

## 2. Summary of Work Programme

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### Overall Methodology

- 2.1 The agreed work programme had 8 elements, briefly reviewed below. The overall methodology started by clarifying the context for management and leadership development in Wales, then identifying and critically reviewing currently available diagnostic tools. An initial stage of data collection from a sample of Welsh SMEs took place to assess past experiences of management and leadership development (if any), and gain an initial view about the potential need for a self-diagnostic tool.
- 2.2 At this point the research team, through discussions with the project manager, had to advise the National Council – ELWa whether there did seem to be a potential need for a new self-diagnostic tool, particularly for use within SMEs in Wales. The working assumption was confirmed that there **is** such a need – based primarily on significant interest in improving management/ leadership performance in **some** organisations. In addition, the initial phases of the project pointed to there being very small numbers of ‘true’ self-diagnostic management and leadership instruments actually available (in contrast, say, to instruments which address organisation-wide or personality issues) and a range of opportunities for encouraging processes of development and improvement such a tool **might** bring.
- 2.3 On the basis of that assessment, a draft specification for a self-diagnostic tool was drawn up, and developed further through 3 focus groups and a number of additional discussions with SME owner-managers. This phase of the project led to a number of enhancements to the draft specification, and the formulation of conclusions and recommendations from this project (see Sections 8,9 respectively)
- 2.4 The actual work programme went to plan in most respects, although recruiting SMEs for the 2 data collection exercises was challenging and ‘fall-back’ positions had to be adopted.

- 2.5 Two features of the project design do need to be emphasised at this point: first, the SMEs taking part in this exercise should not be seen as a representative sample of all SMEs within Wales – it was never intended that they should be. As we point out below, a high proportion of the SMEs taking part in this exercise were much more likely to be interested in management and leadership issues than ‘the average’ SME. They did provide, however, essential indicative and illustrative information about some of the issues faced by Welsh SMEs more generally.
- 2.6 Secondly, the exercise was not intended to cover detailed design issues for a possible self-diagnostic tool through, say, generating first-stage drafts of such a tool: again it was not intended to. This complicated some of the responses to our questions. Because there are currently many fewer ‘true’ self-diagnostic instruments than had been anticipated, it was not possible to use examples to demonstrate key points of interest, and a number of responses from SMEs stressed “*a lot would depend on exactly what it would look like*”.

### **Work Plan Elements**

- 2.7 **Inception:** An initial meeting with ELWa and WMC allowed the scope of the study to be reviewed and ‘fine-tuned’, up-to-date sources of information to be identified, and a detailed work plan to be agreed. CRG drafted topic guides at this stage, finalised following comments from ELWa and WMC, and a formal inception report was produced.
- 2.8 **WMC Meeting:** A full review of the context for the study took place, including the findings of ‘Agenda for Action,’ the broader need for the study, and issues surrounding the appropriateness of a leadership and management self-diagnostic tool within the Welsh context. The opportunity was taken to discuss a number of leadership and management initiatives currently in existence, together with gathering provisional views on the potential future demand for a self-diagnostic tool.
- 2.9 **Key Informant Interviews:** Face to face interviews were initially planned with 18-22 individuals from ELWa, Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), WDA, SSDA, IoD, the education/training sector, and others - including private sector business advisers and consultants - to explore the perceived relevance and suitability of current management and leadership diagnostic tools, and suggestions for the potential demand for a new tool (including requirements for ancillary support). In

the event, 26 individuals<sup>1</sup> took part in this stage of the data collection programme through confidential, semi-structured discussions based around the topic guide given in Appendix II.

- 2.10 These interviews revealed both considerable enthusiasm for ‘doing more’ in the management and leadership development field, but also a picture of little effective self-diagnostic material being currently available. A pattern of generally low levels of current formal management/ leadership development activity was certainly confirmed, particularly within SMEs, although the results that can emerge from informal development were stressed by several interviewees: *“you shouldn’t knock what a lot of people have learned just by having a go – they ‘know’ about marketing, even though they’ve never read a book about it, couldn’t give a lecture about it”* (business adviser).
- 2.11 Several key informants also expressed major concerns about the quality of at least some current support services, stressing the point that *“Just a tool mightn’t be much use – you’d have to be sure people could do something useful on the back of it”* (business support manager).
- 2.12 **Desk research:** We reviewed a range of reports (primarily from the UK) looking at management and leadership development in general, as well as re-visiting well-known general policies for economic development and learning within Wales. This phase of the work programme also sought out as full a range as possible of on-line and paper-based leadership and management diagnostic tools (national and international) that are currently available.
- 2.13 Initial expectations were that this might be something of a ‘crowded market place’: certainly many tools addressing **some** elements of management/ leadership and business development characteristics were identified. The number of ‘true’ self-diagnostic tools specifically addressing management/ leadership development issues is fairly small, however, once more organisation-wide and personality-focused tools are excluded.

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<sup>1</sup> Details are given in Appendix V.

- 2.14 **SME interviews:** Original plans centred on carrying out telephone interviews with 30 SME owner/ managers suggested as having at least some interest in the topic by ‘intermediaries’ who have direct contact with appropriate individuals/ organisations. Our first group of intermediaries were not able to supply the numbers of contacts we needed, so 25 interviews were carried out with SME owner-managers identified from standard business directories<sup>2</sup>.
- 2.15 Further contact with different intermediaries then allowed us to interview a further 28 ‘informed’ individuals. Interviews were based around the topic guide given in Appendix III, designed to explore previous management development/self diagnosis experience, perceived needs for diagnostic tools, and desirable characteristics of possible tools.
- 2.16 **Development of draft specification:** Data collected up to this point was used to produce a draft specification for a possible self-diagnostic tool; an interim report was also produced at this point, and discussed in detail with ELW<sup>a</sup> and the WMC – covering, in particular, an initial assessment of possible **need** for a self-diagnostic tool (see para. 2.2).
- 2.17 **Focus groups:** It was planned to review the draft specification with 4 focus groups of SME owner-managers in different parts of Wales, again using a number of intermediaries to contact appropriate individuals to take part in the groups. Difficulties arose in attracting as much support as we would have wished and the first 3 planned events had to be cancelled through lack of key people willing to attend.
- 2.18 In the end, with active support from a further group of intermediary organisations<sup>3</sup> 3 focus groups did take place, with a total of 14 SME owners/ managers taking part. All three had to take place in South Wales (despite considerable efforts, it was not possible to gather sufficient people together for the planned Mid/North Wales events).
- 2.19 Outline details of those attending are given in Appendix V; in terms of sectors represented, a good mix was achieved (manufacturing, retail, service, etc) as was a good spread of organisation sizes (mostly with 5-25 employees, but a good

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<sup>2</sup> [www.Walesindex.co.uk](http://www.Walesindex.co.uk); Yellow pages and Kelly’s.

<sup>3</sup> A mix of HE institutions, local enterprise agencies, individual business advisers.

representation of sole traders and 2 with around 200 employees). All attendees were clear 'decision-makers' in the organisations they represented. Detailed notes of points raised in the groups were taken, and subjected to systematic content analysis.

- 2.20 The processes of trying to attract appropriate individuals to focus groups led to a number of detailed and very valuable discussions with individuals having high levels of interest in the subject of the research, who simply were unable to attend the formal focus groups. These views were also carefully noted to give information from what was, in a number of respects, a 'virtual' discussion/ focus group. Again, these notes were subjected to content analysis and results have been incorporated in the findings described later in this report.
- 2.21 **Reporting:** Inception, interim and final reports have been produced, and a series of meetings have been held, leading to very helpful comments and feedback from ELWa and WMC. It does have to be stressed, however, that the responsibility for any remaining errors or omissions in the final report rests with the authors.