

## West London Working

# West London Working Evaluation

## Directory of Employment Services



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. West London Working (WLW) is one of 15 City Strategy Pathfinders launched by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in April 2007. The Directory of Employment Services was one of thirteen work packages undertaken by WLW.
2. This evaluation builds on the July 2010 interim evaluation<sup>1</sup> which assessed the Directory's performance in relation to its original aims and objectives and covered its usage from April 2009 to April 2010. This second evaluation focuses on:
  - The usage of the Directory from April 2010 to February 2011;
  - The changes that have been made to the Directory since the July 2010 evaluation; and
  - The succession strategy for the Directory;
3. The West London Working Directory of Employment Services compiles information on organisations which offer employment support and employability training in the six West London boroughs. It is accessible on WLW's website and can be searched by a range of criteria. The Directory is available to all, but front line employment advisers are the key target group. In January 2011, an employer-facing page was also added to guide businesses towards West London providers who offer recruitment and retention services.
4. The Directory aims to contribute to the vision for the WLW City Strategy Pathfinder which is 'to transform the coherence and effectiveness of the existing structure of services in West London to deliver a sustainable increase in the number of local residents in employment and a reduction in child poverty'. It hopes to achieve this by:
  - Ensuring that advisors and referral agencies are aware of the full range of local provision to which residents can be referred to and use it as part of their work process
  - Facilitating personalised support to residents
  - Developing ways to sustain the Directory beyond the funding period of the City Strategy Pathfinder.
5. The design of the Directory was informed by Advisor focus groups, which generated a strong degree of consensus about their needs. The design process also responded to user feedback throughout by making enhancements to the system.
6. The number of hits on the Directory rose steadily during its first year of operation, averaging 1,200 hits per month since September 2009. The Directory has continually attracted new organisations, and employment advisers are aware of it and use it although not as their primary source of information.
7. The Directory's key strength is that it offers more information than previously available to advisers, mostly because it is not restricted to one funding stream, one type of target group

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Employment Services, July 2010, Interim Evaluation of the West London Working Directory of Employment Services

or one type of project. This is valuable to advisers although the results returned by searches can be too broad and not always accurate.

8. The Directory's key weakness was its inability in remaining up to date. This is a key issue to resolve for the future if it wants to become the key point of reference for information on employment related services in West London. The Directory could also have benefited from a more tailored approach to meet the needs of employment advisers.
9. Overall, according to the Interim Evaluation survey, the Directory remains seen as an additional source of information and its impact on referrals has been limited. Its impact on duplication of service provision to date has been hard to define as this has not been tracked.
10. Looking to the future, the Directory is to be extended by the ESF European Programme Management Unit in order to include ESF projects across the whole of London. This agreement ensures the sustainability of the West London Directory as the site will remain and will continue to be accessible through the WLW website.
11. Based on the findings of the Interim Evaluation and our own conclusions, the main lessons to be learned from this project are as follows:
  - Keeping the Directory up-to-date should be the paramount objective
  - Being clear about who the target group is and what information they need. If several target groups are identified, enabling different degrees of access to the site could be useful.
  - Providing relevant links (with the right contact / to the right information in each organisation) for employment advisers.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 West London Working (WLW) is one of 15 City Strategy Pathfinders launched by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in April 2007. It brings together the partners responsible for employment and skills to tackle the high and persistent number of West London residents not in employment. DWP is due to cease its funding support for City Strategy Pathfinders in March 2011.
- 1.2 WLW covers the Boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, and Hounslow. Its vision is ‘to transform the coherence and effectiveness of the existing structure of services in West London to deliver a sustainable increase in the number of residents in employment and a reduction in child poverty.’ The LDA is the accountable body for West London Working.
- 1.3 This report evaluates the delivery of the Directory of Employment Services and aims to “gain a good understanding of what has worked well in the course of achieving the benefits and what has worked less well.”<sup>2</sup> It is one of a series of six reports. The other reports in this series are as follows.
- Work Package 1: Investment & Target Group
  - Work Package 2: Employability Performance Rating
  - Work Package 3: Building Employability Pathways
  - The Meta Evaluation. This report is intended to bring work package evaluations together, and to reach other, broader conclusions.
  - The West London Working 2006-2011 Final Report. This report is intended to be read by a wide audience, and will address the performance of the programme as a whole.
- 1.4 Each of these reports is intended to work as a stand-alone document, and so reports may share some text on methodology and approach.

## Purpose of the evaluation

- 1.5 This evaluation is an update of the July 2010 interim evaluation<sup>3</sup> which assessed its performance in relation to its original aims and objectives and covered Directory usage from April 2009 to April 2010.
- 1.6 The interim evaluation reported the findings from a survey of Directory’s users. It found that the Directory was ‘regarded as a helpful tool for advisers, which is simple and easy to use’. It also found that while there was some overlap between the Directory and other sources, it tended to be more comprehensive in coverage and in terms of details provided. However, only a third of respondents used it once a month or more indicating a potential to increase its usage. In order to achieve this, the evaluation identified a list of enhancements which

<sup>2</sup> LDA, West London Working Invitation to Tender

<sup>3</sup> Institute for Employment Services, July 2010, Interim Evaluation of the West London Working Directory of Employment Services - <http://www.westlondonworking.org.uk/index.php?siid=13948>

would help embed its use amongst employment advisers. They included: more targeted search filters; marketing activity and the addition of an employer-facing site.

- 1.7 This second evaluation builds on the findings of this work and focuses on:
- The usage of the Directory from April 2010 to February 2011;
  - The changes that have been made to the Directory since the July 2010 evaluation; and
  - The succession strategy for the Directory.

### **Structure of report**

- 1.8 The report is structured as follows:
- Section 2 explains the methodology we used to produce this evaluation
  - Section 3 presents the work package being evaluated and what it aimed to achieve
  - Section 4 sets out how it was going to achieve its objectives
  - Section 5 evaluates whether the work package has delivered what was hoped for at the outset;
  - Section 6 assesses the project's Strategic Added Value;
  - Section 7 summarises our findings and draws lessons for the future.

## 2 EVALUATION APPROACH

### Introduction

2.1 This section describes the method we used.

### The methodology we used

#### *We followed a “theory of change” approach*

2.2 We used a “theory of change” approach. Simply put, a “theory of change” methodology requires us to understand the mechanism by which the programme is supposed to effect change, and then evaluate whether this mechanism did in fact work.

2.3 We see two steps for a theory of change approach to this evaluation.

- The first step, undertaken in this work package evaluation report, is to understand why WLW thought that this work package would be valuable, and how the work package would achieve its goals. We then evaluate whether this mechanism worked using the methodology presented below. This provides a model to judge the success of the work package within its own terms. This first stage allows for a close look at the internal logic of the work package and if it has successfully delivered its own objectives, but it does not address how the work package fits with the wider context of the WLW Programme. We therefore need a second step.
- The second step, undertaken in the meta-report published separately, explores whether the deliverables of the individual work packages are relevant to the overall objectives of the WLW programme. This stage asks why WLW thought that each of the work packages would help deliver its overarching objectives. This places the individual work packages in a wider context.

#### *We reviewed background documents and analysed monitoring data*

2.4 This evaluation builds on a number of documents and data sources provided to us by the West London Working Programme team. They include:

- The 2007 Business Plan and 2009 Business Plan refresh as well as the monthly progress reports.
- The specification for the Mapping and Directory work commissioned to Experian.
- The specification for the Development, Hosting and Support services provided by Experian.
- The interim evaluation published in July 2010.
- Usage data from the establishment of the Directory in August 2008 to November 2010. This allowed us to give a fuller picture of the trends in usage of the Directory to date.
- We were also supplied with information on the number of providers registering on the Directory and details of the project expenditure.

***We collected additional information through interviews***

- 2.5 We complemented our desktop work with interviews with the WLW Associate Director in order to assess recent changes to the Directory and the reasons for these changes, and with the European Programme Management Unit to discuss the succession strategy for the Directory. We also spoke with the project manager and the monitoring officer in order to explore issues related to the management and maintenance of the Directory.

### 3 WHAT, WHERE, WHO AND WHICH: THE SERVICE OFFER

#### Introduction

- 3.1 This section provides the basic information on the work package evaluated. In this section we also define what the work package aimed to achieve. Evaluators can only tell if a work package has been successful if they know what it set out to deliver in the first place.
- 3.2 This section simply seeks to provide information. The information provided here is subject to analysis in later chapters.

#### What was the nature of activities?

- 3.3 The Directory falls under the West London Passport Work Package. The aim of the Passport was to develop a management information tool to track residents' progress through the route to work, across different providers. This would help to improve the referral system and offer more personalised support to residents. It would also help identify the most successful routes to work. The Directory formed part of the Passport package, providing an infrastructure which would better link residents to employment services.
- 3.4 However, after undertaking a feasibility study, West London Working concluded that the business benefits that a Passport system could bring did not exceed the cost and complexity of implementation, so the Passport work package did not progress further.
- 3.5 The Directory, while part of the Passport work package, was designed to function independently and was retained as a project.

#### What does the Directory do?

- 3.6 The West London Working Directory of Employment Services compiles information on organisations which offer employment support and employability training in the six West London boroughs. It was commissioned and funded jointly with the East and South East London City Strategy Pathfinder. The East and South East London Directory has a separate site and includes information on East London providers.
- 3.7 The design of the Directory was undertaken by Experian and informed by focus-group discussions with advisers, which generated a large degree of consensus about their needs.
- 3.8 It is accessible through a unique URL (<http://directory.westlondonworking.org.uk/>) as well as through the West London Working's website ([www.westlondonworking.org.uk](http://www.westlondonworking.org.uk)). It can be searched by postcode, borough, free text search or an advance search option including criteria on: the type of organisation, services offered, eligibility (residence, age etc) and sector. The search engine returns a list of organisations which match the selected criteria and for each it provides the information listed below.

---

|   |
|---|
| Name of organisation                      |
| Address                                   |
| Contact details (phone, email, web, fax)  |
| Short description of services             |
| Nearest Jobcentre Plus office location    |
| Type of organisation: private, public etc |

---

List of programmes with drop down list including: description, funding stream, services offered, eligibility and sector covered.

Facilities

Geographical areas covered

Opening times

Map and travel directions from the TfL journey planner

Accreditations held by the organisation

- 3.9 Initially, the Directory was also to include an e-referral mechanism for providers to book their clients onto courses automatically. However, this was reconsidered as a result of feedback from Personal Advisors during the development process as it became apparent that referral organisations prefer to speak to the provider of services to find out more about what they offer and availability before enlisting. It was felt that an automated approach would actually add a delay to the referral process rather than make it more efficient.
- 3.10 In order to ensure that the Directory is used, on-going marketing activity takes place to keep providers aware of it as a tool available to them. For instance, the West London Working Providers' Confederation e-bulletins regularly mentions it and urges service providers to update their entry and their personal advisors to use the Directory as a referral tool.
- 3.11 After several months of active use of the site, feedback from users was gathered and a number of enhancements to the Directory were made in response. They included:
- Marking 'Site Loading' with an egg timer
  - Changing references from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance – change to forms and search tools
  - Change function of the browser back button
  - Develop enhanced user statistics
  - Events and news listing including design of new events form
  - Setting up a discussion board/user forum
  - Updated maps
  - Employer facing page
  - Include JCP location for each search
  - Searching for a group of providers
- 3.12 There were also plans to enhance the Directory by incorporating Performance Ratings when they were made public. As the first tranche of ratings is due to be made public in May 11 this has not yet been integrated.

### ***Who is it for?***

- 3.13 Front-line employment advisers are the key target group for the Directory.
- 3.14 The recent enhancements to the Directory have resulted in a new employer facing element to guide businesses towards West London providers who offer recruitment and retention services.

### ***How is it maintained, updated and monitored?***

- 3.15 The Directory is managed by West London Working's team. It has a dedicated project manager and input from an administrative / monitoring officer.

#### *Experian is responsible for technical maintenance*

- 3.16 Experian, the Directory provider, was responsible for the technical maintenance of the site and for resolving access or data upload issues.

#### *Updating*

- 3.17 The core challenge with any database resides in keeping it accurate and up to date constantly. This was recognised in the Business Plan, where WLW stated that there would be a contractual requirement for providers to inform WLW of details of new services. Providers wanting to add new information to the Directory are signposted to the Programme Coordinator and complete the relevant data forms which are then added in by the monitoring officer. However, due to differences in contracting timeframes and the difficulties of influencing contracts issued by national and regional funders WLW was unable to enforce this contractual requirement outside the projects it directly funded. This means that the information provided by the Directory was not always up-to-date.
- 3.18 The WLW Programme Coordinator also undertook a review of the entries in the Directory on a six-monthly basis during which each provider was asked to update their details or to confirm that the current entry was correct. Where a contact indicated that the service was no longer available they were deleted from the Directory. While this made the best use of the resources available to the project, checking a database on a six-monthly basis and depending on providers voluntarily supplying information is not enough to keep it up-to-date for its users.

#### *Monitoring*

- 3.19 The WLW Project Co-ordinator monitors the number of hits on a monthly basis. In the past the Directory has had limited usage statistics available which included the number of hits per day and organisations most searched for. The enhancement to the Directory, that went live in January 2011, has resulted in the installation of Google Analytics and now statistics can be gathered on number of pages hit per visit, length of time on the site, graphs and similar features.
- 3.20 Absolute figures of the number of providers on the Directory at any one time are available. However the net number of entries (i.e taking into account deletions) in the Directory has not been monitored regularly, although they have occasionally been calculated and reported to the Board.

### **What was the rationale for the Directory?**

- 3.21 The rationale for the project resides in the need for a better understanding of the provision of employment services in West London and better, more coherent, services to residents.
- 3.22 The 2007 Business Plan estimated that in 2006/07 there were 200 organisations from across the public, private and third sectors delivering employment related services in West London for the main programmes and funding agencies. Registered Social Landlords and

Arms-Length Management Organisations also deliver services which were not captured in this estimate.

- 3.23 This resulted in multiple and confused points of contact for residents and for employers. As a result few referrals took place across providers as they were not aware of what other organisations offered. This meant that those looking for employment support services could miss out on opportunities and also that there was a high likelihood of duplication across providers.

### **What were the objectives of the Directory?**

- 3.24 The 2007 Business Plan and the 2009 Business Plan Refresh state that the Directory aims to:
- Ensure that advisors and referral agencies are aware of the full range of local provision to which residents can be referred and use it as part of their work process
  - Facilitate personalised support to the residents
  - Provide up to date information on local provision to aid strategic decision making
  - Provide information to employers on recruitment and retention services
- 3.25 In 2009, an additional objective was added: to develop ways to sustain the Directory beyond the funding period of the City Strategy Pathfinder. Indeed, the dissemination and roll out of infrastructural developments such as the WLW Directory was identified as a priority.
- 3.26 In the specifications for Experian's work, these broad goals are translated into the following, more specific, objectives:
- Through secondary and primary research assemble a database of all publicly funded employment-related services in the 11 boroughs covered by the London City Strategy Pilot.
  - Create maps of provision, set against other data, to assist with macro- and local-level planning.
  - To create, host and support a web-based application for accessing and updating the database, through websites providing a single online searchable tool of all employment courses and employment support services available for the workless population of the relevant geographies.
  - Develop options, including a preferred approach, for sustainable future updates and ongoing management of the database and online directories.

### **What were the target outputs for this work package?**

- 3.27 The 2007 Business Plan identifies the following output indicators for the Directory:
- No. of courses recorded in the Directory, with 97% accuracy rating
  - No. of hits on the Directory
  - No. of referrals made by Business Advisors to WLW providers

- No. of residents getting work from Business Advisor referrals (collected through provider monitoring).
- 3.28 The reference to Business Advisors relates to an early objective where the intention was that the Directory would be used by Business Support Advisors (e.g. Business Link) when offering recruitment support. Although in the context of a single employer offer, this objective remains relevant in practical terms this was hard to put into practice. The development of the employer facing Directory page intended to improve the links between businesses recruiting and the employment services.
- 3.29 Outputs were revised in the 2009 Business Plan Refresh: as the Passport was not implemented it was impossible to track a number of outputs such as the number of referrals made from the Directory. As a result, the following two output indicators were retained:
  - No. of people accessing the Directory (i.e. no. of hits)
  - No. of organisations posting information on the Directory.
- 3.30 However, no target was set against which the performance of the Directory could be assessed.

### **What are the target outcomes for this work package?**

- 3.31 The 2007 Business Plan sets out a number of outcomes for the West London Working Passport work package which the Directory was expected to contribute to:
  - Enable better informed decision making;
  - Generate proactive and evidenced change;
  - Improve efficiency, clarity of entrance to routeway, accuracy of referrals;
  - Improve the demand (individuals) led system;
  - Increase the number of businesses using West London brokerages and JobCentre Plus in order to recruit and retain staff;
  - Increase the number of vacancies filled by referrals from West London providers.
  - Reduce the duplication of provision and the number of drop outs.
- 3.32 The Directory is likely to contribute directly to most of these objectives. More generally, as part of the West London Working programme, the Directory aims to contribute to a more efficient system and to tackle the number of unemployed residents in the sub-region.

### **What were the work package timescales?**

- 3.33 The Directory went live in June 2008. A number of enhancements to the Directory were launched in January 2011. From summer 2011 the Directory will be extended by the European Programme Management Unit to include details of projects across London that support adults into work, and are funded by the European Social Fund. However, this leaves a question mark over who will take charge of updating the information for non-ESF funded projects in West London as we discuss in Section 5.

### Which organisations have been involved in delivering the work package?

- 3.34 The management structure for this project is simple. The West London Working team led on the development of the project. Following consultation with employment advisers through focus groups, West London Working and East and South East London CSP developed the specification to research, develop and deliver the Directory.
- 3.35 Following an open procurement process, Experian won the contract to compile the data, set up the Directory and host it.
- 3.36 The West London Working team maintains and updates the entries in and the content of the Directory and are responsible for marketing it to providers and other stakeholders.

### How much funding was allocated for the Directory?

- 3.37 A total of £71,596 has been spent to date on the project, representing 50% of the total value of the Directory as the East London City Strategy Pathfinder paid for the other half for the East London Directory. As shown in Table 3.1 below, this was split into two contracts.

**Table 3.1 : Expenditure**

|   | WLW contract value |
|---|--------------------|
| Contract 1 – Research & development: mapping & directory                    | £42,329            |
| Contract 2 – Development of enhancements, hosting and support for Directory | £29,267            |
| <b>Total to date</b>  | <b>£71,596</b>     |

Source: WLW

- 3.38 As mentioned previously, both contracts were openly procured and awarded to Experian.

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## 4 DEFINING HOW THE DIRECTORY AIMED TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES

### Introduction

- 4.1 This section presents the West London Working Directory of Employment Services and defines what it aimed to achieve. It forms the basis for the evaluation in later chapters.

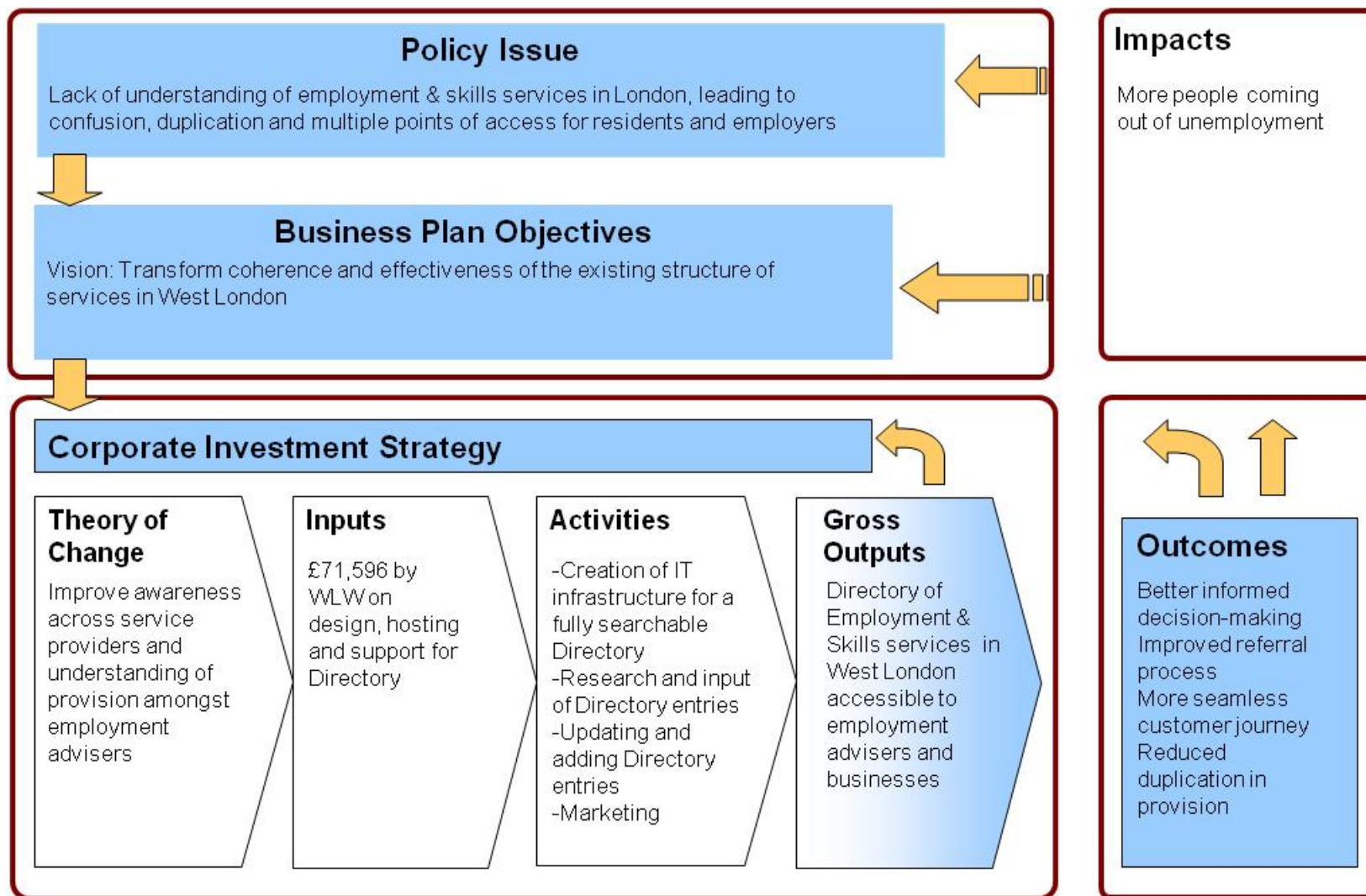
### The Vision statement

- 4.2 The Directory contributes to delivering the vision for WLW City Strategy Pathfinder which is ‘to transform the coherence and effectiveness of the existing structure of services in West London to deliver a sustainable increase in the number of local residents in employment and a reduction in child poverty’.

### What was the work package logic model (“theory of change”)?

- 4.3 The logic model (overleaf) summarises the sequence of events thought to bring about benefits or change over time. It portrays the chain of reasoning that links investments to results: in other words it explains through which mechanisms the Directory expects to deliver its objectives and contribute to the delivery of the vision for WLW.

**Figure 4.1 Work package logic model**



- 4.4 The Directory aims to improve the coherence and effectiveness of the current provision of employment services in West London by compiling information on local providers in one database. This was not available prior to the Directory and the fragmented and diverse offer meant that employment advisers could not be aware of all the opportunities accessible to their clients.
- 4.5 The Directory would help them refer their clients to the most relevant organisation and the most relevant scheme in order to get them back into work. Ultimately, if effective, it should ensure a more personalised, sustainable and seamless journey towards employment.



## 5 HAS THE WORK DELIVERED WHAT WAS HOPED?

### Introduction

- 5.1 In this section we examine how the Directory has performed against what it set out to do, based on the monitoring data supplied to us by West London Working. We also review the results of the survey undertaken for the Interim Evaluation and the findings from our interviews to provide a broader view on what the Directory has achieved and identify any weaknesses.

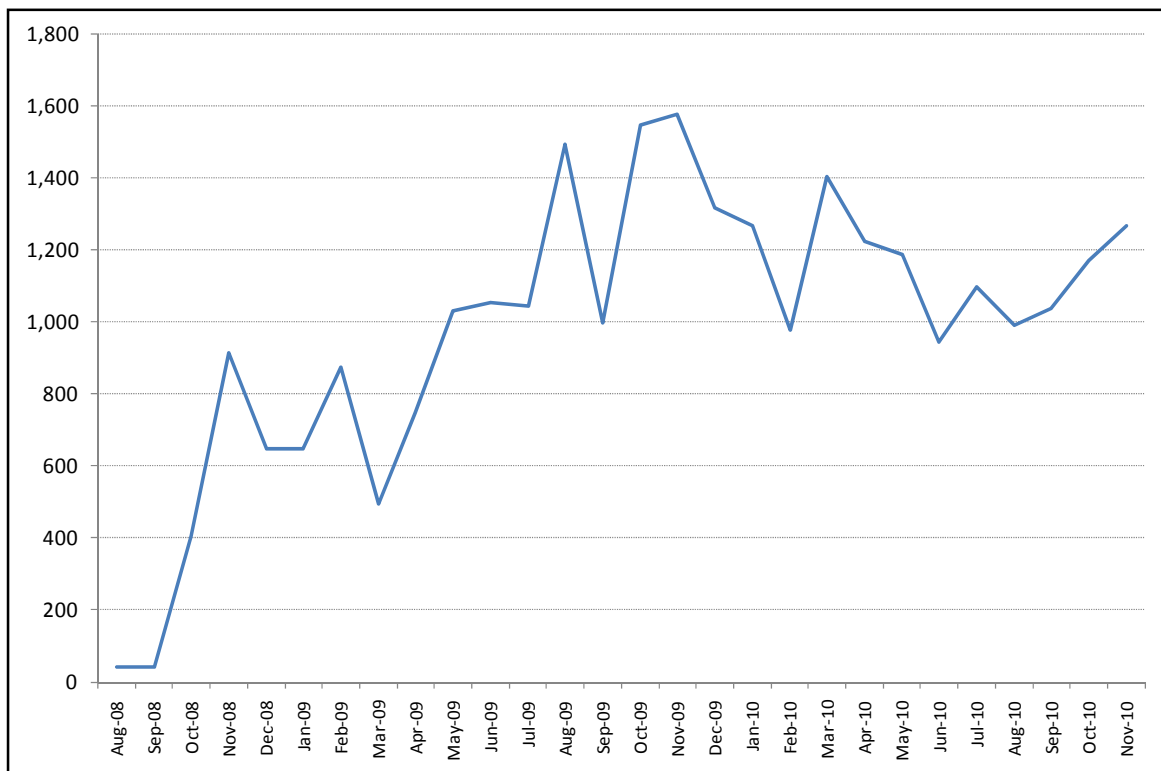
### What outputs have been achieved?

- 5.2 As mentioned earlier, the 2009 Business Plan Refresh selects two measures of success for the Directory which we explore in turn: the number of hits and the number of organisations registered on the Directory.

#### *The number of hits rose steadily from August 2008 to November 2010*

- 5.3 The latest data supplied by the West London Working team shows that the number of hits per month rose from 41 in August 2008 to 1,217 in November 2010. This is illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.

**Figure 5.1 Total number of hits per month**



- 5.4 This presents a positive picture, one of a sustained increase in usage of the Directory over time. However, these figures can more accurately be split into two phases: the first phase, up to August 2009, during which usage rose sharply and the second phase, from August onwards, where usage stabilised, hovering around 1,200 monthly hits on average.

- 5.5 Since January 2011, usage statistics are collated by Google Analytics which will enable more detailed analysis of how the Directory is used and by whom. The first set of figures indicates that there were 229 visitors viewing 1,318 pages in this month.
- 5.6 The business plan did not set any targets for the Directory, which means we are unable to assess whether it achieved as much as it could have in the context of the approximately 150 employment advisors operating in West London and their workload. This would have been a useful measure of whether the site reaches its intended audience.

### ***The Directory continually attracted new organisations***

- 5.7 Based on data supplied to us by West London Working, the Directory started with approximately 160 organisations in summer 2008. Other data shows that between January 2009 and November 2010, 42 entries were added in, an average of around two new entries a month.
- 5.8 However, there is no data on the number of entries which were deleted as a result of services ceasing, which means that there is no information on the net number of entries in the Directory since its launch. This is because there was no consistent, on-going monitoring of the exact number of entries despite the fact that it was one of the Directory's key output indicators. As a result we are not able to gauge whether the real coverage of the Directory has increased over time or not.
- 5.9 On the other hand, the exact number of entries at any one point can be calculated by WLW and West London Working's November management information figures show that there were 218 entries listed in the Directory.

### **What outcomes have been achieved?**

- 5.10 As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 2007 Business Plan identifies a number of outcomes for the West London Working Passport as a whole. Those most likely to be relevant to the Directory relate to: enabling better informed decision making; embedding the use of the Directory amongst employment advisers; improving the referral processes and more generally the customer journey; and reducing duplication in provision.
- 5.11 We explore these in turn, drawing from the interim evaluation<sup>4</sup> produced in July 2010, and reviewed and updated through our discussion with West London Working. However, the findings from the Interim Evaluation survey should be read with caution as it relies on a small sample of users.

### ***Does the Directory enable better informed decision making?***

#### ***The Directory offers more information than previously available to advisers...***

- 5.12 A key outcome of the Directory should be enabling its users to make better informed decisions about the use of employment services in West London.

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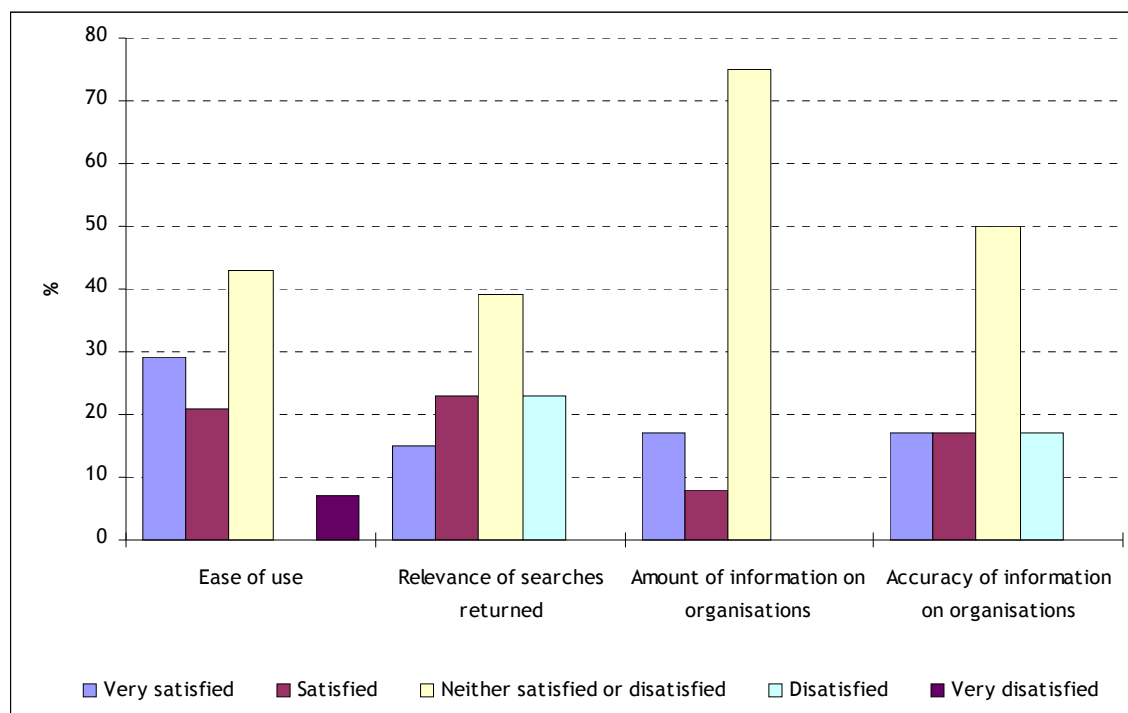
<sup>4</sup> Institute for Employment Studies, July 2010, Interim of West London Working Directory of Employment Services

5.13 The Interim Evaluation noted that ‘the directory provides an enhanced level of information compared to some other resources; some of which are not linked to a database and provide a simple word document or pdf (e.g. West London Network), and others which provide basic contact information but not detailed referral criteria, access information or links to external websites (e.g. Tyne and Wear City Region directory at [twtpvider.hanlonsonline.co.uk](http://twtpvider.hanlonsonline.co.uk))’. It explained that: ‘While there may be some overlap with other resources, the directory generally offers improved coverage compared with other sites, in line with its original aims, because it lists employment advice and training across the West London boroughs, irrespective of funding stream. By contrast, many other resources list only provision funded under a particular lead organisation (e.g. LearnDirect, Jobcentre Plus) or are limited to a single borough or a tightly-defined client group (e.g. refugees, people with substance misuse problems)’.

*but not always in the most relevant way*

5.14 As seen below, the survey undertaken as part of the Interim Evaluation showed that, while hardly any of the 30 respondents were dissatisfied with the Directory, the largest proportion allocated it an average rating on all facets of the information it provides.

**Figure 5.2: How well does the search function operate?**



Source: July 2010 Interim Evaluation

5.15 Respondents found that the results returned by searches were too broad and not always obviously appropriate. The engine tended to return quite long lists and not necessarily local to the postcode entered. In some cases, the latter issue might be because the organisation’s address is the headquarters of a pan-London provider, but this is not made explicit and tends to undermine confidence in the accuracy of searches returned. In addition, the Directory included a large number of East London providers which could not be filtered out.

- 5.16 Overall, it appears that the Directory provides more and better information to employment advisers than previously available but not yet in the most relevant and user-friendly way. For instance, a partner organisation mentioned that being able to conduct the search by funding stream / project name could be more useful to some than by organisation type for instance.
- 5.17 Our interviews with the WLW team also suggest that it is seen as a useful source of information by prime contractors who want to get a picture of the provision of employment services in West London.

***Is the use of the Directory embedded amongst employment advisers?***

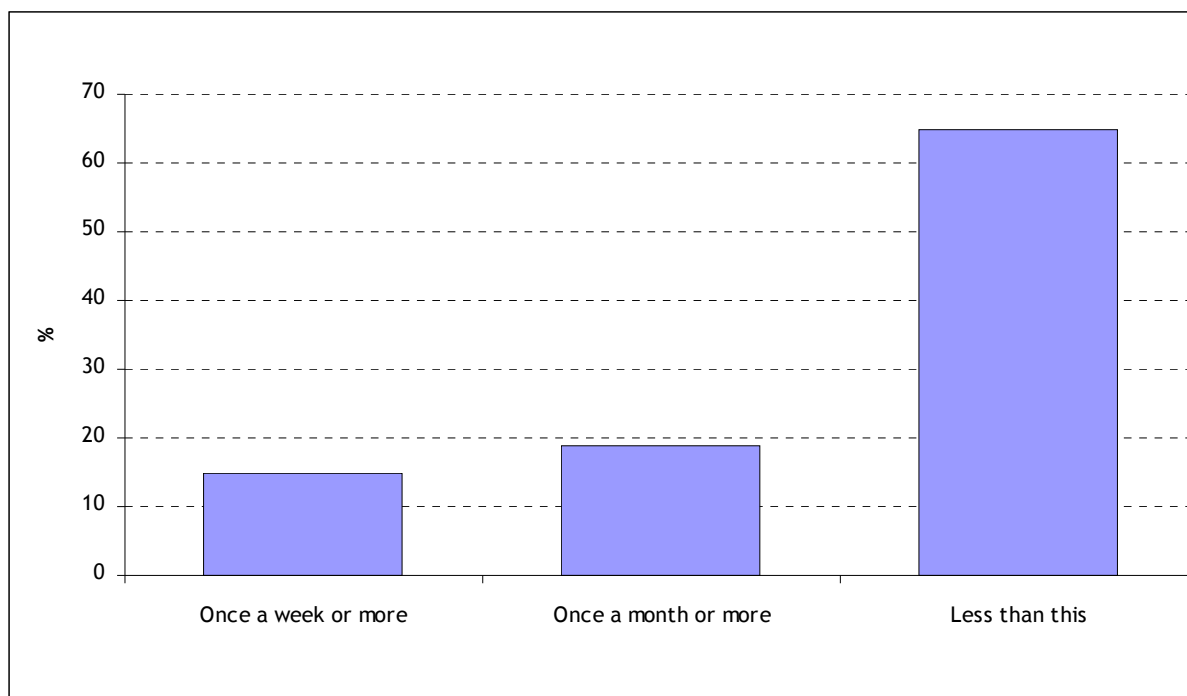
*Employment advisers use the Directory...*

- 5.18 The Interim Evaluation found that employment advisers are familiar with the Directory; they are aware of it and consult it when needed. In this respect, its use has been embedded amongst this target group, albeit mostly on an ad hoc basis. It is found to be broadly useful and to provide additional information.

*although not as their primary source of information*

- 5.19 The survey conducted for the interim evaluation suggests that the use of the Directory is mostly infrequent, that it is one amongst several sources of information used by employment and skills advisers: ‘Survey responses indicated that individual advisers who responded were using the directory on an infrequent basis; over 60 per cent said that they used it less than once a month, and no-one opted for the ‘once a day or more’ response’ as shown in Figure 5.3.

**Figure 5.3: Frequency of directory use**



Source: July 2010 Interim Evaluation

- 5.20 This may be due in part to the links / contents on the site not always answering the needs of its target audience i.e. advisers. For instance, the links to Jobcentre Plus are to public pages, and not those to which advisers need access, reducing the incentive for them to use the directory.
- 5.21 However, the Interim Evaluation pointed out that ‘infrequent use was not necessarily an indication of dissatisfaction. Advisers generally reported that they tended to draw on a repertoire of established routes for routine day-to-day referrals, and so did not need to use the directory for these; instead they were more inclined to turn to it for less usual or out-of-borough needs, and found it helpful in such circumstances’.
- 5.22 For instance ‘Jobcentre Plus advisers were reported as mainly using the JCP ‘tree of provision’. This is an in-house on-line resource which has been up and running since November 2009, and which is seen to duplicate the directory to some extent. This is generally viewed as the Jobcentre Plus advisers’ ‘bible’ and is regarded as efficient and quick to use. Another advantage of it is that it has an ‘opportunity number’ which links data to the person’s LMS record and provides tracking and the possibility of mapping client progress over time. There was still interest in using the directory from Jobcentre Plus advisers, particularly if it could offer access to additional sources of training or job vacancies. It may also have potential for use in outreach sites where there is no access to the Jobcentre Plus resource, as happens in some other regions’.
- 5.23 This still shows that the Directory is seen as a supplementary source of information, rather than a centralised database. As such it does not simplify access to information on employment and skills services. This is not to say that it cannot in time become the point of reference, the first stop for all those looking for information on local provision. However, it does not seem to be the case so far.

*A more targeted approach might be needed*

- 5.24 The question of who is the intended audience for the website was one which came up quite often in the interviews and focus groups.
- 5.25 The Directory is accessible to all visitors of the West London Working website but the business plan identified front-line advisers as a key target group for the directory. Usage statistics do not identify the type of user, as this is currently an open access directory, and this makes it difficult to identify whether it is being used primarily by this group.
- 5.26 In order to serve individuals and employment advisers alike, the information returned by the searches can be too general to be useful to advisers who need professional information and different contact details to the general public.
- 5.27 Employers were identified as a potential target group, whose needs did not appear to be well-served by the Directory despite West London Working being an employer-led partnership. This was addressed by adding an employer facing page. However, as it was launched in January 2011, it is too early to gauge its success.

### ***Has the Directory helped improve the referral process and customer journey?***

- 5.28 Improving the referral process depends on the ability of the Directory to provide the right information to the employment brokers. The Interim Evaluation does not explore this issue which is a shortcoming considering the aims of the Directory.
- 5.29 The survey does find that while the Directory is seen as clear and simple to use, it received a very high number of neutral responses (60% of the total) in relation to its contribution to making better referrals. Only 26% of respondents agree that it has improved their referrals.
- 5.30 The Interim Evaluation also pointed out that there was value in the Directory providing information on training provision which is not available via other resources. For instance, JobCentre Plus pointed out that being able to find details of provision funded by the European Social Fund was useful and increased the value of the Directory for them, compared to their own in-house resources. It helped raise their awareness of other provision and potentially to make links with these other organisations.
- 5.31 Overall, however, the ability of the Directory to improve the referral process and customer journey seems to have been limited so far. More relevant links (with the right contact / to the right information in each organisation) and a better tracking system of beneficiaries may help improve this in the future.

### ***Has the Directory led to less duplication in the provision of employment services?***

- 5.32 This is impossible to answer from the data available to us. This may have happened as a result of the West London Working Programme as a whole but there is no evidence to determine the role of the Directory itself.
- 5.33 It is possible that over time it could help reduce duplication of provision if it is used as a tool to better understand local provision and inform funding allocation accordingly. However, there is no evidence that this has taken place so far.

### ***How has the work package performed against expenditure targets?***

- 5.34 As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Directory was delivered through two contracts with Experian which were delivered on time and budget.
- 5.35 Because of the nature of the project, we cannot estimate Value for Money in a meaningful way.

### ***Was the work package well run and managed?***

#### ***The contents of the Directory were informed by potential users***

- 5.36 Experian, once commissioned by WLW and East and South East London CSP, held focus-group discussions with personal advisers from provider organisations, which generated a large degree of consensus about what the Directory should contain. This was a sensible way to identify the user group's requirements in order to design a website which meets their needs. Personal advisers and employers were also used to test the site, once developed, as well as the more recent enhancements.

### ***Enhancements were made in response to user feedback***

- 5.37 As mentioned in Chapter 3, enhancements to the Directory were made in response to user feedback.
- 5.38 This willingness to listen to users and adjust the Directory accordingly is good management practice. Unfortunately, as the employer facing page and other enhancements went live whilst writing this report it is not possible to assess if they were successful or not.
- 5.39 In addition to these new features, another issue was identified: some boroughs had not been able to use the Directory because of the firewall they had in place. Solutions were posted on the WLW website and all boroughs were issued with a short guide to help address this problem.

### ***The Directory was marketed to ensure its use amongst its target group***

- 5.40 The Interim Evaluation indicated that ‘a lack of awareness of the directory among those who are clearly within its key target audience does highlight the need for regular marketing activity. In some cases this is because of staff turnover within organisations [...]. In other cases, it is more about making sure that the directory remains on the radar, and becomes a regularly used tool. To date, marketing has made up a very small proportion (between 3 and 4 per cent) of the overall spend on the directory, but tackling this issue may be less about deploying additional resources than identifying opportunities to publicise the directory more via existing communication channels within WLW, such as WLW Confederations’ e-bulletins’.
- 5.41 This last recommendation has been acted upon and cross-marketing now takes places through the Confederation’s e-bulletins and events ensuring continued awareness of the Directory amongst providers.

### ***Updating was not part of the delivery agreement for the Directory***

- 5.42 Being up to date is essential to the success of the Directory: if users feel that the information provided is not accurate they will not refer to it.
- 5.43 However, the contracts agreed with Experian did not cover updating of the contents as this was undertaken by the West London Working Programme Team. The approach chosen relied on providers supplying information when new services were added in and on updating the Directory on a six month cycle. However, as we have seen previously, this did not work and the database was not always accurate. The frequency of updating the Directory directly impacts on advisors ability to accurately refer their clients.
- 5.44 There is a lesson for the future: keeping a database up-to-date requires appropriate financial and time resources. It must be considered an integral part of creating a Directory and factored in accordingly.

### ***Monitoring should be part of the delivery process***

- 5.45 The value of monitoring is often underestimated. It has two core uses: to track output delivery and identify any signs of underperformance; and to help assess a project’s achievements against its objectives. It can also provide useful additional information on the

management of a project and its ability to reach its target audience. In turn, a good monitoring system can help draw useful lessons for future delivery.

- 5.46 In the case of the Directory, monitoring did not reflect the project's objectives. In particular, the number of registered organisations – one of the agreed outputs – was not monitored consistently. This is a shortcoming which should be addressed, especially if one of the role of the Directory is to supply a picture of the provision of employment services in West London.

### **How does the work package link to other WLW activities and objectives?**

- 5.47 According to the 2007 Business Plan, the main links with other WLW activities were to be with the Performance Rating; the Guidance, Skills & Brokerage Confederation; and the Personal Outreach Offer.
- 5.48 As mentioned before, the Performance Rating was to be incorporated in the Directory. This has not taken place so far as the Rating has not been mainstreamed yet.
- 5.49 The Confederation complements the Directory and provides a mechanism for promoting its use. Through monthly e-bulletins and regular events the Confederation enables West London providers to be better aware of what others do, encouraging referrals across organisations. It is also a useful channel to help local providers work together to submit bids for funding as consortia.
- 5.50 The links with the Personal Outreach Offer relate to the Directory's role in signposting. It is a tool to help boroughs and their partners to identify which organisations they might work with in delivering this activity.
- 5.51 This same role in identifying potential providers was also useful to the Investment & Target Group, helping them better understand their local supply chain for commissioning.

### **What is the succession strategy for the Directory?**

- 5.52 The 2011-13 ESF Co-financing Framework states that they "will develop and publish a database detailing all organisations in receipt of ESF in London; based on WLW's work thus far". There is currently no single place to find information on ESF funded provision in London.
- 5.53 The European Programme Management Unit is currently commissioning the design of an enhanced on-line directory for London ESF projects, based on the WLW directory. It will require that all providers delivering ESF funded adult provision in London from April 2011 are contractually obliged to input details of their services on the London Employment Services Directory, the successor the West London Employment Services Directory.
- 5.54 This agreement ensures the sustainability of the Directory as the West London Working site will remain and will continue to be accessed through the WLW website. However, it does not offer a process to maintain up-to-date information on employment related services provision across West London. While ESF providers will be required to supply accurate information on their services, other non-ESF funded organisations will be encouraged to log-in to the Directory and update their details themselves. The Greater London Authority,

LDA and London Skills and Employment Board have requested in their Asks of Prime Contractors that they use, add to, and update your and your supply chain entries on the London Directory of Employment Services. However, with no contractual arrangements currently in place except for ESF providers and no infrastructure to keep track of providers and monitor their input, it is unlikely that the information will be consistently kept up to date, diminishing the value of the Directory as a cross West London and cross funding stream source of information.



## 6 EVALUATING THE STRATEGIC ADDED VALUE ACHIEVED

### Introduction

- 6.1 In this section, we examine the extent to which Strategic Added Value (SAV) has been delivered by the work package.
- 6.2 SAV relates to how RDAs use their influencing and lobbying roles to generate positive economic outputs for the region. This recognises that the contribution of RDAs can come through their interventions and expenditure but also through their influence on partners and stakeholders' behaviour and performance.
- 6.3 Whilst RDAs are no longer active as such, the DTI, now BIS, makes clear that SAV must be understood and evaluated. Firstly, delivering SAV was an objective of the West London Working programme; and secondly, the ideas that constitute SAV remain relevant, both to future economic development structures which may be adopted in London, and to similar work packages which might be commissioned elsewhere in the country in future.

### How we evaluated SAV

- 6.4 We evaluate Strategic Added Value along the five categories identified in Government guidance<sup>5</sup>: leadership, strategic influence, leverage, synergy and/or partner engagement.
- 6.5 **Leadership** is defined as: 'articulating and communicating regional development needs, opportunities and solutions to partners and stakeholders in the region and elsewhere'.
- 6.6 **Strategic influence** occurs when a project or programme helps to carry out or stimulate 'activity that defines the distinctive roles of partners, gets them to commit to shared strategic objectives and to behave and allocate their funds accordingly'.
- 6.7 **Leverage** from public intervention is defined as 'providing financial and other incentives to mobilise partner and stakeholder resources – equipment, people as well as funding'.
- 6.8 **Synergy** means 'using organisational capacity, knowledge and expertise to improve information exchange and knowledge transfer and coordination and/or integration of the design and delivery of interventions between partners'. In other words, synergy allows more efficient delivery, less duplication, and a smoother client journey.
- 6.9 **Engagement** is the last dimension of SAV. The guidance defines it as: 'setting up the mechanisms and incentives for more effective and deliberative engagement of stakeholders in the design and delivery of regional and sub-regional priorities and programmes'. In other words, how did the project contribute to the design and delivery of the LDA's Economic Development Strategy (EDS)?

<sup>5</sup> DTI, Evaluating the impact of England's RDA: Developing a methodology and evaluation framework, February 2006

## What was the Directory's Strategic Added Value?

- 6.10 Because of the nature of the Directory as an infrastructure investment rather than a project delivering a service, some dimensions of SAV may not apply. We summarise below how the Directory performed against each SAV category.

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Leadership</b>          | WLW successfully identified sub-regional needs related to better provision of information on employment & skills services. The Directory helped better understand the current provision. It also identified the needs of providers in terms of information through the focus groups ran by WLW and Experian. As such it showed leadership in devising a product which was new and based on users' needs.  |
| <b>Strategic influence</b> | The Directory was directly commissioned by WLW on behalf of the implementation group and the Board. As such it succeeded in getting members to agree to shared objectives, although they did not commit funds accordingly. In addition, as mentioned before, the Directory was not successful in getting funders to ensure their providers supplied up to date information. However, it can claim significant strategic influence through its ability to raise interest from ESF co-financers and their commitment to take it on.<br><br>Overall, partial strategic influence was achieved. |
| <b>Leverage</b>            | The Directory was jointly funded by the East London CSP but it did not lever any additional money.  |
| <b>Synergy</b>             | Synergy should be the main benefit from the Directory, however the evidence to date suggests that it has been limited.<br><br>The results from the Interim Evaluation's survey show that respondents use it as an additional source of information rather than as a central point of reference and that only 26% said it had improved their referrals.<br><br>While it may have helped to reduce duplication in the longer-term, there is no evidence that it has achieved this within the time frame of the project.   |
| <b>Engagement</b>          | This is not really relevant as the Directory is an infrastructure project.  |

- 6.11 Overall, as seen above, the Strategic Added Value from the Directory is likely to be limited as would be expected from an infrastructure investment. It mostly revolves around its contribution to a better understanding of the development needs in West London and the success in gaining ESF's commitment to future sustainability.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- 7.1 The Directory of Employment and Skills services was developed in order to address the lack of a central source of information on all the providers of employment related services in West London. This in turn led to multiple and confused points of contact for residents and employers, creating barriers towards employment by hindering relevant referrals.
- 7.2 The rationale for the project was therefore robust, rooted in the need for a better understanding of the provision of employment services in West London and a better, more coherent, service offer to residents.

### What impacts did the Directory have?

- 7.3 We assess this against the Directory's outputs and objectives.

#### *The Directory is a new source of information*

- 7.4 The Directory provides a type of database for employment-related services across West London which did not exist before. It offers more information than previously available to advisers, compiling information on projects across various funding streams, and as such is found to be valuable.

#### *Usage and coverage have risen steadily*

- 7.5 Based on the monitoring data, the number of hits and the cumulative number of organisations listed on it have increased steadily since its inception.
- 7.6 However, as stated in the Interim Evaluation's survey: 'the Directory appears to be generally well-regarded, with little negative feedback, but somewhat under-used, both in terms of overall use figures and frequency of use among individual advisers. There were also few outstandingly positive views and experiences reported in either the survey or the interviews and focus group. There is a sense that this may be a resource whose potential is not fully being exploited at present'<sup>6</sup>.
- 7.7 A number of enhancements were implemented in order to maximise the potential of the Directory, in particular a new employer-facing site, but it is too early to determine how successful they were.

#### *The Directory has not fully met its objectives*

- 7.8 Respondents to the Interim Evaluation survey found that the results returned by searches were too broad and not always obviously appropriate. The engine tended to return quite long lists and not necessarily local to the postcode entered which tends to undermine confidence in the accuracy of searches returned.
- 7.9 In addition, while the Directory is seen as a valuable supplementary source of information for employment advisers, the survey suggests that it is not their first port of call. It is also

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<sup>6</sup> This is based on a small sample of users and should be read with caution as it may not be representative.

only fully updated every six months and therefore does not always provide accurate information for advisers.

- 7.10 As a result, the ability of the Directory to improve the referral process and customer journey seems to have been limited so far. Similarly, it is too early to gauge the role of the Directory in reducing duplication of provision in West London.

*Is the rationale for intervention of the Directory still relevant?*

- 7.11 Despite the progress made by the Directory, changing the information system in place in West London is a very ambitious aim, one that would take a long time to implement. As it stands, there still is not a central source of information on employment services in West London and therefore the rationale behind the Directory continues to be relevant.

**What were the Directory's key strengths?**

- 7.12 The Directory's main strength related to its ability to provide more information than other existing sources as it was not limited to a specific funding stream, target group, or type of organisation. This is an important achievement and the only way to deliver an integrated view of sub-regional provision.
- 7.13 Another strength related to the on-going marketing of the Directory to local providers, in particular through the Confederation newsletter and events. This ensures that providers remained aware of its existence and used it.
- 7.14 Finally, the value of the Directory as a product was recognised by ESF which is taking it forward and expanding its reach to cover the whole of London.

**What were the Directory's key weaknesses?**

- 7.15 The main weakness of the Directory is its inability to remain up-to-date. This would potentially lead to a loss of credibility amongst users and deters regular use. This is a key issue to resolve for the future.
- 7.16 Anecdotal feedback from some of our interviews suggested there was still some confusion amongst potential users (e.g. colleges provided adult education) about how the Directory fitted in with other sources of information (e.g. Next Steps, Skills Account), or more precisely what differentiated it. If it is to be accessible to all, not just employment advisers, it needs to be very clear about what it offers.
- 7.17 In addition, while the Directory identified employment advisers as their key target group, it remained accessible to all. This may have turned into a weakness because it had implications on the kind of information available on it: it provides general information (e.g. contact details to switchboards) rather than professional information (e.g. contact detail to employment advisers).
- 7.18 Finally, the timeframe for the project has not allowed the full benefits to come through yet. According to the Interim Evaluation survey, the Directory remains seen as an additional source of information rather than the central one and its impact on referrals has been limited.

## Are there any lessons that should inform future approaches in this area?

- 7.19 Based on the findings of the Interim Evaluation and our own conclusions, the main lessons to be learned from this project are as follows:
- The need to be clear about who the target group is and what information they require. If several target groups are identified, enabling different degrees of access to the site could be useful. The last Interim Evaluation survey, although based on a small sample of users concurred with this finding. It found that ‘While a requirement to log on and use a password was seen as something that would deter customer use of the directory, it was felt a log-in for advisers or employers would not generally deter use, and could allow additional functionality’.
  - More relevant links (with the right contact / to the right information in each organisation) for employment advisors.
  - JobCentrePlus also argued that having an opportunity number for directory-listed provision would make it more attractive to them, because it offers the ability to track client progress. This may be an avenue worth pursuing.
  - Finally, but crucially, the process through which the database is kept up to date should be on-going and cannot rely on voluntary input from providers. This is done by either making it part of the contractor’s delivery arrangement or by allocating sufficient resources in-house. A database is an on-going service and its main value derives from being up to date and accurate. This is the main lesson to take from this evaluation.