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Evaluation of Progress for Success

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

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Glossary

| | |
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| CCLD | The Children’s Care Learning and Development qualification |
| CCT(s) | European Social Fund cross-cutting theme(s) |
| CIW | Care Inspectorate Wales, the independent regulator of social care and childcare in Wales. |
| CQFW | Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| EW | European Social Fund East Wales operational programme |
| EYCP | The Welsh Government’s Early Years and Childcare Plan |
| LLWR | Lifelong Learning Wales Record |
| Operation | Reference to “operation” in this report refers to the Progress for Success operation, part of European Social Fund programme |
| Participating employers (also non-participating employers) | Employers in the childcare and play sectors whose employees followed a qualification funded through Progress for Success. Non-participating employers refers to settings whose employees did not follow a qualification funded through the operation. |
| PFS | Progress for Success |
| WBL | Work-based learning |
| WEST | Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (diagnostic test) |
| WWV | European Social Fund West Wales and the Valleys operational programme |

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an evaluation of Progress for Success (PfS), a Welsh Government operation to upskill the existing Childcare and Play workforce. Arad Research was commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake an independent evaluation to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of Progress for Success. This report presents findings from evaluation fieldwork undertaken between July 2017 and December 2019.

Aims of Progress for Success

- 1.2 Progress for Success provided funding to support existing childcare and play workers to undertake recognised qualifications to increase and enhance their skills. The aim of PfS was to support improvements to the quality of provision offered to children, reflecting evidence that a highly-skilled workforce leads to better future educational outcomes for children. Those eligible to access support through the operation were existing employed practitioners aged over 25 years within both the maintained and (CIW-registered) non-maintained sectors, including self-employed registered childminders. Further contextual information on the operation is set out in Section 2.

Evaluation aims

- 1.3 The study included formative and summative evaluation approaches, assessing the delivery and impact of Progress for Success. It aims to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the operation during the period July 2015 to September 2019. In particular, the evaluation explores:
- The extent to which the overall aim and objectives of Progress for Success have been achieved, including its effectiveness in increasing the skills of the early years, childcare and play workforces.
 - The overall management, marketing, and implementation of the operation.
 - The impact of participation in Progress for Success on employers' recruitment patterns and engagement in skills development and training.

- How Progress for Success has performed against the delivery of the cross-cutting themes aims, objectives and commitments, including the Welsh Government's strategic aims for the Welsh language.
- The key strengths of the operation and any constraints/issues that may have impeded its effectiveness.

1.4 The evaluation provides recommendations for future policies supporting skills development in the sector. The report presents findings for both West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales, highlighting any differences in delivery methods and findings between the two regions.

Methodology

1.5 A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the evaluation, which involved several research strands, broadly split into a formative and summative evaluation:

- Formative evaluation: Scoping-stage interviews took place with Welsh Government officials, stakeholders and training providers; depth interviews were held with eight participants and an online survey of participating employers.
- Summative evaluation: Reflective interviews were undertaken with the training providers and stakeholders. Evidence was also gathered during fieldwork with participants; fieldwork with participating employers; and fieldwork with non-participating employers.

These approaches are explained in more detail in the rest of the section.

1.6 Some of the data available to support the evaluation was limited. For example, information on the employers of PfS participants was not recorded as part of operation monitoring arrangements. As a result, the overall profile of participating employers is not known; nor were contact details available so that they could be easily included in fieldwork. There were also delays to the process of finalising lists of PfS participants and sharing this information with the evaluators.

Depth interviews

- 1.7 Interviews were conducted with the Welsh Government PfS team with strategic oversight of the operation, at the formative and summative stages. These interviews gathered evidence on the design and implementation of PfS, marketing and contract monitoring processes. These interviews were supplemented by a review of operation documentation, including the PfS business plan, documents related to the four qualifications available, the delivery specification and applications, PfS publicity materials; and participant monitoring data as recorded on the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR).
- 1.8 A mix of telephone and face-to-face interviews took place at the formative stage with representatives from the three main training providers contracted to deliver PfS and their subcontractors (nine interviews in total). The purpose of these interviews was to understand how training providers were delivering the operation; the data they were collecting; their views on the design of the operation, what has worked well and any challenges faced. Reflective interviews were also conducted with representatives of the three main training providers contracted after operation delivery had ended (five interviews).
- 1.9 A mix of telephone and face-to-face interviews took place with various sector stakeholders at the formative stage, including Play Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Early Years Wales, Pacey Cymru, Social Care Wales, Mudiad Meithrin (also interviewed as a sub-contractor), Skills Active and NTfW.¹ The purpose of these interviews was to gather stakeholders' views on the appropriateness and strategic fit of PfS, operation design and delivery, what has worked well and what could be improved.

¹ [Play Wales](#) is the national charity for children's play; [Clybiau Plant Cymru](#) helps set up, develop and support out of school childcare clubs; [Early Years Wales](#) is an umbrella organisation supporting the early years sector; [Pacey Cymru](#) supports members and people working in childcare, many of them childminders; [Social Care Wales](#) set standards for, and develop the, for the care and support workforce; [Mudiad Meithrin](#) is a voluntary organisation specialising in Welsh-medium early years provision; Skills Active is Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure, Learning and Well-being which had a Wales office at the time of launching PfS but now closed; [NTfW](#) is the National Training Federation for Wales.

Participant survey and interviews

- 1.10 Views were collected from 98 Progress for Success participants. At the formative stage depth telephone interviews took place with eight participants to understand their journey into and through PfS. The eight were either undertaking a PfS qualification at the time of the interview or had already completed their qualification. The interviews gauged participants reasons for undertaking the qualification through PfS, their views on the design of the operation, the offer of Welsh language provision and any early impacts as a result of undertaking the qualification.
- 1.11 During the summative stage the sample was drawn from those for whom contact details were included in the LLWR data provided to the evaluators by the Welsh Government. The database included an incomplete set of mobile numbers and landlines for each participant. Participants with mobile numbers were contacted by text in February and March 2019 to invite them to take part in an online survey or a telephone interview. This resulted in 40 completed online responses. Telephone interviews were carried out with 50 participants using the mobile and landlines to contact a sample stratified according to WWV and EW and type of qualification. During the summative stage, views were collected from 90 participants.

Employer survey and interviews

- 1.12 The evaluation engaged with 72 employers whose employees had participated in PfS. The aim was to gain an insight into various impacts the funded training may have had on the setting, along with any observed changes in skills or confidence in the participant's practice.
- 1.13 Contact details for employers were not collected as part of the PfS operation, and therefore two methods of contacting employers were used by the evaluators. During the formative evaluation stage an online survey was conducted with employers of PfS participants in August and September 2017. Since the contact details for employers were not available to the evaluation team, it was agreed to distribute the survey via training providers. They were provided with the text for an email message, including a web-link to the survey, to be forwarded to all the employers to whom they were delivering PfS qualifications. The rationale for this approach as that

employers would already have developed a relationship with their training provider and the email request would be received from a known contact. Relying on training providers to distribute the survey to their employers meant that the evaluation team was not able to manage the process and subsequently verify how many employers had received the survey. This approach also introduced the risk of bias. The survey received a low response – with 32 completed responses. The data collected was insufficient to enable the evaluation team to draw conclusions in relation to the research questions but did offer some emerging findings and hypotheses to be explored further as part of continued research.

- 1.14 For the second round of contact with employers to at the summative evaluation stage, the evaluation team used the employer names provided by the participant at application stage, as recorded in the LLWR summary details shared with the evaluation team. Where the name of the employer was clear, the contact details were obtained through publicly available sources. There were 639 unique employers on the LLWR summary shared with the evaluators, and the information on LLWR was used to draw a sample representative of area (East Wales/West Wales), type of qualification (CCLD or play) and training provider. Firstly, a sample of 200 employers was contacted via email in June 2019, inviting them to take part in an interview over the 'phone, but providing a link to an online survey option. A relatively low response rate was received to these emails and a reminder email, with only a small number of responses, and all opting to complete the survey online (17 employers completed the survey online).
- 1.15 As the response rate was likely to be low, the evaluation team turned to focus on telephone interviews to allow a more detailed qualitative interview with a smaller number of employers. Telephone numbers were sourced from employers' websites and the Care Inspectorate Wales directory for another 60 employers who had not previously responded. The calls resulted in 23 telephone interviews with participating employers. In total, the views of 40 employers were collected at the summative evaluation stage, with 14 based in East Wales and 26 in West Wales and the Valleys.

Fieldwork with non-participating employers

- 1.16 The researchers were asked to develop an appropriate methodology to assess the counterfactual, that is comparing the outcomes for those having benefitted from PfS (the “treatment group”) with those of a group similar in all respects to the treatment group (the “control group”), with the only difference being that the control group has not been exposed to the policy or operation. The control group should then provide information on what would have happened to the treatment group had they not taken part in PfS. It became clear during the scoping stage that a counterfactual analysis would not be possible. There are two main reasons: at the outset of PfS, the training providers attempted to contact all childcare and play employers in a thorough recruitment campaign. According to the interviews with the training providers, most of those employers opting to not take part in PfS were those who did not have any eligible participants (i.e. there were no unqualified staff aged 25 plus). As such there was not a clear control group and those employers not taking part in PfS would be dissimilar in the respect of staff qualifications. Furthermore, since contact details of the employers taking part were not collected by the operation, a definitive list of participating employers did not exist, and since the “treatment group” could not be clearly identified it was not possible either to identify a control group. A credible counterfactual methodology was therefore deemed not feasible for this evaluation.
- 1.17 Nevertheless, it was agreed with the Client that gathering the views of some employers who did not participate in PfS would be useful in order to provide context and some comparisons between participating and non-participating employers in terms of their experiences of accessing childcare and play qualifications.
- 1.18 Arad designed a survey for the comparator group not undertaking training funded by PfS. It was originally intended that this comparator would be selected on the basis of matching characteristics to the main sample of PfS employers e.g. geography, language, size, to enable comparisons to be drawn between the workforce in the matched sample of non-participating settings and those who have taken part in PfS but, as explained, details were not available on the PfS employers’ characteristics.

- 1.19 Non-participating employers were identified by two methods. Contact details were requested via the childcare offer providers' survey in summer 2019,² and those childcare settings who provided details, and which had taken part in some training but were not PfS employers, were contacted to request an interview. Additional potential employers were gathered from publicly available databases – e.g. Dewis Cymru and Family Information Service lists. Employers were contacted by telephone and asked to complete a short interview. These employers were offered a small thank you payment for their time. The survey questions mirrored those asked of participating employers, including what – if any - training and workforce development programmes their staff have engaged with and the number of staff who have gained level 2 and 3 qualifications during the time when the PfS was operational.
- 1.20 Twenty non-participating employers were interviewed. The sample included six from East Wales and 14 from West Wales. With regard to qualifications, four of the interviewees employed staff who had followed playwork qualifications, 12 CCLD and four had staff who had taken both play and childcare qualifications. The original plan was to contact 40 settings, broadly matching the 40 settings in the PfS participating employers fieldwork. However, the interviews were stopped after contact with 20 settings as no new data and no new themes were being raised. The experiences described by non-participating employers – who were following the same two qualifications, sometimes with the same training provider - were very similar to those described by the participating employers.

² Welsh Government, (2019) [Evaluation of the Childcare Offer for Wales: Year 2](#)

2. Progress for Success: policy context and operation design

2.1 Progress for Success was delivered at a time of considerable change within the childcare sector and during a dynamic period in terms of policy planning to support the childcare and early years workforce. This chapter begins by outlining the key policy developments, providing a backdrop to the operation. It then describes the key features of Progress for Success, and the rationale for the operation's design.

Background to the operation and relevant policy developments

2.2 Around 23,300 people work with children in childcare settings and Foundation Phase settings (including 5,800 as Foundation Phase classroom assistants) according to figures from the Welsh Government's 10-year Workforce Plan. A large proportion of the childcare workforce in Wales work part-time hours, and even though qualification levels are increasing, wages remain low.

2.3 In 2014, the Welsh Government set out its policy for the future of the early years and childcare sector in Building a Brighter Future: the Early Years and Childcare Plan (EYCP).³ In the EYCP, the Welsh Government committed to consult on the right approach for the early years, childcare and play workforce in Wales in respect of minimum qualification levels, graduate leadership, continuing professional development (CPD) and career pathways.

2.4 In the wake of this, a draft 10-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce was developed following a process of engagement with stakeholders across Wales.⁴ The draft plan highlighted the importance of raising the status of the early years, childcare and play profession.⁵ It set out a commitment to support and develop the workforce over the next ten years.

2.5 There were further policy developments during the period in which Progress for Success was delivered. The first of these relates to the development of a new suite of qualifications for the childcare and play sector. Qualifications Wales completed a

³ Welsh Government, (2013) [Building a Brighter Future: The Early Years and Childcare Plan](#)

⁴ Welsh Government, (2014) [Draft 10-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce in Wales](#)

⁵ Ibid, page 4.

review of childcare and playwork qualifications in 2016. This review concluded that there was a need to address the confusion and complexity within the existing system and recommended developing new qualifications covering levels 1-5, offering structured training pathways and progression routes for practitioners working in the sector. The new qualifications recognise the need to support alignment and integration between careers in childcare and play, and are titled Children's Care, Learning, Development and Play (CCLDP).

2.6 The proposed new framework for qualifications for the sector was set out in the Childcare and Early Years Workforce Plan published in December 2017, which built on the earlier draft plan.⁶ The plan aims to deliver the Welsh Government's vision for the childcare and play workforce in Wales to be skilled and for the sector to be highly regarded as a profession and career choice. The plan is structured around the key themes of:

- attracting high quality recruits to the sector;
- raising standards and skills; and
- investing in building capacity and capability.

Progress for Success has links to each of these themes.

2.7 The plan is being taken forward in partnership with local authorities, Social Care Wales, Cwlwm and the Playwork Education and Training Council (PETC) for Wales. It sets out proposals targeting specific cohorts within the childcare and early years workforce, many of whom have benefitted from support through Progress for Success. This includes childminders and home carers; the playwork workforce; and those providing specialist support in the early years.

2.8 A further key policy development in recent years has been the implementation of Welsh Government-funded 30-hours of free early education and childcare provision for 3-4 year olds in Wales. The Progress for Success Business Plan noted that the operation would support the Childcare Offer by ensuring the "workforce are of high

⁶ Welsh Government, (2017) [Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan](#)

quality to further enhance the offer to parents and children, giving them more confidence when putting their children into childcare”.

2.9 The Welsh Government published National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years in 2016. This included information on the proportions of qualified staff required in different childcare and early years settings. For day care settings the standards specified that:

- The person in charge has at least a level 3 qualification recognised on the approved list of Accepted Qualifications for the Early Years and Childcare Workforce in Wales, which is appropriate to the post.
- At least 50 per cent of the non-supervisory staff holds a qualification at least at level 2 from the current list of Accepted Qualifications for the Early Years and Childcare Workforce in Wales. At least half of these have a qualification at level 3.
- For full day care at least 80 per cent of the non-supervisory staff holds a qualification at least at level 2 from the current list of Accepted Qualifications for the Early Years and Childcare Workforce in Wales. At least half of these have a qualification at level 3.

2.10 During the course of this evaluation the Welsh Government conducted and published a Review of the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare.⁷ The Review found that the sector faces problems in meeting the qualifications requirements set out in the National Minimum Standards. Welsh language and playwork settings experience particular problems in recruiting sufficient numbers of staff with the requisite qualifications. The Review also reported confusion among childcare providers about the qualification requirements of the National Minimum Standards. Similar confusion about qualifications requirements was raised by employers and practitioners who contributed to this evaluation.

⁷ Welsh Government, (2019) [Review of the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare](#)

Description of the operation

2.11 Progress for Success, funded under the European Social Fund, aimed to upskill the workforce by funding existing workers to undertake recognised childcare and play qualifications. It was funded separately under the two ESF operational programmes:

- European Social Fund West Wales and the Valleys (WWV) Operational Programme: WWV Priority Axis 3: Youth Employment and Attainment, Specific Objective 4 – to increase the skills of the Early Years and Childcare workforce.
- East Wales (EW) Operation Programme: Respectively the operations will deliver against and EW Priority Axis 2: Skills for Growth Specific Objective 1: to increase the skills levels, including work relevant skills, of those in the workforce with no or low skills.

2.12 To be eligible for the operation individuals were required to meet the following criteria:

- Be an existing employed practitioner within either the maintained sector or a CIW-registered setting in the non-maintained sector, including self-employed registered childminders.
- Be aged 25 or over.
- Work a minimum of 16 hours a week.

There is further discussion on PfS eligibility criteria in section 3.5.

2.13 The original design of Progress for Success consisted of 2 distinct strands, funded separately under the European Social Fund (ESF). These were as follows:

- Strand 1 proposed to fund existing practitioners, who held no or low-level recognised childcare and play qualifications, to undertake recognised sector qualifications at Levels 2 and 3. This was delivered with ESF funding in West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales. Strand 1 delivery commenced in July 2016 and ended in October 2018.
- Strand 2 proposed to fund existing operation participants to undertake a Level 6 qualification, following the completion of their qualification undertaken

through strand one of the operation. This strand was to be delivered with ESF funding in West Wales and the Valleys and Welsh Government funding in East Wales. It was expected that Strand 2 would commence in 2017.

However, this strand was not taken forward through Progress for Success.

2.14 This report is therefore concerned solely with activity delivered through Strand 1, as outlined above. The qualifications delivered under Strand 1 of the operation were:

- Level 2 Diploma in Children’s Care Learning and Development (CCLD) (Wales and Northern Ireland) (QCF).
- Level 3 Diploma in Children’s Care Learning and Development (CCLD) (Wales and Northern Ireland) (QCF).
- Level 2 Diploma in Playwork (NVQ) (QCF).
- Level 3 Diploma in Playwork (NVQ) (QCF).

2.15 In order to procure the delivery of these qualifications, a tendering exercise under the existing Innovation Lot of the Work-Based Learning (WBL)⁴ framework agreement was undertaken. Following this tendering exercise, the training providers commissioned to lead the delivery of qualifications under Progress for Success were: Itec Training Solutions Ltd, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Vocational Skills Partnership, all delivering in partnership with a number of other WBL providers. Each of the training providers was assigned targets for numbers of participants to engage with in West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales.

2.16 Progress for Success training providers were required to ensure that training was accessible for eligible participants. The Business Plan underlined the need for training providers to ensure that models of delivery met the learning requirements of each individual learner, whether by ensuring local delivery or flexible methods that included elements of distance, blended or e-learning. It was anticipated that such flexible approaches would help reduce the need for employers to find cover to release staff and also reduce the need for practitioners to be away from the setting. Progress for Success was designed to mitigate against cost as a barrier to engage in training by providing training and access to qualifications at no cost to the individual or the employer. As such, the operation provided incentives for

practitioners to upskill and for employers to engage in order to gain more highly qualified staff.

- 2.17 Progress for Success committed Providers to offering childcare qualifications in English, Welsh and bilingually. This was intended to ensure equality of opportunity for participants wishing to complete qualifications in Welsh or bilingually, and to raise the qualifications of Welsh speaking practitioners in the sector.
- 2.18 A further feature of the operation's design was that it committed training providers to address any essential skills deficits as part of the process of gaining their level 2 or 3 qualification. Where an essential skills need was identified during practitioners' initial assessment on entry to Progress for Success, they were directed to relevant support.
- 2.19 An operation-wide marketing and communications strategy was devised and commissioned by the operation team. This aimed to launch the operation successfully and raise awareness of Progress for Success among key target audiences and stakeholders. Alongside the national marketing and communications campaign, training providers also engaged in marketing and awareness-raising activity to support the recruitment of participants onto the operation.

The rationale for the design of Progress for Success

- 2.20 Prior to the inception of Progress for Success, childcare and play had been identified as priority sectors within the wider Apprenticeships Programme supported by the Welsh Government. At the time, the Apprenticeships Programme was restricted to participants aged 16-24. As such, the training providers named above, along with other training providers, were already in the process of delivering the same qualifications to 16-24 year olds across Wales, following an established pattern of provision. However, there was a perceived gap in provision, as identified in previous publications and research. Qualifications Wales reported in 2014 their concerns about the "cut-off point for public funding to support Level 2 and 3 for learners over the age of 24... particularly in a sector where there are skills

shortages and strong benefits to having older workers in the workforce”.⁸ By targeting this group, Progress for Success sought to address a gap in support for the existing workforce. Additionally, the operation’s Business Plan referenced a report published by the Care Council for Wales in 2014 that indicated that the majority of the PfS target group (those in employment requiring upskilling to Level 2 and 3) are aged 25 and above.⁹ Drawing on these findings, the Progress for Success Business Plan concluded that there was a need to deliver “childcare and play qualifications to this specific age cohort to ensure the full breadth of the existing workforce have the opportunity to upskill to Level 3”.¹⁰

- 2.21 Progress for Success also linked to wider national policy priorities: it was designed to contribute to economic growth and support the Welsh Government’s wider tackling poverty activities. The operation logic table, developed as part of the Business Plan for the intervention, noted the “clear link between childcare and economic growth”. It also emphasised that “good quality childcare enables parents to work and train, and should be a core strand of the Welsh Government’s strategy for economic growth”. The logic table underlined that the childcare sector is a significant employer and that “good quality childcare helps to tackle some of the longer term, more entrenched issues faced by those at disadvantage”.
- 2.22 As noted above, the operation supported ESF Priority Axis 3, Specific Objective 4: “To increase the skills of the Early Years and Childcare workforce”. It also complemented the strategic aims set out in national plans, including the vision to develop a well-qualified childcare and play workforce that is able to access continuous professional development (Welsh Government’s Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan, 2013).¹¹
- 2.23 During much of the operation development phase, therefore, there was a sound rationale for the operation’s design and focus: a good case was made in the operation Business Plan that PfS represented an additional offer to support the existing childcare and play workforce, and that it was also a good strategic fit in the

⁸ Qualifications Wales, (2016) [Sector Review of Qualifications and the Qualification System in Health and Social Care including child care and play work](#)

⁹ BMG Research (2014) Early Years, Childcare and Play Workforce Survey 2014. Care Council for Wales,

¹⁰ Progress for Success Business Plan

¹¹ Welsh Government, (2013) [Building a Brighter Future: The Early Years and Childcare Plan](#)

wider policy context. There were, however, changes to the wider landscape during the operation's development phase which impacted on this. This is discussed further in chapter 3.

Cross-cutting themes

2.24 As an ESF-funded operation, Progress for Success was required to contribute to the three cross-cutting themes¹² of equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, including the Welsh language; sustainable development; and tackling poverty and social exclusion. The operation was designed to support the cross-cutting themes in the following ways:

- Equal Opportunities:
 - Up-skilling existing practitioners aged over 25 who were previously unable to access Level 2 and 3 qualifications through the Apprenticeship Programme; through this the operation was intended to provide support, indirectly, to older workers and participants with disabilities or health issues, to remain in work and continue to learn new skills.
 - Contributing towards improving access to higher quality childcare, which in turn can improve the life chances of children.
 - Help raise the status of the profession and enable practitioners to have more pride in their career.
 - Identify and support opportunities to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. Welsh speaking practitioners are actively targeted through the operation's marketing and communications strategy to enhance their skills by undertaking training in Welsh or bilingually.
- Sustainable Development:

¹² Welsh European Funding Office, (2017) [Cross Cutting Themes Key Document – European Social Fund. Version 4](#)

- Contribute towards the well-being goals linked to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, specifically “A prosperous Wales” by developing a skilled workforce; and “A more equal Wales” as children will be able to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances.
- Local supply chain development.
- Development of an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives.
- Resource efficiency measures.
- Tackling Poverty:
 - The operation ensures that existing eligible practitioners in WWV, who may be subject to in-work poverty, are provided with the opportunity to access higher skills and this may result in higher pay.
 - High quality early education and childcare has an important role in supporting our drive to tackle poverty and inequality as set out in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan and Strategic Equality Plan. The link between high quality early education and positive outcomes for children appears to be especially strong for children from disadvantaged families.

Literature review

- 2.25 A literature review was carried out to understand approaches to develop and professionalise the childcare and play workforce. The review of recent literature presents an overview of the importance of qualifications for the childcare and playwork sector. It also contains a summary of the key elements required for effective professional development and training, with some specific practice examples which illustrate some of the key factors in more detail.
- 2.26 The impact of qualified staff on the quality of care is discussed in the review. The key learning points include evidence from across the UK and further afield and underline:

- The necessity for clear progression routes in the profession has been identified;
- the links between the qualifications held by the childcare and playwork workforce and the quality of care delivered;
- that the quality and professionalism of the early years workforce have been linked to positive pre-school educational outcomes;
- it takes time to embed initiatives designed to improve workforce development;
- that practitioners who gain higher qualifications sometimes leave the childcare sector;
- in recent years, there has been a shift in policy emphasis from early years education to providing childcare for parents to support employability.

2.27 Evidence from the UK and internationally on the success criteria needed for effective professional development identified the importance of a qualification system and staff qualifications; acquisition of knowledge (particularly child development); time to study material that is relevant to settings and delivered using an approach appropriate for the practitioner (e.g. online/face-to-face); peer learning and the value of communities of practice and time for reflection. Key learning points from examples of specific professional development delivery aligned with some of the findings in the evaluation of PfS, and included that,

- training needs to be appropriate to individual childcare settings;
- working collaboratively with supportive trainers is important;
- online training can provide a useful mode for delivery;
- engaging with parents and focusing on children's interests can lead to successful delivery and outcomes;
- enquiry-led learning can be successful in providing space for reflective learning; this can also result in practitioners informing the content of the training to be delivered;

- as staff improve their qualifications it is possible that they spend less time working directly with children (as they take on more management or administrative duties).

2.28 This research provides some context for the different ways PfS can influence development and professionalisation of the childcare and play sectors. The quality and professionalism of the early years workforce have been linked in the research to positive pre-school educational outcomes, reinforcing the main aim of PfS. The review presents key learning points that future efforts to upskill the sector should take into account.

3. Findings: strategic design of Progress for Success and its model of delivery

3.1 This section summarises the findings of desk-based research, and research with stakeholders, WBL providers, employers and participants in relation to operation design.

3.2 Key findings are set out in the summary box below, with further supporting information set out in the following sections. These are structured according to findings in relation to i) the overall operation design and strategic fit; and ii) the model of delivery for Progress for Success.

Summary findings: Operational design and strategic fit

- The childcare and play sector were supportive of the overall aims of Progress for Success to upskill the workforce.
- Stakeholders felt that although the operation's aims were aligned with other Welsh Government childcare policies, they were sceptical about being able to isolate and measure the contribution of PfS towards broader policy goals.
- A key feature of Progress for Success was that it provided funded work-based learning opportunities for existing childcare and play workers aged over 25. The policy announcement to implement an all-age Apprenticeship Programme removed a key rationale for the operation and meant it was no longer filling a gap in funded provision.
- As a direct consequence there was confusion within the childcare and play sectors about how Progress for Success differed from the wider apprenticeship offer.
- A number of sector stakeholders questioned the strategic alignment and added value of PfS.
- The requirement for participants to be employed for 16 hours or more proved restrictive and disqualified many employers and part-time employees from benefitting from the funded training available.

- Despite the Welsh Government's activities to engage with external stakeholders during the design and planning phases of the operation, sector representatives felt that had little influence on key aspects of the design and delivery model of Progress for Success.

Summary findings: Model of delivery

- There were valid reasons for choosing an apprenticeship model as a method of delivering the qualifications through Progress for Success.
- The way in which WBL providers were procured to support operation delivery, which limited prospective bidders to those on an existing framework contract, excluded some specialist providers from tendering.
- Some contracted PfS training providers were relatively inexperienced in delivering qualifications in the fields of childcare and/or play and did not have established relationships or networks with employers in the sector.
- Progress for Success was considered by some stakeholders and training providers to have been a disruptive and destabilising factor in terms of patterns of provision and relationships between training providers and employers.
- The delivery model and the assumptions made about Welsh language provision did not take account of the profile of Welsh learners pursuing qualifications in childcare and play, many of whom have traditionally been aged under 25 and working fewer than 16 hours.

Overall operation design and strategic fit

- 3.3 Training providers, stakeholders and employers were supportive of the overall aims of Progress for Success to raise the quality and skills of the childcare and play workforce. The aim of upskilling the workforce, targeting a cohort of the workforce (those aged over 25) who had not previously had access to funding to complete qualifications, was supported in principle by all stakeholders.

3.4 There was recognition among stakeholders that the operation’s aims were aligned with a number of Welsh Government policies and strategies – both sector-specific and broader strategic plans. Contributors to the evaluation noted the potential contribution of Progress for Success to the ten-year workforce development plan.¹³ Interviewees, including Welsh Government officials, sector stakeholders and practitioners in the sector, were in agreement that increasing qualifications and skill levels across all ages of the childcare workforce had the potential to raise the profile of careers in the sector, improve career pathways, and support the further professionalisation of the workforce. The operation was also seen as a mechanism to respond to any increases in demand for additional qualified staff as a result of the roll-out of the 30-hour Childcare Offer. However, these stakeholders expressed reservations about the ability to isolate and measure the specific impact of Progress for Success on these issues, highlighting the distinction between alignment in design and aims on the one hand, and direct impact on these strategies and policy priorities as a result of the operation’s delivery.

Progress for Success eligibility criteria

3.5 As noted in section previously, only those aged 25 or above and already employed for 16 hours or more at a registered maintained or non-maintained early years, childcare or play setting were eligible to take part in Progress for Success. Self-employed childminders were also eligible. As a result of the change to the Apprenticeship Programme in June 2016, at which point it became an all-age programme, questions were raised about the rationale for the operation. One stakeholder summarised their view on the situation by suggesting that PfS had lost its “unique selling point”. Other stakeholders questioned the level of alignment in operational planning, however it was also conceded that this was a policy decision taken outside the department involved in designing Progress for Success. The evaluation found substantial evidence that this change – which occurred at a time when training provider contracts for PfS were being let – impacted negatively on the initial roll-out and the sector’s understanding of the operation. There was a period

¹³ Welsh Government, (2017) [Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan](#)

during June and July 2016 (prior to PfS training provider contracts being finalised) where a substantial number of participants (approximately 240) aged 25 and above who would have been eligible for PfS were allowed to enter the Apprenticeship Programme.

- 3.6 Evidence from stakeholders, training providers and employers noted that there was confusion among employers about the operation and how it differed from the existing apprenticeship offer. This supports information set out in the final PfS Business Plan which also noted that PfS-eligible learners signing up to completed qualifications through the all-age Apprenticeship Programme “significantly impacted the initial momentum of PfS”.¹⁴
- 3.7 The eligibility criterion that restricted PfS to those employed for 16 hours or more was a central feature of the operation’s design. There was widespread acceptance that this requirement meant that PfS was unable to address the professional development needs of a number of employers and part-time employees in the childcare and play sectors.
- 3.8 With the benefit of hindsight, targeting and restricting the operation to individuals aged 25 and over was unnecessary as this age group are able to pursue a childcare or play qualification through the all-age Apprenticeship Programme. Additionally, limiting eligibility to those working 16 hours served to restrict the reach of the operation.

Input of internal and external partners into the design of Progress for Success

- 3.9 Arrangements were put in place to secure input from internal and external stakeholder groups to shape Progress for Success. PfS was initiated as a joint-departmental operation, led by the Early Years team within the Education Department. An internal stakeholder group, comprising representatives of several divisions¹⁵ was established in Summer 2013, and an external group was

¹⁴ Business Plan Progress for Success (PfS) 2014-2018

¹⁵ Officials representing the following policy areas were represented on the internal stakeholder group: Higher Education, Welsh language, Employment and ESF Policy, Childcare and Play policy, Family support policy, Flying Start, Higher Education, WEFO, Welfare Reform, Work-based learning and funding, School support staff/EWC, Vocational Qualifications

established in March 2014, with a cross-section of sector representatives.¹⁶ Both groups ran until September 2014 in order to scope the PfS operation, reflecting the needs of the early years, childcare and play sector.

- 3.10 The evaluation collected feedback from sector representatives about their input into the design of the operation through the external stakeholder group. Although the Welsh Government's commitment to engaging with the sector was valued, many felt disappointed that they had relatively little "meaningful" input or influence in relation to key aspects of operation design (in particular the decision to follow an apprenticeship model for PfS, the choice of qualifications delivered through the operation and procurement/delivery methods).

Model of delivery

Delivery of PfS through the apprenticeship framework

- 3.11 A range of delivery mechanisms for PfS were considered at the business planning stage in discussion with internal colleagues and stakeholders. It was decided to deliver PfS-funded qualifications as an apprenticeship and to procure the provision of these qualifications through a "mini-tender" exercise under an existing framework, namely the Innovation Lot of the WBL framework. Applying this delivery model enabled PfS to be delivered as a national operation, funded under two separate ESF operational programmes in West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales. Welsh Government officials, reflecting back on the rationale for choosing an apprenticeship model as a method of delivering the qualifications, noted that this approach provided a coherent structure for the operation, while also offering the advantages and efficiencies associated with being able to capitalise on existing delivery arrangements. Furthermore, this approach, officials noted, supported the Welsh Government's policy commitment to expand the number of apprenticeships.

¹⁶ The following organisations were represented: CCW, All Wales Foundation Phase Advisers, Children in Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru, Colegau Cymru, CIW, Director of Children's Services, Estyn, Federation of Small Businesses, Flying Start Network, GMB, Mudiad Meithrin, NDNA, PACEY, Play Wales, SkillsActive, WLGA, WPPA

- 3.12 Some feedback has been provided by WBL providers and stakeholders on the procurement process outlined above in 3.3. The decision to procure WBL providers through the existing Innovation Lot framework was intended to expedite the process and be less resource intensive. However, the evaluation has found that the process may have unintentionally served to exclude some smaller (and more specialist) WBL providers who were not on the existing framework. Sector representatives – those representing the play sector in particular – raised further questions about whether there was sufficient expertise and experience among the commissioned PfS providers to deliver the Level 2 and 3 Playwork qualifications offered through the operation. Welsh Government officials noted that, with the benefit of hindsight, the decision to contract with a limited number of WBL providers caused “unnecessary difficulty and disrupted existing patterns of provision and links between providers and employers”.
- 3.13 In keeping with all apprenticeships completed as part of the Apprenticeship Framework, essential skills support was embedded into Progress for Success qualifications. PfS participants took an essential skills test to assess their communication, application of number and digital literacy skills. The essential skills assessment, which forms part of the initial assessment, was undertaken using the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (also referred to as the WEST test). PfS providers were required to ensure that the essential skills needs of participants (identified following the initial assessment) were clearly defined, and that they provided support to address these needs through the apprenticeship framework. PfS apprentices follow essential communication skills, essential application of number skills and essential digital literacy skills. (See further discussion of evidence in relation to essential skills support in 4.25)

Consideration of the Welsh language as part of operation planning

- 3.14 As part of the business planning process for Progress for Success, operational leads considered the ways in which Progress for Success could support the Welsh language and the national Welsh language strategy at the time, A living language: a language for living. Progress for Success committed to offering a choice of

language to up-skill in (English, Welsh or bilingually) to practitioners undertaking qualifications where this was available. The operation Business Plan noted:

“Providing participants with a choice of language to upskill in will lead to an increase in opportunities for practitioners to use the Welsh language more often and more confidently in the workplace, directly benefitting both English and Welsh medium settings.”

- 3.15 Targets were set for participants completing qualifications through the medium of Welsh, based on previous patterns of take-up of qualifications through the medium of Welsh. Prior to Progress for Success, Mudiad Meithrin received funding from the Welsh Government to deliver the level 3 Diploma in CCLD, through its training arm, Cam wrth Gam. Some 200 Welsh speakers and learners qualified per year from 2004 until the contract ended in March 2016, with the funding subsequently transferred to be used as match funding for PfS.
- 3.16 A target of 10 per cent, or just over 200 of the original target, was set for Welsh-medium completers, and the Business Plan for PfS in WWV explained the rationale for these targets as being “based on ensuring the 200 participants per year that the previous Cam wrth Gam contract catered for in the sector, continue to have the opportunity to train and to ensure that Welsh language skills within the workforce continues to thrive and increase in line with evidenced demand”. Around a third of those 200 qualifying each year with Cam wrth Gam, however, were aged under 25 and the majority were new entrants rather than employed workers – typically volunteering as a step towards entering the sector. After the launch of PfS Mudiad Meithrin publicly shared concerns while giving evidence to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, about the “limitations” of PfS. They explained that although the target for Welsh-medium qualifications was in line with the numbers qualifying in previous years, they had concerns about new entrants and those under 25 not being included in the scheme.
- 3.17 Evidence from key stakeholders, supported by comments from Welsh language employers, indicates that, although the Welsh language was considered as part of operation design and delivery, this was not done with sufficient knowledge of the previous Welsh language provision and the impact of PfS eligibility criteria in

disrupting the pipeline of Welsh language practitioners. It has been suggested by stakeholders that the various scenarios that could arise as a result of the PfS model were not thought through in an informed or sophisticated way. The numbers of participants competing the qualification in Welsh fell far short of the target as is discussed in chapter 4.

Comment on variations in evaluation findings between West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales.

PfS was designed and delivered as an all-Wales operation. Two of the three main training providers delivered qualifications in both regions, adopting the same approach to delivering the operation in WWV and EW.

The same eligibility criteria applied in both regions and the evaluation found no differences in the overall model of delivery.

4. Findings: Implementation and outcomes

4.1 This chapter presents findings in relation to the promotion, delivery and outcomes of Progress for Success (PfS). It draws on fieldwork conducted over the duration of the evaluation with Welsh Government officials; sector stakeholders and training providers; fieldwork with employers and participants. Findings and conclusions are set out in the following sequence:

- marketing and recruitment;
- the implementation of PfS;
- and outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Marketing and recruitment

Summary findings: Marketing and recruitment

- A distinct brand and marketing campaign for Progress for Success was created and promoted by the Welsh Government. However, the PfS brand was not well recognised by employers and prospective learners and was of limited use as an aid to recruitment for training providers.
- Evidence from stakeholders, training providers and the sector indicates that PfS was viewed by many as part of the wider Apprenticeship Programme instead.
- Training providers reported challenges in recruiting participants in sufficient numbers to reach targets they had been set. As a result, they were required to invest additional resources in seeking to recruit participants onto the operation.
- Training providers planned their recruitment activity based on the allocation of qualifications (i.e. the targets set out in contracts) set out in procurement documentation. However, they questioned whether the estimated number of eligible participants was robust and realistic.

- Some of the methods used by training providers to attract interest among employers and recruit learners were deemed to be overly insistent, with employers reporting that they received multiple marketing calls from a number of different providers.
- In addition, claims that the information provided was not always accurate: a) in terms of explaining the amount of time and support needed to complete a Level 2 or 3 qualification; and b) suggestions that the qualifications were mandatory for some staff when this was not the case.
- Employers reported that their motivations to take part were most frequently linked to using PfS to increase the numbers of qualified staff in order to comply with National Minimum Standards.
- Learners were more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to gain the qualification itself as well as opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge.

4.2 The operation team, working with the Welsh Government's communications team, prepared marketing materials and guidance and developed a distinct brand for Progress for Success. A media agency was contracted to develop a communications plan to promote the operation. In addition to branding and marketing guidance, Business Wales and sector representatives were briefed and asked by Welsh Government to play a role in raising awareness of the training opportunity. Media activities included commissioning a radio advert targeting employers and participants.

4.3 While PfS marketing materials were produced centrally, the recruitment of childcare and play employees to the operation was the responsibility of the training providers. The operation delivered qualifications that training providers had previously delivered (and subsequently) as part of the mainstream Apprenticeship Programme. Training providers tended to market the opportunity as an apprenticeship (or often, just as "free training") rather than use the PfS brand which they believed caused confusion among employers.

Training providers' experiences of recruiting learners to Progress for Success

- 4.4 Training providers reported challenges in recruiting participants in sufficient numbers to reach their targets. Consequently, providers noted that it had been necessary for them to invest more resources in marketing activity than they had anticipated in order to sign practitioners up to PfS.
- 4.5 Training providers were, in many cases able to build on existing employer contacts in West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales in order to promote PfS. However, they also sought to engage with employers with whom they had previously had no contact. This involved direct approaches to prospective new clients through telephone marketing or the distribution of electronic or paper-based materials.
- 4.6 One training provider explained that they had to revisit and redouble their efforts to generate PfS leads, having found it more challenging to recruit than expected. The summary in figure 4.1 illustrates the range of marketing methods used and the relatively low success rate experienced through a number of methods.

Figure 4.1 Summary of marketing activity and leads generated by one PfS Training provider

The training provider explained that they had:

- Used employer engagement staff to liaise with potential customers.
- Sent a mailshot to all CIW registered providers, which generated 10 leads.
- Held meetings with childcare and play organisations and Flying Start teams.
- Run a month-long telesales campaign with 250 outbound calls a week which generated 15 starts.
- Led a social media campaign which resulted in a “trickle” of enquiries.
- Issued a mailshot to all after-school clubs in Wales that produced 3 leads.
- Commissioned a PR agency to lead a campaign focused on placing adverts and features in local papers which generated no leads.

4.7 Training providers reported that they had assumed – based on information provided by Welsh Government – that there were strong levels of demand among the target group for the funded qualifications at levels 2 and 3. Training providers reported increasing difficulties in recruiting learners over the duration of the operation. They attributed these challenges to the fact that eligible learners became progressively scarcer as time passed due to multiple training providers pursuing the same target group. Training providers planned their recruitment activity based on the targets allocated to them in the contractual requirements set out in the procurement documentation. However, they questioned whether the estimated number of eligible participants was robust and realistic. One training provider reported:

“We were told there would be hundreds (of eligible candidates) out there. We employed a new business sales manager to lead on recruitment, expecting to find loads but soon realised that this wasn’t the case.” (Progress for Success Training Provider)

4.8 Other training providers also spoke of reaching a “saturation point”, feeling that they were investing resources in recruiting candidates from a target group that had been already exhausted, given the eligibility criteria for PfS.

"The eligibility is counter intuitive, [it] doesn’t make sense since most in the sector have to have the qualification to work so would already be qualified. PfS could have been perfect for new entrants.” (Progress for Success Training Provider)

4.9 Finally, in many cases, training providers were reaching out and attempting to make links with employers in the childcare and play sectors with whom they had had no previous contact. For some providers, PfS required making contact and winning the trust of employers within a short timeframe in order to reach targets that they had been set – something that proved challenging for many as evidenced in overall operation output data (see paragraph 4.46).

4.10 These challenges led to aggressive marketing campaigns by some providers which resulted in some employers receiving multiple “sales” calls. Employers and stakeholders raised questions, and in some cases concerns, about the methods used by training providers to generate leads and recruit learners onto the operation. There were reported instances where providers did not always make clear to

childminders that the training wasn't mandatory for them. Other employers reported that training providers did not always explain that a full apprenticeship includes essential skills during the initial marketing and promotion. Finally, it was not always made clear that the short qualification - Level 3 Transition to Play work from early years - was a valid option for practitioners and that they would not therefore need to take the full PfS-funded diploma.

- 4.11 Some training providers, including a number of those working as subcontractors to the main PfS providers, reported more positive experiences through the operation. They were able to build on longstanding working relationships with some employers, reaching out to childcare and play setting they knew and with whom they had "trusted working relationships". Some of these providers explained that, as sub-contractors, they were also able to focus on a discrete geographical area or on part of the sector, and therefore could concentrate on those settings with whom they had existing links. Some were also able to align with other provision, e.g. business planning support and supporting other qualifications at the workplace. For other providers, PfS provided an opportunity to expand their provision in playwork qualifications.

Employers experiences of training providers' marketing activity

- 4.12 The majority of the employers whose staff completed a qualification through PfS had not previously worked with that particular training provider (23 out of 40). Most employers consulted during the formative stage of the evaluation reported engaging with the operation as a direct result of having been contacted by training providers, who encouraged them to take up the offer of free training. There was little evidence that national marketing activity proved successful in raising awareness among employers of the qualifications on offer.
- 4.13 Some employers reported that the training came at an opportune time for them and they were very grateful for the support in equipping them with the necessary numbers of qualified staff to ensure they were in a stronger position to comply with National Minimum Standards. One manager of a day nursery commented:

"It was meant to be - I needed someone with a Level 3, [my employee] was interested in upskilling and we got a random marketing call at just the right time."

- 4.14 In several other cases, employers reported receiving repeated telephone calls marketing the qualification, describing the approach taken by the training providers as "pushy" or "insistent". Some employers interviewed observed there was a contrast between the focus placed on encouraging employers to sign up to the qualification and the quality of support provided during subsequent stages – see example below.

Example: Employer experience of marketing and subsequent support

"We had experience of a couple of different providers through Progress for Success. The initial training provider was heavy handed in getting us to sign up to the qualification. They told us that we needed the qualification because new regulations were coming into force and that we had to complete it within a set period of time – I think they said it would have to be completed in 12 or 16 months. But then when two members of staff had signed up, the training provider didn't provide any real support. There was a complete shift in approach – as if all they wanted was for us to sign up. We subsequently switched training providers because the quality of support was so poor. [Employees] had fallen behind in their work, were stressed, weren't getting support - visits were cancelled. So we switched providers and things improved."

Employer, play setting, East Wales

- 4.15 Three-quarters of employers who contributed to the evaluation explained that they were motivated to take part in Progress for Success in order to comply with National Minimum Standards in terms of the required ratios of qualified staff. The next most common reasons given by employers for signing up to PfS were: to enable their employee(s) to gain new skills (cited by over a third) and to enable their employee(s) to gain a new qualification (cited by under a third). This indicates that, among those employers who contributed to the evaluation, pressure to comply with regulations was a greater motivation to take up the offer of training than the desire to develop new skills and qualifications for the benefit of their employees.

Learners' motivations to complete a qualification through Progress for Success

- 4.16 Participants who undertook a PfS qualification and who responded to the survey were asked how they had heard about the opportunity to complete their Level 2 or 3 qualification. The largest proportion of survey respondents (54 out of 90) noted that they had heard about the opportunity to complete their qualification through their employer. A smaller proportion of participants said they had heard about the opportunity through a training provider (21), through word of mouth or via a colleague (19), sector organisations (8), and marketing materials (3). This suggests that employers and setting managers were a key target audience for training providers, but that training providers were also able to make direct contact with staff when marketing the funded training available through PfS.
- 4.17 Participants who responded to the survey were asked to indicate why they chose to follow the qualification (by selecting their top three reasons). Responses are summarised in Figure 4.2 below. The most common reasons were to gain an accredited qualification in the sector (60 out of 90 respondents) and to increase participants' knowledge and skills in childcare/play (48 out of 90 respondents). A minority of survey respondents noted that they signed up for the qualification because they were told to by their employer (17 respondents), to help gain a promotion (8 respondents) and to help participants promote or advertise their childcare services (5 respondents). Just under half of respondents offered other reasons why they chose to follow the qualification. These reasons were mainly centred around three themes: compliance with new regulations coming into effect relating to qualifications for playwork settings; the qualification appealed because it was free; and participants wanted to upskill to improve their career prospects. Examples of participants' comments are provided below.

“Had to have it because of the new law coming into action in 2020. That's why I went to [training provider] to do it.” (PfS participant)

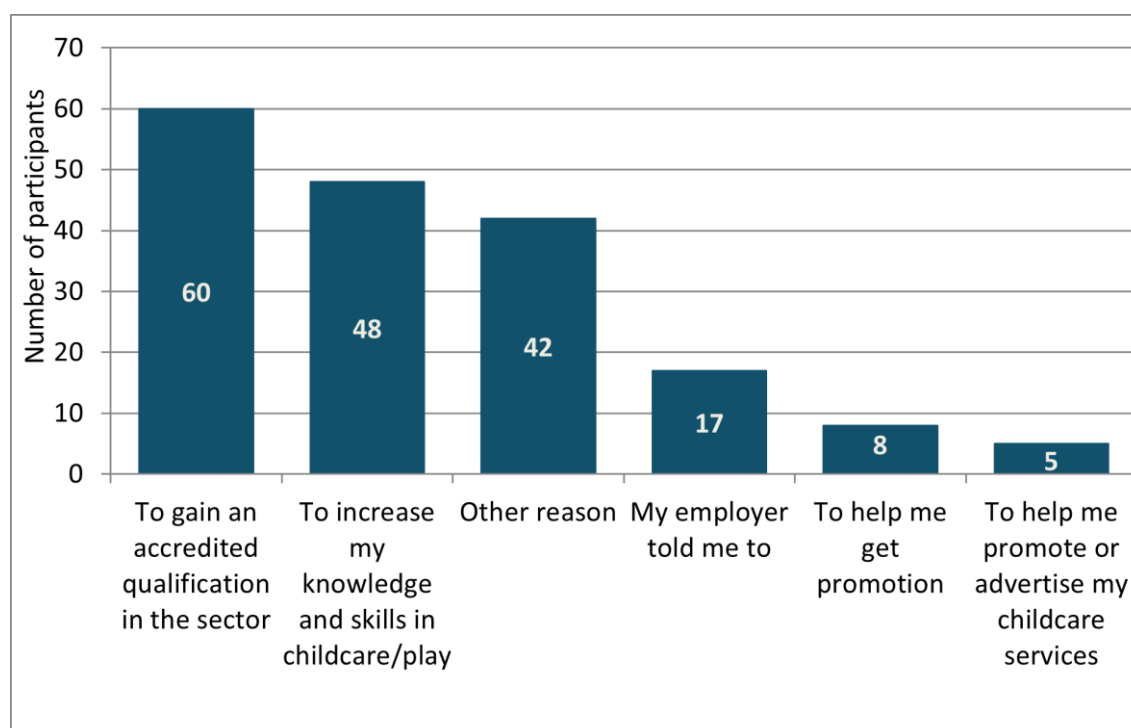
“I worked for 5 years as a secondary teacher. I wanted to go into childminding once I had a child, since it was easier to fit in care around my work hours.

Obviously [the qualification] also appealed to me as it was free.” (PfS participant)

“I am hoping to go higher within my field - wanted to further my knowledge.” (PfS participant)

“To enhance future career opportunities - to make me more employable in future.” (PfS participant)

Figure 4.2. Participants reasons for undertaking the qualification



N = 90, Source: Arad PfS participant survey

4.18 Progress for Success attracted a substantial proportion of learners who were childminders. At the time when PfS was being delivered, registered childminders only needed to complete one unit of the CCLD focused on home-based childcare. Therefore, the full CCLD was not required for childminders in order to comply with National Minimum Standards. Almost three-quarters of childminders who completed a survey noted that they chose to take part primarily to gain an accredited qualification. Some of these reported that they felt the qualification would be valuable for them when advertising their provision. Some also explained that they were told by training providers when they signed up that they would shortly need to complete the full CCLD as part of proposed changes to National Minimum Standards. Although discussions were ongoing at the time about changes to

National Minimum Standards, there were no plans to require childminders to hold a full CCLD.

“I’ve heard that CIW are thinking about making it compulsory for childminders to have the Level 3, so I wanted to be “on the ball” with that rather than panic in a couple of years’ time.” (PfS participant, childminder)

- 4.19 In some cases, PfS learners who were childminders had registered relatively recently and were looking to continue the momentum of having recently completed some initial training. Some training providers reported that they had experienced relatively good success in recruiting childminders, attributing this to childminders seeing the value of upskilling from the dual perspective as both employers and learners. A number of childminders interviewed explained that they were able to be flexible and fit in work-based learning around their childminding commitments, something that had been a factor in them signing up to the qualification. Others also reported that completing the qualification involved more time than they had envisaged.

Example: Childminder’s motivations for engaging with PfS

Susan explained her reasons for signing up for Progress for Success. She was interested in taking part in Progress for Success for a number of reasons:

- The timing was good for her: from September 2016 last year the children she was caring for were all in-school, meaning that she had time to concentrate on the qualification during the daytime.
- She felt that it would be beneficial in helping to build her childminding practice (e.g. if she decided to advertise her childminding services in future, she felt it would be an advantage to be able to mention the qualification).
- Gaining the qualification could potentially open doors to employment in the childcare sector (e.g. if she wanted to apply for a job at a private nursery).

It is unlikely that Susan would have completed the qualification if it wasn’t for Progress for Success. She probably would not have thought to sign up for work-based learning if she hadn’t heard about the opportunity from another childminder. Her only previous childcare related training was 6 years ago when she first registered with CIW. This was an Introduction to Childcare unit at Level 3. Progress for Success provided her with an opportunity to gain a full qualification.

(Participant, Level 3 CCLD, Childminder)

Implementation of PfS

Summary findings: Implementation

- Essential skills delivery was embedded into the PfS qualifications. Sector stakeholders welcomed the opportunity to address essential skills through the operation, but concerns we raised about how essential skills qualifications and the initial WEST diagnostic test were communicated to employers and employees.
- Evidence collected suggests differences in approach to engaging with employers through PfS. There were variations in the frequency and nature of assessor contact and the strength of the working relationship between the assessor/provider and the employer.
- Most participants were satisfied with the amount of time their assessor spent with them and the quality of this support.
- A minority of PfS participant survey respondents were not satisfied, usually linked to the fact that there had been a change in assessors during the period of the qualification or that the contact was infrequent.
- The operation fell short of the targets set for Welsh-medium qualifications. The main reason suggested by training providers and some stakeholders was that the potential pool of eligible learners in Welsh-medium settings was far smaller than estimated. Other reasons were that many of those workers who could take Welsh-medium qualifications worked in sessional day care and for fewer than 16 hours a week. There was evidence of reluctance by participants to undertake qualification fully through the medium of Welsh.

4.20 This section explores view and experiences of taking part in PfS, drawing on evidence from stakeholders, employers and participants relating to the diagnosis and delivery of essential skills, the approaches to engagement and assessment taken by the providers and the delivery of Welsh language qualification.

Essential Skills

- 4.21 As with all apprenticeship frameworks, essential skills support was embedded into the PfS qualifications. Unless the learner can provide proof of the equivalent level of a proxy qualification, they are required to take an essential skills diagnostic test, the WEST test – an online questionnaire where respondents answer a series of questions – in order to identify their essential skills level. They are then provided with essential skills training if needed.
- 4.22 Fieldwork with employers and PfS participants explored views on the WEST test and essential skills component alongside the Level 2 and 3 qualifications in childcare and playwork. A range of views in relation to the essential skills component of PfS was received: some valued the opportunity to refresh or enhance the essential skills of the workforce, while others, especially participants, questioned its relevance to the specific qualifications being followed. Some commented that they had not fully understood the essential skills requirements when enrolling and others viewed the diagnostic test, and the subsequent delivery of the essential skills component as burdensome and unnecessary.
- “I had to lose a few days of work, and therefore pay, to attend essential skills days. Would have appreciated knowing about these at the beginning of the course. Thankfully, someone came to my home to complete the digital literacy while I was working.” (PfS Participant, Childminder).
- 4.23 Improving essential skills was welcomed by the sector stakeholders, and especially by childcare organisations who acknowledged the benefits of improving the essential skills of childcare and play workers. However, they – and training providers – also reported that both the initial WEST test and then the essential skills element of the apprenticeship can be very off-putting for workers and their employers. They told the evaluation team that some employers complain that the WEST and the essential skills tasks took up too much time away from work, did not seem relevant and that their employees were daunted by the essential skills element. Concerns were raised that the purpose and value of the WEST test was not communicated well enough to employers and learners. One consequence of

this can be that potential candidates could drop out once they understood what the course entailed. One training provider provided a figure of 40 per cent of potential candidates not pursuing the course after the initial introduction having been deterred by the essential skills element. Indeed, one training provider explained that they had some candidates who opted out of the free apprenticeship route and choose to take only the CCLD diploma part in order to avoid the essential skills element.

Example: Participating Participant's experience of WEST and Essential skills

The candidate explained her frustration with the WEST test and the essential skills element:

"It wasn't relevant to my situation. I just wish I'd done all of this through a different way. ... but I just couldn't do it and I couldn't take it all in because I couldn't find it relevant for me at this time and I refused to carry on doing it. Because of the timing. I just think things like that you need to be there all day. You need to be in a classroom. I just don't think it's right. It's not relevant. I did the maths and I didn't pass. I just couldn't do it. With the digital literacy I did alright but at the end I didn't answer the last three questions, so I walked out. I worked myself up into a state and I just couldn't do it."

She goes on to explain that it was too much for her, especially with a busy home life.

"It was just too much. I've nearly finished my Level 3 and I don't know how I've done that but the other stuff – it's just not for me. The essential skills, I'm sorry, I'm still upset about it. I just wish you could have just done the NVQ [i.e. the CCLD only], but I know it doesn't work like that. But that's the only thing I would change about it. Because I refuse to carry on now with the Essential Skills. But I know from a friend before that they've been able to pay it off, but I've been left struggling and going to every lesson and trying to do it but I couldn't do it. I refused to carry on, but I didn't understand why I just couldn't pay, but when I got told I could pay £1,000 I thought that was beyond a joke."

Female, Level 3 CCLD

Differences in approaches to delivery and employer engagement

- 4.24 Evidence collected from participants, employers and training providers suggested that there were differences in the approach taken by assessors to engage with employers through PfS, and differences in the assessors' ways of working, within and between providers. These differences resulted in varying levels of participant and employer satisfaction with WBL providers. These differences included:
- Frequency of assessor-learner contact: minimum contact vs. more regular contact by text, phone calls and email to "check in" on progress outside structured assessor visits.
 - Strength of the working relationships: first time engagement where employers respond to "speculative" marketing vs. engagement building on prior relationships and knowledge of employer, where the WBL provider has established links and understands workforce development priorities or needs.
 - The level and accuracy of information provided by training providers at the outset: relatively little detailed information about the qualification and workload/unrealistic expectations placed on learners vs. a comprehensive discussion with employer and learner about the planned programme of work, including realistic milestones and targets set.
- 4.25 Participants' engagement with their training provider was via the assessor who supported and guided learners through the qualification with (usually) monthly visits to the learner's workplace. Participants were asked their views on the support they received from their assessor, and responses are summarised in Figure 4.3 below.
- 4.26 Most participants were satisfied with the amount of time their assessor spent supporting them (56 out of 88 were very satisfied and a further 11 were fairly satisfied) and the quality of this support they received (55 out of 88 were very satisfied and a further 11 were fairly satisfied). Further comments provided by these participants illustrate reasons why they were satisfied with this support. These reasons included being able to contact their assessor whenever they felt they needed to; the assessor explained things clearly and was helpful; the assessor was flexible in their approach and appreciative of the needs and learning styles of the participant.

“Assessor was brilliant. If I needed anything, I could contact straight away. From the start, she explained the benefits of having the qualification, and how it would help my career.” (PfS participant)

“Really good assessor. Let us work at our own pace. I think she tailored her approach to teaching depending on how comfortable she felt we were with the work. Always felt like I could ask her for help if I needed.” (PfS participant)

“My assessor was brilliant. She always helped when I needed it and explained things clearly.” (PfS participant)

4.27 A small number of participants and employers described receiving support and answers to queries from their assessor at weekends and very late into the evening. While this was welcomed by participants, it raises questions about both the assessors’ and the learners’ workloads.

4.28 A minority of the participant survey respondents were not satisfied with the amount of time (11 of the 88 were fairly or very dissatisfied) nor with the quality of this support (11 of 88 fairly or very dissatisfied). Participants from all three main providers were among the respondents. A common complaint among those dissatisfied with their assessor (and from those neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) was that they had several different assessors throughout the duration of undertaking the qualification. Other participants, and employers, commented that they didn’t have much time with their assessor or felt that the visits were infrequent. Changes in assessors often meant that it took participants longer to complete the qualification due to a gap of several months whilst they were being allocated a new assessor.

“I feel that I didn't get the support I needed because during the course I had so many different assessors.” (PfS participant)

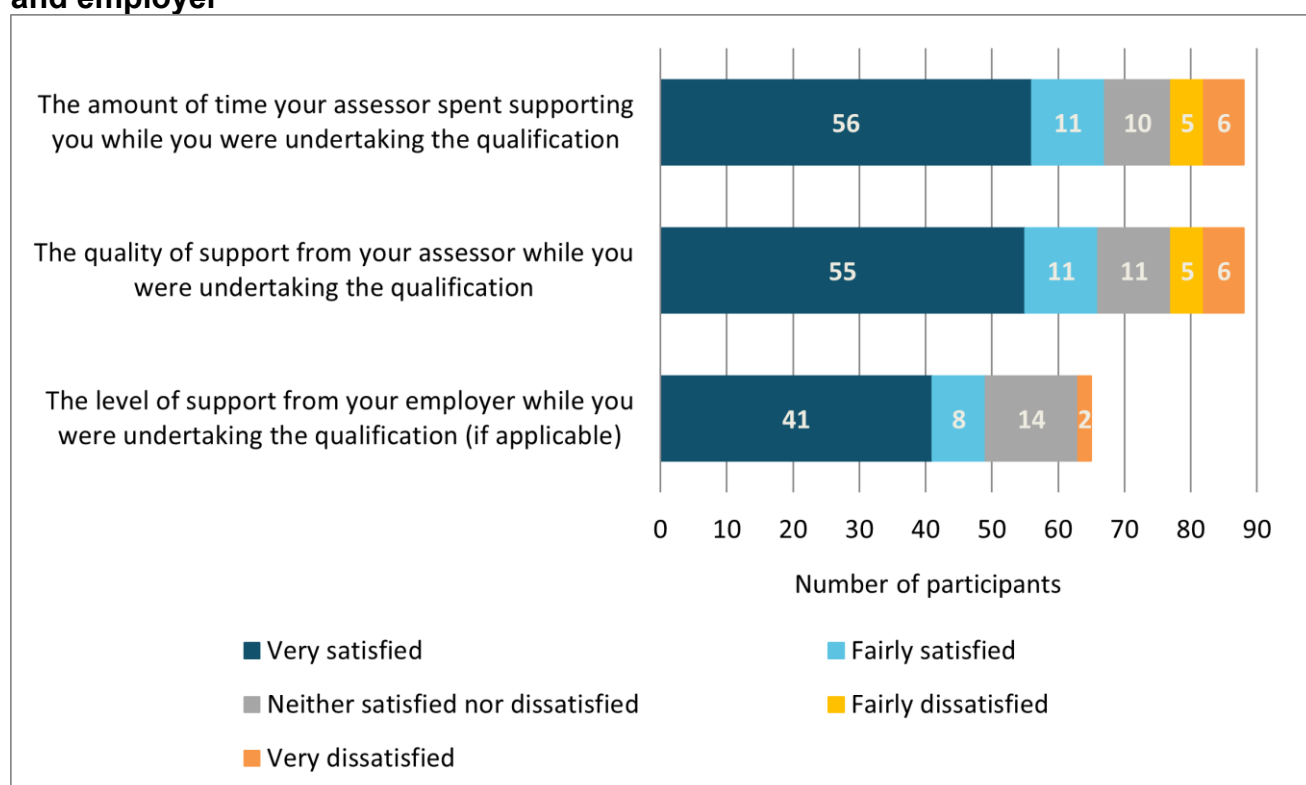
“The original assessor started a few units with us, but then left her post, and they couldn't find a replacement for her. The whole thing ended up dragging on and on.” (PfS participant)

“The last assessor that I had was the fifth one. Overall, it was a bit of a bumpy ride, due to assessors starting for a while, and then leaving, which meant

there was a large gap of time where no work was being done.” (PfS participant)

4.29 In addition to support from their assessor, participants were also asked for their views on the support they received from their employer whilst undertaking the qualification. Most participants were satisfied with the level of support they received from their employer whilst undertaking the qualification (41 out of 65 were very satisfied and a further 8 were fairly satisfied). However, a very small number were not satisfied with the level of support from their employer (2 were very dissatisfied). The remaining respondents (14 out of 65) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the level of support from their employer.

Figure 4.3. Participants’ views on the support received from their assessor and employer



N = 65-88

Source: Arad PfS participant survey

4.30 The participant survey respondents were asked whether they found it difficult to find the time to complete the qualification. A large proportion of respondents said that finding the time to complete the qualification was difficult, with just under half (41 out of 90) indicating that it was somewhat difficult and around one fifth (17 out of 90)

indicating that it was very difficult. For the remaining survey respondents (32 out of 90) this was not an issue.

- 4.31 Published guidance notes that Level 2 Foundation Apprenticeships should take at least 12 months and that Level 3 Apprenticeships should take at least 20 months; however, there were many who completed the apprenticeship in less than a year which may explain why many found it challenging to find the time to complete the qualification. This echoes previous findings by Qualifications Wales in its Sector Review of Qualifications and the Qualification System in Health and Social Care (2016). That study reported concerns that learners were being required to complete a Level 3 Diploma in Children’s Care Learning and Development in one year, resulting in “a serious impact on the quality of learning and assessment”.

Example: Employer’s views on assessor support

The employer reported mixed experiences with assessors over a period of using non-PfS and PfS providers to deliver qualifications:

“There was a slight problem with the assessors. The previous one was based in Cardiff and had to drive 2 hours to get here just to assess for a couple of hours, and it doesn’t seem worth it for me. I feel that the assessor should be here for the full day to get as much of the work done as possible. Then assessor visit cancellations, among other things, dragged out the qualification significantly in my experience and my employees”.

“I personally started my Playwork level 3 qualification with [non PfS provider] but I never saw the assessor so only completed a few modules. [PfS provider] got in touch then and I could transfer the work I had done over to the other assessor and carry on from there. I saw the assessor from [Training provider] every 2 weeks, which was much better. We have an assessor that’s local now which is good.”

Employer of Level 3 CCLD participant, WWV

Example: Participant experience of Work-based learning

The participant took up a position in a school last September, combining roles as after-school club assistant and lunchtime monitor. She enrolled on PfS soon after starting, seeing it as a valuable opportunity to combine a qualification with practical on-the-job training.

Experience of the qualification: She feels it's been an excellent course and the tutor has been very supportive. She feels it has benefitted her in her work immensely: she is now more aware of how children develop and how she can best react and respond to situations to support them. She is certain she wouldn't be able to afford to pay for training on her own. She explains "I've been away from learning for many years. I enjoy learning but lack confidence. It was scary at first but very enjoyable over time. I've loved it."

What next?: She hopes to finish the Level 2 in December already wants to progress onto Level 3 with the same WBL provider.

After-school club assistant; CCLD Level 2; WWV

Delivery of Welsh-medium provision through PfS

- 4.32 The Welsh language was a cross-cutting theme, and one of the key ESF programme objectives for equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming was to "identify and support opportunities to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language and support speakers of the language".¹⁷ A target of 10 per cent participants (or just over 200 of the original overall target) was set for Welsh-medium completers. The monitoring data shows that 1.4 per cent, or 13 individuals and all from WWV, started their course in Welsh, which was significantly short of the original target. Almost 21 per cent completed their qualifications partially through the medium of Welsh, across East Wales and West Wales and the Valleys.

¹⁷ Welsh European Funding Office, (2017) [Cross Cutting Themes Key Document – European Social Fund Integrating the Cross Cutting Themes across the 2014-2020 European Structural Funds](#)

4.33 Interviews with training providers (including Mudiad Meithrin) and stakeholders explored the reasons behind the challenges faced in recruiting the targeted number of Welsh-medium participants:

- Cam wrth Gam, a previous project encouraging the childcare sector to pursue Welsh-medium qualifications, had been open to practitioners of all ages, including new entrants. The restrictive eligibility criteria for PfS meant that individuals who would have been able to benefit via Cam wrth Gam could not sign up for this operation. Data received from Mudiad Meithrin on the past four years of Cam wrth Gam showed that the average number completing the diploma who were over 25 and currently employed in an early years setting (for any number of hours) was only 30 individuals per year.
- Most of the marketing to Welsh-medium settings was via Mudiad Meithrin as sub-contractors, who in turn focused on their members, which are made up in the most part of sessional childcare offered in playgroups operating typically for only 2 to 3 hours a day, so not working the minimum 16 hours a week to be eligible for PfS. Many of the workers in Welsh-medium settings had already also qualified through Cam wrth Gam in recent years.
- In order to qualify as a Welsh-medium learner under PfS, all learning and assessment had to be carried out through the medium of Welsh. This was not consistent with the previous offer under Cam wrth Gam which allowed participants to complete some elements of the learning and assessment in English. Training providers reported that this model of provision had previously appealed to those who lacked confidence in their written Welsh. Providers (and employers and participants themselves) reported that some learners were put off by the requirement to complete all tasks in Welsh and decided not to pursue the qualification.

4.34 The low numbers starting the qualifications in Welsh meant that far fewer workers in Welsh-medium settings qualified in CCLD in particular during the PfS period compared to previous years. Concerns were raised that this could present difficulties in staffing in future years and could affect the number of assessors able to work through the medium of Welsh in the longer term.

- 4.35 Participants who responded to the survey were asked whether they had been offered the opportunity to undertake the qualification in English or Welsh. The majority (67 out of 86) said that they were offered this opportunity. Four survey respondents reported that they had completed some aspects of the qualification through the medium of Welsh – the observation element or a couple of units. None had completed all of their qualification in Welsh.
- 4.36 Comments from participants and their employers revealed that some had opted to follow the qualification in English for various reasons: some felt that their written Welsh would not be up to the standard required; others noted that they were more familiar with English terminology; others explained that resources (e.g. textbooks, websites) were only available through the medium of English and therefore they felt that translating or working across different languages would be time consuming.
- 4.37 Participants were also asked whether they would have liked to have been offered the opportunity to undertake the qualification, or some elements of it, through the medium of Welsh. The vast majority said “no” to this question (59 out of 65). However, a small number said they would have either liked to have been offered the opportunity to undertake all of the qualification through the medium of Welsh (2 respondents) or some elements of the qualification through the medium of Welsh (1 respondent), suggesting at least some mis-match between demand and supply.
- 4.38 Interviews with employers provided further context, and some employers explained that among their staff, even in a Welsh-medium setting, there was a reluctance to carry out the qualification in Welsh. One employer explained that the learner “prefers to do her written work in English. Some of the observations were of Welsh work, but that was fine and suited her”; whereas another explained:
- “Most choose to do the qualification in English, it's not as easy in Welsh because of the materials and so on. But the tutor speaks Welsh and there's no problem on her side, but I don't know if they've got (Welsh-speaking) assessors”. (PfS employer)

Example: Participating Employer Building on previous Welsh-medium delivery

Many of the employers taking part in the PfS through the medium of Welsh were familiar with the previous Cam wrth Gam approach and team. One manager of a Cylch Meithrin explained:

“We’ve had several Cam wrth Gam students over the years, and I was aware that the rules had changed. The old Cam wrth Gam was easier for us because we didn’t have to employ somebody first but this time we really wanted to help [...] change career and start working for us after her eldest child had started school. We’ve had to create a job for her and the money has come from the Cylch’s reserves. In fact, it’s suited us because the Cylch is growing and we need the extra staff. We know the assessor well, from the working with her over the years and she’s really flexible.”

Cylch manager, Employer of CCLD 3 participant

Experiences of non-participating employers – implementation

- 4.39 The evaluation found no significant differences between the experiences of those employers who had taken part in PfS compared to employers whose staff had followed the same qualifications outside of PfS funding.
- 4.40 None of the non-participating employers had heard of PfS as a brand. With one exception, the non-participating employers reported that did not have employees who would have been eligible under PfS in the period. In the one exception, it appears that employer was approached by a (non-PfS) provider in the period immediately prior to PfS training provider contracts being finalised (see 3.5). This resulted in several employees – aged under and over 25 enrolling on level 3 and then level 5 qualifications.
- 4.41 There were several ways of hearing about the opportunity – many said they were approached directly by a provider, as was the experience of many of the PfS funded employers; others explained that it was through word of mouth through contacts in the same sector. Employers were more likely to explain that they were using the

same training provider as in previous years, or were using a provider known to their learner from previous employment,

“When I started the after-school club, I looked around for the play qualification and went to [non-PfS college] and they were so supportive so I have stayed with them over the years and used them for my staff. The same [assessor] comes and it’s good that the staff get used to her before they then start the course”. (Non-participating employer)

4.42 As with employers who participated in the operation, the majority of non-participating employers were complimentary about the support from their assessor. The non-PfS employers explained the benefits of building a relationship and getting to know one assessor as did the PfS employers. The same concerns about the disruption of changing assessors came through in the non-PfS interviews. One non-participating employer noted that

“[the training provider] was horrendous and during the 8 months that [name of learner] took the level 3 CCLD, she had 12 assessors who were all unhappy in their jobs, and complained that they had triple the workload they should”.

4.43 The experiences and views of non-PfS employers were similar to those reported by the PfS employers. Among the non-PfS employers interviewed there was a Welsh-medium setting manager who explained that she was offered the qualifications in Welsh but that she and the learner prefer to do written work in English. Another respondent – a childminder and toddler group leader - thought that her qualification was “classed as English”, but that she would describe it as “naturally bilingual” as the assessor could understand some Welsh and would observe both English-medium and Welsh-medium work.

Outputs and outcomes

Summary findings: Progress for Success outputs and outcomes

- Progress for Success has succeeded in achieving its primary short-term outcome of increasing the skills levels of the early years, childcare and play workforce. However, in terms of the scale of this achievement, the operation fell short of the targets set by a considerable distance:
 - The operation provided training to 862 employees across Wales, compared with the target of 2,059.
 - Around two thirds of participants gained a qualification (583, 67.63 per cent), compared to a target of 77 per cent.
- Output data also indicates that male participants were under-represented during the operation: across Wales as a whole, 3.7 per cent of PfS starts were male.
- The majority of PfS participants reported increased confidence as a result of completing the qualification. This was supported by most employers who contributed to the evaluation.
- Evidence also suggests that PfS increased the quality of childcare and playwork delivered by those who had completed qualifications and also increased knowledge and skills. There was recognition by employers that gaining the qualification had made their staff more “reflective” practitioners, with a better appreciation of how to plan and deliver activities to support children’s developmental milestones.
- The evaluation found examples of how the qualification had resulted in practitioners taking on additional responsibility and incorporating new methods in their practice.
- Over a quarter of PfS participants had completed or were in the process of completing further training.

- A quarter of employers reported that their employee had taken on additional responsibilities as a direct result of completing the qualification.
- Employers noted the benefits of a more qualified workforce in terms of being able to mention qualifications in their marketing and promotional materials.
- Some employers felt that younger and less experienced staff gained more from the qualifications on offer in terms of skills and knowledge than more experienced practitioners.
- It was not possible to assess whether PfS has achieved some of the medium- and longer-term outcomes included in the operation Business Plan. This was due to a number of reasons including the difficulties in measuring and isolating the operation's impact on, for example:
 - children's education attainment;
 - parents' working hours and patterns and attitudes to using childcare.

4.44 Data on the number of participants who enrolled on PfS was submitted to Welsh Government by contracted WBL providers and held as part of the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)¹⁸. The output data set out in this section is derived from LLWR data. This draws on output data made available to the evaluation team.

Progress against targets

4.45 The Wales-wide target for participants on Progress for Success was 2,059 participants, divided between WWV (1,338) and EW (721). The PfS Business Plan also included targets for participation among males and females; for numbers of

¹⁸ Statistics on learners in post-16 education and training, excluding those at schools but including those at Further Education Institutions, other Work-based Learning providers and Community Learning provision collected via the Welsh Government's Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR).

participants gaining qualifications (i.e. completing their Level 2 or 3 qualifications); and for numbers of participants gaining qualifications through the medium of Welsh.

4.46 Table 4.1, below summarises the performance of PfS against its overall participation targets.

Table 4.1: PfS targets and final output data: total participants in WWV and EW

| Area | Original target (a) | Recorded starts (b) | No gaining qualifications (b) | Percentage gaining qualifications |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| WWV | 1,338 | 578 | 374 | 64.71% |
| EW | 721 | 284 | 209 | 73.59% |
| Wales total | 2,059 | 862 | 583 | 67.63% |

Sources: (a) Business Plan (b) LLWR data

4.47 The PfS Business Plan included output targets for the proportion of female and male participants on the operation, while also acknowledging the fact that “PfS cannot influence male/female split as the target group is an existing workforce that is already in place”. The Business Plan included a target that 77 per cent of those undertaking qualifications would successfully complete the qualification undertaken and that, within this total, the ratio of female to male would be 95 per cent:5 per cent.

4.48 In total, around two thirds (67.63 per cent) of PfS participants gained a qualification. Table 4.2, below, shows that of the 583 participants who gained a qualification, 97.08 per cent are female and 2.92 per cent are male.

Table 4.2: Gender of PfS participants (starts and gaining qualifications), WWV and EW

| Area | Gender | No of participants (starts) | Percentage of participants (starts) | No of participants gaining qualifications | Percentage of participants (starts) |
|--------------|--------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| WWV | Male | 24 | 4.15% | 12 | 3.21% |
| | Female | 554 | 95.85% | 362 | 96.79% |
| EW | Male | 8 | 2.82% | 5 | 2.39% |
| | Female | 276 | 97.18% | 204 | 97.61% |
| Wales | Male | 32 | 3.71% | 17 | 2.92% |
| total | Female | 830 | 96.29% | 566 | 97.08% |

Sources: LLWR data

- 4.49 There are higher numbers of women than men employed in the early years and childcare workforce. The Welsh Government’s draft 10-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce in Wales noted that on average there are “eight female staff to one male worker in each setting”. The differential was less marked in play settings, where there are typically “between three and four men to nine women”.¹⁹ Given the overall gender profile of the sector, one would expect male participants to be in the minority; indeed, male participants were under-represented in terms of the proportion of males who benefitted from training through the operation.
- 4.50 The Business Plan set out an original target for the number of PfS participants gaining qualifications through the medium of Welsh. This target was based on the 200 learners per year catered for through the previous Cam wrth Gam training contract. Originally a target of 159 Welsh-medium learners through PfS was set for the duration of the operation in WWV. The numbers following the qualification fully through the medium of Welsh were well short of the WWV target, with 13 undertaking their qualification through the medium of Welsh. However, 143 pursued elements of their qualification through the medium of Welsh. In East Wales, one participant pursued their qualification fully through the medium of Welsh, and 69 pursued their qualification partially through the medium of Welsh.

¹⁹ Welsh Government, (2014) [Draft 10-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce in Wales](#).

Table 4.3: PfS participants pursuing qualifications fully or partially through the medium of Welsh, WWV and EW

| Area | Language | No of participants (starts) | Percentage of participants (starts) |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| WWV | Fully Welsh-medium | 13 | 2.25% |
| | Partially Welsh-medium | 143 | 24.74% |
| | No Welsh | 422 | 73.01% |
| EW | Fully Welsh-medium | 1 | 0.35% |
| | Partially Welsh-medium | 69 | 24.30% |
| | No Welsh | 214 | 75.35% |
| Wales total | Fully Welsh-medium | 14 | 1.62% |
| | Partially Welsh-medium | 212 | 24.59% |
| | No Welsh | 636 | 73.78% |

Source: LLWR data

Other data relating to PfS participants and delivery (based on provisional data)

4.51 Firstly, LLWR data provides a record of the qualifications pursued by PfS participants. Participants had signed up to undertake a CCLD or play qualification, at either Level 2 or 3. Table 4.4 below presents the number of participants undertaking each of these qualifications revealing that almost two-thirds (59.42 per cent) were studying for the CCLD qualification and that the majority, across both subjects, pursued a qualification at Level 3 (86.19 per cent).

Table 4.4 Type and level of qualifications being undertaken through PfS

| CCLD/Play qualification | Level of qualification | West Wales and the Valleys | East Wales | Total |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| CCLD | Level 2 | 47 | 22 | 69 |
| | Level 3 | 281 | 202 | 483 |
| | Total | 328 | 224 | 552 |
| Play | Level 2 | 36 | 14 | 50 |
| | Level 3 | 214 | 46 | 260 |
| | Total | 250 | 60 | 310 |
| Totals | | 578 | 284 | 862 |

Source: LLWR data

4.52 Based on provisional data, including relatively limited data relating to learners who had completed their qualifications, the time taken to complete each course was as follows:

- CCLD (Level 2): 10 months;
- CCLD (Level 3): 11 months;
- Playwork (Level 2): 11 months;
- Playwork (Level 3): 12 months.

These figures, albeit based on provisional data, are in contrast to published guidance which notes that Level 2 Foundation Apprenticeships should take at least 12 months and that Level 3 Apprenticeships should take at least 20 months.

4.53 LLWR data provides an insight into the previous highest qualification levels of PfS participants. This data reveals that over 60 per cent of PfS participants in West Wales and the Valleys were already qualified to Level 3 or above. One in five participants had previous qualifications at Level 5 or above. In East Wales just under half of participants were already qualified at Level 3 or above, most of whom were qualified at Levels 3 and 4. This data is summarised in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Highest previous qualification level of PfS participants, WWV and EW

| Area | Existing qualification level | No of participants (starts) | Percentage of participants (starts) |
|------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| WWV | Below CQFW level 1 | 47 | 8.13% |
| | CQFW level 1 | 17 | 2.94% |
| | CQFW level 2 | 164 | 28.37% |
| | CQFW level 3 | 203 | 35.12% |
| | CQFW level 4 | 23 | 3.98% |
| | CQFW level 5 | 42 | 7.27% |
| | CQFW level 6 | 75 | 12.98% |
| | CQFW level 7 | 7 | 1.21% |
| | CQFW level 8 | 0 | 0.00% |
| EW | Below CQFW level 1 | 37 | 13.03% |
| | CQFW level 1 | 7 | 2.46% |
| | CQFW level 2 | 109 | 38.38% |
| | CQFW level 3 | 74 | 26.06% |
| | CQFW level 4 | 6 | 2.11% |
| | CQFW level 5 | 7 | 2.46% |
| | CQFW level 6 | 40 | 14.08% |
| | CQFW level 7 | 4 | 1.41% |
| | CQFW level 8 | 0 | 0.0% |

Source: LLWR data

4.54 By July 2017, 56 of the participants had left the operation early. Their reasons for doing so are not recorded on LLWR. Fieldwork with PfS employers found that the most common reason for participants not completing the qualification was that they left the setting before gaining the qualification (and in some cases, left the sector altogether).

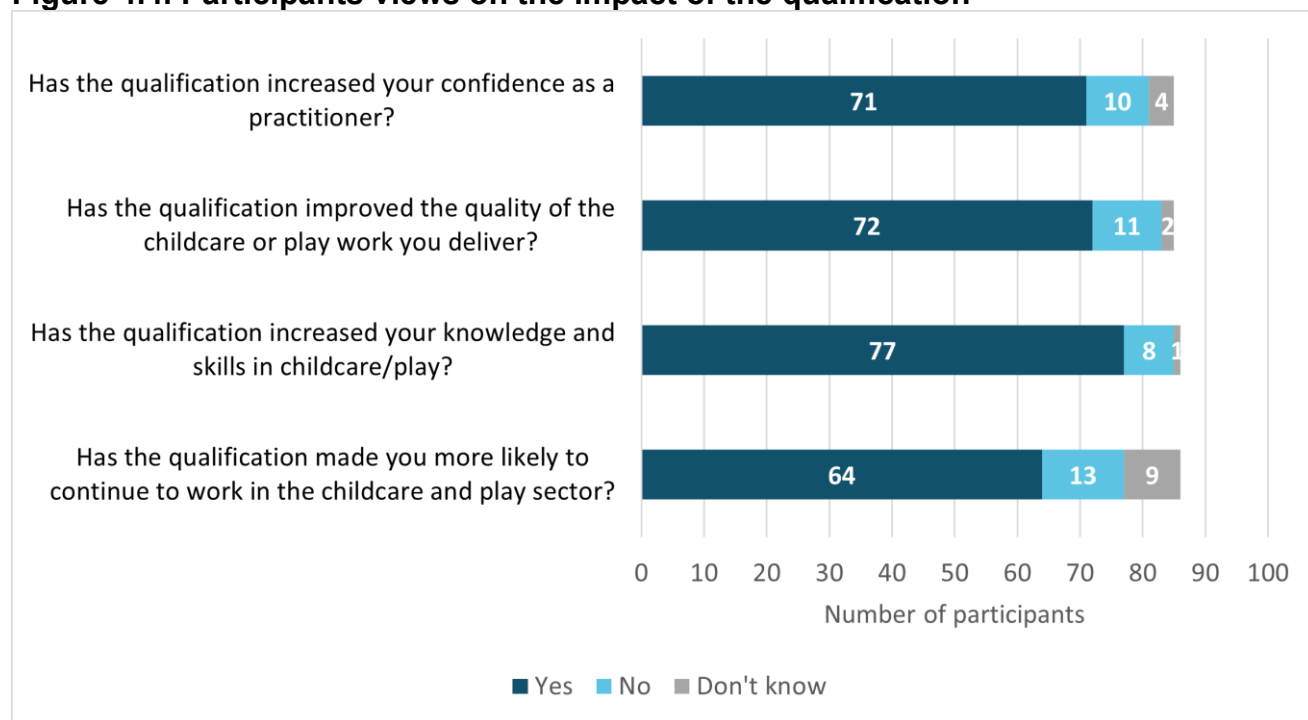
Impact on participants

4.55 Findings set out in the following sections draw on evidence from participants and employers presented at various points in time during the evaluation.

4.56 Participants who responded to the survey were asked whether the qualification has had an impact on them, specifically in terms of their confidence, the quality of the childcare or play work they deliver, their knowledge and skills in childcare/play and

their likelihood of continuing to work in the sector. Responses are summarised in figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4. Participants views on the impact of the qualification



N = 85

Source: Arad PfS participant survey

Evidence relating to the impact of PfS on participants' confidence

4.57 In terms of participants' confidence, most of those participants who completed a survey during the evaluation (71 out of 85) noted that the qualification had increased their confidence as a practitioner. Participants also noted that their confidence had improved as a result of them feeling more knowledgeable. Participants noted that they had gained an improved understanding of their role and the good practices associated with providing quality childcare and play provision as a consequence of undertaking the qualification.

“I am generally not a confident person but doing the qualification has improved my confidence as I am now more knowledgeable in the role I do.” (PfS participant)

“I feel so much more confident in my job ...having acquired much more knowledge.” (PfS participant)

“Helped in regard to writing policies and so on. It also got me thinking about certain things in more detail. Increased my confidence as an independent business and in terms of the work that I deliver. Feel like it's broadened my horizons in terms of understanding, and also opened a few doors for me.” (PfS participant)

- 4.58 The majority of employers who contributed to the evaluation also reported that undertaking the qualification had increased participants' confidence. Employers observed that their staff were more self-assured and willing to take a lead in planning and delivering sessions as a result of them gaining the qualification.

“The employee's confidence has improved greatly. They are now taking the lead in doing the planning and showing visitors round. She has the confidence to be more vocal. This has taken the pressure of the senior team as well.” (PfS employer, nursery, WWV)

- 4.59 Nonetheless around a third of PfS employers who took part in the evaluation noted that they either did not feel that their employees had gained in confidence or that they were unsure. For these employers, those who took part in the operation were already experienced and confident practitioners and gaining the qualification made little difference to their practice. One noted that the qualification employees gained had repeated elements of a previous qualification.

“All three [members of staff] who did the qualification were experienced members of staff - with two of them in their 50s. So it didn't really make a difference to their confidence or improve them as practitioners but gave them an opportunity to reflect on their practice. They had NVQs in childcare and one had completed the Level 2 Playwork. Level 3 repeated much of what had been covered in the Level 2 Playwork qualification.” (PfS Employer)

Evidence relating to the impact of PfS on the quality of childcare or playwork

- 4.60 With regard to the quality of participants' work, most PfS participants (72 out of 85) were of the opinion that the qualification had improved the quality of the childcare/play work they deliver. A smaller proportion (11 out of 85) said the

qualification had not helped improve the quality of their work. The remaining respondents (2 out of 85) noted that they did not know. Participants explained how they thought they had improved the quality of their work.

“It has improved the quality of my planning. Made me aware of the need to personalise provision. Also, I place more of an emphasis on letting children make decisions on some sessions. I let the children take the lead more, which I think has improved their enjoyment.” (PfS participant)

“It made me pick up things that needed improving, things we were lax on. I became more aware of the numbers [for ratios], of recording accidents etc. Even though my manager would be checking all that I then understood it better and could check myself.” (PfS participant)

The majority of employers also agreed that the qualification had increased the quality of their employee’s childcare (see example below relating to employer’s view on the impact of the qualification on quality). Employers talked about the benefits to staff of spending time reflecting on the theory behind their practice – with some employers noting that the qualifications were particularly beneficial for less experienced employees. Employers referred to a number of outcomes that had increased the quality of provision: employees being more informed about the importance of play and effective strategies to support play; employees being better informed and more able to discuss children’s developmental milestones with parents; employees being able to plan and deliver sessions in ways that respond to children’s requirements.

Example: Participating employer's views on the impact of the qualification on quality

"If I'm being honest, my expectations about what I thought we'd get out of the qualifications were limited. I signed up a bit reluctantly because I thought about the impact that having two people doing the qualification would have on our small setting.

"But I have noticed a definite difference over time. They are both more reflective and knowledgeable. They were already fairly experienced members of staff but the qualification has led to them carrying out session observations in a more informed way – now they assess what had worked well and suggest ways of changing or improving future sessions. They also question and challenge more than previously – in a positive way, which is a sign that they are thinking about their practice differently. One thing it has shown me is that it's not about the certificate at the end but the opportunity that [the qualification] gives staff to think about how they do things and think about what they can do better."

Employer, East Wales

- 4.61 Those employers whose staff had completed CCLD qualifications were slightly more likely to report a positive difference in the quality of their staff's provision. The comments of employers who expressed scepticism about the impact of qualifications on the quality of provision tended to fall into one of two categories. Firstly, employers noted that where participants were already experienced, they didn't feel this made a difference to quality. Secondly, and linked to the above point, it was suggested by some that quality of practice comes with experience, rather than through qualifications.

"I don't think that chasing qualifications because of changes to rules, ticking boxes, etc makes a difference to quality. I'd rather have a good [team] with the right attitude, willing to learn from what they see around them, than staff who are qualified to level 3 but can't change a nappy." (PfS employer, nursery, East Wales)

Evidence relating to the impact of PfS on practitioners' knowledge and skills

4.62 Most participants (77 out of 85) indicated that the qualification has increased their knowledge and skills in childcare/play. Only a small number of respondents (8 out of 85) said that the qualification had not increased their knowledge and skills, with one respondent noting that they don't know. Participants felt that gaining the qualification through PfS had made them more "reflective" practitioners, with a better appreciation of how to plan and deliver activities to support children's developmental milestones.

"It has increased my knowledge and understanding and has made me more mindful about my practice and how I support children." (PfS participant)

4.63 Nearly three-quarters of PfS employers who contributed to the evaluated reported that the qualification had increased their employees' knowledge and skills. Once again, a number of employers commented that it was the relatively younger and less experienced members of staff who gained most from the qualification. Employers noted that, by encouraging staff to reflect on their working practices and methods, the qualification had boosted their knowledge of childcare and play and had helped bring "added maturity" to a number of staff members.

Additional outcomes reported by practitioners and employers

4.64 One of the intended medium-term outcomes of Progress for Success was to raise the status of professionals working in the sector, helping to make a career in childcare and playwork more attractive. Three-quarters of PfS practitioners surveyed (64 out of 85) reported that the qualification has made them more likely to continue to work in the childcare or play sector. Some practitioners commented that the qualification has opened up new promotion opportunities within their setting and wider progression opportunities across the sector.

4.65 A quarter of employers reported that their employee had taken on additional responsibilities as a direct result of completing the qualification. A smaller proportion noted that staff had taken on additional responsibilities but not as a result of gaining the qualification. Around half of employers noted that their employee was in the

same role. A number of employers cited ongoing challenges with retention within the sector – of these a minority felt that upskilling the workforce risked compounding these challenges. An unintended outcome for a couple of settings was that it led to them losing staff to another childcare provider, which was a source of considerable frustration, particularly for smaller settings where there may be fewer opportunities for promotion and progression.

“If you're being pushed to upskill staff but it makes life more difficult down the line then that's not great. One member of staff who did Level 3 has left to work elsewhere. This is the problem for us: qualified staff are going to be harder to keep. I understand the drive to professionalise the workforce but it can also be unsettling for settings if it's leading to staff having itchy feet.” (Employer, WWV)

- 4.66 The majority of PfS participants surveyed during the evaluation noted that they anticipate that they will be working in the childcare or play sector in both two and five years' time: 88 per cent thought they would still be in the sector in two years, and 72 per cent anticipated working in the sector in five years.
- 4.67 Over a quarter of PfS participants (28 per cent) had completed, or were currently undertaking, further training. A further 31 per cent answered that they had not yet pursued further training but were planning on doing so. Among those who had undertaken training since PfS, the most frequently cited examples were:
- progressed to a Level 3, having previously completed Level 2 in either childcare or play (some participants completed Level 2 and began their Level 3 through PfS);
 - Level 5 qualifications in childcare or play;
 - teaching assistant qualifications;
 - social care qualifications;
 - safeguarding;
 - first aid;
 - Welsh language courses.

- 4.68 PfS employers referred to a number of other benefits and outcomes. Employers felt that having more qualified staff was useful “from a business standpoint”, noting that they are able to refer to staff qualifications in marketing materials.
- 4.69 Settings where multiple members of staff gained qualifications through Progress for Success felt that the availability of free training through operation was beneficial in enabling them to demonstrate a commitment to investing in staff development. By freeing up employees’ time to complete the qualification employers felt that this conveyed a positive message about employers supporting upskilling.
- 4.70 A small number of employees noted that staff who were reluctant to pursue qualifications had been inspired to access training, having seen other staff in their setting gain a Level 2 or Level 3 qualification.

A comment on other medium / long-term outcomes

- 4.71 The Progress for Success Business Plan set out a number of medium- and longer-term outcomes for the operation. In most cases, it has not been possible to draw any robust conclusions on whether these intended outcomes have been met. This includes the medium/longer term outcome to improve children’s early years attainment, educational outcomes and to lead to parents being more likely to work due to increased confidence in childcare. No robust baseline data was established at the operation design phase against which to measure these outcomes. In addition, isolating the impact of PfS is highly problematic, given the range of factors that influence children’s attainment and parental attitudes. A further outcome related to practitioners progressing into higher paid employment: although there was some evidence of PfS participants taking on additional responsibilities and progressing to more senior roles, no baseline data exists against which to measure changes in income.

East Wales and West Wales and the Valleys

Marketing and recruitment

Progress for Success was marketed as an all-Wales campaign. The evaluation found no differences in training providers methods of recruiting learners between the two regions.

Training providers experienced difficulties in recruiting and supporting participants in more rural areas. However, this was linked to travel times and practical considerations, as opposed to any differences in models of delivery between WWV and EW.

Learners experiences of how they were recruited to the operation did not differ between West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales.

Based on survey results from PfS participants, most learners in West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales heard about PfS through their employers. In both regions the same proportion (55 per cent) reported hearing about the opportunity directly through their employer. Participants in WWV were more likely to have heard about the operation from training providers than their counterparts in EW (23 per cent stated they had heard about PfS from a training provider in WWV, compared with 14 per cent in EW).

There were no discernible differences in motivations to take part in PfS between participants from WWV and those from EW, based on survey data collected.

Implementation

Progress for Success was implemented as an all-Wales operation and the evaluation found no differences in implementation between WWV and EW. Differences in frequency of assessor contact or in the strength of the working relationships were more local and not linked to differences between the East Wales and the West Wales and the Valleys programmes.

Essential skills were embedded in the PfS qualifications in the two delivery areas, and there were no differences in the views of employers and participants in the two areas.

Learners in WWV and EW were offered the opportunity to follow all or some of their PfS qualifications through the medium of Welsh. Only 13 individuals, and all of them from WWV chose to complete their qualification wholly in Welsh, but this is likely linked to the linguistic profile of that programme region rather than differences in how the operation was designed or delivered.

Outputs and outcomes

Progress for Success operated in EW and WWV and increased the skills levels of the early years, childcare and play workforce in the two programme areas, but fell considerably short of its original target in both WWV and EW.

The operation provided training to 602 employees across WWV against a target of 1,338, and provided training to 342 employees across EW against a target of 721.

There were no significant differences in levels of increased confidence reported by participants between the two programme areas.

5. Incorporating the WEFO Cross-cutting themes

Summary findings: CCTs

- Three cross-cutting themes (CCTs) were integrated into all of the 2014-2020 Structural Funds Programmes, namely equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, including Welsh language; sustainable development; and tackling poverty and social exclusion.
- PfS integrated these CCTs into the operation to upskill the childcare and play workforces at the design and procurement stage and the Welsh Government set out a contractual requirement to the providers of the qualifications to address and report against the CCTs.
- There was limited evidence of any additional activity or engagement with the CCTs over and above that which training providers already had in place in their delivery of the mainstream apprenticeship framework. Little information was available to the evaluators at a Welsh Government or training provider level as to how the cross-cutting themes had been addressed, and what had been achieved.

Background to cross-cutting themes

- 5.1 Three cross-cutting themes (CCTs) are integrated into all of the 2014-2020 structural fund programmes, namely equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, including Welsh language; sustainable development; and tackling poverty and social exclusion, as set out in paragraph 2.25. This chapter considers the extent to which the PfS has supported the cross-cutting themes. The evidence is drawn primarily from interviews with Welsh Government officials, interviews with training providers, stakeholder interviews and desk research.

Overview

- 5.2 The delivery of PfS was procured under the existing work-based learning framework and the contract between Welsh Government and each successful provider set out the obligations under the cross-cutting themes, which included written policies and procedures.
- 5.3 The design of the operation, in its upskilling of older workers who were previously unable to access the qualifications contributes to the theme of equal opportunities; and the focus on childcare and play workers contributes to towards improving access to higher quality childcare, which in turn can improve the life chances of children linked to both equal opportunities and tackling poverty.
- 5.4 The training providers already had policies and action plans in place and were reporting on how they were addressing the cross-cutting themes as part of the WBL framework contract requirements. Training providers explained that these policies and procedures were well established and when starting to deliver PfS it was a matter of continuing with existing arrangements. with the launch of PfS and no new or changed activity to address the CCTs took place. CCTs were reviewed and monitored at a WBL or provider-wide basis rather than specifically for PfS.
- 5.5 Data on gender, disability, language, care responsibilities was recorded by training providers from all participants, but training providers did not recall any additional requirements or guidance linked specifically to PfS. The evaluation found only limited knowledge and recognition among stakeholders of the CCTs, and the wider links between the operation and other Welsh Government's strategies named in the PfS Business Plan.

Equal opportunities, gender mainstreaming and the Welsh language

- 5.6 The Business Plan affirmed that the PfS operation contributes towards the cross-cutting Theme of Equal Opportunities through being "open to all eligible existing

practitioners aged 25 and above, regardless of age / gender / health / disability / ethnicity / etc. to allow for equality of opportunity to up-skill". The plan notes that "recent evidence indicates that the majority of the existing workforce are aged 25 and above, therefore, the operation will indirectly support older workers and participants with disabilities or health issues, to remain in work and continue to learn new skills". An Equality Impact Assessment completed for PfS by the Welsh Government concluded that no groups with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 would be negatively affected by the operation.

5.7 Targets were set for equal opportunities in the WWV business plan. None of these targets were reached:

- Disability targets
 - The PfS disability targets were set at 10 per cent of the target group being disabled within WWV.
 - According to monitoring data 22 disabled people enrolled on the operation which corresponds to 3.8 per cent of all participants.
- Participants from black and minority ethnic groups
 - The business plan set a target of 2 per cent of participants from black and minority ethnic groups.
 - According to monitoring data 10 of the enrolled participants (just under 2 per cent) are from a black and minority ethnic background.
- Gender targets
 - The business plan set out a 95 per cent female / 5 per cent male split but notes that according to monitoring data the male / female split of participants enrolling on PfS was 94.9 per cent / 4.1 per cent.
- Welsh language targets
 - A target of 159 was set for Welsh-medium participants in WWV
 - 2.25 per cent of WWV participants, and 1.62 per cent overall enrolled on a fully Welsh-medium qualification.

5.8 At the operation's inception, the actions taken to address equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming from the Welsh Government included ensuring that all

marketing and promotional materials issued were gender neutral and included a range of people. Marketing materials also included individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds and different genders in images used to ensure all existing practitioners are targeted equally and to avoid gender stereotyping.

- 5.9 The PfS operation also part funded the post of work-based learning equalities and diversity champion at the National Training Federation for Wales (alongside part-funding of a bilingual champion and a quality champion). The role was established in May 2016 to provide the work-based learning provider network, including PfS providers, with a supportive structure to help increase the take up of apprenticeships by individuals from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and disabled people. As part of the support available, a toolkit was prepared for providers.²⁰ There was no evidence that PfS leads and assessors working for training providers had engaged with the equalities and diversity champion.
- 5.10 As part of the procurement exercise undertaken to appoint contractors to deliver qualifications under this operation, training providers were required to have equality and diversity policies in place and to provide evidence of their implementation. Training providers were asked to outline how they had addressed this cross-cutting theme in interviews, however all interviewees referred to existing measures and plans that had been put in place for the mainstream apprenticeship framework prior to starting PfS. Discussions about equalities took place at the apprenticeship framework contract management meetings, and there was no evidence of additional activity specifically associated with the delivery of PfS.
- 5.11 A further cross-cutting theme for the operation was support for the Welsh language. At a wider programme level, one of the key ESF objectives for equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming was to “identify and support opportunities to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language and support speakers of the

²⁰ Welsh Government, (2018) [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit for the Work Based Learner Provider Network](#)

language”.²¹ The evaluation reviewed the planning for Welsh-medium delivery and its take-up (see section 4.37 onwards) to explore “how the operation has contributed to the Welsh Government’s strategic aims for the Welsh language”.

5.12 The 10-year plan for the sector²² includes high-level aim of a bilingual workforce and in a written statement around the time of launching PfS , the Welsh Government stated that PfS will “support the aim of the Welsh Language Strategy to achieve the ambition for Wales to become a country where Welsh-medium education and training are integral parts of the education infrastructure”.²³ This was consistent with the Welsh language strategy²⁴ in place at the time of designing PfS which outlined a vision to ensure the Welsh language thrives. The current long-term Welsh language strategy for 2017 onwards, Cymraeg 2050, and associated work programme,²⁵ sets out the aim to “expand Welsh-medium provision in the early years as an access point for Welsh-medium education”. In this strategy, the Welsh Government recognises that the childcare workforce will have a key role in achieving the aim, and “we need to ensure a coordinated plan to develop this important workforce. We will also need to see a substantial increase in the number of post-16 lecturers and trainers able to teach through the medium of Welsh”.²⁶ The play sector workforce is not mentioned.

5.13 At the business planning stage there was an expectation that PfS would be able to build on the endowment of a previous project, Cam wrth Gam, but there was subsequently no clear plan as to how the Welsh-medium targets would be met. Cam wrth Gam was granted a temporary extension while there were delays in launching PfS. Once launched all the contracted training providers engaged with Mudiad Meithrin as a sub-contractor but the operation fell short of its Welsh-medium targets and far fewer learners enrolled on a Welsh-medium qualification than aimed for.

²¹ Welsh European Funding Office, (2017) [Cross Cutting Themes Key Document – European Social Fund Integrating the Cross Cutting Themes across the 2014-2020 European Structural Funds](#)

²² Welsh Government (2017) [Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan](#)

²³ [Written Statement - 10 Year Early Years, Childcare and Play Workforce Plan](#)

²⁴ Welsh Government, (2014) [A living language: a language for living. Welsh Language Strategy 2012-17](#)

²⁵ Welsh Government, (2017) [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers Work programme 2017–21](#)

²⁶ Ibid, page 43.

Sustainable development

- 5.14 The Business Plan for PfS set out that the PfS operation intended to contribute towards the theme of Sustainable Development by “promoting social justice and equality of opportunity” and “to ensure all eligible practitioners have the opportunity to upskill”. The Plan also set out that “PfS will directly benefit all children in WWV in their early years by ensuring greater access to higher quality provision regardless of the setting they attend”; furthermore, in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which came into force in April 2016, PfS intended to contribute to all of the well-being goals. The Business Plan noted that the operation sought to contribute, in particular, to “A prosperous Wales” by developing a skilled workforce; and “A more equal Wales” as children will be able to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances.
- 5.15 Based on a review of operation documentation, it was unclear to what extent sustainable development was promoted through the delivery of PfS. Interviews with training providers sought to understand whether there were additional measures in place, however training providers indicated that PfS was delivered mostly using the same staffing structure from existing centres or offices. As such, there was little change in how training providers operated and therefore made no discernible contribution towards the theme of sustainable development.
- 5.16 This cross-cutting theme included actions to support local supply chain development. During interviews with training providers there was evidence that the contracted training providers had established sub-contracting arrangements with new providers, and strengthened links with existing contacts. Training providers explained that these were business decisions based on how best to deliver in different geographical areas or to a certain cohort (Welsh language trainees) rather than driven by the requirements of the contract.

Tackling poverty and social exclusion

- 5.17 The Business Plan set out that the PfS operation intended to contribute towards the cross-cutting theme of Tackling Poverty by “enabling those experiencing in-work poverty to access more highly-skilled, better paid jobs”. The Plan identified that “high quality early education and childcare has an important role in supporting our drive to tackle poverty and inequality as set out in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan and Strategic Equality Plan”.
- 5.18 There are clear links between PfS and the Welsh Government’s wider tackling poverty priorities. The Business Plan explained that existing eligible practitioners, who may be subject to in-work poverty, would be provided with the opportunity to access higher skills and this may result in higher pay as a result of the operation. No robust evidence emerged through the evaluation that participating in PfS resulted in higher pay for participants, although a number of participants who contributed to the evaluation had progressed into other roles or had left the childcare or play sectors.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 In this chapter we present evaluation conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings.

Overview of operation achievements, outputs and outcomes

6.2 Progress for Success funded childcare and play qualifications for 862 practitioners aged over 25 across the West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales regions. Evaluation evidence indicates that those who completed qualifications benefitted from increased skills and confidence and that it improved the quality of provision in many settings.

6.3 Although Progress for Success succeeded in increasing skills levels among the childcare and play workforce, it fell short of the targets set. The operation provided training to 862 of employees across Wales, compared with the target of 2,059. The regional breakdown was as follows:

- In WWV, 578 employees signed up, compared with a target of 1,338, which equates to 43.20 per cent of the target.
- In EW, 284 employees signed up, compared with a target of 721, which equates to 39.39 per cent of the target.

Table 6.1 Area and gender of PfS participants starting and gaining a PfS qualification

| Area | Gender | No of starts | No gaining a qualification | Percentage of starts gaining a qualification |
|--------------|--------|--------------|----------------------------|--|
| WWV | Male | 24 | 12 | 50.00% |
| | Female | 554 | 362 | 65.34% |
| EW | Male | 8 | 5 | 62.50% |
| | Female | 276 | 204 | 73.91% |
| Total | Male | 32 | 17 | 53.13% |
| | Female | 830 | 566 | 68.19% |
| | All | 862 | 583 | 67.63% |

6.4 Table 6.1 above shows that the majority (67.63 per cent) of those who started a course on the programme gained a qualification at the end. As noted in chapter 4,

the business plan set a target of 77 per cent of participants gaining a qualification, which was not met.

- 6.5 The operation did not meet its targets relating to the numbers of participants gaining qualifications through the medium of Welsh: 13 participants pursued their qualification fully through the medium of Welsh, compared to a target of 159 in WWV.
- 6.6 The evaluation found that the qualification resulted in practitioners taking on additional responsibility and incorporating new methods in their practice. Over a quarter of PfS participants had completed or were in the process of completing further training.
- 6.7 The Progress for Success Business Plan set out a number of medium- and longer-term outcomes for the operation. These intended outcomes included improving children's educational attainment and leading to parents being more likely to work due to increased confidence in childcare. The rationale for identifying these outcomes is unclear and no baseline data was established against which to measure the impact and influence of the operation.

Operational design

- 6.8 Through its overall aims to upskill the existing childcare and play workforce, PfS was aligned other Welsh Government childcare policies, however stakeholders were sceptical about being able to isolate and measure the contribution of PfS towards broader policy goals.
- 6.9 A key feature of Progress for Success was that it provided funded work-based learning opportunities for existing childcare and play workers aged over 25. The policy announcement – which came during the planning phase for PfS – to implement an all-age Apprenticeship Programme removed a key rationale for the operation and meant it was no longer filling a gap in funded provision. There was, as a result, confusion across the childcare and play sector about how Progress for Success differed from the wider apprenticeship offer.

- 6.10 As the planning phase was already well progressed, it was decided to continue with the planned operation. It is reasonable to conclude that, had the announcement to deliver an all-age Apprenticeship Programme been made some 6 months earlier, there would have been a strong case to not to continue with plans to deliver the operation.
- 6.11 To be eligible to benefit from free training through Progress for Success, employees were required to be aged 25 or over and employed for 16 hours. There was consensus among training providers that the eligibility criteria were restrictive, rendered it extremely challenging to meet targets set and resulted in many (part-time) employees from accessing the funded qualifications. This led many stakeholders, including training providers, to question whether the estimated number of eligible participants was robust and realistic.
- 6.12 The delivery model and the assumptions made about Welsh language provision did not take account of the profile of Welsh learners pursuing qualifications in childcare and play, many of whom have traditionally been aged under 25 and new entrants to the sector.

Model of delivery

- 6.13 Progress for Success was delivered through an apprenticeship model. Training providers were procured to deliver the qualifications through an existing framework contract. This resulted in some specialist providers not being able to tender to deliver qualifications through the operation (however a range of more specialist providers were subsequently contracted to support provision through sub-contracting arrangements).
- 6.14 Between July 2016 and October 2017 Progress for Success represented a change to established patterns of provision. Progress for Success was considered by some stakeholders and training providers to have been a disruptive and destabilising factor in terms of patterns of provision and relationships between training providers and employers. Some contracted PfS training providers, and some of the subcontracted providers, were relatively inexperienced in delivering qualifications in

the fields of childcare and/or play. A number of sector stakeholders were of the view that this may have resulted in a temporary reduction in the take-up of childcare and playwork qualifications across Wales during the time PfS was live.

Marketing and recruitment

- 6.15 A distinct brand for Progress for Success was developed and a national marketing was commissioned by the Welsh Government. However, the PfS brand was not well recognised by employers and prospective learners and was of limited use as an aid to recruitment for training providers. Relatively few PfS employers and participants reported hearing about Progress for Success through adverts and materials produced as part of the national marketing campaign.
- 6.16 Training providers experienced challenges in recruiting participants in sufficient numbers to reach targets they had been set. As a result, they invested additional resources in seeking to recruit participants onto the operation. Some of the methods used by training providers to sign up learners were deemed to be overly insistent, with employers reporting that they received multiple marketing calls from a number of different providers. Questions were raised about the accuracy of information provided by some training providers during their marketing and recruitment activity, with some qualified learners being encouraged to pursue additional qualifications unnecessarily.

Implementation of Progress for Success

- 6.17 Essential skills delivery was embedded into the PfS qualifications. Sector stakeholders welcomed the opportunity to address essential skills through the operation, but concerns were raised about how essential skills qualifications and the initial diagnostic test were communicated to employers and employees. Some participants perceived the essential skills component of the qualification to be of little relevance to them.
- 6.18 There were variations in how closely assessors from various training providers worked with learners. Most participants were satisfied with the amount of time their

assessor spent with them and the quality of this support. However, a minority of survey respondents were not satisfied, noting that they had not received the level or quality of support that had been promised.

- 6.19 The operation fell short of the targets set for Welsh-medium qualifications. The main reason suggested by training providers and some stakeholders was that the potential pool of eligible learners in Welsh-medium settings was far smaller than estimated. Other reasons were that many of those workers who could take Welsh-medium qualifications worked in sessional day care and for fewer than 16 hours a week. There was evidence of reluctance by participants to undertake qualification fully through the medium of Welsh.

Cross-cutting themes

- 6.20 Three cross-cutting themes (CCTs) are integrated into all of the 2014-2020 Structural Funds Programmes, namely equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, including Welsh language; sustainable development; and tackling poverty and social exclusion.
- 6.21 PfS has integrated these CCTs into the operation to upskill the childcare and play workforces at the design and procurement stage and the Welsh Government set out a contractual requirement to the providers of the qualifications to address and report against the CCTs.
- 6.22 There was limited evidence of any additional activity or engagement with the CCT agendas over that which was already in place by the providers in their delivery of the mainstream apprenticeship framework. Little information was available to the evaluators at a Welsh Government or training provider level as to how the cross-cutting themes had been addressed, and what had been achieved.

Recommendations and issues for further consideration

6.23 Based on the evaluation findings it is recommended that:

- i. The Welsh Government should continue to fund childcare and play qualifications: Investment in upskilling the childcare and play workforces is still needed. The relevance of this operation to the wider agenda of childcare and play has increased during the lifetime of PfS with the national roll-out of the childcare offer and the associated need to ensure that there is a skilled workforce to deliver the offer.
- ii. Future operations would benefit from ensuring that eligibility criteria are as broad and as flexible as possible: The PfS eligibility criteria restricted the operation to those who were over 25 and working at least 16 hours; these restrictions may have contributed to the operation failing to meet its targets. Future operations should be designed to be as flexible as possible within funding constraints so that the changing needs of the sector can be addressed.
- iii. Provide briefings and further information on qualifications for employers. Due to a number of instances where employers and participants were confused as to what the qualification would entail, it is recommended that the Welsh Government, working with sector stakeholders, should provide clear details centrally on the qualifications' requirements including the essential skills element, typical hours needed for assignments, how long a level 2 or 3 should take, NMS requirements, and the expected support from employers.
- iv. There is a need to provide continued and targeted support to increase Welsh language skills across the childcare and playwork workforces. Future operations aimed at upskilling the workforce should extend Welsh-medium and bilingual WBL provision in order to support the vision set out in the Welsh Government Cymraeg 2050 strategy to expand Welsh-medium provision in the early years as an access point for Welsh-medium education.

- v.** Research is required to understand why Welsh-speaking childcare and play practitioners choose to follow qualifications through the medium of English and whether this varies in different parts of Wales. An understanding of these reasons could inform the design and delivery of qualifications through the medium of Welsh or bilingually in future.
- vi.** Review data collection and monitoring: It is recommended that Welsh Government continues to collect monitoring data on participants but should consider collecting further monitoring information on their host employees to enable a better understanding of the each of the qualifications, and inform future evaluations.
- vii.** Identify and disseminate good practice in supporting and assessing learners: Participants and employers valued the support available from the assessors. There were isolated complaints about the high turnover of assessors in some areas, and an observation by some employers and participants that their assessors' workloads seemed high. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to examine the role and terms of the assessors, however the Welsh Government should consider further research into the role played by assessors in supporting qualifications.
- viii.** The Welsh Government should encourage training providers to consider the qualifications they provide to childcare and play employers as part of a broader suite of business planning and business development support. This evaluation of Progress for Success has found evidence of the importance of trusted working relationships between training providers and settings in supporting positive outcomes. Through the programmes and operations it funds, Welsh Government could explore ways of encouraging training providers to place a greater emphasis on understanding settings' business plans and their priorities as organisations. There are potential benefits to training providers by gaining a deeper understanding of the sector's needs which, in turn, can inform their own provision and methods of delivering qualifications.

The childcare and play workforce: development and professionalisation

A literature review

Presented to Welsh Government by Arad
Research

November 2019

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1. Introduction

The focus for this literature review is on understanding what approaches and activities work to develop and professionalise the childcare and play workforce. The purpose of the review is to inform the Welsh Government of examples of practice in this area from other countries and contexts to support future policy decisions for the childcare and playwork sector in Wales. As a result, an overview of the current literature, with reference to qualifications, training and skill development is included, with examples of specific programmes and training delivered to support the development of the workforce.

The review's objectives are to:

- Summarise and evaluate research focusing on the development of the childcare and playwork workforce.
- Summarise and evaluate existing evidence of effective actions and interventions to develop and professionalise childcare and playwork.
- Identify key findings which will inform further policy development for the childcare and playwork workforce in Wales.

Methodology and search strategy

The review has been designed as a focused assessment of available evidence: it is intended to support and provide further context to the evaluation of the ESF-funded Progress for Success operation and, as such, resources were not available to complete a full systematic review of relevant literature. Nevertheless, from the outset it was decided to divide the literature searches into “childcare” and “playwork”, in order to help organise and focus the searches and review. An initial search of titles and abstracts using the following was run for the childcare element, with “play”/“playwork” replacing “childcare” for the playwork element:

Childcare AND Staff OR Practitioner OR Workforce; And Qualification OR Skill OR Training OR Professional development using databases such as: SCOPUS; the Directory of Open Access Journals; ScienceDirect Journals; ERIC and JSTOR.

The search was focused by targeting sources in the following subject areas: “education”, “learning”, “professional development” and excluding “nursing” and “sport” subjects. References sourced were also mined for the references they cited, this resulted in further sources being identified. Grey literature is not included on these databases, as a consequence searches of Google Scholar, and key organisations such as the British Association for Early Childhood Education and the Nuffield Foundation, and searches within specific targeted academic journals such as the following were undertaken:

- Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood
- Early Childhood Education Journal
- European Early Childhood Education Journal
- International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy
- International Journal of Early Childhood
- International Journal of Play
- Journal of Early Childhood Research
- Journal of Playwork Practice

The scope of the review is concerned with publications since 2009 and included both national and international sources.

Reviewing the quality of evidence

To provide an indication of the quality of the evidence included in the discussion of specific examples of professional development delivered (Section 3.2), the following criteria were used:

- the study context is described in detail allowing applicability to other settings /contexts;
- a robust research design, with the methodology, size of sample and rationale well defended;
- evidence supports the findings and conclusions, and demonstrates a coherent logic.

References linked to the examples discussed in section 3.2 have been coded to indicate their quality:

Red - no criteria achieved.

Amber - one criteria achieved.

Green - two or more criteria achieved.

The quality of the sources referenced is listed in the Annex.

It is important to note that although several sources did not achieve any criteria, as they are literature reviews or very small-scale examples, they have been included because they provide additional evidence of a particular type of delivery.

The next section positions the review in the current literature, presenting an overview of the importance of qualifications for the childcare and playwork sector. This is followed by a summary of the key elements required for effective professional development and training, with some specific practice examples which illustrate some of the key factors in more detail.

2. The importance of childcare and playwork workforce qualifications

This section provides context and an overview of the current thinking regarding the significance and role of qualifications to the childcare and playwork sector and includes examples from across the UK and further afield.

Key learning points

- The necessity for clear progression routes in the profession has been identified
- The qualifications held by the childcare and playwork workforce contribute to the quality of care delivered
- The quality and professionalism of the early years workforce have been linked to positive pre-school educational outcomes
- It takes time to embed initiatives designed to improve workforce development
- Practitioners gaining higher qualifications sometimes leave the childcare sector
- In recent years, there has been a shift in policy emphasis from early years education to providing childcare for parents to support employability

Professionalisation of the sector has become more apparent in recent years with the need for clear progression routes and consistency in training and professional development. The impact of qualified staff on the quality of care is also raised in this section, including differences between private and public funded settings.

Importance of qualifications

The qualifications of the childcare and playwork workforce are one factor that contributes to the quality of care delivered. Structural quality and process quality provide a framework to

explore the sector. Qualifications of the workforce are part of the structural quality, which also includes elements such as class size, child-teacher-ratio, all believed to indirectly impact child development (Bonetti and Brown, 2018; Slot, 2018; Finnegan, 2015; Whitebread et al, 2015); whereas process quality refers to the nature of adult – child interactions (Sim et al., 2018; Anders, 2015).

Staff qualifications perform a critical element of the “iron triangle”, which also includes the child to staff ratio and group size, all viewed as “being instrumental to structural quality” (Bonetti and Brown, 2018, p. 26). It is proposed that the ability to consistently devise engaging content requires a level of confidence that is often obtained through professional qualifications, in addition to being able to maintain higher quality staff-child interactions (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

International evidence

An international analysis of workforce development for early childhood education and care also states that “higher pre-service qualifications” resulted in “higher quality staff-child interactions” (OECD, 2018, p. 66). An overview of international evidence based on the childcare policies and practices from 21 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries was conducted to inform the Childcare Commission (Centre for Research in Early Childhood and Ipsos MORI, 2013). This study noted that countries operating a “split system” required workers to hold different qualifications according to whether they worked in “kindergarten/pre-school” or childcare, but countries with “integrated services” tended to have higher qualification requirements for staff working with younger children (Centre for Research in Early Childhood and Ipsos MORI, 2013, p. 24). Others provide further insight with it noted in a study that examined childcare in 27 European countries, funded by the German Federal Ministry, that a couple of challenges for the early childhood education workforce include:

“ ... a common lack of truly flexible and inclusive pathways linked to formal professional recognition and status for all practitioners in the field; another is the continuing need to seek more effective ways of including men in the early childhood workforce”. (Oberhuemer, 2011, p. 55)

UK evidence

An overview of professionalisation in the early years and childcare sector noted the range of policy initiatives across the UK nations that have aimed to professionalise the sector's workforce in recent years (BERA-TACTYC, 2017). Such intentions are also evident in Wales with the development of new qualifications for childcare and play and the importance of continuing professional development (Welsh Government, 2018). A "high-level relevant" qualification is believed to be the most important structural aspect of childcare, with the presence of highly qualified graduate staff influencing interactions with children and raising the quality of care that less qualified colleagues provide (Wall et al., 2015, p. 85; Hillman and Williams, 2015; Bertram and Pascal, 2014; Parker, 2013).

A review of the Scottish childcare workforce also noted that qualifications and professional development processes are key for an effective workforce (Siraj and Kingston, 2015). Even though it is acknowledged that qualifications are important to "quality staff", respondents from one small-scale practitioner study (18 settings /165 practitioners) raised concern about these as an "absolute guarantee of quality", as relationships between staff teams are critical (Cottle and Alexander, 2012, p. 648) along with the ability of staff to create a "better pedagogical environment" (OECD, 2017, p. 23; p. 86).

Nevertheless, it is reported that "well trained and high-quality professionals are the key to providing high quality childcare" (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019, p. 10) and graduate-led care "can raise the quality of provision" (Osgood et al., 2017, p. 13). A recent report of 16 case studies completed for the Department for Education that focused on "good quality early years settings" found that staff "qualifications were valued", with high quality settings prioritising "on-going continuing professional development" (Callanan et al., 2017, p. 62). One large-scale longitudinal study²⁷ that investigated the influences of pre-school on educational outcomes for the Department for Education concluded that quality of the pre-school was "positive for a range of academic outcomes" (Taggart et al., 2015, p. 8),

²⁷ Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project ([EPPSE](#)) began in 1997, the progress of 3,000 children monitored from the age of three to 16 years old.

thus providing a strong rationale for developing the childcare and playwork workforce in order to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for children.

Other research supports this commenting that child outcomes are naturally positively correlated with the increase of staff professionalism due to the resulting improvement in pedagogical quality (OECD, 2012). Nevertheless, the different preparation and working conditions of staff working with younger children and those aged three to four could be explored separately (Bonetti and Brown, 2018). For younger children (one-two year olds) stability and low ratios are critical, with “highly qualified childcare professionals for those aged three and over” being more important (Parker, 2013, p. 7; Melhuish and Gardiner, 2018, p. 28).

However, it is also believed to be difficult to determine exactly which elements of delivery, for example ratios, qualifications, curriculum, or regulations are specifically responsible for improving the quality of childcare (Butler, 2016; Parker, 2013). On the other hand a small qualitative study of 12 practitioners over a six-year period concluded that perceptions of children’s needs formed the basis of practitioners’ professionalism, and policy and curriculum are interpreted to meet these (Brock, 2012).

The number of childcare hours experienced differs across the public and private sector, for example some children experience long hours in private day nurseries, which can also influence quality outcomes (Blanden et al., 2017a). However, according to one large-scale review of data on over two million children it is proposed that conventional approaches to measure quality such as Ofsted ratings and staff qualifications “do not influence educational outcomes in most setting types” (Blanden et al., 2017b, p. 5).

Challenges for the sector

It is reported that across the four UK nations initiatives to improve workforce development “have not always had time to embed and often lacked integrating strategies” (BERA-TACTYC, 2017, p. 11), with the provision of important continuing professional development

“fragmented” (BERA-TACTYC, 2017, p. 14). The importance of clear progression routes for the profession and the role of apprenticeships in childcare is recognised with further research recently proposed to explore training provision and professional development in England, with the non-graduate workforce’s skills also requiring attention (Department for Education, 2019).

It is noted that there has been a shift in the professional development for the sector in the past couple of decades; “from upskilling the workforce through higher level qualifications to developing learning communities, and on to supporting the workforce through supervision and mentoring” (BERA-TACTYC, 2017, p. 15). An increase in the number of graduates in recent years for England’s early childhood workforce provides evidence of a focus on professionalism (Department for Education, 2013), with the associated higher pay viewed as key to professionalise the workforce (Musgrave, 2010). However, the achievement of higher qualifications may also be viewed as a “route out of childcare” (Kendall et al., 2012, p. 551). On the other hand, others note that there is confusion surrounding training and qualifications in the sector and progress in driving improvements in workforce qualifications has slowed, with little attention given to ongoing training (Elwick et al., 2018; Stewart and Waldfoegel, 2017; Kalitowski, 2016; Finnegan 2016).

Changes in policy direction

The shift in policy in England - from early years education to providing childcare for parents to support employability – is mirrored in Wales through the current implementation of the funded Childcare Offer across the country for working parents.²⁸ Evidence presented by the Sutton Trust highlights the importance of staff being “well-trained and qualified”. However, the Sutton Trust believes that focusing on provision to allow parents back to work may negatively impact quality (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 2019, p. 28). A previous review of more than a thousand settings noted the variance in quality between private and public settings; private, voluntary and independent settings with staff possessing

²⁸ The Welsh Government have committed to 30 hours of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of three and four year olds for up to 48 weeks of the year.

better qualifications were associated with better quality for all children (Mathers and Smees, 2014). Professor Sylva's evidence to the All-Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility reinforced this point; reporting varying quality delivered in the private, voluntary and independent sector, which tended to be lower than the quality of childcare in the maintained sector (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 2019).

It is noted that the majority of this discussion is informed by the childcare literature, with limited reference to the playwork sector. The development of the playwork sector is more recent and although training "boomed" under the National Occupational Standards for Playwork introduced in 1992 – questions were raised regarding content and consistency of training (Newstead, 2015, p. 62). It has also been proposed that defining playwork is a central problem for the professionalisation of the sector – as it "is used to cover a myriad of ways" of delivering childcare and if the profession is continued to be viewed as a "conglomerate of separate activities" (after-school care, breakfast clubs; after-school activities and adventure playgrounds) "professionalisation will be a distant goal" (Dallal, 2015, p. 71).

The following section provides a deeper discussion on the elements needed to ensure the effectiveness of professional development activities for both the childcare and playwork sectors.

3. Effective professional development practice

This section presents proposed specific content and structure of professional development, along with a discussion of some examples of the implementation and delivery of such continuing professional development in practice.

The key elements of effective professional development

Reviews have been conducted in the UK and internationally to establish the success criteria needed for effective professional development.

Key learning points

- Reviews of the sector have identified the importance of;
 - a qualification system and staff qualifications;
 - acquisition of knowledge (particularly child development)
 - effective family engagement;
 - time to study material that is relevant to settings and delivered using an approach appropriate for the practitioner (e.g. online/face-to-face);
 - peer learning and the value of communities of practice
 - time for reflection.
 - Practitioners who have worked longer in the profession can positively influence the quality of care.
 - The commercial priority of private settings, and the perception of unpaid training time provide challenges for the delivery of professional development.
-

An extensive review of the early education and childcare qualifications in England drew attention to the need for high quality qualifications and professional development for the sector (Nutbrown, 2012). The review highlighted the following key issues for the development of the sector's workforce;

- the need for a clear and rigorous qualification system;

- fundamental to this system is a thorough understanding of child development and play and how this understanding can be applied most effectively;
- some critical content should include “non-negotiable” – safeguarding and child protection, health and safety, nutrition, first aid, legal frameworks and obligations (e.g. Equality Act), and inclusion and diversity, along with an understanding of language development, special needs and disability, and the importance of play;
- observations and assessments should be used to inform pedagogical processes, along with gaining experience in a range of settings;
- developing the skill to work effectively with families is also needed;
- time needs to be available to study, ensuring reflection and discussion.

(Nutbrown, 2012, p.17-22).

The review’s findings also noted that employers in the sector were uncertain as to which qualifications equipped workers most effectively and there was a need for greater standardisation, but cautioned against moving towards a single qualification (Nutbrown, 2012).

“The best professional development uses a blended approach including high quality materials, work-based learning and support, visits to other settings, experiences which challenge thinking, attending conferences, and provision of mentoring from outstanding leaders and peers.” (Nutbrown, 2012, p. 53)

A review for the US Department for Education that explored what effective professional development should look like concluded that the following features should be evident:

- specific and articulated objectives for professional development;
- a focus on developing practice, with emphasis given to linking knowledge and practice;
- collective participation of practitioners from the same setting;
- an intensity and duration to match the content;

- preparedness to undertake child assessments and interpret findings;
- a relevance to the setting/organisation.

(Zaslow et al., 2010, p. xi)

However, the review noted gaps in material with more training needed that focused on working with children under three years, and there was a need to explore the most appropriate approach to target the timing of professional development i.e. pre-service or in-service (Zaslow et al., 2010).

Developing qualifications

In order to develop the qualifications an improved Early Years Educator, Level 3 entry qualification, an early years apprenticeship scheme, along with an early years stream of the Teach First leadership development programme have emerged in the UK. Nevertheless, “there is an urgent need for a more strategic and joined-up approach to workforce development”, with particular concern surrounding the upskilling of the existing workforce (Kalitowski, 2016, p. 2) and “clear pathways would provide motivation for continuous professional development”, with “rigorous, challenging and fit for purpose” qualifications (Osgood et al., 2017, p. 100). Inspection processes requiring evidence of continuing professional development are an important element in the process (Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales, 2019; Welsh Government, 2014; Nutbrown, 2012; Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, 2010).

A review of England’s The Graduate Fund Programme, which is discussed in more detail later, concluded that although there were positive impacts in having more highly qualified members of staff, this is less apparent with “the quality of provision for infants and toddlers” and the “length of service” of staff was linked to higher quality support for children (Karemaker et al., 2011, p. 2). Others support the positive influence of more experienced staff, however, a study of 363 American childcare providers also noted an unexpected finding “that education had no significant relationship to feeling professional” (Martin et al., 2010, p. 347).

A review of the Scottish childcare workforce qualifications recommended that content and assessment of courses needs to reflect the “main business of the settings in which the student learners work” (Siraj and Kingston, 2015, p.104). Another Scottish review that focused on play also concluded the importance of child development knowledge for those working in “play”, with it proposed that creativity also be given more importance in the content of qualifications (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, p. 33). This extensive research project which included consultations with key stakeholders in Scottish education and play concluded that the gaps in professional development for all engaged in play could be solved with “funded play Doctorates (Professional doctorates), Academic play research network and Professional Doctorates and Part-Time PhDs” (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015, p. 29). Limited promotion of play qualifications was also to be addressed with updates to National Occupation Standards.

Knowledge of child development

Specific subject knowledge of child development is critical along with pedagogical knowledge, where theory is linked to practice, which results in staff being able to foster “the next stage in development”; opportunities for reflection are also important, as well as the “co-construction” of training content (Mathers et al., 2014, p. 41; Jensen and Brandi, 2018, p. 50).

“Training which supports practitioners in applying their knowledge, and ongoing on-site techniques such as coaching, can be more effective than one-off and one size-fits-all taught sessions which practitioners are then expected to adapt to their own contexts.” (Mathers et al., 2014, p. 41)

A scoping study of training and qualifications in England reported on particular curriculum content of qualifications; with the theories of child development and diverse placement experiences viewed as effective content (Osgood et al., 2017, p. 11). Practitioners also endorse the importance of understanding child development (Callanan et al., 2017, p. 64). Others expand this and note that although appropriate practice is vital child development needs to be “more extensive and cover a greater age range” (Siraj and Kingston, 2015, p.

37). Qualifications must also reflect the specific needs of the sector and be “evidence-based” (Siraj and Kingston, 2015, p. 11). This review of the Scottish childcare workforce also noted that effective professional development needs to include “guidance on supporting speaking and listening skills, emergent literacy, numeracy and science, linking learning to interests and allowing children to understand the purpose and function of their learning” (Siraj and Kingston, 2015, p. 40). However, a finding of this review which resonates in the Welsh context is the challenge of delivering training to settings that are located remotely, as distance learning is not believed to be “particularly effective” (Siraj and Kingston, 2015, p. 42).

Planning and delivering professional development

The perceived importance placed on professional development by workers was explored by a small-scale study conducted with 20 practitioners in the north of England. A key finding focused on the clear priority for private settings to “make money” which resulted in training viewed as “a low priority”, training was also reported to be “a nuisance because it is not paid” (Ingleby, 2018, p. 26). Consequently, there is a challenge to establish professional development training as being necessary, with pressures such as meeting targets, commercial priorities and inspections of concern to practitioners (Ingleby, 2018, p. 30).

Opportunities for peer learning and working in a community of practice were thought to be significant for successful training outcomes (Osgood et al., 2017, p. 13). Others have previously stated the importance of belonging to a group with a clear “sense of belonging” with opportunities such as networking important, proposing the significant role that a professional body would have for such practitioners (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010, p. 83). A survey of childcare providers (1,392 responses) in the US reported that participation in professional development was positively impacted when a “strong sense of identity as an early care and education professional was experienced” (Swartz et al., 2016, p. 781).

It has also been noted that capturing and promoting “a ground-up professionalism” would mean that work with the child, parent and carer would be recognised, along with “the mindful requirements of an ethic of care; and the importance of reflexivity for professional practice” (Chalke, 2012, p. 219). Nevertheless, it is also reported that “planned intervention

and dedicated structures, activities and tools” are needed to develop the profession (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015, p. 415).

However, psychosocial factors also need to be considered when planning for professional development, this would include opportunities to connect with peers and planning support for the stress workers experience, which can result from dealing with such issues as behavioural difficulties (Swartz, et al., 2015, p. 782). A further study of 393 childcare workers supports similar findings with staff experiencing a high level of positive feelings linked to effective engagement at work, with it proposed that there is potential to develop strategies to reinforce employees’ positive feelings toward work which would contribute to a more engaged workforce (Lee et al., 2019, p. 77). It is also recommended that a route to improved professionalism is to “learn from those with expertise and experience”, with one Think Tank promoting that nurseries with outstanding ratings be encouraged to share effective practice and mentor others in their locality (Waldegrave, 2013, p. 44).

A small-scale study which examined the creation of higher education playwork qualifications at an English university reported that key factors for success included – establishing local demand and gaining the support of the local authority (funding and marketing) to develop playwork career opportunities in order to recognise practitioners’ professional status (Dallal, 2015, p. 72). Due to the time needed for the validation process and sourcing support for “top-up” qualifications, it took the institution five years from the initial development stages to recruiting students. The university has continued to successfully recruit a further two cohorts of students (Dallal, 2015, p. 74). This example is expanded on in the following section, and other specific professional development interventions are presented.

Examples of specific professional development delivery

Key learning points

- Training needs to be appropriate to individual childcare settings.
 - Online training could provide a useful mode for delivery.
 - Working collaboratively with supportive trainers is important.
-

-
- Engaging with parents and focusing on children’s interests can be successful.
 - Enquiry-led learning can be successful in providing space for reflective learning, this can also result in practitioners informing the content of the training to be delivered.
 - As staff improve their qualifications it is possible that the time they are not directly working with children can increase (as they take on more administrative /training duties).
-

Continuing professional development has been a theme for special issue journals in the early years field.²⁹ Some of the research focuses on examples from practice; for instance, in Italy continued investment provided impetus to improve services in one city, but the investment was not solely in the professional development offer; promoting workplace conditions to support professional growth with “ongoing pedagogic guidance and strong links between practice and research” were also critical to successful implementation (Lazzari, 2013, p. 143).

Collaboration with higher education

The significance in the practitioner’s setting in supporting learning is emphasised by some, with collaboration with universities also viewed as important, along with a focus on regionalisation and online learning (Hadley et al., 2015, p. 2015 (an 18-month study across five Australian childcare centres); Hordern, 2013, p.116). Another small-scale Australian study with 16 childcare sector workers proposed a “a compendium of five models instead of a “one size fits all” to deliver employment-based training” (Choy and Haukka, 2010, p. 141).

One American study examined the delivery of a college-level course to early childhood professionals from 10 settings, concluding changes in knowledge and practice. However, challenges were identified with additional support needed to deliver similar courses across

²⁹ For example: [Early Years \(2013, Vol 33, Issue 2\)](#) and [Professional Development in Education \(2015, Vol 41, Issue 2\)](#).

multiple settings (LoCasale-Crouch, 2011, p. 275). An examination of the childcare sector in Flanders also highlighted that although there is potential for joint professional co-operation between centre-based care and childminding, in most cases additional professional training available has no impact on improving the “subordinate position of childminders” (Bauters and Vandebroek, 2017, p. 393). Whereas a strategy designed to improve the knowledge and skills of after school care educators in a region of Australia using a “knowledge and competency framework” found that staff retention improved and the competence along with the capacity of the educators, but the success relied on “highly competent leaders” within the services (Cartmel and Brannelly, 2016, p. 17).

A Scottish Government commissioned review also noted that currently the “play” content of qualifications can be optional and recommended teaching parents about the positive value of risk in play; play courses for teachers and doctoral level investment in play related qualifications to develop professional opportunities for “play” (Audain, 2016, p.1).

Conclusions drawn from another very small-scale (two centres) American qualitative study reported the effectiveness of enquiry-led learning supported by university mentors, could potentially prove more effective than delivering workshops, particularly when such workshops may be lacking in depth and personalisation (Swim and Isik-Ercan, 2013, p. 182). Others support the option for “alliances between playwork practitioners and academic researchers” to address specific issues (McKendrick, Horton, Krafti and Else, 2014, p. 6). Collaborations between the playwork sector and researchers are proposed in order to ensure more robustness in evaluations of interventions targeting play provision (McKendrick, Horton, Krafti and Else, 2014, p. 6). The limit in the number of existing evaluations that focus on practitioners’ professional development in playwork is a reflection of this.

The creation of a successful English university-led Level 4 and 5 playwork qualification discussed in the previous section – was costed at £1,000 for a four term course based on 15 students once a week over a 36 week academic year, with a “top-up” bridging module providing progression to Level 6 (degree). The institution, to date has recruited three cohorts. Since the first year of delivery there have been minor changes following student

feedback e.g. due to students' work commitments the delivery has changed from a weekday to Saturday once a month (Dallal, 2015, p. 74).

In England the Graduate Leader Fund³⁰ provided a £305 million ring-fenced fund (2008-2011) to support all full day care sector providers to employ a graduate or Early Years Professional by 2015. Part of the project also gave local authorities greater flexibility to develop, target and publicise their own incentive systems (Ranns et al., 2011, p. 1). This fund has been extensively evaluated using a baseline study to test the impact of employing a graduate with 327 settings revisited two years later (Mathers et al., 2011b, p. 6).

Improvements were reported with the funding driving change to improve "child-led planning" (Mathers et al., 2011a, p. 68). However, it was reported that staff who gained Early Years Professional Status experienced a decrease in the time they spent working directly with children when compared to before, due to the additional leadership/administrative jobs they needed to undertake (Mathers et al., 2011a, p. 37). A smaller study that explored the opinions of 15 English childcare settings "reluctant to engage" with the Fund concluded that "by addressing areas of perceived "restrictive" practice, the move to increase status and professional qualifications in early years may become more inclusive of the current workforce" (Payler and Locke, 2013, p. 125).

Online training

Although limited in its methodology, with self-reporting from 231 early educators and 28 trainers in one American state, a research study provides an indication of the sector's possible receptiveness to using online training (Stone-MacDonald and Douglass, 2015, p. 244). This evaluation of the design and delivery of online training courses concluded that although participants were familiar with technology for personal use, they were "less familiar with learning technologies" and preferred to use both technology and direct feedback from an instructor. It was concluded that understanding how online modules are used and participants' "level of comfort is critical in understanding whether this method is accessible to all early educators, useful to the workforce, and truly sustainable" (Stone-MacDonald and Douglass, 2015, p. 247).

³⁰ A range of outputs are available evaluating [The Graduate Leader Fund](#)

Mentoring

An analytical study of 73 research studies that focused on professional development in early childhood education reported that more than half of the studies included coaching or training workshops, with the authors reporting that diversity in “the content of instruction” and “experiment with innovative formats” for delivery of professional development along with better evaluation are needed (Schachter, 2015, p. 1057).

A Canadian research study with 94 practitioners from 44 childcare centres, applied three differing training delivery approaches for “constructivist curriculum”³¹; consultant model, workshops, and a readings group. The study noted that using the “consultant model” there was an increase in “guidance interaction”, which promoted learning and development for the children (Howe et al., 2012, p. 353). As a result, the evaluators emphasised the potential for “longer-term, one-on-one mentoring” as an effective means of facilitating change, with a combination of consultancy and workshops also proposed to ensure specific setting needs are considered, with a more flexible approach being critical (Howe et al., 2012, p. 371).

Another study, conducted via four focus groups with 54 childcare providers each year for three years, reported that “supportive social relationships” were critical to professional development experiences (Lanigan, 2011, p. 399). Some key findings included that providers preferred small class sizes for professional development training and having the same trainer/mentor throughout. They also “preferred to investigate a single topic over 10 months and have the opportunity to apply what they learned through homework, ask questions and obtain feedback”. Collaborative monthly evaluations and goal setting were also positively received (Lanigan, 2011, p. 408).

Engaging with parents and time for reflection

A training programme for practitioners working with pre-school children in England reported significant impact on practitioners’ new skills and confidence for working with parents.³² The

³¹ In this perspective, children construct their knowledge and understanding of the world through interactions with others and thus, knowledge is a shared and co-constructed cultural experience rather than an individual or solitary experience (Howe et al., 2012, p. 355).

³² [Achieving Early Pilot](#) (2013-15) included tailor-made plans, professional coaching, engaging workshops and expert techniques,.

report, based on 60 settings, recognised the particular need for practitioners to engage effectively with parents across the childcare workforce, and the limitation of existing qualifications in addressing this (Achievement for All and Esmee Foundation, 2016, p. 21). The impact of the benefits of the training were also evidenced in improving inspection outcomes for participating settings (Achievement for All and Esmee Foundation, 2016, p. 23). Individual setting outcomes support points noted earlier regarding the importance of “following children’s interests” and practitioners “having time to reflect” (Achievement for All and Esmee Foundation, 2016, p. 44 and p. 46).

A small-scale Australian study also reported on the importance of reflection for those in the playwork sector – practitioners engaged in monthly training days and bi-monthly mentor visits requiring reflective practice. It was concluded that the reflective practice inspired staff and forced them to know more about their children, putting children at the centre of their practice (Vollbrecht and Rothwell, 2015, p. 80).

Action research

Following a literature review and consultations with 120 professionals, it was concluded that the importance of enquiry-led learning can also provide the effective inclusion of action research; weaving theory to applied learning, bridging the “theory-practice divide” (Osgood et al., 2017, p. 100). A Continuing Professional Development programme supporting 14 early childhood care and education centres in Ireland to implement the national quality and curriculum frameworks was developed in consultation with practitioners using an action research approach,³³ and provides a useful example here. The action research approach was used to develop the programme and to improve the quality of practice in the centres (Bleach, 2014, p. 188). Following a series of visits by the facilitators to each setting, the process, timetable and content for the programme was agreed. Three training sessions were delivered over a year and individual settings were visited, and “additional support sessions” provided when requested. The content of the training sessions had been informed by the staff reporting good practice and their ideas for change and improvement. Feedback

³³ Action Research involved presenting the theory and pedagogy of the frameworks; reviewing existing practice; develop an action plan to improve practice; implement action plan; evaluate implementation; reflect and discuss; review practice and the cycle of action research continues.

from participants noted an increase in confidence and “a greater sense of themselves as professionals”, with the opportunity for reflexivity and “purposeful peer interaction” viewed as significant (Bleach, 2014, p. 193 and p. 196; Bleach, 2013, p. 370).

The research has identified a range of successful approaches such as opportunities for collaboration with higher education, one-to-one mentoring and the use of online training, and training that allows practitioners the time for reflection and engagement with parents which need to be considered. Any continuing professional development training also needs to be appropriate for individual practitioners and setting context. The role of higher education in supporting evaluation of delivery is also important.

4. Annex: Quality of evidence

To provide an indication of the quality of the evidence included in the discussion of specific examples of professional development delivered (Section 3.2), the following criteria were used:

- The study context is described in detail allowing applicability to other settings /contexts;
- A robust research design, with the methodology, size of sample and rationale well defended;
- Evidence support the findings and conclusions, and demonstrates a coherent logic.

References linked to the examples discussed have been coded using a coloured box to indicate the strength of the source;

Red - no criteria achieved.

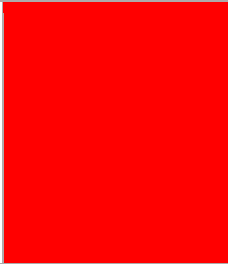


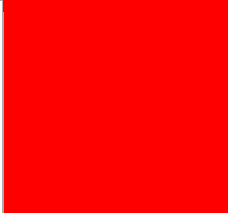
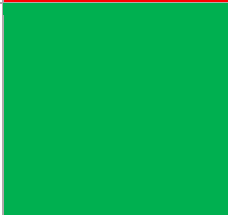




Amber - one criteria achieved.

Green - two or more criteria achieved.

It is important to note that although several sources did not achieve any criteria, as they are literature reviews or very small-scale examples, they have been included because they provide additional evidence of a particular type of delivery.

| Reference | Strength |
|---|----------|
| Achievement for All and Esmee Foundation. (2016) <i>Achieving early, Improving the life-chances of pre-school children through the Achieving Early Pilot. End of Pilot report January 2016</i> . UK: Achievement for All. | Green |
| Audain ,I (2016) <i>Learning about Play in Scotland, summary overview</i> , Scottish Out of School Care Network. | Green |
| Bauters, V. and Vandebroek, M. (2017) The professionalisation of family day care in Flanders, France and Germany, <i>European Early Childhood Education Research Journal</i> , 25(3), pp. 386-397. | Red |

| | |
|--|--------|
| Bleach, J. (2014) Developing professionalism through reflective practice and ongoing professional development, <i>European Early Childhood Education Research Journal</i> , 22(2), pp. 185-197. | Green |
| Bleach, J. (2013) Using action research to support quality early years practice, <i>European Early Childhood Education Research Journal</i> , 21(3), pp. 370-379. | Green |
| Cartmel, J and Brannelly, K. (2016) A Framework for Developing the Knowledge and Competencies of the Outside School Hours Services Workforce. <i>International Journal for Research on Extended Education</i> , 4(2), p. 17. | Red |
| Choy, S. and Haukka, S. (2010) Effective employment-based training models for childcare workers. <i>Australian Journal of Adult Learning</i> , 50(1), pp. 141-163. | Yellow |
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