carpentry work was starting properly you had to move to the next placement – couldn’t see the job through before moving.’

4.20 Completed Apprentices also described some difficulties they encountered whilst on placement, for example not being able to undertake tasks which utilised and enhanced the trade skills that they had been developing whilst at college. Additionally, some Apprentices advised that they had experienced difficulties with work colleagues. However, these were a minority of cases and, are similar to issues experienced by Apprentices on mainstream Apprenticeship programmes³⁹:

‘For a lot of the time I was just cleaning up. Just doing the donkey work – I accept that we might not be bricklaying every day – but cleaning?’

‘One placement wasn’t so good. All they gave me was the rubbish work and one of the blokes I didn’t get on with – I was glad to get away.’

³⁹ Benefits of undertaking an Apprenticeship. Learning and Skills Council, 2009.

Achievement to date

- 4.21 One cohort has completed from the construction pilot Apprenticeship programme to date. 24 Apprentices started the programme. Of the 22 Apprentices who remained on the programme until the end, 20 achieved a full Advanced Modern Apprenticeship, with the remaining two achieving a NVQ level 2 Apprenticeship⁴⁰. Furthermore, 19 of these Apprentices had secured employment with a CCTAL employer in their chosen trade, with three securing employment elsewhere (that is, all Apprentices who completed subsequently got a job).
- 4.22 These figures – suggesting a completion rate in excess of 90% – compare with a typical ‘achievement rate’ for all Apprenticeships (any sector) of around 75%⁴¹ whilst ConstructionSkills reports its overall ‘standard’ Apprenticeship completion rate as being ‘over 75%’⁴². Thus, although a strong statistical comparison is not available because of low numbers so far, the figures suggest that the Shared Apprenticeship model has performed well, delivering achievement at a higher-than-typical level.
- 4.23 In a further simple comparison, a report in England (*The Benefits of Completing an Apprenticeship*; Learning and Skills Council, 2009) suggested that, on average, 79% of Apprentices (all sectors, both levels) achieved employment on completing an Apprenticeship compared with 100% of the first cohort of Apprentices in the construction pilot.

Destination on completion

- 4.24 All of the Apprentices interviewed had secured full time employment, usually with one of their placement firms. In other cases, one was working in a family business, two had found work through their own efforts in applying by letter or telephone to local companies, and one had been offered a post by a family acquaintance.

⁴⁰ Data provided via CCTAL November 2010

⁴¹ Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, conference of the National Training Federation Wales, November 2010

⁴² ConstructionSkills website

4.25 Apprentices' future plans for development and progression were explored. Some reported that they were considering undertaking further training and qualifications within construction to enhance their skills. Anecdotally, delivery and strategic partners for the pilot advised that the proportion of Shared Apprentices undertaking higher levels of qualifications following their Apprenticeship was greater than that from more traditional routes. For example, one Apprentice, currently employed as a carpenter, was seriously considering taking his HNC and HND in construction technology and management in the future with a view to a management position, whilst another Apprentice who completed his bricklaying framework had recently started a HNC in Building and Construction Management because the Shared Apprenticeship had helped him develop the confidence to cope with the classroom based work:

'I don't see myself staying on the tools all my life, so I will probably take my HNC and HND and get into management if I can.'

'It's better for me to do it now while I am used to the college-based stuff, being back in the classroom like.'

4.26 Although it is notable that some Shared Apprentices have sought to undertake further training and qualifications, most of those completing in 2010 reported that they are content to be working and have no current plans or thoughts about undertaking any further training at the present time. Nevertheless, all the respondents appeared to be proud that they had attained a level of competence in their chosen occupation which is respected by other more experienced employees:

'We were taught to a good standard – the older chippies on the jobs were ok about working with us, we were doing pretty much the same as them.'

'People underestimate the ones like us doing work-based learning, more so with construction. They think we can't do the

theory but a lot of us on the Apprenticeship had got a good basic education, GCSEs and such. We were all good.'

Would they recommend the Shared Apprenticeship Programme?

4.27 It is encouraging to report that all respondents who were interviewed said they would recommend the Shared Apprentice pilot to other young people on the grounds that it helps young people like them to develop their skills and achieve qualifications. Most respondents believed that participation on the Shared Apprenticeship pilot would give other young people something meaningful to do rather than being unemployed. In particular, Shared Apprenticeships were strongly recommended by those Apprentices who had completed the pilot, with most saying that it had been a key factor in their gaining employment.

'Without the course I wouldn't be working.'

'It made it easier to get a job. I hadn't even picked up a trowel before taking the course – now I am earning a good living at it so it must be some good.'

'It got me my job. I hope it can give others the same chances.'

5 Experience of employers

Key findings

- Construction employers had a high level of engagement in the pilot since they were all members of CCTAL and thus had a high level of understanding of the pilot.
- Engineering employers were also very engaged with the pilot even though some had not had Apprentices before.
- Employers reported that they had established good and effective working relationships with the providers delivering the off-site training elements.
- Support from training officers and training managers was highly valued in limiting the amount of paperwork that employers needed to complete.
- The calibre of Apprentices was felt to be of a high quality. This was felt to be a particular strength of the pilot.
- All employers advised that the range of learning opportunities available through the pilot was an attractive element, enhancing Apprentices' awareness and knowledge of the sector.
- Engineering sector employers reported that the wage subsidy for their engineering Apprentices strongly incentivised their participation.
- Most employers who have experience both of the Shared approach and of traditional Apprenticeships believed that the Shared Apprenticeship programme thus far compares very well with the traditional route, although they do not see it replacing that route.

Introduction

5.1 This chapter provides an overview of employers' experiences of the pilot. Employers' views were gathered from site visits, telephone depth interviews, and observing a provider-employer partnership meeting.

Motivations for involvement

5.2 All of the construction employers had connections to CCTAL and, through their company directors, most are members. Some of these had

input to the development of the Shared Apprenticeship pilot, so they had a high level of awareness and were keen to see the pilot succeed. Furthermore, some employers viewed the pilot as an improvement on the normal NVQ training, even in one case describing Shared Apprentices as *'elite'*.

'We had always been keen to employ local lads but I was sceptical at first. It came from the top but it has been great. The lads we got were fantastic. Their commitment encouraged us to do the same and commit to them to make sure they got what they needed.'

'It adds to the normal NVQ and the level 3 was what we agreed was needed. It takes the learners out of the ordinary...they are a bit of an elite if you like.'

- 5.3 Engineering employers were more diverse in terms of experiences of Apprenticeship and of motivations for participating in the pilot. All respondents advised that supporting Apprenticeships was something that they would ideally like to do but they had to consider a number of issues when deciding whether they would employ an Apprentice. Some reported that they had not employed Apprentices for a number of years, whilst others already had established Apprenticeship programmes.
- 5.4 Those employers who did not have a tradition of employing Apprentices described how they had been cautious in recruiting at this level due to the time and expense involved. Unsurprisingly, the provision of a wage subsidy in the first year was a significant factor for these employers when deciding whether or not to participate in the pilot. Employers with more recent experience of supporting Apprentices advised that the subsidy was welcomed, since it helped training and personnel staff to make the business case for taking on Apprentices to senior directors and business owners during the economic downturn:

'It is a risk for us taking young people on as they take up a lot of time, so any incentive will be helpful in lessening the costs it takes to train them up.'

- 5.5 It is encouraging to note that some engineering employers, although motivated by the subsidy, also mentioned that the structure and ethos of the pilot motivated them to take part. These employers advised that they welcomed the opportunity to share Apprentices, particularly with employers in their supply chain:

'It's a good opportunity for the Apprentices to gain experience from elsewhere and for us to work with other companies in the area.'

- 5.6 All employers advised that the range of learning opportunities available through the pilot was an attractive element, enhancing Apprentices' awareness and knowledge of the sector. This helped to ensure that Apprentices eventually progressed to employment in an environment which matched their skills and interests:

'Learners can experience a wider range of environments and methodologies. It's better for the trainees. They get put with large and small employers. They learn different methods and get better experience than just being stuck with one employer.'

- 5.7 All employers reported that the Shared Apprenticeship approach was a good way of giving young people training without taking too many risks as an employer. This was particularly true for construction sector employers due to rotated placements which enabled them to see different Apprentices before committing to employing them.

- 5.8 Engineering employers also advised that the recruitment process allowed them to get a sense of different Apprentices before employing them through 'taster' placements whilst the learners were undertaking the PEO qualification. Close working arrangements with the training officers were identified as facilitating this process.

- 5.9 In general, it appears that many employers have used Shared Apprenticeships as something of a 'shop window' – they can 'try before they buy'. Apprentices also get a taste of what it might be like working full-time for a particular company, and can experience the sorts of work

the employer undertakes, the travel situation, and the existing employees who may become colleagues:

'You can get a good look at a few of the Apprentices and with a bit of luck you could find a couple of good local lads to offer a job to.'

Appropriateness of non-work based elements

5.10 All employer respondents from both pilots advised that the college/provider-based provision has been appropriate. In particular, construction employers reported that their Apprentices had a good foundation of knowledge and work ethic by the time they came to do their placements:

'The provider element deals with all the health and safety stuff before they get out on site so that saves employers having to do so much before the youngsters can start the job properly.'

'The way the college has sold it to the learners. They treat the Apprentices with respect and expect it back. It has given the drive for the levels of commitment that is the basis for the whole thing.'

'The provider was supportive and proactive and ahead of the game.'

5.11 Relationships between providers and employers were reported as working well with good working arrangements being established and with employers reporting that providers are becoming more understanding of employers' needs through the links established.

Employer satisfaction with Apprentices

5.12 Generally, satisfaction with the quality of the Apprentices has been high, with employers from both pilots stating that they have found the Apprentices to be hard-working and highly motivated. Employers who had employed 'traditional' Apprentices recently (in the last three years) advised that Shared Apprentices compared well, and in many cases were better:

'We had a couple of exceptional Apprentices. They have been very quick to pick things up but all of them were good lads, I was proud of them and proud to be involved.'

5.13 For some, success lay in the high commitment level of learners and the added value by developing life skills as well as work skills:

'They wanted to work and wanted to learn. Not just the job either. It was about getting on with people of all sorts, people skills, life skills. We get them to do the paperwork as well so that is another aspect they get to work with.'

5.14 Employers who were new to Apprenticeship or who had not supported Apprenticeships for a long period reported that they were very satisfied with the quality of their Apprentices, and would consider employing Apprentices in future; although it should be noted that some engineering employers stated that the availability of a wage subsidy would influence their decision to employ further Apprentices or not.

5.15 Generally employers advised that they wish to give young people the opportunity to enter these sectors, and that the structure of the Shared Apprenticeship pilot has reduced some of the risk associated with recruiting people through shared elements by providing work placements to try out Apprentices before employing them, along with the provision of subsidised training:

'It's about having a job – a trade – and the respect – the self-respect of earning your own living. More so with the way work and employment is round here at the moment.'

Views on how the shared approach compares with mainstream Apprenticeships

5.16 Employers were asked to compare Shared Apprentices with traditional Apprentices. Most employers who had experience of both reported that the Shared Apprenticeship programme thus far compares very well with the traditional route although they do not see it replacing that route. It was felt that the future success of the approach will eventually depend on the quality of applicants for Shared Apprenticeships and that further

thought might need to be given to the entry requirements onto such courses. Employers generally advised that they considered the applicants to have been of a high standard and they debated whether this could be maintained for a wider roll out:

'We have had some good guys coming out of this but they were pretty good I would say when they went into it. If the entry level drops too far then we might hit a snag or two.'

'You will have to go into it a bit deeper to make sure they are good candidates but we treat them all the same as individuals but different individuals. It's about evaluation and merit.'

5.17 Additionally, construction employers recognised that the Shared Apprenticeship approach may provide a better 'safety net' in the downturn than mainstream Apprenticeships, since not being tied to a single employer means that there is more security and continuity for the learners. Some employers suggested that when market demand drops, the first thing to suffer is training and it is the Apprentices who are often the first to be 'let go'. Shared Apprenticeships have allowed learners to finish their training without the enforced breaks which might occur in the traditional pathway. This was particularly true for construction Shared Apprentices, but also true for some engineering Shared Apprentices who were supported towards completion of their Apprenticeships when their employers lost contracts.

5.18 However, some employers also suggested that there is a place for both systems and defended the traditional Apprenticeship as providing greater stability and generating better commitment to the company from the trainees:

'I hope Shared Apprenticeships do not take over completely. We like our own Apprentices – gives us commitment and stability – they work our way and are likely to stay with us.'

5.19 Other employers recognised that the shared nature of the training means that the Apprentice has the opportunity to experience a wider range of

work than a single employer could cover in the normal course of their operations:

‘Okay, it might be for a shorter term but by being shared they can see a more varied range of jobs and methods than they might in the five years with somebody with a limited scope; and have less chance of being laid off and not working for part of the time and having to catch up.’

Would employers recommend Shared Apprenticeships?

5.20 All of the employers interviewed were positive about the Shared Apprenticeship programme and say they would recommend it, citing a range of reasons for this. Construction employers reported that they welcomed the opportunity to work with a range of Shared Apprentices, and ultimately get an opportunity to view potential employees’ skills and abilities prior to offering them a full-time position. Engineering employers also advised that the Shared Apprenticeship approach had enabled them to be given a clearer insight into applicants’ skills and abilities before employing them due to the preparatory work undertaken by training officers. More importantly, however, for most engineering employers, the wage subsidy, as a strong incentive to employ young people, was a key factor in their participation. Overall, employers were very enthusiastic about the pilot. The only negative aspects mentioned concerned variations in the standard of applicants.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

6.1 This final chapter reviews the evidence set out in previous chapters to come to overall conclusions about the Shared Apprenticeship pilots. It does so by discussing findings in relation to the research questions (as set out earlier in paragraph 2.2). Some recommendations for the further development of Shared Apprenticeship, based on those conclusions, are set out.

Some evaluation questions

How has delivery progressed to date?

6.2 Delivery has mainly progressed satisfactorily with numbers of Apprentices broadly meeting targets. There was one initial difficulty in that the college first expected to supply candidate Apprentices for the SEMTA pilot in mid-Wales did not deliver the numbers anticipated. However, broadening the pilot to other colleges in the region has latterly solved the problem.

What are the practicalities involved in delivering the pilot?

6.3 There are four main practical factors contributing to successful delivery of the pilots.

6.4 Firstly, the recruitment of a set of committed employers who are willing to accept Apprentices who are not ‘theirs’ and fully understand that Apprentices will move between companies. In the construction pilot, this was more readily achieved because of the involvement from the start of an established construction sector employer association (CCTAL) in the pilot partnership. More extensive effort was required in the SEMTA, engineering pilot, case. The partnership was not ‘SSC plus an employer association plus a single college provider’ within a limited geographical area (as in the construction case) but rather of ‘SSC plus three providers (two colleges, one private training company)’ operating over a wider geography. The employer network in the first case was largely pre-established whereas the network had to be constructed in the second

case. One consequence was that the construction pilot was able to recruit trainees and start training significantly in advance of the engineering pilot.

- 6.5 Secondly, the availability of Apprentices willing to be recruited into the 'shared' version of Apprenticeship is important. This, following suitable marketing to young people and parents via Careers Wales and promotional efforts, does not appear to have been difficult. Demand from young people was high. Both Apprentice and employer respondents both attested to high levels of Apprentice commitment.
- 6.6 Indeed, as a result of high demand, the pilots were able to undertake recruitment processes which were perhaps more intensive and selective than for 'standard' Apprenticeships in the sector. One employer referred to the chosen Apprentices as an '*elite*' and one Apprentice remarked that he and his colleagues were all of a good educational standard: '*we were all good*'. This circumstance raises an interesting question (and one which the evaluation cannot answer because it had no comparator model of Shared Apprenticeship in which Apprentices were not '*elite*'); that is, whether the model would have worked as well as it did with an average standard of recruit (equivalent to those entering the normal mode of construction and engineering Apprenticeships). It may be that, in that circumstance, achievement might have been lower and the demands placed on Apprentice flexibility (travel arrangements to different placement locations, fitting in with new sets of employed staff, and so on) might have led to greater drop-out.
- 6.7 The third practical demand of the pilot programmes was clearly for organisational and managerial effort (involving central managements, training officers, and administrative support) and consequent cost. Of course, 'standard' Apprenticeship also needs organisation and management. It is not possible to quantify the *additional* management demand which shared Apprenticeship needed but there is clearly extra cost in time and resource in managing the movement of Apprentices across a set of employers. In considering this cost, however, two factors are salient. First, part of the additional cost was that incurred in setting

up of the partnerships (particularly in establishing the employer network in the engineering case). If Shared Apprenticeship models were established in particular areas on an on-going basis, the overall organisational and management cost would diminish. Secondly, the pilots had high rates of achievement (perhaps largely because of the careful selection of motivated Apprentices noted above). If costs are calculated on a 'per *completed* Apprenticeship' basis, then the average cost of Shared Apprenticeship may be closer to that of standard Apprenticeships with a lower completion rate.

- 6.8 A final key practical requirement is simply to achieve what the management activity discussed above seeks to achieve; that is, the movement of young people (some with difficult home lives and backgrounds) between placements in different locations at times which fit both Apprentice and employer needs (with least redundancy in terms of Apprentice learning time and greatest fit with employers' workloads). It seems that the construction model involved more movement between different employers than the engineering model which mainly had a 'two employer' approach (a primary and secondary employer) rather than the more fluid construction model involving varied numbers of different placements per Apprentice. However, in either case (though probably more so in the construction case) careful planning and organisation is needed to get the best fit between Apprentice learning needs at particular points in their programme and learning opportunities available in the employer network; and Apprentices, as above, have to be sufficiently mobile and flexible to adapt to planned movements and sometimes to unplanned ones when employer workloads fluctuate unexpectedly (particularly in downward directions as they have in the recent recession and post-recessionary period).

What are the motivations for employers becoming involved in the project?

- 6.9 Clearly, a need to develop a skilled labour supply into their sector is a principal motivation for employers but additions to, or nuances of, this motivation were apparent from discussions with employers.

- A sense of ‘corporate’ commitment in the case of employers within the CCTAL employer association in the construction pilot case.
- A belief that the ‘shared’ nature of the pilots would develop a broader base of skills than might occur when Apprentices are trained with a single employer.
- The availability of a strong Apprentice recruitment process which allowed selection from a range of Apprentices and, thus, the capacity to select the most capable and committed (and which, in the event, developed reciprocal commitment from employers to Apprentices).
- Lessening of the risk which inhibits some employers from committing to host an Apprentice when they are uncertain that their future workload will support the Apprenticeship through its full term.
- The availability of a wage subsidy in the Apprentices’ first year was a strong incentive (particularly, in some cases, allowing HR or training staff to ‘sell’ the Apprenticeship to businesses’ directors and owners).

How has the role of Training Officers/Project Managers contributed to the pilot?

6.10 This role has been critical to the pilots’ success. In the case of the engineering pilot, the establishment of the employer network through marketing and advocacy depended on this role. Once the pilots started training, training officers and project managers were essential to the management of Apprentice movements at appropriate times, fitting Apprentice needs and employer circumstances together as effectively as possible and mediating solutions when there were (mostly minor) conflicts between these.

What role have employers played in the pilot?

6.11 Employers have, of course, also been critical to the programme, supplying the work experience which the Apprentices needed. Discussions with both employers and Apprentices suggest, however,

that employers have not simply been passive vehicles for Apprentice placements but have generally been effective and supportive partners in Apprentice development. This was not always the case – some Apprentices reported being given low-grade or ‘make work’ activities to do – but this may reflect occasional hiatuses in work demand or, perhaps, the inevitability of the least experienced people on site occasionally being given the least skilled tasks.

What are the benefits for Apprentices and employers?

6.12 For Apprentices, the benefits are:

- the development of the basis of skilled long-term employment in sectors in which they were already interested or committed (this interest evidenced by Apprentice reports that, for example, they had undertaken relevant pre-entry courses in school or college, or that they had obtained Performing Engineering Operations at Level 2 before entering the pilot, or simply that they had an interest in the sector before the Apprenticeship opportunity became known to them)
- the achievement of qualifications and employment: this was most evident in the construction case which started earlier and has a ‘completed’ cohort. There were few early withdrawals (only 2 from the first construction cohort). Of the 22 who remained, 20 achieved a full Advanced Modern Apprenticeship whilst the other 2 achieved a Level 2 Apprenticeship. All 22 had secured employment
- a basis for progression: in discussions, several ex-Apprentices expressed interest in HNC and HND qualifications and in progression to supervisory/management roles. Even where ex-Apprentices were not immediately interested in progression, they placed great value in being in work in difficult times and in being able to earn good wages
- a sense of self-worth: expressed not only, as above, in the confidence of having saleable skills but also, that, at a young age, they stood comparison with other older, established workers.

6.13 For employers, the benefits are:

- a supply of skilled and committed labour
- the ability to use the pilot to select the most capable people to train
- the lowering of risk – through this ability to select and (as discussed above) through not having to commit (as his/her employer) to an Apprentice when they are uncertain as to whether they can properly host the Apprenticeship throughout its full term
- minimisation of administration burdens which are mainly borne by project managers and training officers (who also manage the inevitable minor frictions in the Apprenticeship programme)
- the receipt of wage subsidy which lowers Apprenticeship costs
- possibly, in some instances (probably rare and perhaps minor) the Apprentice brings skills and knowledge gained with one employer into another employer's workplace which are of benefit to the latter because they constitute new skills or knowledge not available in that second workplace. (The example was of an Apprentice able to show an employer how to use new CNC machinery because he had previous experience with another employer).

How has the economic downturn impacted on the pilot?

6.14 Paradoxically, the economic downturn has revealed one of Shared Apprenticeship key strengths. Thus, numerous placements were affected by drop-off in workload or business closures. With 'standard' Apprenticeships these might have resulted in termination of the Apprenticeship or, at least, in Apprentices killing time. In this case, 'footwork' by training officers and project managers allowed Apprentices to transfer between placements in ways which minimised negative impacts.

How do Shared Apprentice's levels of achievement compare with those of 'standard' Apprentices?

- 6.15 A technically precise answer to this question is not possible. Detailed levels of achievement for Apprenticeship in general are difficult to obtain, achievement is variously defined, and statistics for Level 2 and Level 3 Apprenticeship achievement are often conflated. And in this case, the only Shared Apprentices who have completed is the small number from the first construction pilot cohort.
- 6.16 However, as reported earlier, both completion rates and subsequent employment rates appear to be somewhat above those for standard rates.
- 6.17 In a further simple comparison, a report in England (*The Benefits of Completing an Apprenticeship*; Learning and Skills Council, 2009) suggested that, on average, 79% of Apprentices (all sectors, both levels) achieved employment on completing an Apprenticeship compared with 100% of the first cohort of Apprentices in the construction pilot.
- 6.18 Clearly, more extensive analysis over time will be needed to check the progress of later cohorts in the pilots (and, possibly, difficult economic conditions will need to be factored into the interpretation of such achievement figures as are later observed); but, so far at least, outcomes from the pilot are very positive.

What impact has there been to date?

- 6.19 Essentially, the impact of the pilots, as indicated above, has been almost wholly positive.
- A largely satisfactory and efficient delivery process
 - High levels of employer and Apprentice satisfaction
 - Where pilots have progressed sufficiently to tell, a high level of positive achievement and employment outcomes
 - Therefore, it can be assumed, the pilots have made, and are making, a positive contribution to skills supply in the two relevant sectors.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the pilots?

- 6.20 The key strengths are that the pilots have efficient and committed management partnerships which have secured capable and committed employers and Apprentices. The result is that in terms of operation and outcomes, the pilots work.
- 6.21 The weaknesses are that the pilots, in the engineering case at least, took considerable time and effort to set up, both pilots are relatively high maintenance in terms of management time, and involve wage subsidy. They are thus relatively costly (although some of the cost may be discounted if set-up costs are regarded as a one-off charge to the long-term arrangement, and if costs are calculated on a per-completed Apprenticeship basis).
- 6.22 A further weakness may be (though the evaluation does not prove it either way) that the apparent success of the pilots has depended on an efficient selection process which has accurately identified the most capable candidates for the Apprentice positions on offer. It may be, thus, that the model would not readily transfer to situations where less selectivity was possible and/or applicants were of a lower standard.

What issues need to be considered for future roll-out?

- 6.23 Corresponding to the discussion above, issues which need to be considered for future roll-out are that:
- the construction pilot was based on an existing employer association. This brought very considerable advantages in getting the pilot up and running and in reducing start-up costs. It also appears to be the case that, as an unintended effect, the employer association may get benefits beyond those of the skills developed by Apprentices. In this case, the construction pilot employer association, CCTAL, appears to have raised its profile and expanded its membership at least partly as a result of its work to make Shared Apprenticeship succeed
 - an important factor in pilot success appears to have been the careful selection and recruitment of capable Apprentices. Of course, this feature will improve any Apprenticeship programme. The question

for roll-out is whether a wider Shared Apprenticeship programme operating alongside standard Apprenticeship should be able to 'cream off' the most competent candidates in order to ensure its success

- an important and valuable characteristic of Shared Apprenticeship (in its pilots) is that it has allowed Apprenticeships to proceed towards completion in two sectors which became highly unstable in recession. It may be that any expansion of Shared Apprenticeship (presumably to a degree limited by available funding) should favour deployment in locations and sectors where instability can be anticipated rather than in, say, public administration where institutions and budgets are (relatively) secure and Apprentices can be more or less guaranteed a stable working environment for the term of their Apprenticeship
- a further question which a comparison of the construction and engineering pilots raises is whether the 'shared' approach has a more natural fit with some sectors than others. The construction sector is mainly comprised of quite small businesses, often in fluid contractor/sub-contractor relationships, often operates to fairly short contract periods in varied locations, and has a set of distinctive trades. The engineering sector has larger businesses on average (though, of course, there are many small businesses as well), has more stable supply chains, fixed locations, and perhaps, in modern engineering, less differentiated skill sets (with the old engineering crafts having been replaced by multi-skilled operatives and technicians). In practice, the construction pilot involved more Apprentice movements, with a sense that such movements fitted the 'natural' mobility of the sector. In the engineering sector the sharing element added value to the standard Apprenticeship but not, perhaps, to the same extent as in the construction sector (and some engineering employers specifically pointed out that the shared version should only run alongside the standard model, not replace it – their view was that having their 'own' Apprentices increased

stability and improved the chances of Apprentices staying with the business). It is, perhaps, notable in this context, that all of the recent, local Shared Apprenticeship programmes in England (which were identified in Footnote 17) are located in the construction sector

- as in all other forms of Apprenticeship, both employers and Apprentices think that the workplace element – ‘on the job’ – is the most valuable part of the whole experience. Clearly, there is a need to meet framework requirements for learning of ‘underpinning theory’ in college or training school and the balance of on- and off-the-job periods is clearly significant to the overall costing of programmes. The Shared Apprenticeship pilot experience seems to suggest that an intensive first year in college is effective (either as *part* of the Apprenticeship in the construction case or whilst working towards PEO Level 2 *before* the Apprenticeship in the engineering case). However, having undergone this preparation, Apprentices are thereafter very keen to be ‘hands-on’. If Shared Apprenticeship is to be truly ‘demand-led’, it will find ways to maximise the *work experience* element of the programme, particularly after the year spent in preparatory learning
- finally, this discussion has referred to the costs of the pilot programmes. Clearly, set-up and management costs and wage subsidies make Shared Apprenticeships more expensive than standard ones. However, this evaluation has not had the full information (average time to completion, completion rates and actual expenditure figures, for both Shared Apprenticeships and standard Apprenticeships in both construction and engineering sectors and at the two levels of Apprenticeship) which would allow a precise cost comparison to be made.

Recommendations

6.24 Some key recommendations which derive from this analysis for any future extension or development of Shared Apprenticeship in Wales are:

- 1. A full costing exercise, to ascertain the true cost of Shared Apprenticeship for each completed Apprenticeship compared with the equivalent cost of a completed 'standard' Apprenticeship in the same sector, should be undertaken and made available.**

6.25 We understand that the major costs of operating the Shared Apprenticeship programme will be recognised by DfES managers (in future programme development). However, we are unsure whether known costs account fully for all management time involved (for example, of the CCTAL SSC staff operating the programme), whether costs have been related to outcomes (to calculate cost-per-completion), and whether costs of Shared Apprenticeships with standard Apprenticeships in the same sector have been compared. Thus, whilst Shared Apprenticeship can be recognised as relatively costly, the scale of difference is not widely available (and was not made available to the evaluation team). It will be important to any future deployment or development of the Shared Apprenticeship approach that the cost implications should be clearly visible to all parties involved in decisions as to whether or not to take a Shared Apprenticeship approach forward. A straightforward balance sheet, explicitly comparing the costs of Shared and Standard Apprenticeship models, would be valuable companion to this report.

- 2. A wage subsidy in Shared Apprenticeship needs to be factored into any future Shared Apprenticeship programme.**

6.26 Both pilots operated with a training allowance or wage paid to Apprentices which, whilst fed through the SSCs involved, was an additional government subsidy over and above the normal government payment of off-site training costs in standard Apprenticeship. It seems improbable that employers in the pilots (or any successor programme) will generally agree to pay an Apprentice who is not 'theirs' and who may be with them for only a short period of time (particularly if this is at an early stage of the Apprenticeship when Apprentices' value to the business may be quite low or negative).

- 3. Seek to roll-out Shared Apprenticeship (if a cost analysis shows that to be viable) in locations where there are existing employer networks which are committed to supporting the Shared Apprenticeship programme.**

6.27 The evaluation clearly showed that the model worked most readily in the construction case where an employer network was already in place. In the engineering case, that network had to be constructed at some cost in time and effort and with significant delay in getting the programme up and running.

- 4. Consider carefully whether Shared Apprenticeship has wide application across all sectors.**

6.28 It seems that the construction sector – a mobile sector with episodic or fluctuating workload and considerable variety in the nature of work offered between sites – fitted most closely with the Shared Apprenticeship concept. Other sectors may or may not provide conditions in which an Apprentice's ability to demonstrate competence in different parts of their NVQ is necessarily enhanced by movement between employers and may, conceivably, be set back or delayed by such movement. SSCs may be best placed to advise on this matter.

- 5. To achieve a good success rate, Shared Apprenticeship needs to select from the most able and committed Apprenticeship candidates.**

6.29 It appears that the Shared Apprenticeship pilots were successful – with positive experiences for both Apprentices and employers and, so far, with high completion rates and post-programme employment rates – at least in part because there was a high degree of selectivity of the strongest Apprenticeship candidates. The Shared Apprenticeship model was not tested with 'average' candidates. However, it seems probable that less able and motivated candidates would not have achieved as well and would have been less able to cope with the transitions from employer to employer. If Shared Apprenticeship is extended it may need

to recognise that a high degree of selection will be required to maintain the success and satisfaction levels exhibited in the pilots.

6. Shared Apprenticeship needs to be seen as a minority variant of standard Apprenticeship, to be applied in particular circumstances which warrant that application.

6.30 Given the previous recommendations (concerning additional costs, and the needs for Shared Apprenticeship ideally to fit with prior employer networks, perhaps in a restricted set of sectors, and with the most able candidates) it seems unlikely that Shared Apprenticeship (particularly in difficult times for public finances) can become a mainstream delivery mode of Apprenticeship. It may be that alternatives which have the key advantages of Shared Apprenticeship (the reduction of costs, bureaucracy, and risk for small businesses) but which do not have its complexities, may be preferred. The 'Group Training Association model' by which an external or umbrella organisation employs the Apprentice and then places the Apprentice with a placement business for a fee is the obvious example. Shared Apprenticeship may best move forward by developing synergies with such approaches.

Annex 1 Apprenticeship Frameworks

SSCs (SSCs) are responsible for drawing up frameworks for all apprenticeships in their individual sectors. These set out the elements apprenticeships should contain, ensuring that standards are upheld.

The table below outlines the qualification levels that need to be achieved to gain an Apprenticeship framework at Levels 2, 3 and above. Shared Apprentices on both pilots are expected to work towards achieving an Apprenticeship at Level 3.

Foundation Apprenticeship	Competence-based element – NVQ Level 2
	Knowledge-based element – Technical Certificate Level 2
	Key Skills– Level 1 (plus Level 2 in some cases)
	Employment Responsibilities and Rights (for those aged 16-25)
	Additional Employer Requirements - Basic Engineering training (units from Performing Engineering Operations NVQ Level 2)
Advanced Apprenticeship	Competence-based element – NVQ Level 3
	Knowledge-based element – Technical Certificate Level 3
	Key Skills / Functional Skills – Level 2
	Employment Responsibilities and Rights (for those aged 16-25)
	Additional Employer Requirements - Basic Engineering training (Performing Engineering Operation NVQ Level 2)
Higher Apprenticeship	NVQ Level 3/4
	Foundation Degree (HNC/HND minimum)
	Key Skills – Level 3 (Level 4/5 optional)
	Employment Responsibilities and Rights
	Initial Stage Learning - units from Performing Engineering Operation NVQ Level