



Adtrac Evaluation

Interim Report:

Executive Summary

The journey so far
August 2020



1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document summarises the findings of an evaluation of the ADTRAC project carried out by Wavehill, an independent social and economic research company, on behalf of Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (GLLM). The report summarises the progress made in delivering ADTRAC up to March 2020. It was preceded by an Inception Report finalised in December 2019, and will be supplemented with a Final Report due upon closure of the project.
- 1.2 ADTRAC is an operation delivered across North Wales that seeks to reduce the number of 16–24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The operation is partially funded under European Social Fund (ESF) Project Priority Axis 3: Youth Employment and Attainment, Specific Objective 1. Led by GLLM, ADTRAC brings together all six local authorities in North Wales and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).
- 1.3 ADTRAC provides person-centred support to participants, identifying their individual needs and the barriers preventing them from entering education, employment or training (EET). ADTRAC staff then work with participants to overcome these barriers, or signpost participants to other agencies capable of providing suitable support.
- 1.4 The three-year operation was initially intended to run from March 2017 to August 2020.¹ Following reprofiling, however, the operation is now expected to conclude in May 2021. During this time, ADTRAC aims to support 1,451 young people who are NEET and face barriers that prevent their pathway transition and progression to EET.²

2. Objectives and Methodology

- 2.1 The interim evaluation explores the progress that has been made in delivering ADTRAC up to March 2020. Specifically, the interim evaluation has sought to identify:
 - the progress of the operation in meeting its performance indicators;
 - the effectiveness of management and operational processes;
 - early impacts of the project upon both delivery organisations and project beneficiaries;
 - initial recommendations for improvement.

¹ N.B. Across the region there were staggered delivery dates which were on account of team recruitment.

² Please note that this figure has been revised from an initial target of 1,651 following a reprofile of the operation.

- 2.2 The evaluation has been carried out using a theory-based approach. In practice, this has involved developing a logic chain and a series of indicators that have been used to assess the progress of ADTRAC against its overall project goals. The logic model and evaluation framework for ADTRAC can be found in the Inception Report.
- 2.3 To build an evidence base for the interim evaluation, the following research methods were used:
- A review of key documentation and monitoring data across Joint Beneficiary areas, including Participant Monitoring Data provided up to January 2020 and Lessons Learned Logs.
 - An online survey of staff engaged in the management and delivery of ADTRAC (n = 48), to understand perspectives on the delivery approach and perceived impacts.
 - One-to-one in-depth telephone interviews with staff engaged in the management and delivery of ADTRAC (n = 9), to gather further insight into how the project is delivered and their perspectives on the key strengths and challenges of the delivery model.
 - One-to-one in-depth telephone interviews with strategic stakeholders (n = 9) to understand the strategic fit of the project and perspectives on the support delivered.
 - One-to-one telephone interviews with participants (n = 30) to gather a detailed understanding of the impact of ADTRAC support upon participants, and perspectives on how the support is delivered.
- 2.4 All of these data collection methods were offered bilingually (in both English and Welsh).

3. Project Delivery

- 3.1 The evaluation has concluded that ADTRAC is currently being delivered effectively, although there are some areas of possible improvement. What is more, stakeholders identified that ADTRAC adds value to the existing support available to young people who are NEET in North Wales through the individuals with whom it works and the way in which it works with them.

- 3.2 Both stakeholders and management and delivery staff reported that they believe that the support provided is appropriate to the needs of ADTRAC participants. In particular, stakeholders were positive about its person-centred approach, the involvement of trained Mental Health Practitioners, and its focus on those furthest from the labour market, all of which set it apart from existing provision and make it particularly well suited to support individuals furthest away from the labour market.

Project Delivery

- 3.3 Stakeholders were positive about the way in which ADTRAC is being delivered, including a strong consensus that GLLM has played an effective role in setting up and coordinating the project. As a result of the effective structures put in place, the local authorities and the BCUHB are effectively collaborating to deliver the project.
- 3.4 While trained Mental Health Practitioners were seen to be a key asset to ADTRAC, there remain challenges in relation to meeting the mental health and well-being needs of participants due to challenges associated with recruiting Mental Health Practitioner roles in some Joint Beneficiary areas. This was perceived to be a result of slow recruitment processes within the BCUHB. Additionally, some staff members reported confusion surrounding the coordination of these roles and were unsure as to where management and responsibilities lay between Joint Beneficiaries and the BCUHB, with some staff reporting that it felt as though Mental Health Practitioners were ‘half in and half out’ delivery teams.
- 3.5 Another area of concern raised during the evaluation has been the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) used by ADTRAC. Delivery staff frequently raised concerns surrounding the effectiveness of the DPS, which was perceived by some to be ‘not fit for purpose’. Staff noted how ‘slow’ processes using the DPS could result in participant disengagement. This is an area that could benefit from improvement.
- 3.6 Participants were particularly positive about the one-to-one support being delivered. However, it should be noted that since these participants were identified by Joint Beneficiaries, the views of participants with more negative experiences of ADTRAC may not have been captured in the process. Consequently, further evaluative work should seek to explore the perceptions of a wider cohort of participants to ensure that their views are representative of the wider participant group.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- 3.7 The operation appears to be making a good contribution against its Cross-Cutting Theme (CCT) targets. ADTRAC is exceeding its target for participants with a disability or work-limiting health condition, and performing well against its target for participants from a BME/Migrant/Minority background. However, the operation appears to be facing greater challenges in reaching targets with regard to the inclusion of participants with childcare/caring responsibilities and female participants.
- 3.8 In addition to contributing to the CCTs, consultation with strategic stakeholders indicates a clear sense that ADTRAC is contributing to the objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFGA). There is evidence that the approach adopted through ADTRAC involves all five ways of working that constitute the WFGA's 'sustainable development principle'. Specifically, it demonstrates a preventative approach delivered through collaboration between public bodies, integrating numerous well-being objectives (primarily relating to the 'a prosperous Wales', 'a healthier Wales' and 'a more equal Wales' well-being goals) which take into account the long-term needs of North Wales.

Recruitment of Project Participants

- 3.9 As part of the evaluation, the evaluation has explored the project's performance against recruitment targets. As evidenced in Table 1.1 below, it is notable that the project has under-recruited against its target at this interim stage. At present, females and individuals with childcare/caring responsibilities are particularly underrepresented. Additionally, the operation is currently at risk of not achieving its engagement targets and outcome targets, particularly in relation to the proportion of participants entering employment and entering education/training. It is possible that some of these participants have been 'picked up' by other programmes such as the Welsh Government- and ESF-funded Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE) project, or provision from the North Wales Young Carers' Trust, and it may be that due to the conditions of Universal Credit, young people with childcare responsibilities are less likely to be seeking employment.

Table 1.1: Participation targets and performance data, by demographic group

Participation group	Target	Target (%)	No. achieved	Percentage of target achieved
Total participants	1,451		893	62%
Participants with a disability/work-limiting health condition	112	8%	263	235%
Participants who are BME/Migrants/Minorities	31	2%	21	68%
Participants with childcare/caring responsibilities	121	8%	56	46%
Male participants	721	50%	509	71%
Female participants	730	50%	384	53%

Source: Participant Monitoring Data (base = 893)

4. Outcomes for Participants

- 4.1 ADTRAC appears to be performing well in relation to soft outcomes, but has been less successful in achieving hard outcomes, particularly in relation to the number of young people whom the support has exited into education.
- 4.2 The support appears to be particularly successful in driving improvements in participant well-being and employability skills. This is evidenced by an increase in average Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) scores for participants upon exiting from the programme. Of all those who have exited the programme, the average score upon entry was 41, which upon exiting had risen to 51.8. This difference was statistically significant. When compared to average WEMWBS scores for this cohort collected through the National Survey for Wales, which shows that the average WEMWBS score for this age group in North Wales is 50.6, it suggests that participants enter the programme with considerably lower-than-average well-being and exit the programme with slightly higher-than-average well-being among 16–24-year-olds.
- 4.3 Similarly, there is evidence of a statistically significant difference in skills and employability for participants upon exiting the programme, as captured by the Work Star. Upon entering ADTRAC the average score achieved across all seven elements was 5.91. Upon exiting, the average score had risen to 7.59. In total, 71% of participants who exited the support observed an increase in their Work Star score. When individual measures are disaggregated, it appears that the greatest distance travelled has taken place in relation to participant aspiration and motivation, job-searching skills, and job skills and experience.

- 4.4 ADTRAC has also been successful in reducing the number of barriers to EET experienced by participants. Monitoring data indicates that between entry and exit, the average number of barriers faced by participants falls by 4 (from an average of 7 barriers to 3). There was also qualitative evidence of this, with several participants interviewed during the interim evaluation noting how they “couldn’t even leave the house” before they accessed ADTRAC, but ADTRAC had enabled them to attend sessions and interact with other people. In some cases, this had resulted in the participant entering EET.
- 4.5 However, although it has successfully achieved soft outcomes, the operation appears to have some way to go in reaching its hard outcome targets, as shown in Table 1.2 below. Behind these headline figures, there is considerable variation with regard to which outcomes have been achieved by local authorities. For example, Denbighshire has been particularly strong in achieving ‘into employment’ outcomes, albeit relatively weaker with regard to education and qualification outcomes. By way of contrast, Anglesey has been particularly strong in achieving qualifications targets and weaker elsewhere, whereas Wrexham and Flintshire have been strong in relation to education/training and qualifications targets, but are further behind with its into employment targets.

Table 1.2: Outcome targets and performance data

	Target no. of participants	Target no. of participants (prior to reprofile)	Performance to date	% of target achieved to date
Total participants	1,451	1,651	893	62%
NEET participants (16–24 years of age) gaining qualifications upon leaving	350	350	200	57%
NEET participants (16–24 years of age) in education/training upon leaving	270	280	92	34%
NEET participants (16–24 years of age) entering employment upon leaving	367	357	149	41%
Participants gaining other positive outcomes³	290	330	337	116%

³ Other positive outcomes could include the following:

- Achieving more than one qualification/accreditation as a consequence of the intervention
- Achieving part-qualification/accreditation
- Achieving unaccredited training
- Achieving work-relevant certification upon leaving

- 4.6 Reflecting these figures, interviews with strategic stakeholders and delivery staff highlighted concerns surrounding whether the project targets are realistic. This is particularly important in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which is likely to cause a recession in Wales, making these targets even more difficult to achieve. Views on why this was the case varied, however. For some, the multiple and complex barriers faced by the young people with whom ADTRAC engages — the project has high levels of participants experiencing issues in relation to low confidence, social isolation, and mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression — mean that long-term work with participants is required.
- 4.7 Concerns were raised by several staff members and strategic stakeholders that the project's targets were too focused on hard outcomes and risked missing the importance of softer outcomes for some participants. They suggested that judging the project only by its hard outcomes risked eclipsing the role that soft outcomes, such as stabilising a young person's life, play in contributing to a young person's journey. This might suggest that the project could benefit from greater emphasis on capturing softer outcomes as well as providing additional support to turn soft outcomes into harder outcomes, such as work experience and structured volunteering opportunities — or referring participants to other programmes that will offer these opportunities.
- 4.8 Regional variations, including factors such as labour market conditions, travel, the location of FE colleges, and the number of those educated other than at school (EOTAS), are likely to affect the differences in outcomes achieved across different local authorities. Although it is not clear as to what this impact is, it is notable that Denbighshire County Council has been particularly successful in achieving 'into employment' outcomes, potentially reflecting the project being situated within Working Denbighshire. Although all local authority teams provide work experience and volunteering to project participants, it may be that Working Denbighshire publicises this part of its offer and prioritises 'into employment' outcomes, contributing to its successful outcomes in this area.

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- Entering part-time education (less than 16 hours)
 - Completing work experience placement/volunteering opportunity
 - Entering employment of less than 16 hours (including self-employment)
 - Entering employment on zero-hour contract
 - Entering a traineeship
 - Improvement in mental well-being
 - Improvement in soft outcomes

4.9 It should be noted, however, that other stakeholders perceive the hard outcome targets to be less of an obstacle to achieving programme outcomes than restrictions on whom the project can work with, particularly those related to Communities First areas.

- 4.10 Another potential reason as to why the project is behind some of its targets is the length of time that it takes to work with participants to achieve outcomes. Participants with multiple complex barriers are more likely to require support of a long-term nature to enable them to build up trust with advisors and develop foundational skills such as confidence. These can, in turn, help to ready individuals on the path towards EET, but for those with the greatest barriers, it can take advisors a long time to build up these foundations. This may indicate that the project needs to review its targets, considering the multiple and complex barriers faced by the cohort whom the operation is supporting.
- 4.11 In light of this, the operation may need to consider whether its priority lies in providing long-term support to young people NEET or achieving outcome targets, as these priorities lend themselves to differing approaches (including whether to introduce caps on the duration for which the operation can support participants or whether to revise targets down so as to enable the project to deliver more long-term support). Whilst the former approach may lend itself more towards “quick wins” and would enable the operation to meet its participation targets, this approach could come at the expense of the operation’s success in reducing the barriers to EET that participants experience, and would remove ADTRAC’s niche in respect of supporting young people who are the furthest removed from the labour market.

5. Implications of COVID-19

- 5.1 Engagement with participants provided some early indications of how COVID-19 could lead to outcomes being reversed as a result of job opportunities being placed on hold. This could result in participants who have exited into a result becoming unemployed again. Additionally, in the context of a potential recession, employment opportunities may be reduced, which could adversely impact on the ability of the operation to exit young people into an employment outcome.
- 5.2 Whilst this issue was outside of the scope of the current evaluation, it is also likely that the pandemic and the associated lockdown measures will have adversely impacted on the mental health and well-being of current/potential participants. As a result, the proportion of participants who experience poor mental health and well-being as a barrier to entering EET may increase as a result of the pandemic, which may increase the proportion of participants requiring more intensive support from the ADTRAC team to move them towards the labour market.

6. The Future of ADTRAC

- 6.1 During the evaluation, strategic stakeholders have expressed a high level of support for ADTRAC. It is seen to be vital provision for 16–24-year-olds who are furthest away from the labour market. Several stakeholders expressed concerns surrounding the potential of major gaps in local support provision at the end of its current funding.
- 6.2 Additionally, concerns were raised in relation to the ability of Joint Beneficiaries to hold on to qualified and skilled staff — and potentially retain the learning that has been achieved if staff are left unsure of whether the project will be extended or replaced in some form. As such, a priority for the next phase of work should be exploring opportunities to sustain this provision or provide a roadmap for an alternative.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 Recommendations for how the operation could be improved are detailed below. It is noted, however, that the context of COVID-19 may make some of these difficult to achieve.

Project Targets

- 7.2 **Recommendation One:** The operation should consider the proposed participation and outcome targets in the context of the participant group and the timescales for support and consider the revision of targets in the context of a potential recession. The operation should consider revising down targets in the context of the impact that COVID-19 is likely to have upon available employment and training opportunities, and consideration will need to be given to the areas that exclude ADTRAC, such as Communities First.
- 7.3 **Recommendation Two:** The operation should explore strategies with which to increase participation from females, as well as from individuals with childcare or other caring responsibilities. However, if it is identified that appropriate provision is already available through other programmes such as PaCE, ADTRAC should not duplicate this provision.

Project Delivery

- 7.4 **Recommendation Three:** The BCUHB should speed up the recruitment of Assistant Wellbeing Practitioners to ensure that participant needs can be met.

- 7.5 **Recommendation Four:** The operation could work alongside Careers Wales and Working Wales to explore opportunities to provide light-touch support to recently exited participants who may be at risk of becoming NEET again as a result of COVID-19, with the aim of reducing the impact.

Future Research Needs

- 7.6 **Recommendation Five:** Further research could seek to explore the longitudinal impact of the support to identify whether the support delivered by ADTRAC is helping participants to move closer to EET in the long term, even if participants are unable to achieve an outcome during the timescales of the operation. Furthermore, it could explore the extent to which successful hard outcomes achieved upon exiting from ADTRAC have been sustained in the long term.
- 7.7 **Recommendation Six:** Future evaluative work should seek to explore the perceptions of a wider cohort of participants to ensure that views are representative of the whole participant group. This should include — if possible — engaging with individuals who have disengaged from support, to understand possible areas for improvement.

The Future of ADTRAC

- 7.8 **Recommendation Seven:** There is a case for local authorities to work with the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, as well as the BCUHB, to identify opportunities to extend ADTRAC or replace it with similar provision when the current ESF funding cycle concludes.
- 7.9 **Recommendation Eight:** Reflecting ADTRAC's successes in achieving soft outcomes, but also its struggles in achieving harder outcome targets, it appears that ADTRAC is successful in moving participants closer to EET but may not be successful in achieving employment outcomes on its own. If a successor programme to ADTRAC is designed, placing greater emphasis on provision for people closer to the labour market, such as work experience placements and volunteering, could be considered. This provision would build on the soft outcomes achieved and would support participants into work, ensuring that participants continue to receive mentoring support as they move into work experience. Alternatively, referrals to other provision for individuals closer to the labour market could be considered a successful outcome for the provision for individuals furthest away from the labour market.

This document is also available in Welsh

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the ADTRAC project.

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