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**Salford**  
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**SHUSU**  
SUSTAINABLE HOUSING  
& URBAN STUDIES UNIT

# Evaluation of DWP & Oxfam Livelihoods Training Project

## Interim Report

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June 2017



**OXFAM**



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for Work &  
Pensions

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## **About the authors**

The Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) is a dedicated multi-disciplinary research and consultancy unit providing a range of services relating to housing and urban management to public and private sector clients. The Unit brings together researchers drawn from a range of disciplines including: social policy, housing management, urban geography, environmental management, psychology, social care and social work.

## **Acknowledgements**

Without the time, expertise and contributions of a number of individuals and organisations, this Interim Report could not have been completed. The teams at Oxfam Cymru and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have provided guidance and assistance throughout, and thanks must go to all of them for their support.

Particular thanks must, of course, go to the people who found the time to talk to us and answer our questions in a full, honest and patient manner. It is hoped that this report is able to accurately reflect their experiences.

This report is based on research undertaken by the study team and the analysis and comment thereafter do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the research commissioners, or any participating stakeholders and agencies. The authors take responsibility for any inaccuracies or omissions in the report.

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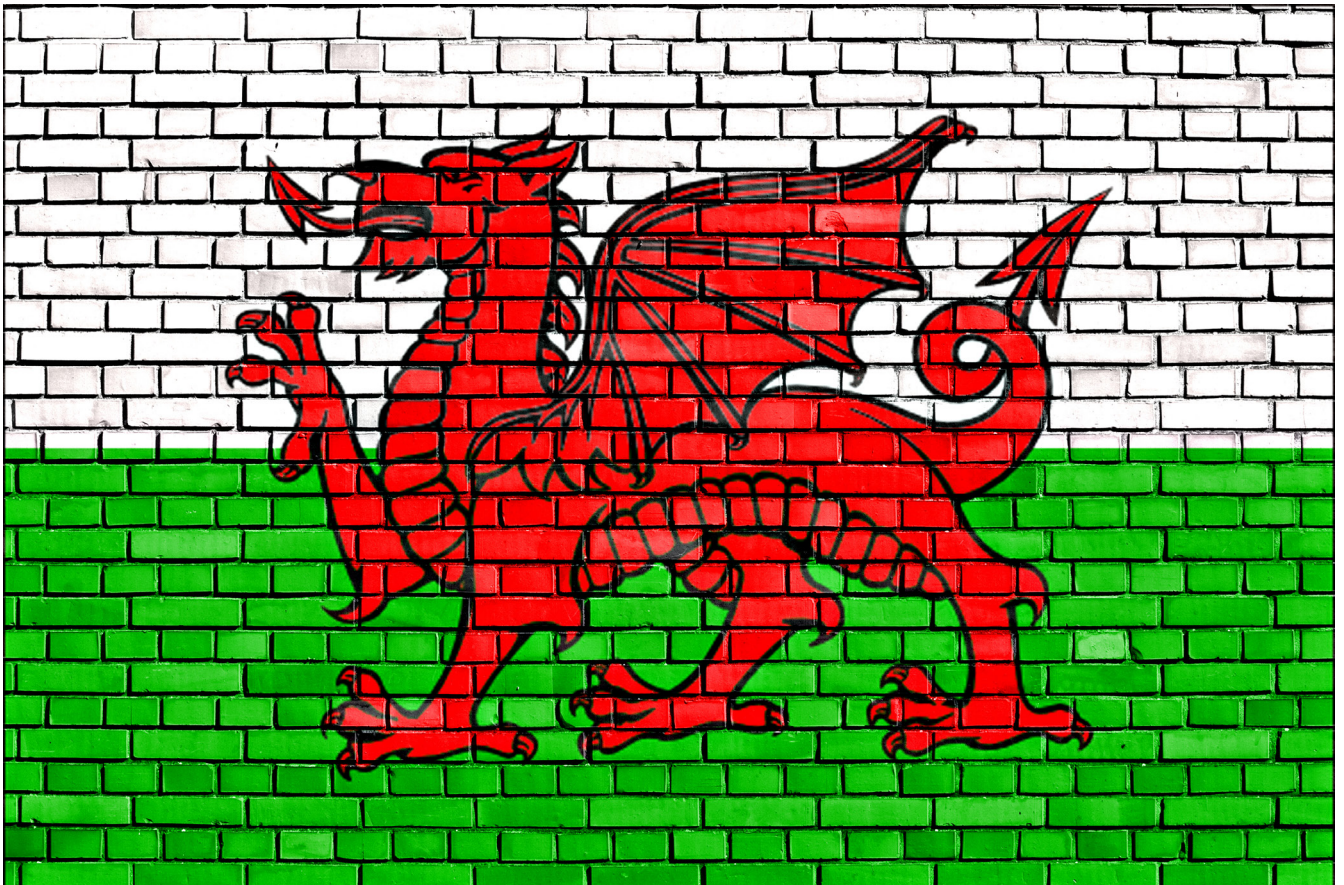
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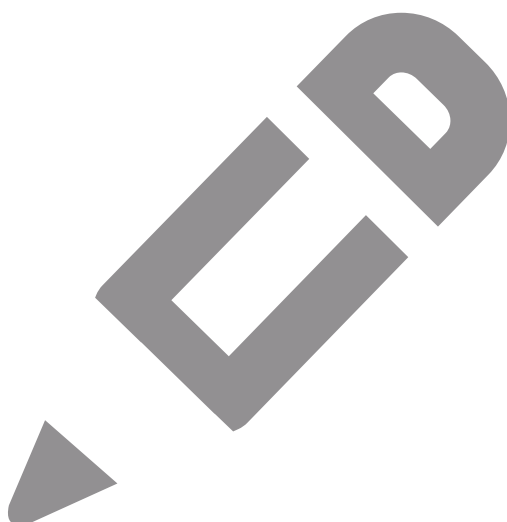
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# 1. Introduction



It is estimated that around 23% of the population in Wales are in poverty, with an increase in absolute poverty in more recent years<sup>1</sup>. Movement into sustainable employment is a key element of any anti-poverty strategy; however, it is recognised that Wales faces considerable challenges in relation to high levels of 'worklessness' and economic inactivity, particularly when compared to the UK overall<sup>2</sup>. At a central government level, active labour market programmes and welfare reforms have been introduced, particularly in more recent years; for example, the Work Programme and the introduction of Universal Credit. These reforms have also included the introduction of an enhanced sanctions regime<sup>4</sup>. However, concerns have been raised around the 'one size fits all' nature of some mainstream employment support, which does not sufficiently take into consideration people's individual needs, capabilities and responsibilities outside the paid labour market<sup>5</sup>.

Within this wider policy and practice context, Oxfam Cymru have undertaken the Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales project, moving away from the 'one size fits all' model to a person-centred, assets-based approach to tackling poverty. Learning from this and an earlier Access to Work and Enterprise project (2012-14) - which also used the same assets-based approach to working with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) lone parents - has been used to develop the Livelihoods Training Project. The overall aim of the Project is to embed understandings of poverty within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) service across Wales, to enable DWP staff to better understand the needs of customers, and consequently be better placed to provide appropriate support and solutions to meet their needs. It is hoped that this more personalised approach will reduce the need for sanctions and improve outcomes in terms of sustainable employment. The Project aims to provide training to around 600 DWP staff across Wales by September 2017. At the time of writing, training had been provided to 206 DWP staff up to the end of January 2017.

The training draws on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), which was initially used in international development settings and brought to the UK by Oxfam and other non-governmental organisations. The SLA has been used in Wales with a wide range of projects and partners, and along with individuals, families and communities, it works with service providers to help them adapt their approach to people experiencing poverty or disadvantage. The SLA is a participatory approach which starts by looking at the day-to-day experiences of people's

1 New Policy Institute (NPI) (2015) Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Wales 2015, York: JRF.

2

3 Ibid.

4 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2012) Changes to Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions from 22 October 2012, available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130627060116/http://www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/updates/jsa-sanction-changes/>.

5 Scullion, L. (2016) The ethics of welfare conditionality, Overview of First Wave Findings Presentation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) London Office, 12 May 2016.

lives in order to move beyond a focus on what is missing (the more traditional 'deficits' model, which focuses on the negative aspects of a livelihood such as not having a job) and instead focuses on what is present (assets). The idea is that as a person's assets increase, they are better able to respond to shocks - such as needing to replace white goods, or periods of unemployment. The approach is based on the recognition that people experience poverty in different ways due to gender, ethnicity, language, or other aspects of their identity.

The SLA focuses on five interlinked categories of assets which make up a person's livelihood: human assets (e.g. skills and knowledge); social assets (i.e. social networks, family relationships); physical assets (e.g. housing, transport, work clothes or equipment, basic white goods, a computer); public assets (i.e. availability of and engagement with local public services, facilities and amenities such as community centres, libraries and local organisations); financial assets (e.g. earned income, savings, pensions, credit facilities, welfare benefits, child maintenance)<sup>6</sup>.

Tools include 'Drawing the Household', 'OK/Not OK Timeline', and the 'Assets Pentagon', among others<sup>7</sup>. To give an example of their use, Drawing the Household uses a visual prompt to document the movement of people within the household in order to understand material and non-material support, social networks, and differences between men's and women's interactions. Participants are asked to describe who comes in and out of their home each day (including household residents, friends, family, neighbours, services that engage with the household, etc). The information can be used to contextualise decisions taken by participants and thereby go beyond the surface-level issue that they may present with.

## 1.1 Evaluation aims and objectives

In August 2016, Oxfam Cymru in partnership with the DWP commissioned the Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford to carry out an evaluation of the Livelihoods Training Project. The overarching aim of this evaluation is to utilise a mixed-methods approach in order to document and evaluate the operation of the Project and its impact on DWP staff, customers and participating community partners. In order to address this aim, the evaluation has three linked objectives:

1 To understand how the Project was delivered, assessing to what extent the Theory of Change for the Project was fulfilled, and the factors affecting success;

2 To set out the difference the Project made in terms of quantitative (statistically measurable) impact for

key Project outcomes, including the learning from and limitations of this assessment; and,

3 To present an assessment of how the benefits of the Project relate to the costs.

## 1.2 Structure of this report

This Interim Report provides an overview of some of the initial findings of the on-going evaluation, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data collected to date (February 2017). It is not our intention to present definitive findings from the evaluation in this Interim Report; rather this report is a first consideration of the issues emerging from the data collected to date. The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 outlines the research methods that feed into this Interim Report.
- Chapter 3 presents an analysis of facilitator notes.
- Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the findings from the surveys of DWP staff.
- Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the findings from a qualitative case study in one geographical area.
- Chapter 6 brings together some brief conclusions arising from the interim findings and presents the next steps for the evaluation.

<sup>6</sup> Oxfam Cymru/Oxfam GB (2013). Sustainable Livelihood Approach Toolkit for Wales, available at <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

# 2. Methods



This evaluation utilises a mixed-methods approach, involving analysis of quantitative survey data and qualitative consultation with community partners, and DWP staff and customers in a selection of case study areas. This Interim Report is informed by four key sources of data:

- Facilitator notes
- Surveys of DWP staff
- Qualitative case study
- Consultation with a community partner

Each of these is discussed in greater detail below.

## 2.1 Facilitator notes

This Interim Report includes analysis of flip-chart notes made by the training facilitator during each training session, which log key issues raised during the training sessions in relation to potential uses of the tools but also potential barriers to utilising the tools. The facilitator notes are summarised in Chapter 3.

## 2.2 Survey of DWP staff

There are two data sources that are used in relation to the surveys of DWP staff. The Oxfam Post-Training Feedback questionnaire is a self-completion pen and paper questionnaire, distributed at the end of training sessions between 28th June 2016 and 31st January 2017.

All 206 training participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, and 200 anonymous responses were received (a response rate of 97.09%).

Participants were then asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire administered by the DWP, initially at six weeks after the training although this was subsequently extended to include participants up to six months after the training. The survey was completed anonymously online through the DWP Survey Maker system. As is to be expected with follow-up questionnaires, there appears to have been a degree of participant attrition. At the time of writing, the figures available from the DWP contained 27 responses. If the 44 participants receiving training before the end of August 2016 is used as a guide (due to responses being collected for up to 6 months after the training), the response rate can be understood as 61.36%.

The content of the two questionnaires is similar, including demographic information and a number of questions which are used to measure the same variables. The DWP questionnaire has additional questions on awareness of poverty issues, supporting customers, and using Livelihood approaches and tools at work, and there are also questions relating to being a livelihood lead/mentor, the impact of the training and participants' perspectives on their work. The Oxfam Post-Training Feedback questionnaire measures pre-and post-training levels of knowledge and awareness, while the DWP survey records perspectives from after the training only. For the purposes of this report, responses from the Oxfam and DWP questionnaires are compared. Due to differences in the

content/variation in question wording, responses to the Oxfam administered survey are analysed before turning to the DWP administered survey. Analyses of both of these surveys form the basis of Chapter 4 of this report.

### 2.3 Qualitative case study

In consultation with Oxfam Cymru and the DWP, an initial case study area was identified for qualitative analysis. The evaluation as a whole will include a number of qualitative case studies (a minimum of one for each of the Welsh districts) (see also Next Steps in Chapter 6). These case studies provide a more nuanced understanding of the process (and any variations in implementation across different areas), and views on the outcomes of the training against its objectives. Within each case study area, data is derived from semi-structured interviews with DWP customers and a focus group with DWP staff who have received the training (however, it is recognised that the composition of the case study fieldwork visits may vary depending on the types of setting/participant availability).

#### Consultation with DWP staff

The analysis in this Interim Report is informed by a focus group and two semi-structured interviews with DWP staff from a Job Centre in South Wales. The staff were approached by their manager to invite participation in the evaluation. Participant Information Sheets and consent forms were provided, and for those who agreed to participate, an appointment time was agreed for the focus group/interview. A total of seven staff took part in this consultation which focused on their reflections on the quality of the training, views on the impact of the training to date, and any suggested areas of improvement. The consultations took place at the Job Centre, and were undertaken by a University of Salford researcher. The focus group/interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then analysed thematically in line with the issues outlined above. The findings of these consultations form part of the analysis in Chapter 5 of this report.

#### Consultation with DWP customers

The analysis in this Interim Report is informed by five semi-structured interviews with DWP customers who are currently supported by the same Job Centre in South Wales in which the staff consultation above took place. The participants were all customers who were being supported by staff members who had received the training. For pragmatic reasons relating to access to contact details, they were approached by DWP staff to invite participation in the evaluation. Participant Information Sheets and consent forms were provided, and for those who agreed to participate, an appointment time was agreed for the interview. The interviews took place at the Job Centre, and were undertaken by a University of Salford researcher. The interviews focused on their reflections on interactions with Job Centre staff, with a particular focus on identifying if there had been any perceived changes in more recent months. Each participant received a £10 shopping voucher as a thank you for their time. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then analysed thematically in line with the issues outlined above. The findings of these consultations form part of the analysis in Chapter 5 of this report.

### 2.4 Consultation with a community partner

In addition to consultation with DWP staff and customers, the evaluation also includes consultation with community partners involved in supporting the delivery of the training. To date, a small number of community partners (approximately eight) are playing an important role in the Project and three organisations collaborate actively by volunteering on the Project and assisting in co-training, where possible. At the time of the Interim Report, we were only able to consult with one community partner. As such, this consultation does not feature as a separate chapter; rather, their reflections are incorporated into the relevant sections of the existing data analysis chapters. This community partner was interviewed via telephone, focusing on their role within the Project, their reflections on the training and its impact, as well as any suggested areas of improvement.



# 3. Findings:

## Facilitator notes



As highlighted in Chapter 2, one of the data sources available for the evaluation includes detailed notes made by the training facilitator during the training sessions. More specifically, the facilitator collates the flip-chart notes that are taken during discussions with participants. This chapter provides a summary of the flip-chart notes provided to date. This data is useful as the discussions centre around people's views on the day of the training in relation to how they could use the tools going forward, but also any potential barriers to applying the tools to their day-to-day work. It therefore provides an interesting comparison to the qualitative case study, which focuses on whether or not people have been able to apply the tools in their work post-training and the barriers they have faced (see Chapter 5).

### 3.1 How could you use the tools when working with customers?

When asked about how they felt they would be able to use the tools, a number of different elements were highlighted across the training sessions; for example, it was suggested that the Timeline Tool could be used to extract a much fuller CV, while others cited the Asset Pentagon as most relevant. However, the most common general application was to build confidence and trust with customers (often described as 'rapport'). It was

felt that work coaches could use the tools with certain customers to build rapport and get information flowing; conversely others suggested that they could use them with customers they already had a rapport with.

Participants also indicated that the tools could be useful for certain groups of customers; for example, over 45s, defensive customers, and people with caring responsibilities. The potential benefit of the tools for customers with health issues was also cited. One example suggested using them to identify options / opportunities when reviewing a person's Employment Support Allowance (ESA) assessment, instead of just saying 'yes or no' once they had reviewed their recent medical assessment, while another proposed that disability and health coaches/disability employment advisors could use the visual aid to support their work.

In addition, participants highlighted how the tools could be applied to different stages of the 'customer journey'. This included at initial assessment / first tier stage; to enrol customers onto Communities for Work (C4W)<sup>8</sup>; or in conjunction with the Claimant Commitment. The specific advantages of the tools (or elements of them) within

<sup>8</sup> Communities for Work (C4W) is a Welsh Government (WG) and European Social Fund (ESF) programme co-sponsored by the DWP. It is a voluntary programme delivered in the community to help adults furthest from the labour market into employment.

different settings was also highlighted; for example, in a community setting as part of C4W.

### 3.2 What are the barriers to their use?

With regards to potential barriers to applying the tools in their day to day work, concerns around lack of time was raised most frequently. However, the DWP indicated that the Jobcentre network culture and way of working is currently undergoing a massive transformation with a shift from target driven, time bound interventions to 'doing the right thing for our customers'. They stated that the introduction of the new Jobcentre Operating Model (JOM) and the national roll out of Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS) supports this change and allows Work Coaches the autonomy to manage their diaries to ensure that they spend more time with customers that need the most support. However, it is recognised that in areas yet to roll out, Work Coaches may perceive time constraints as a barrier to use of the tools.

The other potential barriers that were mentioned related more to personal interactions than structural issues. For example, fear of 'opening a can of worms' was mentioned on a number of occasions, as well as not having a good rapport with individual customers meaning that cooperation might be unlikely with little information forthcoming.

Finally, staff shortages, but also a lack of ownership (or 'buy in') by management, were also flagged as potential issues.

### 3.3 What would need to be in place to overcome these barriers?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the previous responses, more time and a positive rapport with customers were the most common responses. With regards to time constraints, it was suggested that a shorter 'DWP friendly' version of the toolkit should be developed. However, a large proportion of participants referred to organisational changes that would need to happen, both in terms of ways of working but also the attitude and commitment of staff. Overcoming a culture of 'box ticking' was highlighted, as was 'buy-in' from senior staff. As such, it was felt that managers should also participate in the training. Furthermore, in terms of structural changes, recommendations included making the training a standard part of work coach training, especially the eight week training course provided for new work coaches.

Other recommendations included being able to signpost customers to specialist support organisations, as many staff were only now getting to know what was available in their locality (although it was acknowledged this was wider than purely job or training related issues).



# 4. Findings:

## Surveys of DWP staff



This chapter analyses findings from surveys administered by both Oxfam and the DWP. The surveys were designed by the organisations themselves in conjunction with an external consultant, with the explicit purpose of measuring the impact of the Livelihoods Training Project. Due to differences in the content/variation in question wording, responses to the Oxfam survey are analysed before turning to the DWP administered survey. It should be noted that there are some limitations in the comparability of the two surveys, however. Along with variations in question format, there are also some differences in the response scales used. The Oxfam survey is based upon a 10-point continuous scale. Initially, the DWP survey was based upon categorical responses (strongly agree; agree; don't know; disagree; strongly disagree). However, after discussions with the research team, the scale was changed to a 10-point continuous scale where possible. In order to utilise data already collected, we have converted the categorical responses to a 10-point scale as follows: strongly agree = 10; agree = 7.75; don't know = 5.5; disagree = 3.25; strongly disagree = 1.

The Oxfam survey received responses from four participants with a large number of missing answers. These responses were excluded from the analysis. Approximately 22 further responses to the Oxfam survey contained missing data for a small number of variables. These responses were analysed as far as possible. The

number of missing responses for each question is noted under the relevant tables. Data was analysed using Stata software, version 14 to generate descriptive statistics and explore association through cross-tabulation.

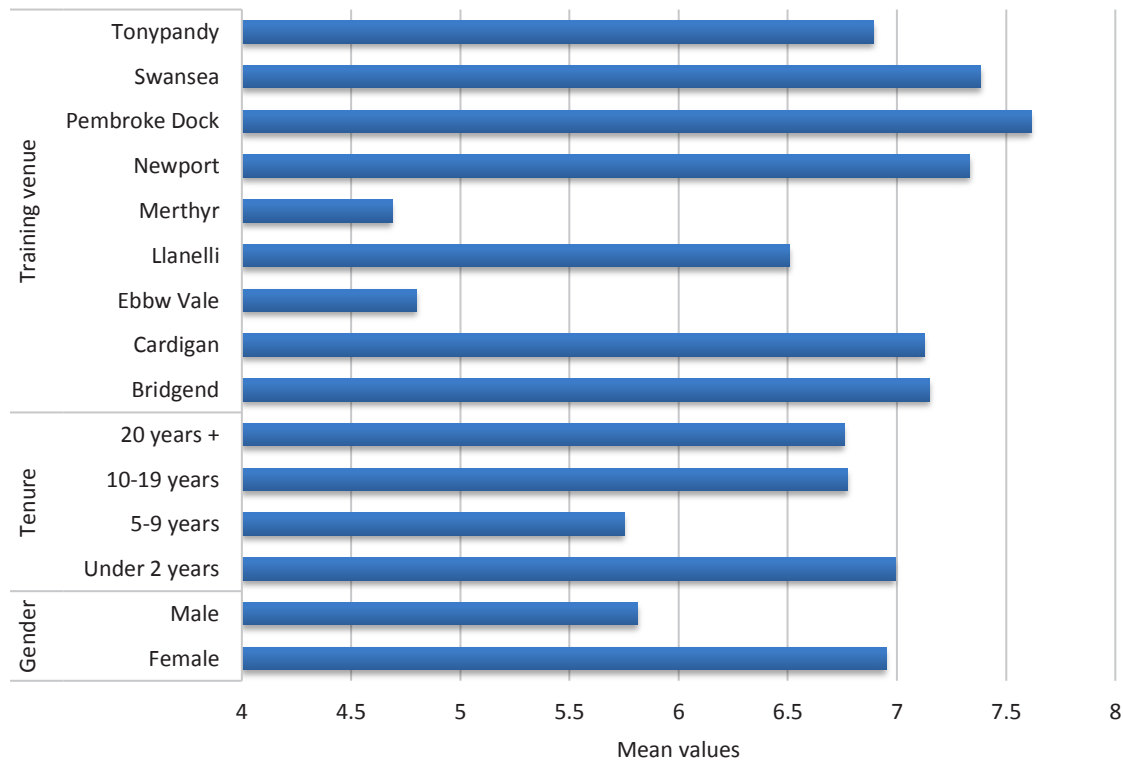


Figure 1 - Use of SLA tools directly in work by demographic characteristics

		N	(%)
Gender	Female	144	(82%)
	Male	32	(18%)
Tenure	Under 2 years	35	(20%)
	2-4 years	0	(0%)
	5-9 years	8	(4%)
	10-19 years	51	(29%)
	20 years +	84	(47%)
Training venue	Bridgend	42	(21%)
	Cardigan	8	(4%)
	Ebbw Vale	15	(8%)
	Llanelli	29	(15%)
	Merthyr Tydfil	16	(8%)
	Newport	15	(8%)
	Pembroke Dock	13	(7%)
	Swansea	39	(20%)
	Tonypanyd	19	(10%)

Note: 20 responses were missing for gender and 18 for tenure.

Table 1 - Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=196)

## 4.1 The Oxfam survey

### Demographics and likelihood of using SLA tools

In terms of demographics, of those who revealed their gender, 144 were women and 32 were men. Most participants had attended the training in Bridgend (42), followed by Swansea (39), and Llanelli (29), with the least participants (8) attending in Cardigan. The majority of participants had considerable experience of working at the DWP. While 35 participants had been working at the DWP for less than two years, 84 participants had been working at the DWP for 20 years or more, and 51 participants for 10-19 years.

Overall, the likelihood of using the SLA tools directly in their work received a mean score of 6.74 from participants, suggesting that they did think they would use the tools in future. Female respondents appeared more likely to use the tools than their male colleagues. Those with less than two years of work experience at the DWP appeared more likely to use the tools than their colleagues, while those with 5-9 years' experience appear least likely to use the tools when considering tenure length. There was considerable variation in likelihood of using the tools between the different areas where training had taken place. Those in Pembroke Dock appeared more likely to use the tools, although those attending sessions in Bridgend, Cardigan, Newport and Swansea also responded with high scores. Participants in Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale both gave mean scores of less than 5, indicating that they are unlikely to use the tools in future.

### Awareness of poverty

Responses indicate that knowledge was low prior to the training, with a net gain of more than three-points for the context of poverty in Wales and how it relates to people's ability to find and stay in work; the factors that create poverty and social exclusion and their impact on people's lives; the stigma and myths surrounding poverty; and values, attitudes and behaviours (personal or organisational) which can impact on service delivery. This indicates that the training had a very strong impact on participants' knowledge of poverty.

		Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Context of poverty in Wales	Start	4.94	2.11	1	10
	End	8.27	1.09	4	10
	Impact	3.33	2.04	0	8
Factors creating poverty/social exclusion	Start	5.17	2.18	1	10
	End	8.56	0.97	4	10
	Impact	3.39	2.10	0	9
Stigma and myths surrounding poverty	Start	5.18	2.19	1	10
	End	8.48	1.11	4	10
	Impact	3.30	2.11	0	8
Values, attitudes and behaviours	Start	5.29	2.16	1	10
	End	8.51	1.13	3	10
	Impact	3.20	2.04	0	8

Notes: 1. Responses were missing for the context, factor and stigma questions, and 4 responses were missing for the values question.

2. SD = standard deviation (i.e., the amount of variation in responses. The lower the SD, the closer the responses were to the mean).

Table 2 - Awareness of poverty issues (N=196)

## Supporting customers

The impact was also strong for awareness of supporting customers, with net gains of 2.5 points or more for their awareness of 'people-centred', 'holistic', and 'asset-based' approaches. These gains were not quite as strong as for the awareness of poverty. This can be explained through participants coming to the training with a higher initial level of awareness of issues relating to customer support.

## Using livelihoods approaches in your work

The net gains in the responses to using the livelihoods approaches in work were over 2.5 points each for 'people-centred', 'holistic', and 'asset-based' approaches. Again, this demonstrates the strong impact of the training session with participants indicating that they hope to be able to use the approaches in their work from now on.

		Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
People-centred	Start	6.15	2.38	1	10
	End	8.65	1.06	2	10
	Impact	2.51	2.19	-1	9
Holistic	Start	6.16	2.35	1	10
	End	8.74	0.99	5	10
	Impact	2.59	2.21	0	8
Asset-based	Start	5.72	2.33	1	10
	End	8.68	0.95	5	10
	Impact	2.94	2.25	0	8

Note: 4 responses were missing for each of the questions.

Table 3 - Supporting customers (N=196)

		Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
People-centred	Start	5.87	2.40	1	10
	End	8.50	1.31	1	10
	Impact	2.63	2.09	0	8
Holistic	Start	5.68	2.24	1	10
	End	8.43	1.36	1	10
	Impact	2.75	1.97	-2	8
Asset-based	Start	5.62	2.23	1	10
	End	8.57	1.21	1	10
	Impact	2.95	2.05	0	8

Note: 1 response was missing for the people-centred and asset-based questions, and 2 responses were missing from the holistic question.

Table 4 - Using livelihood approaches in work (N=196)

## Using livelihoods tools in your work

Participants were asked if, as a result of the training, they have new ideas on improvements to ways of supporting customers, and if the SLA tools are directly relevant to their current job role. Responses to these questions were very positive, with 166 reporting that they do have new ideas, and 139 saying that the tools are directly relevant to their job role. Only a small minority answered 'no'.

The tools that respondents most frequently reported as most relevant for their work were the Assets Pentagon (24 responses), 'Timeline' (OK/Not OK Timeline; 18 responses), and 'House' (Drawing the Household; 11 responses).

## General comments

Comments by participants about positive aspects of the training focused for the most part on how much they enjoyed the training, the passion of the trainer and the usefulness of the subject matter/tools:

The training was excellent. I was aware of the SLA approach and toolkit, however it was brought to life by the trainer. This can be used and I will be using it ASAP. The trainer made sure everyone felt good and valued. Her energy and passion was clear. She made the products come to life and me want to use them.

Excellent interactive event, very informative, food for thought. Good insight into tools and found candidate discussion very useful. Learnt quite a lot about self also, and how I could use to interact with customers.

Loved the interactive sessions. Refreshing to have time to discuss and share ideas with the group. The course tutors were positive and inspiring - lots of anecdotal stories used that definitely added to this learning.

Only a small minority of respondents commented on areas that could be improved. These included comments related to the amount of time ('More time to cover techniques'; 'Not enough time'), and also relevance to role ('don't see how this is relevant to people in telephony-based roles').

Several respondents commented that they would have liked more local information in order to better signpost customers to appropriate support:

I would have appreciated more details of the specialised facilities in my local area – where to signpost.

I would have liked a bit more info on what is available in our area for people who are in poverty.

Finally, one respondent felt that the content contradicted other training that they were taking at the time:

Seems to contradict the new route-way training I'm currently on and finding hard to adapt it into this.

	New ideas on improvements to ways of supporting customers		Direct relevance to job role	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Yes	166	(87%)	139	(77%)
No	9	(5%)	25	(14%)
Don't know	16	(8%)	17	(9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>191</b>		<b>181</b>	

Table 5 - Using SLA tools in work

## 4.2 The DWP survey

### Demographics, effective customer support and enhanced work satisfaction

In the DWP follow up survey, the majority of respondents were again female. Those training participants with less than two years' work experience at the DWP were most likely to respond to this survey, which is interesting given the high number of more experienced colleagues that participated in the training overall. In terms of area, more of those attending the training in Bridgend and Tonypanydy have responded to the survey so far. There have been no responses to date from several areas. For Ebbw Vale, Merthyr Tydfil, and Newport, this is to be expected as the training only took place in January 2017. However, there have been no responses to date from Llanelli, despite training taking place in April and August 2016. The reasons why are not clear, although this may be related to job role, with the sessions featuring a significant number of staff who work on the phone.

Participants responded positively in relation to questions on whether the tools have helped them to offer more effective customer support and to feel more satisfied with their work. Overall, a slightly higher average score was received for customer support than work

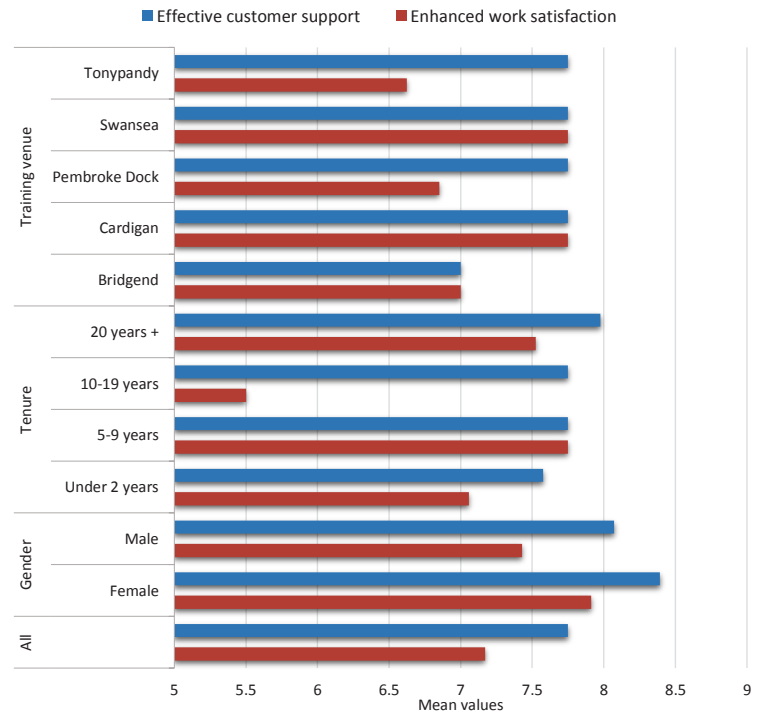


Figure 2 - Use of SLA tools directly in work by demographic characteristics

		N	(%)
Gender	Female	14	(52%)
	Male	7	(26%)
	Prefer not to say	6	(22%)
Tenure	Under 2 years	13	(48%)
	2-4 years	0	(0%)
	5-9 years	2	(7%)
	10-19 years	2	(7%)
	20 years +	10	(37%)
Training venue	Bridgend	6	(29%)
	Cardigan	1	(5%)
	Ebbw Vale	-	-
	Llanelli	-	-
	Merthyr Tydfil	-	-
	Newport	-	-
	Pembroke Dock	5	(24%)
	Swansea	3	(14%)
	Tonypanydy	6	(29%)

Note: There were 6 missing responses for training venue.

Table 6 - Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=27)



satisfaction. Female respondents were slightly more likely than their male colleagues to respond positively to both questions. There were no great differences by grade, tenure or training venue in responses to the questions, although those with 10-19 years' work experience at the DWP felt that the livelihoods approaches had least impact on their work satisfaction. As this group thought that the approaches were helpful in terms of customer support, it may be that there are wider factors impacting upon their work satisfaction.

### Awareness of poverty and using livelihoods approaches

Responses relating to awareness of poverty received high scores from participants. The mean scores for awareness of the context of poverty in Wales and values, attitudes and behaviours (personal or organisational) were similar to those for the Oxfam post-training data. This suggests that participants have been able to maintain their awareness of poverty after several weeks or months back at work. The responses for using livelihoods approaches in work were not as high; however, they were still higher than the pre-training measure collected by the Oxfam survey, which again suggests that the participants continue to feel the impact of the training.

### Using livelihoods tools in work

Participants were asked about whether, as a result of the training, they have been able to come up with new ideas for improvements to ways of supporting customers, and if they have been able to apply these ideas in their work.

The majority of responses indicated that they have not been able to come up with new ideas. Similarly, a majority indicated that they have not been able to use the tools in their work. These responses can be contrasted with the Oxfam administered questionnaire, when 85% of participants indicated that they had new ideas as a result of the training and that the tools are directly relevant to their job role.

Those who responded that they are able to apply their new ideas in work commented upon how the tools have helped them to support customers:

I meet with customers on a weekly basis, usually for an hour, during that time I get to know them quite well to build up rapport. Using the livelihood tool in some form has helped me to do this.

In using the tools, I have built a better rapport with previously harder to help customers.

		Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Awareness of poverty	Context of poverty	8.17	1.77	1	10
	Values, attitudes & behaviours	8.33	1.48	3.25	10
Using livelihoods approaches in your work	People centred	6.69	2.45	1	10
	Holistic	6.79	2.67	1	10
	Asset-based	6.66	3.26	1	10

Table 7 - Awareness and livelihoods (N=27)

		N	(%)
New ideas	Yes	8	(30%)
	No	14	(51%)
	Don't know	5	(18%)
Able to apply in work	Yes	9	(33%)
	No	18	(67%)

Table 8 - Using livelihoods tools in your work (N=27)

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
More effective	7.25	2.29	1	10
More interested in work	6.75	2.52	1	10
More sense of personal accomplishment	7.08	2.23	1	10
Recommended the training to others	8.00	2.01	1	10

Table 9 - Impact of training (N=27)

Follow-up responses from those that answered 'no' focused primarily on lack of direct contact with customers:

- I do not work directly with customers.
- I have a support role which doesn't involve working directly with claimants.
- I have not dealt with claimants that they would be applicable to.

Lack of time due to work pressures/interview time constraints was also given as a reason for not using the tool:

- Not had the chance yet.
- Interview time restraints. Using the Livelihoods Tools would require longer interviews to fully utilise them.

### Impact of training

Participants were asked several questions relating to the impact of the training on their work. These included whether they are now more effective in their day-to-day work, more interested in their work, whether they now have more sense of personal accomplishment, and if they have recommended the training to others. The overall scores for these responses were positive, which suggests that respondents do feel that the training has impacted on their experiences of work. The highest mean score was for recommending the training to others, while the lowest was for interest in work.

### Being a livelihood lead/mentor

Two thirds of participants indicated that at the end of the training session they did not sign up to become a lead/mentor for the development of livelihoods approaches with the DWP. While the majority were still interested in taking on this role at the time of the DWP follow-up survey, there was a slight increase in interest, which could potentially be due to the perceived impact of the livelihoods training.

### Toolkit downloads

An alternative way of measuring the level of interest among DWP staff is through download statistics for the Sustainable Livelihood Approach Toolkit for Wales from the Oxfam GB 'Policy & Practice' website<sup>9</sup>. The download figures for the financial year 2016-17 on a quarterly basis were as follows: Q1 140; Q2 105; Q3 137; Q4 102<sup>10</sup>. While downloads were made from across the UK and

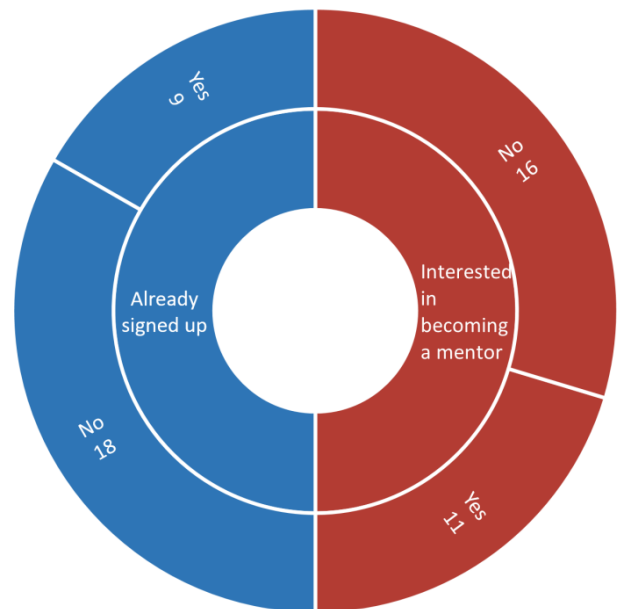


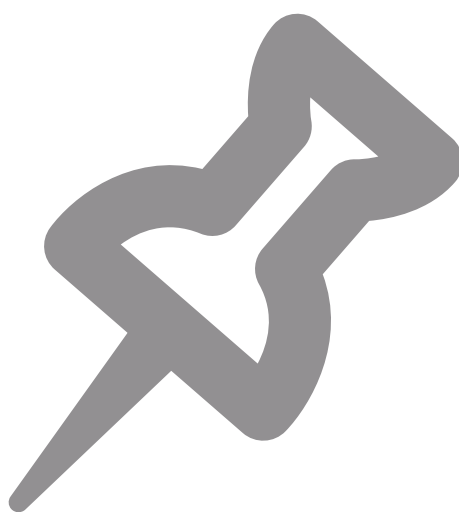
Figure 3 - Being a livelihood lead/mentor internationally, only a relatively small proportion of these took place in Wales. For example, in Q3, 20 of the 137 downloads were in Wales and the location was unknown for another 4 downloads. Although the 20 downloads all took place in south Wales where the training has been taking place thus far, there is clearly scope to promote the toolkit and online resources among DWP staff in Wales.

<sup>9</sup> The toolkit is available from <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233>

<sup>10</sup> Data provided by the Oxfam GB Policy & Practice Website Manager

# 5. Findings:

## Qualitative case study



As highlighted in Chapter 2, in consultation with Oxfam Cymru and the DWP, an initial case study area was identified to undertake qualitative consultation with DWP staff and customers. This chapter presents the findings of this consultation, dividing the discussion between the views of the two different stakeholders. To safeguard anonymity, identifiers of the different respondents and any references to geographical areas have been removed. The interviews took place in January/February 2017.

### 5.1 Qualitative consultation with DWP staff

The findings below summarise the responses from a focus group involving five frontline DWP staff and an additional two interviews with a Work Services Manager and another frontline worker. The participants had worked for the DWP for between 14 months and 40+ years. All except one were working in customer facing, work coach roles. Those who were more senior had additional leadership and mentoring responsibilities.

### Overall perceptions of the training

The majority of staff had heard about, and were asked to attend the training, through their managers. Participants did not feel there had been any challenges in attending the training, and it was indicated that people had very few pre-conceptions of what the training would involve. Overall, staff spoke very positively about the training that they had attended:

It's an excellent course. It gets you thinking about things, looking at things in a different way. I just found the subject interesting... it gave me a little bit of an insight going back to be a bit more mindful perhaps of how things can affect households and the impact certain things have.

However, some staff valued the training more than others – this related to their varying roles and experience. For one participant who specialised in working with 'hard to reach' groups, and who had more flexibility in their role to spend longer periods with customers, they did not feel that the training had taught them anything new:

A lot of it, and I'm not being patronising in any way, found it was common sense and I didn't see things any different to how I'm doing now. I was trying to get some new ideas but it was a lot of what I'm doing now... everything in the course was great but that was a lot of common sense.

Another did not feel that it 'stood out' against other training they had received; however, it was apparent that this participant had attended a number of training courses during the same time period. In addition, this respondent felt that they learnt more from observing colleagues than attending training per se:

It blended in to all the rest of my training. I don't remember it standing out next to anything I did because I did it at the same time I was training for everything else. Really, I think I've learned more from watching [colleagues].

Others felt that the training would be most useful for less experienced staff:

I think perhaps for the less experienced staff these tools do give them some sort of structure or perhaps areas that they could target that they might not necessarily think of with their lack of experience.

However, even those with a long history of working for the DWP had found the training useful. For example, one respondent had found the tools useful in better tailoring customer's Claimant Commitments:

I think that those tools are useful as well for drawing information from the customer for the Claimant Commitment because a lot of our claims are very generic.

In addition, one respondent explained that the tools provided a helpful structure when trying to take a more holistic approach:

Even for those very good at taking a holistic approach...it just gives you a structure to enhance that or even go further... some members of staff say 'well I do that anyway' – well do they? Otherwise they wouldn't still be unemployed... people think sometimes that they're doing things when they're not.

In terms of more general comments about the training, all of the respondents were highly complementary about the enthusiasm and passion of the training facilitator. They also valued the flexibility and ongoing informal support post-training:

The other day there wasn't enough referrals for the course so she came here and she spent the day, if people wanted to go up and speak about the tools to her. I felt that was useful because she went through a few more of them and I thought, oh yes, we did sort of role play a little bit within that session so I found that useful.

Even if [somebody said something] negative, she turned it around to be a good valid point...and that was good because then people aren't afraid to speak up.

Overall, the majority of respondents felt that the training equipped them with useful tools which they were able to use to understand the lives and support needs of their customers:

I think if there's perhaps somebody that ... you've had a rapport with for quite some time...[and] you know there's something else happening there but you're not quite sure what it is. They're useful perhaps to delve in different areas because you could perhaps think, right I'm not getting a lot from him about perhaps his personal circumstances, he's never forthcoming there.

There's one customer now ... So straight away I thought, right, I'm going to use the house tool on him and I know why I'm going to use the house tool on him.

One participant liked using the more visual tools in particular:

I enjoyed the training and became a lead for it...I like the visual ones, like I have used the timeline and the house so I enjoy the visual aspect because I'm quite visual as well, so I do enjoy them.

However, there were some reflections on elements of the training that were seen as more problematic for participants. More specifically, some staff felt that some of the tools could be quite negative and intrusive:

I sometimes think they can be quite negative and I would rather push the positivity of things ... like the timeline one, I tried to use it but it spent so much time focusing on the negatives that I think I needed to push the positive side a bit more.

## Reflections on the impact of the training

Participants explained that they had not yet applied the training to their work with customers in any substantial way. Indeed, a number of participants felt that it was a 'bit early in the day' to know whether or not the training had had a significant impact on the way in which they approached their work:

I think if you'd done this evaluation in perhaps two months', three months' time, you'd have a lot more different – because we're just starting off using them really. There's not a lot of usage in, you know, because not everyone's been on the training even so it's relatively new. So perhaps a little bit soon for us, for this.

In part prompted by this evaluation, more effort had recently been put into trying out using tools:

We've probably used them more over the past couple of weeks because we've known you were coming.

Going forward, respondents felt that there would be a more concerted effort to apply the tools; for example, through various group work activities currently taking place at the Job Centre. There also appeared to be a genuine interest in exploring how the tools could be practically applied. To this end, one participant explained how they were about to visit a job club run by one of Oxfam's community partner organisations to explore how to put the training into practice:

We're going to visit somewhere now in [name of area] that have been using these tools for two years in their group session environment but not necessarily with the visual tools, just adopting part of the tools within the group. So we're looking to see how we can adopt the things here.

While the application of the training had been limited at the time of the focus group, a number of participants did describe using the tools in their work with customers:

I've got another customer who doesn't really like to open up that much so I use 'the house', I've used some of the questions from the structured interviewing question and I used something else which I can't remember which one it is.

In addition, some participants described developing their own ways of using the tools:

I've started using them and I'm sort of developing my own way of using them and they're really, really useful so we started off with baseline evaluations which are quite, well the Livelihoods [toolkit] suggests they're a good tool to use first, and then I think you develop them, bringing in the other tools as per the discussions for the customer, you know? So if they really identified that they perhaps need some debt management there's some great tools for that, or, you know, if you need to dig a bit deeper there's a tool for that. So it's just knowing what sort of tool you could perhaps bring in and use on that occasion.

Most participants felt that the training had helped them to understand more about the everyday experiences of their customers. Significantly, the approach was useful in helping staff to recognise the wider barriers to work faced by some of their customers, and a number of staff felt that the tools were a useful method of helping them to get to the root of their customers' issues. They felt that the training had helped them to recognise that customers could be reluctant to share and open up about the wider issues they were struggling with in their lives:

It makes you see the bigger picture... It makes you think about what else might be happening in that person's life.

You just don't know what's going on in people's lives, do you? I think sometimes they're embarrassed to say or they don't want to say so you could use the tools to just sort of dig - you don't have to use them, I don't think, like [colleague] was saying, get out a house and say, 'Right, we're going to have a look at this.' You could use aspects of it to try and draw information out.

I think, yes, it's the different ways of speaking to people and working with people. I think it just opens up your mind set a little bit to perhaps other issues they could have in their lives, whereas you perhaps wouldn't have thought about it.

In addition, one respondent felt that the training had made them think a lot more about people's wider networks of support, and how isolated some people can be. Where the tools had been used, they were felt to work particularly well for customers with multiple barriers to the labour market (including older people, lone parents, younger people):

My lone parent - she's got a lot of issues around her family and she cared for her father, and when she lost her father it made her feel, well, she just felt a bit hopeless and she didn't know what to do. She'd lost her confidence ...we did the timeline so that I could see and she could visually see how much she's overcome in the last five years and looking for work and being able to manage that with her son is something that she can do. So we did the timeline and I said, 'Look, I want you to look how much you've managed to get through. Even though you don't think you're strong enough, you are strong enough.'

I've got a customer [I used] the house on, I didn't realise how much she didn't leave the house. She'd left once a fortnight to come and see me and maybe once a week to volunteer but that's it. She doesn't leave the house ... and she doesn't really have any friends and she doesn't have any confidence and I'm trying my hardest to get her to do things ...now I'm contacting her on a weekly basis even via email because if I said to her, 'Do you want to come in every week?' She'd be like, 'No.' So I'm emailing her every other week to see how she's doing, see what progress she's made.

However, for some, it was difficult to attribute this sort of holistic approach to working with customers to their participation in the Oxfam training alone. Indeed, two respondents felt that their involvement in earlier 'personalisation pilots', which involved engaging more with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants with health issues, had helped them to take more of a holistic approach.

When asked explicitly whether or not the training made staff more or less likely to sanction customers for non-compliance with conditionality requirements, they all agreed that they did not think that the training made them any more or less likely to sanction people. Indeed, there was a strong message that they would 'never sanction anyone unnecessarily anyway'.

Staff felt it was not yet possible to say whether or not the new approach had had any tangible impacts on customer outcomes. In addition they did not feel that the training had, so far, had any impact on team morale and job satisfaction. However, staff reported that they felt that some changes had occurred in the way in which they were treated by customers as a result of them taking more time to talk to them about wider issues.

Furthermore, one respondent said that the training had impacted on their management style, explaining how they had used one of the tools on a member of staff in order to help understand them better, encourage them to open up and motivate them. This was seen as an unexpected, but welcome, by-product of the training.

### Barriers to applying the training

Participants identified a number of barriers to putting the training into practice. These included a lack of confidence in using the tools; a lack of time to apply the tools; the work-first approach of Universal Credit and wider processes; and the way in which staff felt the tools were not always appropriate for use with some customers.

#### A lack of confidence in using the tools

A couple of respondents felt that a lack of confidence in using the tools presented barriers to their application. However, it was explained by some that the more they used the tools, the more they understood them and saw their value:

It was the confidence for me initially. I felt I didn't know enough about them to actually start using them so I wish they'd spent a little bit more time on it or had a course where perhaps the tools were the main topic, having a few role-playing sessions, perhaps getting us involved - I think I would have left there with a bigger understanding, and thought: 'yes, that's really how I could use that'.

#### A lack of time to apply the tools

Time constraints and work-load pressures were a barrier to applying the tools, particularly the view that longer appointments were required in order to utilise the tools with customers:

It would be difficult to fit into a normal work coach's day but they could - also they'd have to book that longish period out. It's not something they could weave in. It would have to be an understanding that these could take some time, you know, with the customer, to have that long interview.

I'm booking two weeks in advance now for my customers so if I had someone come in tomorrow, someone who needed the extra support. If I didn't have any new claim slots available they'd have to wait two weeks for me to even consider booking it in, to see myself.

The issue of time was also reiterated in consultation with a community partner, who indicated that some employment support can be a 'numbers game', making it difficult to apply the approaches recommended in the training.

### Work-first approach of Universal Credit and wider processes

Linking in with the issue of time above, one participant described that the pace with which Universal Credit claimants were expected to move into work presented a challenge to applying the training. In addition, one person described various bureaucratic processes such as the Claimant Commitment, updates and markers, which took time away from responding to customers' more individual needs:

I work on Universal Credit and it's a faster pace benefit. That's the idea of it, to get people into work as quick as you can...Because it's a quicker benefit, we need to be getting them into work.... I don't think [the tools are] necessarily in-keeping with Universal Credit and the goals that we've got there with that benefit.

I think in terms of Universal Credit, because we see each other's customers, the only way it would work is if we were all trained on it...we were all saying the exact same thing, so I don't see it having much of an impact going forward at the moment because I'm the only one who's had the training and I don't use it myself... As far as we're concerned, the results we're getting as it is are good so I think if we just continue working the way we are, we're doing what we need to do so I don't really see the need to bring in the tools but it's because I don't find them very useful. I'm not saying anybody else might not so I can't really speak for the rest of the team.

### The appropriateness of the tools

Some staff members explained how important it was that the tools were used sensitively but also flexibly, as they felt that the tools were not always appropriate for certain customers:

You've got to know your customers. Those tools aren't going to work on everybody. You've got to have that rapport in [the] place first. Like a lot of customers in the group information session, I've worked with them on and off over the years anyway so I think we're quite comfortable with that but I think some of the questions, the 'OK/ Not OK' tool, I don't think I'd be very comfortable using that because I find that quite invasive.

### Suggested areas of improvement for future roll out

All participants said that they would recommend the training for any services that are supporting people seeking employment (JCP offices, but also Work Programme providers and community organisations). One respondent felt that it was particularly valuable for Communities for Work (C4W) staff. Interestingly, the issue of time was raised again here, with a perception that C4W staff can offer longer appointments to customers:

There was a lady on our course... and she was from Communities for Work and she loves them and she's been using them a lot so it was interesting to see how Communities for Work do it, but Communities for Work have got more time to be able to speak to customers.

Respondents also felt that staff working at all levels would benefit from the training, regardless of whether or not they had a customer facing role. One respondent felt it was important that the training had the 'buy-in' of those in managerial and mentoring roles so that the use of the tools continued to be actively promoted:

Where managers have been on it and saw the value of it they would probably make more of an effort.

However, it was confirmed by Oxfam that a 'Leads Training Session' had also been developed to support those interested in taking the tools forward, which provided more depth on how to use the tools.

The main areas for improvement that people suggested related to having more time to explore the tools in the training; the use of more accessible language; improvements to the case studies; building the training into existing training programmes; and ensuring the continued quality of the training.

### More time to explore the tools in the training

All participants were in agreement that not enough time had been spent using the various tools in the training session.

For the tool side of things, they didn't spend probably that much time on them as it was just at the end after they'd gone through all the agenda and the other areas of the Livelihoods programme, they went onto a couple of the tools. Only a couple of them they touched on and it was quite quick.

Until you've actually looked at it or used elements, you don't know how useful it's going to be or how you could use it if you've never used them so I think the actual course itself doesn't give you any sort of real steer of how beneficial they could be, the tools, because they don't spend enough time on them.

Indeed, a number of participants felt that the course was perhaps too intense for a one day course. Instead, they felt that it should be spread over a number of days:

I thought it was very, very good but I found as well it was quite intense and I felt after about four o'clock looking around the room people were starting to switch off. I think it was overloading.

I think [the training should be] over a longer period because I did find all the sessions useful and I think she did coach for the tools. She did explain in all fairness it was a whistle stop tour of the tools and that, so I think maybe if the course had been delivered over one and a half or two days, that, yes.

This issue was reiterated in consultation with a community partner, who was supportive of the training but felt that there was perhaps 'too much to take in in one session'.

Furthermore, all participants felt that too long is spent in the training going over statistics and poverty definitions:

There was the one bit I didn't like and I didn't think a lot of people got what we were supposed to be doing and they gave cards with comments for government figures and things like that on there.

The first half of the presentation where they're talking about poverty and the work that Oxfam is doing, lovely. But then we didn't have enough time then to go over perhaps more tools.

I think just an overview of poverty, what sort of types of poverty then going into the tools in a bit more depth rather than some of the game stuff they did.

However, from Oxfam's perspective, a key purpose of the training is to embed an awareness of poverty. As such, the tools are not the sole focus, and hence substantial time is devoted to definitions and understandings of poverty. As highlighted above, a subsequent 'Leads Training' session is available for those who want a more in-depth understanding of how to use the SLA tools.

### Using more accessible language

A small number of participants felt that the language used in the training pack could sometimes be quite inaccessible, and one respondent felt that the training materials would benefit from having some simpler examples:

They are quite easy and common sense, a couple that we went over to be fair, but there are some, once you start reading through - like the assets pentagon and things like that - you think 'Oh God, I wouldn't think of a situation to use that'. So I think just to spend a bit more time on the ones that are a little bit more complex. Some of them are; if you just look at them you think, 'I don't understand it'. Also, the 'wordiness' of it, that's the only thing I find, reading through that handbook I do find perhaps some of the language not so easy to understand.

However, it was noted by Oxfam that, while efforts are made to ensure accessibility, the training needs to reflect the accepted terminology and definitions in relation to poverty, more broadly, and assets-based approaches, more specifically. Any amendments to simplify the toolkit would therefore need to ensure that these key elements were not compromised.

### Informal and on-going training at their workplace

Some respondents described very positively some of the more informal and ad hoc training that had taken place in their offices. They felt that more contact of this nature with the training facilitator would be worthwhile going forward:

It felt more relaxing in that environment with people I knew, my colleagues. We had a bit of fun with it as well, taking on characters and things like that, but I just think perhaps more of that, perhaps a bit of one to one, maybe small group support afterwards if needed, maybe.

The need for follow-on sessions was also reiterated in consultation with a community partner, who emphasised that such sessions were vital for community partners and staff who were being trained as Leads.

### Improvements to the case studies

Some participants struggled to recognise their customers in the case studies presented during the training. Participants therefore felt that the case studies could have been better tailored to the sorts of customers they saw on a day-to-day basis, and that the training might benefit from a dialogue with staff prior to their attendance; for example through asking staff to submit their own (anonymised) case studies prior to the training, of either typical cases or those that they were having particular difficulties with:

I think they said they got them from real life people but when we're trying to relate them in our heads to who we could use them on, in our customer pool, it's a little more difficult.

### Building the Livelihoods Training into existing training and procedures

One respondent felt that the training could easily be incorporated into existing 'route way' training for new staff, and that more needed to be done to build the use of the tools into staff diaries. In addition, one respondent felt that if staff had to report back with statistics on their usage of the tools this might generate greater buy-in, at least initially, until the wider value of the tools was recognised following greater use. This idea of DWP 'buy-in' was reiterated in consultation with a community partner who felt that the training should be incorporated into DWP basic training as a means of formally legitimising it within DWP systems.

### Ensuring the continued quality of the training

As highlighted above, all participants were highly complimentary about the passion and skills of the training facilitator. As such, all respondents were in agreement that the quality of the facilitator would be pivotal to the success of the future roll out of the training:

The person who delivers [the training] is massive to this... if the DWP were going to roll it out then you would have to have the same passion.

## 5.2 Qualitative consultation with DWP customers

The findings below summarise the responses from interviews with five JCP customers. Please note that these participants were all being supported by the same work coach who had undergone the Livelihoods Training.

As such, they are not reflective of all customers on whom the tools are being utilised. However, this initial analysis provides some very useful insights into the views of customers more broadly as they also provide reflections on interactions with other Job Centre staff.

### Background information about the customers

All participants were male and aged over 45 and all were currently receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Three respondents had been claiming JSA for more than 12 months (2 years, 5 years and 13 years), while two had been claiming JSA for between 8 months to one year. One participant had previously been claiming ESA for around 5 years until undergoing a Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which had determined that he was 'fit for work' (despite appeals from the claimant).

Participants described experiencing varying levels of conditionality: four had to engage in job search activities every day; one had these expectations reduced to two days per week in recognition of his health condition. A number of respondents had experienced mandatory work experience placements. However, participants were not always clear on what activities were mandatory. Only one participant had experienced a sanction during their time claiming JSA. This had been for missing an appointment.

### Job aspirations

Respondents' job aspirations varied. Two described being happy to take any job, one was keen to pursue a career as a food hygiene inspector, one wanted to find work in retail and another was hoping to return to work as an engineer. Two respondents had work histories which were predominantly in construction; however, they were hoping to change careers to something that was less physically demanding. To this end, one was trying to improve their digital skills, while another was volunteering at a local charity shop.

### Barriers to work

In terms of barriers to work, respondents described a range of issues which they felt were preventing them from moving into work. Two felt like their age counted against them and described struggling to compete for jobs with younger people, including new migrants:

Age goes against you. I think they're looking more at youngsters across the board and when you've got immigration coming into this country throughout the UK, it's a nightmare.

Both respondents acknowledged significant changes in the skills they needed to succeed in the labour market since leaving school, with limited digital skills presenting barriers to accessing jobs in today's labour market. Two other respondents were unsure about the reasons why they had struggled to find work; however, they felt that it might be due to limited demand in the local labour market. These sentiments were common across all accounts:



There's nothing. [This town] used to be a thriving town. It's gone. If you walk round [this town] it's like a ghost town. Things are closed up, the market, 75 per cent of it's gone.

For one respondent, poor mental health was the main barrier to work. Others also described physical health problems which they felt counted against them in the labour market.

### Previous interactions with DWP staff

In order to understand the impact of the training, we wanted to explore customers' previous interactions with DWP staff to provide a comparison to more recent experiences (e.g. post-Livelihoods Training). Perhaps unsurprisingly, respondents varied in terms of their previous interactions dependent on the nature and length of their claim. However, very few people described the interactions in terms of providing very useful support, as one respondent highlights in contrast to his current experience:

Until I'd seen [current work coach], I was just, 'Oh, hi, how's it going? Sign here, go', and they were looking, they knew they're not going to get me a job and I knew they weren't going to get [me] a job and they more or less were - unless [work coach] got out of me, I would have been chugging along like that until I'm 67.

### Current interactions with DWP staff

Respondents were broadly positive about the support they were currently receiving. Most significantly, they felt that staff were friendly and approachable, and that they supported them to keep motivated, as well as finding opportunities to improve their skills and wider employability:

The people working here are really nice. They treat you with respect. They're always polite. [Staff member] is always smiley and I don't know what tablets [they're] on but I'd get some of them!

[Staff member] is great, like now all I ever see is [they] keep sending me to different places all the time and they're all reasonable and helpful.

### Recent changes

Respondents tended to see the same work coach/JCP staff member every time they came into the Job Centre. One respondent explained how this consistency was a recent (and welcome) development:

It's easier seeing one person because they can more or less rate you and instead going over and over and over stuff... [They] know where you coming from and [they] know your situation. It's much easier.

All of the respondents felt that the staff understood their personal situation and how best to help them. For example, one respondent described how their work coach recognised their concerns about being unable to sustain a job should they need to take periods of time off due to ill health:

I told [staff member]...about worrying about if I had a job and then I had three days off and then, perhaps, it was a day a week for the next few weeks, but then it could be a month and then that wouldn't be accepted. [Staff member] said, 'Well, we'd have to find you a job which could put up with that.'

However, respondents did vary on the extent to which they felt they could talk openly with JCP staff about their job aspirations and barriers to work. One respondent described not being a particularly 'open' person, instead preferring to talk to family members rather than staff from JCP or other support services. However they described a recent conversation about 'rating their confidence', which they felt had helped them to open up to their Job Coach. Another respondent felt the need to 'watch what you've got to say', despite the friendly staff.

A number of respondents felt that the service they received at the Job Centre had improved over the last few months:

I think they've become a bit more approachable, a little bit more approachable... [Before] it was very much not a Jobcentre, a check-up centre I used to call it. I'm not going to the Jobcentre, I'm going down to the check-up centre because that's all they do. They don't look for work for you, they don't help you with getting work, they just check what you're doing. I haven't felt that so much.

The last couple of months, they're - how can you describe them - more sociable. They seem to be not so hard-faced, so to speak. They're more calm. They're not so, 'I'm in charge; you're nothing', making you feel small every time you go there. It's more sociable now...It's more relaxed. You sit down, 'How are you?' and whatnot. It's a more family, well, not a family atmosphere, but more relaxed, so whatever they've had training, it [has] helped, I think.

Reflecting on the approaches used in applying the tools described in the staff consultation above, most respondents were not aware of the Livelihoods Training that the staff had received. However, it is clear that in some instances, staff were more explicit about the tools being used in their appointments. As one respondent explained:

Respondent: [Staff member] said, I think we were in that place where we had the castle thing, the closer you get to the castle, whatever, I can't exactly remember all of it...but it's all about the changes they're making, trying to be more helpful. [Staff member] did say but I can't remember what it's called... It's a circle and give words like how you're feeling on a scale and the nearer you are to this castle, the better you feel.

Interviewer: What did you think of that?

Respondent: Well, it was okay but it feels a bit kindergarten-ish to me but [laughs] it was okay I suppose.

Overall, respondents felt that their current experience of staff was better than previous interactions. Respondents described a more personable approach, greater consistency in terms of the staff member who they

worked most closely with, and felt that staff were more forthcoming with information about relevant courses. However, as all respondents were still looking for work, they did not feel that they had had more positive outcomes during their more recent interactions with the Job Centre.

### **Alternative sources of employment support**

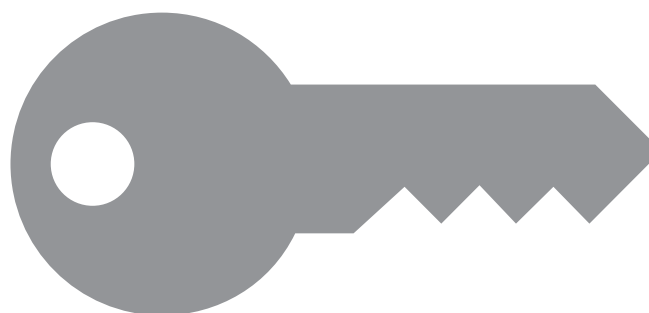
A number of respondents were also engaging with employment support provided by organisations other than the DWP. In two cases, these agencies had been invited into the Job Centre by DWP staff. Respondents valued this support as they felt they were able to talk more openly and receive more impartial advice and information regarding the financial benefits of moving into work:

[DWP staff member] gets different people in. There was somebody here last Thursday. I'm trying to remember where they were from. They were doing a bit of a survey and they were great because they were independent, so you could talk.

The [name of external organisation] one was brilliant. She explained things like, do your calculations because if you get a part time job you might be worse off which - none of this information has come from here [Job centre] which, I don't think it's fair. They should say, yes, go back to work and do the calculation for you and say you really need to be looking for full time or you really need to be looking for part time, something like that. They don't provide that and I think some people when they get a job and they suddenly find out they're worse off there will be a hell of a resentment there.

One respondent also referred to the 'friendlier atmosphere' that they felt was offered by some of the other employment support agencies, as well as the additional facilities and practical assistance that they were able to access (e.g. access to PCs, telephones, etc.).

# 6. Concluding comments and next steps



This Interim Report has presented emerging findings of the evaluation data collected to date in relation to the DWP & Oxfam Livelihoods Training Project. As highlighted previously, the purpose of this report was not to present definitive findings from the evaluation; rather this report is a first consideration of the issues emerging from the evaluation and is designed to provide insights that can support the on-going delivery of the Project. This final chapter presents a brief overview of some of the key issues that have emerged from our collation and analysis of the various data sources, as well as identifying the next steps for the evaluation.

## 6.1 Concluding comments

With regards to the quantitative data collated and analysed to date, responses to the Oxfam administered survey were very positive and highlighted the clear, immediate impact of the training. Overall, responses for the likelihood of being able to use SLA tools directly in their work were positive, although those trained in Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale represent exceptions. Responses relating to the effects of the training on awareness of poverty, supporting customers, and using livelihoods approaches at work were positive across the board and scores were clearly higher following the training. A large majority of respondents said that they

intended to use the tools and that they are directly relevant for their job role.

After returning to work, participants appeared to continue to feel positive about whether the tools have helped them to offer more effective customer support and to feel satisfied with their work. Responses demonstrate the continued impact of the training on awareness of poverty in particular. While responses are not as strong for using livelihoods approaches at work, they are still an improvement on before the training.

Most noticeably, there has been a big decrease in participants stating that they have been able to come up with new ideas and apply these ideas in their work. Several participants explained this through lack of time or their lack of contact with customers. Respondents do feel that the training has had a positive impact on their work in terms of feeling more effective, interested in work, and a sense of accomplishment, and they have subsequently recommended the training to colleagues. There has also been a slight increase in the numbers of respondents interested in being a Lead/mentor. Downloads of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach Toolkit for Wales have been low within Wales, however, and there is clearly scope to promote the toolkit and online resources among DWP staff in Wales.

With regards to the qualitative data collated and analysed to date, the consultation with DWP staff again highlighted a number of positive responses in relation to the training, particularly around the skills of the training facilitator and the post-training support, as well as the impact it had had on how they approached particular customers. However, the qualitative consultation was able to draw out some of the nuances of people's experiences, and while largely positive, some staff had yet to fully utilise the tools (despite the training taking place a few months ago) with some also having slightly more ambivalent views towards the training and its impact on their work. The qualitative consultation also enabled us to explore some of the barriers to using the tools in greater detail, highlighting that time constraints and organisational barriers were key. However, personal barriers were also relevant, whether that related to the confidence of staff or the perception that it would be difficult to use on certain customers. It was evident, from the case study and the facilitator notes, that 'buy in' from senior DWP staff would be vital for embedding the tools within current working practices.

With regards to the qualitative interviews with customers, it was clear from the interviews that were undertaken that there had been a shift in more recent months in how staff were interacting with them during appointments. It was more difficult to attribute these more positive experiences solely to the delivery of the training, as the DWP noted that there have also been broader changes to the DWP service over that time period, including the move to Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS) and greater 'customer collaboration' on Claimant Commitments. However, the survey of DWP customers and comparisons with existing customer insights data should hopefully be able to demonstrate any changes that have occurred following the training (see Next Steps below).

## 6.2 Next steps

This Interim Report has presented emerging findings from the data collected up to February 2017. The evaluation will be on-going until September 2017, at which point a full final evaluation report will be produced. The final evaluation report will incorporate the following data:

- The two phases of the DWP staff survey;
- A survey of DWP customers who are supported by staff who have received the training, to be compared with existing customer insights surveys undertaken by the DWP;
- Post-training questionnaires and facilitator notes;
- A number of qualitative case studies, including consultation with both DWP staff and customers;
- Consultation with all community partners; and,
- Consultation with Oxfam and DWP staff responsible for the delivery of the Project.

The final evaluation report will provide a process, impact and economic evaluation.







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