



Building Better Opportunities Evaluation

Annual Report June 2018



Building Better
Opportunities Evaluation



NATIONAL
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1.0 Introduction

Ecorys were commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) to undertake an evaluation and learning contract for the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Programme. This annual report draws on a number of pieces of work undertaken throughout 2017/2018 by the evaluation team as well as evidence emerging from other sources, including project level evaluation reports and outputs. Many BBO projects are reaching the end of their first year of delivery, making it a good point to reflect on success and lessons learned in terms of engaging the programme target groups and delivery so far, as well as the immediate and potential future outcomes from the programme.

1.1 BBO programme overview

BLF is matching funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 programme to provide joint investment in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth, particularly for the hardest to reach groups. BBO adopts a decentralised programme design, with 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) being involved in designing project outlines to inform the development and delivery of the programme at local levels. These outlines have been used to allocate funds to 132 projects that deliver interventions to address local priorities. The programme is supporting a variety of projects, ranging from those improving employability for the most disadvantaged, helping those with multiple and complex needs, to improving financial literacy. BBO has been designed to engage the expertise and knowledge of a wide range of stakeholders through encouraging partnership delivery, and thus create positive impacts for harder to reach groups. An earlier [evaluation report](#) looked in more detail at the profile of partnerships, interventions and target groups of BBO.

1.2 Evaluation aims

The evaluation primarily concentrates on examining the approach to programme implementation on the ground. In doing so, it is taking a formative perspective to generate insights and timely lessons during the life of the programme. The broad areas for investigation and analysis through the national evaluation are considered briefly below under the headings access, impact and learning.

- With regard to **access**, the evaluation will explore progress to date in opening up ESF funding, via BBO, to VCSE organisations that should be well placed to deliver effective interventions for harder to reach target groups.
- The evaluation will conduct a range of activities to examine the **impacts** of the programme, including project reviews on a sample basis (i.e. a 'deep and narrow' analysis) to provide detailed and insightful findings about what works and for whom.
- The above evaluation work will be coupled with a strong emphasis on sharing **learning** through a programme of learning activities. Specifically these will be designed to identify critical success factors and lessons for the Fund and delivery organisations.

Building on the above, an evaluation framework was developed and refined following the evaluation scoping stage. The full evaluation framework is available in Annex A.

1.3 Evaluation methodology

The BBO evaluation and learning contract is being pursued through a number of strands of work. Building on the work undertaken during the scoping stage and the earlier evaluation tasks, the following has been the focus of evaluation activities in the current period:

- **Grant holder interviews:** A programme of qualitative telephone interviews was undertaken with grant holders. To date 15 interviews have been undertaken. Selection of organisations to interview involved purposive sampling to ensure different types, sizes and locations of organisations were consulted. The interviews explored what the challenges and successes have been so far in delivering ESF funding. The interviews also reflected on delivery to date, including what is going well in terms of engagement, delivery of interventions and outcomes so far.
- **Funding officer focus group:** A focus group was conducted with BLF funding officers, who had direct experience of the application process and are now engaged in managing individual BBO grant holders. This enabled the evaluation to capture the perceptions of BLF staff on the successes and challenges grant holders may have experienced in the first phase of delivery.
- **In-depth qualitative research:** In depth, qualitative research with a sample of projects is an important aspect of the evaluation work package on impact. To date two visits have been conducted to collect evidence, and undertake qualitative in depth interviews with the project manager(s) in the lead organisation, interviews with strategic and operational staff from a range of partner organisations and mini focus groups or one-to-one interviews with participants.
- **Shared learning and networking:** Ecorys is delivering a number of learning and networking activities that serve as an opportunity to share learning, capture evidence for the evaluation and provide an opportunity for project staff to interact directly. Three face-to-face networking events were facilitated in May and June 2017 by Ecorys. Additionally Ecorys is managing an online networking group using the Yammer platform. The aim of this network is to allow projects to interact regularly outside of the more formal events, share good practice, updates and learning across the BBO projects and ask each other questions. The network includes BLF staff, partner representatives and local evaluators. A webinar and supporting resources on cross cutting themes was also delivered in December 2017.
- **Review of other sources of evidence:** In addition to evidence gathered directly by the evaluation team, this evaluation report draws on a range of other evidence including local evaluation reports, case studies collated by grant holders and BLF, other outputs developed by individual projects hosted on, for example, project websites, and views expressed at learning and consultation events delivered by BLF in 2017.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter Two explores the successes and lessons learned by BBO projects in terms of identifying and engaging the target groups they were aiming to work with.
- Chapter Three reviews the emerging intervention approaches and models adopted by the BBO projects to support participants, including identifying emerging principles underpinning the effective delivery of BBO projects.
- Chapter Four considers several aspects to partnership working.
- Chapter Five reviews the outcomes and results of BBO that have emerged to date.
- Finally, in Chapter Six we provide some concluding thoughts and areas for focus for the next phase of the evaluation.

2.0 Referral and Engagement Approaches

This chapter reflects on successes and lessons learned by BBO projects in terms of identifying and engaging the target groups they were aiming to work with. It considers the processes by which participants are referred onto provision, or otherwise engaged by BBO projects, with a particular focus on challenges faced and successful approaches to referral and engagement.

To be eligible for BBO support participants have to be legally resident in the UK and able to take paid employment, along with being unemployed or economically inactive at the point of engaging with the programme. In order for a participant to be supported, evidence needs to be gathered and retained by projects to prove their eligibility. Beyond this, given the varying nature of BBO projects, the target groups BBO provision sought to engage were specific to each project.

2.1 Referral approaches and level of success to date

The BBO projects each have different targets for the number of participants they engage with, which reflect the range of activities they undertake, the different target groups they work with and the size of the grant awarded. Based on self-reporting by grant holders interviewed by the evaluation team and a review of local evaluation reports, it seems that at this stage many of the BBO projects were close to target overall. However, there was some variation in terms of achievement of engagement targets for particular groups, such as women and economically inactive participants. It was evident that projects were generally closely monitoring their own performance and, as described below, specific action or activities were being undertaken in response.

2.1.1 Building the brand/project profile locally

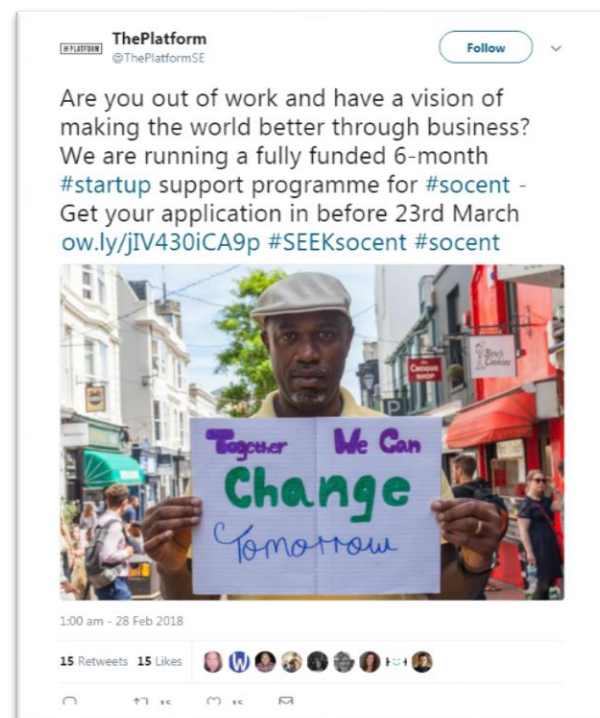
Across the programme, BBO projects are undertaking various activities to raise and maintain awareness of their services among potential participants, referral partners and other external organisations. Overall, there was a view, particularly from project managers interviewed, that a range of engagement and referral routes works best and that projects and partners need to be proactive. As one noted:

“I think what works best is having the range and the mix [of referral routes] and putting the time into it.” (Project manager)

Some of the approaches that seem to **work well**, as well as examples from specific projects, include:

- **Social Media** - Social media is variously being used as a route to raise awareness of the BBO projects and to highlight the results being achieved. Typically projects are targeting participants directly through social media, using different social media platforms and mechanisms dependent on the type of participants they are seeking to attract:

- The Seek Project, led by The Platform, uses social media such as Twitter as a key tool for its recruitment of participants to its six month social enterprise start up programme. Using established hashtags on Twitter has extended the reach of the posts.
- The Reaching Out Across Durham project has had success with Facebook advertising, targeting female participants in particular. This was achieved by highlighting the outcomes and results of one female participant including using her weight loss as an angle. *“We’ve had a huge response to it, much better than I expected, to the point where we’re actually going to repeat it.”* (Project manager)



- **Local media coverage** – Projects variously reported BBO projects attracting interest from local media, including having undertaken radio interviews and achieving coverage in the local press. Typically this was undertaken at the point that projects launched, but media monitoring by the communications team at the Big Lottery Fund also suggested that the earlier funding announcements generated a good level of local coverage. There are also examples of projects achieving coverage of project outcomes and results with positive individual participant journeys proving an attractive angle for coverage. This all helps to raise and maintain the profile of the projects and there are examples of direct referrals being generated as a result.

Figure 2.1 Local media coverage example

Good practice example relating to local media

Active Plus, who are leading the Who Dares Works project in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, achieved both TV and radio coverage in the lead up to the launch of the project, including on BBC Radio Cornwall, BBC Radio Devon and BBC 1 South West's Breakfast Show. *“This was great opportunity early in the project, and resulted in direct participant referrals starting the very next day”¹* (Project manager)

- **Resources** – There are several examples of BBO projects developing digital directories highlighting the partners and support available and, where projects have a geographical offer, outlining which partners are operating in the different locations. One example from the Step Forward Tees Valley project is shown below.

¹ Taken from BBO Programme newsletter produced by Big Lottery Fund



The MOVE project operating in Lincolnshire similarly has an online platform available where resources and information about the project is readily available to all and regularly updated. This is complimented with a specific partners' handbook which contains information about all of the delivery partners, the geographic area they cover, the MOVE offer, information about cross referrals, and contact details. Such resources were reported to be particularly important by projects involving large partnerships, where a large geographical area is covered, and/or where projects are seeking to provide a holistic response or participants are being engaged with a varied profile of needs. Online resources were used in these cases to make the range of support on offer clear, along with specifying who was delivering it and how to get in touch.

- **Joint recruitment/engagement activity across BBO projects** – In some LEP areas the project outlines were designed to provide complimentary activity and in some cases this has led to more joined up engagement activity. This is also emerging where there the same lead grant holder is leading on multiple projects. One example of this is evident in Hertfordshire where a single leaflet and an online sign up platform is being used for all three BBO projects run by the lead grant holder:



The project is part of the 'Building Better Opportunities' programme funded jointly by The Big Lottery with match funding from the European Social Fund. It aims to tackle the root causes of poverty and unemployment, such as physical and mental health issues, homelessness, addiction and much more. It brings together public, private and voluntary organisations to create one of the biggest partnerships in the county.

"Big Lottery funding of £5.5million has been granted to Hertfordshire County Council to help boost skills for residents"

The three strands of the programme are STRIVE in Hertfordshire (Barriers to Employment), MIL E in Hertfordshire (Financial Confidence) and Herts Youth Futures (Young People).

You would like to take part you will receive dedicated one-to-one support from your local mentor. They will guide you through the many training and skills opportunities available through this project helping you move towards gaining work experience placements, volunteering opportunities or apprenticeships, employment and self-employment.

Herts Youth Futures

The Herts Youth Futures project will support young people furthest from the workplace to improve employability and enter training or work.

Eligible groups are young people aged 15-19 years (up to 21 for care leavers, up to 25 for young people with disabilities) from Hertfordshire currently not in employment, education or training.

Herts Youth Futures offers 1-to-1 support to help you get ready and work out your training or job goals through involvement in regular fun activities such as a youth project, sports club or creative group.

Key Eligibility:

- ✓ a young person aged 15-19,
- ✓ an under-21 care leaver, or an under 25 young person with disabilities
- ✓ registered unemployed, economically inactive

27 Partners working together to make a difference for you.

STRIVE

The Support and Transition Routes into Volunteering and Employment (STRIVE) in Herts project.

If you have previously tried to find employment and the support you had was not successful then this project could be for you. We provide tailored support to your interests and needs, helping you move into sustainable employment, volunteering or education.

Key Eligibility:

- ✓ aged 19+
- ✓ registered unemployed
- ✓ economically inactive

- **Self-referrals/word of mouth** – Those projects operating for longer periods reported that, in recent months, they were starting to see more people self-refer to the project on the back of their friends, family or peers having received support.

2.1.2 Partnership expertise and building trusted relationships

In addition to promotional activity, BBO projects are also proactively seeking to engage participants through utilising the expertise and existing networks of partners within the partnership.

As noted above, the BBO programme was designed specifically to engage the expertise and knowledge of a range of stakeholders to help generate positive impacts for harder to reach groups. This principally manifested itself in the formation of partnerships that included specialist partners with established links with the target groups identified. This was reported to be a key recruitment/referral route for many BBO projects, and one which is proving successful. In this way, BBO projects could 'piggyback' on an existing community of service users, and take advantage of 'acceptance by association', whereby participants were happy to participate in a service that was provided through an organisation with which they already had a trusted relationship. The types of organisations involved, and the specific strategies they are using, varied along with the nature of the BBO project. One example is outlined below from the Wise Steps project in North Tyneside.

Figure 2.2 Specialist partner example

Good practice example relating to specialist partner role

What works example

The International Community Organisation of Sunderland is a partner on the Wise Steps BBO project in North Tyneside. They are an organisation that focuses on minority groups that may find it hard to understand the UK labour market and are well established in communities, with a trusted reputation. To support recruitment to the BBO project, they have used advertising specifically targeting particular communities, for example using a Polish language poster to engage participants from this community



Beyond the partners directly involved in BBO projects, there is evidence that some projects have sought to expand the number and type of referral partners. In some cases, this was in response to the pursuit of a particular target group. For example, one project made links with local schools as a route to potentially attract female participants as they tend to be the primary care givers and as such were attending schools for events or to collect children.

More widely, projects are running various engagement activities as first step to recruitment. As one project manager reported, and as has been established by previous evaluations of 'what works',² there is a need to be proactive in such activity:

“Whatever it is you are doing, actually going out there is important. You can't just sit and wait for people to come to you.” (Delivery staff member)

Activity included visiting community venues or established groups, or having BBO project staff permanently or on an ad hoc basis based in local organisations or offices. Project staff reported needing to build up credibility and develop a good reputation with these organisations to generate referrals:

“There's a trust element there, so they now trust that the project actually delivers what we say we're going to deliver. They will refer participants quite freely now to us.” (Project manager)

An important element of converting referrals into engagement was establishing personal contact with participants early on in the process in order to sell the benefits of BBO and to start building a working relationship. In line with the holistic and responsive approach of many projects, taking a

² For example [NIACE \(2011\) Engaging unemployed women in ESF-funded training: successful approaches and case studies](#)

flexible approach to the initial engagement with a participant when a referral is made was reported by projects as important. In practice, this often meant project staff meeting a potential participant for an initial discussion in a location of venue that the participant feels most comfortable in. Examples included meeting in a local café or for a walk along a canal whatever a participant is happy or prefers to do.

“Popping a leaflet through the door isn’t going to get somebody coming out to engage. It’s about the mentor helping to break down barriers, building up that trust by making the effort for that individual.” (Delivery staff member)

There is further examination of this relationship building in Section 4.

BBO projects are variously demonstrating success in reaching out to participants through a range of activities as the first step to engagement in BBO. These activities are intended to attract participants by offering or focusing on activities they are interested in, providing a ‘safe’ environment in which participant involvement in BBO can be introduced, project staff can start to build trust with participants and start to build the confidence of participants. Commonly these activities are tailored to attract particular groups. For example, the STRIVE project in Hertfordshire took part in promoting International Women’s Day, with the aim to specifically target female participants.

2.2 Challenges in referrals and engagements

There was some consensus around challenges that projects have faced in respect of referral and engagement. An early challenge reported by projects was inappropriate referrals from referral partners, which was generating referrals of participants who did not represent the intended target group of the hardest to reach. A number of actions have been put in place to address this, including the good practice example presented below.

Figure 2.3 Centralising referrals example

Good practice example relating to centralised referrals
Centralising and making the process and referral form uniform across the partnership has worked well for the Motiv8 project to ensure participants are truly those furthest away from the labour market. The project worked on several iterations of a referral form, which was subsequently made electronic to allow the lead partner – New Charter Homes – to act as the recipient of all referrals rather than referrals being processed in individual delivery hubs. This process was supported by in-house training for all staff.
<i>“Having our single point of access functions sat with us was definitely the right thing to do.”</i>

In other cases, the eligibility criteria excluded some existing users of partner organisations’ services, requiring BBO project partnerships to undertake more outreach work. In addition, there was a view that the administration of the programme was having an impact on referrals and engagement more widely by limiting the time that management staff have available for the relationship building to generate referrals, as this manager suggests:

“I'd love to be able to go out like I did in the very early days and really build relationships with organisations that still haven't heard about us. We have got partners with their own fantastic networks and they're out doing that but I know there are organisations out there that work with the people we need to work with, that aren't aware of us. If I was to have more time and not be so tied into the monitoring side then I could go out and do that.” (Project manager)

Even with the focus of the programme on those hardest to help, the level of support that individuals need who are coming on to the programme is in some cases is still far greater than expected. Some projects are reporting a significantly higher than expected number of people with disabilities, both those that are disclosed as well as more moderate needs that isn't disclosed. In particular mental health challenges are emerging as more prevalent than the projects anticipated. This is perceived by project staff as being partly due to austerity and cut backs in statutory services, resulting in fewer services available but also a higher rate of undiagnosed/lower level needs.

The requirement to confirm eligibility has resulted in an elongated process in starting support for participants and, in particular, is affecting engagement, as this project worker describes: *“It does slow things up in terms of gathering the evidence because we are working with people who are pretty chaotic.”* This in turn is reported by projects to be a challenging time, particularly where some participants engage with a project as they are in a time of crisis with immediate issues to be addressed, as technically no provision can be delivered until eligibility is confirmed.

In particular, evidencing economic inactivity has emerged as a key challenge. As one project worker explained: *“It's about someone negatively proving they're not doing something rather than proving they are.”* Use of self-declarations is one approach being used by projects to overcome this challenge, particularly where participants are in receipt of ESA but are unable to get proof. .

One further specific target group where eligibility challenges were highlighted was in respect of young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), or more generally vulnerable young people. It was noted that whereas older age groups tend to have access to passports/birth certificates/ benefits documents, vulnerable young people do not in a lot of cases. Specific challenges reported included:

- Asking for this type of information can be a huge barrier when engaging young people in the first place, with suspicions aroused due to not understanding why this level of personal information is needed.
- Projects reported having difficulties with some parents and their attitudes, finding they are unwelcome when they make contact to seek the required evidence.
- The resources and time being spent on chasing evidence rather than progressing participants in terms of confidence or skills.

More widely, the issue of evidencing eligibility and the time it is taking to do so is highlighted by projects as an issue affecting conversion rates. One project has developed a specific 'attachment team' to support the key workers in the process of gaining the required documentation to prove eligibility. The level and complexity of needs is also highlighted as a factor in conversion rates:

“Yes, because at point of referral they may want the support, and they want to engage, but then it could be a week later. Things can change a lot in a week in some people's lives.”
(Project delivery staff)

Other challenges related in broad terms to referrals and engagement concerned the publicity and branding requirements that need to be applied to all materials produced by BBO projects. This has led to some materials being produced by delivery partners that do not meet the requirements and having to be redone, or having to ask partners or change their own materials as a result of a change in the guidance. This was well managed by some project leads by setting up templates or asking partners to seek approval from the lead organisation before any materials were used.

3.0 Intervention Approaches

This chapter reviews the emerging intervention approaches and models adopted by the BBO projects to support participants. Given the specific locally designed project outlines and associated target groups, across the BBO programme there is significant variation in the intervention approaches and delivery models being delivered. Despite this, it is possible to identify emerging principles or common elements underpinning the effective delivery of BBO projects to date, regardless of the target group. These are considered below in respect of the following themes:

- Comprehensive but carefully delivered needs assessment and action planning
- Addressing initial confidence and self-belief barriers at an early stage
- Having a single key worker or advisor dedicated to an individual participant
- Offering flexible and individualised support.

3.1 Needs assessment and action planning

A diagnostic assessment was a common successful element across BBO projects, whereby projects offer undertake an individualised assessment of needs. In line with wider evidence, this initial element was critically important to ensure appropriate support is subsequently delivered. There are examples of a range of specific tools being used by BBO projects for this needs assessment, typically with tools being specifically designed dependent on the particular focus of the project. An example from the New Horizons project, which allows needs around financial capability to be identified, is shown below:

**Money, Online & Work
Personal Health Check**

I get help and advice with money, being on-line and work when I need it

I have a current account and use it without incurring penalty charges

I budget and plan ahead for the things I need

I can cover all my living costs, including one off costs without falling behind

I always get the best deals when I am buying things (e.g. Goods & Services)

I don't worry about money issues

I regularly use the internet to save money and to access information I may need

I enjoy building my skills and confidence

I am confident about finding training, voluntary and/or paid work

I plan ahead for changes in my life and feel confident about managing them

Date completed:

Client name:

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Other projects that have a wider focus or are targeting a range of participants have designed more wide-ranging assessments. The Motiv8 project’s assessment tool, for example, focuses on three areas: health and wellbeing, finance and employability, and self-confidence and self-development, to ensure a full range of needs is captured.

While assessment was discussed as being an important early stage for participants, project staff highlighted the need to introduce and conduct the assessment carefully so as not to discourage the participant. Approaches reported as working well included assessments being completed over several meetings, or project staff approaching assessments through a conversational approach and completing the specific paperwork afterwards as this projects staff member suggests:

“If a mentor goes in straight at the very beginning and goes, ‘Right, I need to fill in this form, you, you need to tell me that,’ people just run a mile, because, ‘You’re not interested in me as a person, you just want me to tick boxes so you can get some funding.’” (Project manager)

3.2 Priority focus on developing confidence

There is good evidence from BBO projects that a priority in the early delivery of support to the BBO target group is to focus initially on building confidence and self-belief. It is widely recognised that addressing these softer skills is essential before participants typically can think about other goals, especially those involving moving into work. Related to this, projects recognised that many participants are experiencing social isolation. Therefore, regular social interaction between

participants and delivery staff, or between participants, offers an important early positive impact for those engaged and was seen as supporting their ability to move towards employment or education or training. As one BBO project representative commented:

“It’s really important to get people to actually start talking to other people. If you don’t get their confidence to grow, you’re never going to move them closer to the labour market; it’s just not going to happen.” (Delivery staff member)

BBO projects are demonstrating many varied and creative ways to provide this initial confidence building activity:

Figure 3.1 Confidence building examples

Examples relating to building participant confidence
The Step Forward Tees Valley project running football sessions with Middlesbrough FC Foundation Trust at a local leisure centre. In the Darlington area, a knitting group has been established to bring together participants to share skills and build confidence.
The Who Dares Works project uses the Active Plus Who Dares course run by veterans as an initial activity that aims to build confidence, motivation, teamwork and communication skills, whilst also providing an opportunity to provide information on the subsequent provision available.
The Steps to Work project runs a range of activities, including getting people playing chess, arts and crafts, cooking all intended to bring people together and start to build confidence.

There is evidence of learning, however, where provision of this nature has not been so successful to date. One project, for example, has a specialist partner that offers teambuilding days as a way to build some of the soft skills required. However, the project hasn’t utilised this provision as the activities involves participants being physically fit, or open to a physical challenge, and the profile of the participants concerned hasn’t in reality been right for this.

3.3 Key worker model

‘Key workers’ are individuals who provide on-going one-to-one advice and support to participants on employment or support programmes, with this role having been highlighted in several previous evaluations to be effective.³ The key worker model is a common approach adopted by many BBO projects, although terminology used to describe this role varied to fit with project focus, for example Mentors, Coaches or Navigators.

³ For example: [Ecorys and ipsos Mori \(2016\) Evaluation of the Department for Work and Pensions European Social Fund Support for Families with Multiple Problems](#)

Figure 3.2 Key worker models in BBO

Examples of key worker roles
The Opportunity and Change project operating in Nottingham and supporting individuals with multiple and complex needs – including combinations of substance misuse, repeat offending, mental ill-health, domestic abuse and homelessness, assigns each participant a <u>Personal Navigator</u> who supports them to achieve their goals in partnership with existing support agencies.
The Positive People project in Cornwall matches disadvantaged participants with multiple barriers with a <u>Change Coach</u> to provide individualised support.
The STRIVE project in Hertfordshire has <u>Learning Mentor</u> roles, working closely with participants to support them to overcome barriers to learning and barriers to work in order to achieve their full potential.

The individuals who fulfil these roles varies across projects, with the role being tailored to participant needs and varying according to the project focus. For example, the Progress Coaches working with young people on the Progress project in the West Midlands are all experienced youth work professionals. In other projects, the key worker roles is fulfilled by professionals from different services and matches are made dependent on the needs present by a participant. In the Who Dares Wins project, for example, participants are able to choose their mentor and/or suggest someone they are already working with to become their mentor on the BBO project. This was reported as supporting the building of a trusted and productive relationship between a participant and mentor, a key factor typically identified as an important element for success in a key worker/participant relationship. The local evaluation of the New Leaf projects identified further evidence on this, highlighting that a successful mentoring relationships should be built:

- based on trust and co-production;
- with a persistently assertive/challenging approach;
- with the aim of creating a common purpose.

Other project staff reflected on the practical approaches that worked well in the context of the key worker model to support these characteristics, including arranging meetings with a clear purpose set out in advance:

“Arrange meetings to do a specific thing not just, 'I'll come and see you next Tuesday,' for no particular reason. If you plan things in place, plan what you're going to do with them, a reason why that meeting's happening then they know what they're going to get out of it each time.” (Delivery staff member)

The benefit of making arrangements that are efficient for the participant by arranging meetings and catch ups that fit in with other appointments was also commented on:

“If you are going to be working with somebody who's got a lot of complex needs, they're probably not going to want to go out twice that week to see two different people. If you can

make that meeting at one point with two people then it's going to be more likely that they're going to attend” (Delivery staff member)

3.4 Flexible and individualised support

The opportunity BBO offers to provide individualised and flexible wrap around support to participants emerged strongly from the evidence collected to date as one of the key strengths of the BBO programme. As one project manager outlined of the support offered:

“It is participant led, really. The fact the whole journey's built around the participants. The programme's flexibility, whilst they're on programme, to offer them different support as necessary. Really, I think that's the true strength of it.”

The way individualisation of support is being delivered varies across BBO projects, but some common approaches that appear to be working well include:

- Offering or facilitating access to a menu of thematic provision:

Many projects have set up a menu or programme of internal provision that participants can access to address the specific barriers they face. The model for delivering this varies across BBO projects. In some projects a single organisation delivers end-to-end support, while in others a participant's journey may include many more different partner interventions. The latter model was reported to work well in many cases, with partner organisations delivering services and provision in line with their own specialisms and achieving the aim of BBO programme to utilise specialist provision. A further benefit was identified in the local evaluation of the Greater Lincolnshire MOVE project, wherein it was noted that *“cross referrals between delivery partners represent a very good collegiate approach to delivery.”*⁴

The types of interventions and specific provision delivered are numerous and varied across BBO projects, responding to the specific aims, target groups and barriers BBO projects are seeking to address. However, some common themes emerge:

Figure 3.3 Addressing particular needs

Examples relating to addressing specific participant needs

Health and wellbeing – Projects reported that health and wellbeing, and specifically mental health issues, are more prevalent amongst the participants they support than anticipated, so interventions on this theme have been well utilised. Examples include:

The **Step Forward Tees Valley** project has an experienced team of health link workers to support participants to better manage any psychological/physical health conditions they may have.

⁴ Greater Lincolnshire MOVE (Moving On, Volunteering & Employability) Year 1 Evaluation Report, local evaluation report submitted by grant holder

Digital inclusion – Given the increasing use of digital platforms for job applications, and the need to provide electronic/typed covering letters and CVs, this is a key area of activity for many projects. Similarly, the introduction of Universal Credit in many areas, and the need for claimants to interact or evidence their commitments digitally, has meant this is a common area of support need.

The **Wise Steps** project in Tyne and Wear has engaged Leonard Cheshire Disability as a specialist partner to provide digital inclusion support. This includes awareness raising amongst project staff of the potential needs and adaptations required for those with disabilities, delivery of basic IT training, or training on any particular hardware or software to participants directly.

Debt/Financial inclusion – Beyond the projects with a principal focus on financial inclusion, other projects were delivering debt advice or more preventative provision aimed at addressing financial barriers. Commonly, this is delivered through having a specific specialist partner such as Citizen's Advice to which referrals can be made.

Sector/employment focus – Given the aim to achieve employment results for participants, projects are delivering a range of interventions with an employment focus. Employer engagement work is not emerging strongly at this stage, with individual brokerage being the main focus so far. Examples of the employment focus adopted by projects include:

The **Who Dares Works** project in Cornwall which has a series of employment focused interventions that participants can join depending on where their employment interests or goals lie. Who Dares Builds, Who Dares Cares, Who Dares Repairs, and Who Dares Serves are delivered as interventions to provide participants with experience of working in particular sectors. They are delivered in several formats from a one day taster to more in-depth session involving structured placements. The overall ethos is that the interventions are not classroom based but seek to give participants hands-on experience of jobs in a particular sector.

Additionally, or in conjunction with internal provision in order to meet the specific needs of participants, projects are also referring participants to external provision as needed. This is highlighted by one project to be particularly important in light of the potential longer term support participants may need, given their more complex and multiple barriers. As one project representative commented:

“Our strapline is: 'don't make them dependent, make them independent'. Where there is statutory services or local provisions that people can dip into, we would refer them to that rather than do it in-house, because that's long term. It means they can go back to that at the end of our contract. Otherwise, you just come back to a revolving door of people not knowing where to go.” (Project manager)

- Personalised budgets

The individualised support available for participants is also evident in terms of direct financial assistance offered through some projects. The New Leaf project offers individualised support

through a personal development budget of up to £250 to support expenditure on items required to support participation and progress towards work or education. The support is allocated following an assessment of need and is being used to support travel costs, interview clothing and aids to enable participation in work or volunteering placements.⁵

- Informal hand-holding support

Beyond more formalised or structured interventions, there is clear evidence emerging from BBO projects that a more informal, hand-holding, type of support is commonly required and being delivered, particularly where projects offer a key worker or mentor support model.

“We've had participants where a project officer has actually gone on a bus journey with them because the anxiety of getting on a bus by themselves, project officers who've actually gone and sat with the participant at a doctors or I know one actually went to court, not as a witness but just sat there as support and that makes a huge, huge difference to people.”
(Project manager)

There was consensus amongst the project staff interviewed that a key success factor in offering effective individualised and flexible support involves the ability of projects to provide the combination of the types of support outlined above. Equally, it was noted that it can be important to combine such interventions without a very strict or fixed timescale for doing so, hence allowing the pace and pitch of activities to be tailored to an individual's needs. As one project representative outlined:

“It's a great project and it feels really good to be able to offer some quite intensive support for people for as long as they need it. There aren't many projects out there that [can do so]. This is the only project at the moment in this area that's offering that much support.” (Project manager)

Similarly, the ability for projects to be more relaxed and flexible in terms of a participant's frequency of engagement, and essentially to offer an 'open door' policy, was seen as a key advantage for BBO over more structured employment interventions:

“So it's really key that we're realistic about the complex lives people lead. One of the biggest things is that this group drop off. We're dealing with people who are perhaps transient in their homelessness, so one week they're staying with someone, they're easily contactable; the next three weeks, they've disappeared off the face of the planet. It's about being tenacious and always having that door open.” (Project manager)

⁵ Taken from New Leaf Building Better Opportunities Project – Year 1 Evaluation

4.0 Partnership Arrangements

Partnership working is at the heart of the BBO programme and examining the arrangements involved, along with partnership functioning, is a key focus of evaluation activity. This chapter reflects on evidence gained from a number of sources, including visits to BBO projects, grant holder interviews, local BBO evaluation reports, and other materials generated by delivery organisations, to consider several aspects to partnership working emerging to date. In turn, the sections that follow cover: evidence on the importance of partnership working to BBO and its benefits, challenges encountered and solutions developed, and key success factors identified for effective partnership working along with good practice examples.

4.1 The importance of partnerships to BBO and their benefits

The initial grant holder survey, reported on in the previous annual BBO evaluation report in 2017, suggested that partnerships were both a key part of delivering the programme and that, in general, they were viewed positively in terms of how they were working to date. Activity to inform this report has helped to deepen our understanding of the importance and centrality of partnership working to BBO, as well as providing a range of concrete examples of the benefits of positive partnership working.

A key role of partnerships in the BBO context concerns the opportunity they offer for projects to draw on a wide range of delivery organisations, often with specialist skills, to enhance the wraparound, holistic support offered to BBO participants. A number of strong examples of utilising partners' specialist skills are available within the BBO programme. In some cases this involves the delivery of support to specific BBO target groups. For example, the 'Wise Steps' BBO project operating in Tyne and Wear works through a partner organisation, ICOS (International Community Organisation of Sunderland), to target and support minority groups that may find it hard to understand the UK labour market and face challenges in accessing it. ICOS represents one example of the common use of organisations embedded in particular communities which are able to use their position of trust to more effectively engage and support minority groups.

The importance of partner organisations in enhancing the BBO offer to participants is also a strong theme running through the local evaluation activity undertaken to date. As the previous annual report revealed, a feature of BBO partnerships is the fact that they are often composed of a large number of partners, each bringing a particular set of provision and expertise to bear within projects. As the local evaluation of the BRIDGES (Building Reachable Individual Dreams Gaining Employment & Skills) BBO project operating in the Black Country makes clear, having a partnership composed of 29 organisations enables the project to '*offer a truly diverse range of services to participants*'.⁶ The evaluation also illustrates a key theme emerging more widely in the BBO context, namely the positive outcomes from this approach for partner organisations themselves. As the evaluation report outlines:

⁶ BRIDGES First Year Evaluation, local evaluation report submitted by grant holder (Steps to Work)

“Whereas partners, prior to the programme, were unaware of some organisations and services available they are now building strong working relationships, the impact of which could last far beyond the lifetime of the programme.”⁷

As another local evaluation, of the Greater Lincolnshire MOVE (Moving On, Volunteering & Employability) BBO project, similarly outlines, delivery partners are already using the programme as an opportunity to develop their services and to undertake joint work in addition to MOVE, with this being identified as a “...really positive aspect of delivery to date.”⁸ As such examples indicate, BBO is generating positive outcomes through partnership working not only for participants but also for delivery organisations. Moreover, the partnership models established are, in a number of cases, helping to generate spin-off benefits from BBO activity, along with promoting the expansion and sustainability of the support activities established through the programme. This illustrates the potential of the BBO programme to act as a catalyst for the development of additional support networks and provision for its target groups in local areas, including enhancing the capacity of the VCS sector to offer such support in particular.

A further key element to the benefits of partnership working was evident through the case study visits and provider interviews undertaken to date, namely the importance and benefits of developing partnership activity outside of the delivery partnership itself. This covered both a range of organisations that can act as a referral to the provision, as well as developing more strategic arrangements with key local partners including, for example, Jobcentre Plus. Approaches evident in respect of such more developed partnership arrangements included co-location within local services and close working between BBO staff and staff from other services to support participants. The following quote from a delivery partner representative illustrates how this is working on the ground, along with highlighting the ability to develop key linkages with organisations playing a central role in respect of the BBO target population:

“We've set up very strong relationships with our Jobcentre Plus partners, so we have a presence in each of those eight Jobcentres within [local area] and that's really been about building those relationships on the ground and making sure that our advisers are chatting to their advisers and we're giving feedback and we're attending their 'comms' meetings. We've also set up links with probation services, with other voluntary sector organisations, so a lot of it has been about relationship building really and making sure that other agencies are aware of [BBO project] and how we can work alongside them.” (Project manager)

The role of co-location in supporting effective partnership working was also apparent within delivery partnerships as well as in respect of external partners. In some instances, this was used to strengthen partnership working, in others to enhance the coherence and convenience of the support offer for participants and, in one or two cases, to support improvements in the understanding and effectiveness of partners that had faced challenges to date. A combination of such motivations for co-location was equally evident in some delivery contexts. The themes of strengthening partnership working and supporting improvements in partner effectiveness were

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Greater Lincolnshire MOVE (Moving On, Volunteering & Employability) Year 1 Evaluation Report, local evaluation report submitted by grant holder

apparent in respect of one of the BBO projects visited, for example, wherein a member of staff outlined that:

“Where we’ve struggled with quite a few of our partners - we’ve looked at a model of introducing their member of staff being co-located here with us every week, and that works really well, so we have a link in. We also give them access to our systems so they can communicate with all of the delivery hubs.” (Project manager)

As the above quote illustrates, close working and co-location is also being used by BBO delivery partnerships to address some of the common challenges faced in delivering provision, including sharing of data and effective communications.

A range of other examples of the central role of wider partnership arrangements in supporting key aspects of BBO delivery models, including engagement and referral in particular, were also evident from the case study visits. As one representative explained, for example, “...by far, our biggest referral stream in [local area] is through our partnerships with other agencies.” Likewise, representatives described how relationships with key local services helped to access intelligence on the BBO target groups, highlight specific issues being faced in the local area, and enhance both the engagement process and support offer respectively.

As the above discussion and examples illustrate, BBO partnerships are playing a central role in effective delivery of support, both in terms of the relationships and expertise of direct delivery partners helping to enhance the BBO offer, but also in terms of relationships with wider partners being key to the effective functioning of the programme. While much of the evidence in this area is positive, it is also fair to say that partnership working has not been without its challenges. It is to these challenges, and in some cases solutions developed to address them, that we now turn.

4.2 Challenges and solutions

The provider survey and additional consultations undertaken for the previous annual evaluation report indicated that a particular issue faced by BBO grant holders involved partners initially identified at the bid stage subsequently dropping out of partnerships. Evidence gathering for this report confirmed the ongoing nature of this issue whilst also enabling it to be explored in more depth, particularly in terms of exploring why partnerships had changed over time and the reasons for partners dropping out. Research with BBO providers indicated that there are a range of reasons for changes in partnership composition, including in particular:

- Realising the need for new partners during the course of delivery, either due to unanticipated gaps in provision or the prevalence of particular needs amongst the participant groups supported.
- Requirements imposed by the nature of ESF provision and/or the ‘full cost recovery’ model adopted for the programme, particularly around data and evidence collection and submission, leading partners to drop out having decided they did not have the capacity to cope with this, or that the costs of their participation outweighed the benefits for them as an organisation.

- Insufficient referrals to some organisations, meaning that the administrative costs of delivery were not justified by the small numbers coming through to access services (this being particularly, though not exclusively, an issue faced by smaller and more specialist providers).
- In an apparently small number of instances, suspected or actual irregularities concerning the way some partners were delivering support, and/or in relation to administrative requirements, causing lead partners to remove some delivery organisations from their partnerships.
- External changes occurring to delivery partners in respect of their focus and/or organisational status; for example, in one case a charitable trust was absorbed back into a local authority, with the latter feeling that it was not really appropriate for the organisation to continue to deliver in light of this change in status.

Of the above reasons, the most prevalent concerned issues with the administrative requirements of participation. This appeared to be particularly challenging for smaller providers which, in some cases, had limited prior experience of delivering ESF provision, and/or which faced capacity challenges in terms of dealing with the requirements imposed. Linked to this, such organisations also appeared to be more vulnerable to provision taking time to get fully up and running and/or referral and engagement rates being less than anticipated. Amongst grant holders discussing these issues, it was acknowledged that there are no easy solutions, but that some of these challenges can be mitigated through effective support for the delivery partnership and strong communications. As one BBO grant holder outlined in this context, for example:

“They're [smaller, specialist partners] expecting more money to flow, more participants to come through and, in reality, perhaps some of that hasn't come through. It's been a process of trying to manage those relationships and make sure they remain on a positive footing.”
(Project manager)

In a limited number of cases there were also indications that smaller, more specialist, providers may be being disadvantaged by a reluctance of larger partners to make referrals to them, or to not necessarily see the value in doing so. In the cases concerned, this scenario appeared to relate, in part, to the issue noted above of smaller than anticipated engagement numbers coming onto the programme in some contexts. In one such instance, for example, a representative of the lead partner acknowledged that:

“I think the specialist partner provision probably hasn't been as utilised as much [as expected] ... I think for the key worker, they're thinking, ‘why would I put them [participants] into that one when I can put them into exact similar provision over here?’ And we can actually claim it as an outcome and that's the end of their journey ... I think that's really kind of disadvantaged our specialist partners in a way”. (Project manager)

Interestingly, there were also examples of providers reflecting that, with hindsight, the initial partnerships developed were too large in relation to the scale of delivery involved. In some of these cases, a reduction in the partnership was seen as actually being beneficial. This was the case in

respect of one particularly large partnership that had been reduced by a significant degree; as a representative concerned explained:

“When you split project budgets of that size over 40-odd partners and look at the skills they've got, a lot of partners ended up with relatively small allocations and they realise that with the level of administrative work involved in the programme [it was not worth continuing] ... I think we're comfortable with the withdrawals. There's nothing that's left a great, gaping hole and everything that's been done in terms of withdrawals makes sense and allows us a little bit more flexibility going forward.” (Project manager)

Equally, some of those engaged in the evaluation felt that changes in delivery numbers and partner roles are inevitable in programmes such as BBO, and should not be necessarily seen as a negative outcome. The point was made by several interviewees that a phase of refining delivery is often necessary, and that the partnership structure that emerges over time may be more suited to the nature of delivery once this is fully understood.

On a similar theme, there was also a widespread recognition that some challenges and difficulties are inherent in partnership working of the type on which BBO depends. Equally, the point was made that shared challenges and working through issues can make partnerships stronger in the long-run and enhance the effectiveness of provision. As one provider representative commented:

“I think there's been some wonderful times and some really challenging times! As with anything, I think, given that it is very challenging, we've got different organisations for a start and we've all got our own organisational structures, our own policies, I think it's quite amazing how it's managed to co-exist together.” (Project manager)

An important consideration here involved the perceived need for grant holders acting as lead partners to make efforts to facilitate open and honest dialogue, alongside building trust and avoiding unnecessary blame. The theme of effective partnership management came through particularly strongly in the case study visits with BBO providers, and is returned to below in discussing success factors and good practice to which we now turn.

4.3 Key success factors and good practice

Evidence from the interviews with BBO project representatives and from local evaluations serves to highlight a series of key success factors relating to effective partnership working on the BBO programme, allied to a number of examples of approaches that can be considered as good practice. Table 4.1 below summarises the most commonly cited and apparent key success factors and the benefits they were seen as securing in respect of effective partnership working.

Table 4.1 Partnership working: key success factors and benefits

Key success factor	Benefits for effective partnership working
Developing clear Partnership Agreements/Memoranda of Understanding that all partners sign up to	Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities amongst all partners
Open, honest and effective communication, particularly from the lead partner to the wider delivery partnership	Maintaining partnership integrity and building trust
Widening partnership activity beyond those directly involved in delivery to engage other services and relevant organisations	Enhanced delivery capacity including improved intelligence and improved referral and engagement routes
Holding regular partnership meetings, along with encouraging relationships to develop across the partnership at both strategic and operational levels including through 'peer learning'	Facilitating a space to share good practice while also maintaining partnership bonds and encouraging a sense of shared endeavour and support
Developing clear management, governance and accountability structures	Ensuring that all partners are supported and that mechanisms are in place to address any challenges that arise whilst maintaining a focus on effective delivery
A strong focus on partnership management on the part of the lead provider, including allocating specific resources for this as appropriate	Ensuring that all delivery partners feel that they are supported, understand their delivery roles and responsibilities and that the partnership functions as a 'whole' beyond the sum of its parts
Taking responsibility as a lead partner to seek to reduce the burdens on delivery partners where possible and appropriate	Ensuring consistency in key processes – e.g. claims – whilst ensuring that delivery partners are able to focus on their own strengths and avoiding attrition within the partnership
Developing co-location arrangements, both within the delivery partnership and with wider services operating locally	Improving the overall performance of the BBO project, enhancing and developing linkages and overcoming issues such as data and intelligence sharing constraints
Developing effective cross referral processes between partners and encouraging this as part of a 'collegiate' approach to delivery	Enhancing the support offer for BBO participants whilst avoiding situations where partners feel 'left out' of delivery

As the above table illustrates, the most commonly reflected success factors around partnership working are often inter-related and mutually reinforcing. In several of the project contexts reviewed

for this report, it was evident that a supportive lead partner, offering clear guidance and expectations, channelled through well-developed partnership structures and processes, formed a key underpinning basis for effective partnership working and delivery practice. The importance of this was heightened in contexts where a large number of delivery partners were involved and/or where some partners had limited previous experience of delivering ESF provision.

In addition, lead partners willing to take on the administrative burden where possible, and with a focus on reducing this for delivery partners rather than just passing all requirements on to their partnership, were seen as key in developing trust amongst partnerships and in ensuring their effective functioning. Allied to effective communication and channels for partners to share good practice, factors such as these not only illustrate the importance of partnership working to BBO but also the clear link between effectively functioning partnerships and effective delivery. Facilitating the development of relationships and opportunities to share practice and engage in peer learning emerged as a particularly strong theme, as outlined in the following provider reflection:

“I think there's 60-odd key workers in total and I think they all know each other and I think that's great. I think there's a lot of good practice shared there and the fact that we have the development workers that work across them, so there's lots of ‘if something is happening in one area, we're very keen to replicate that’.” (Project manager)

Continuing this theme of success factors and effective partnership processes, the project visits, interviews and other materials gathered for the evaluation served to highlight a number of examples of good practice in this area. A couple of examples are presented in table 4.2 below, though it is important to note that several of the projects engaged in the research displayed similar approaches and ‘good practice’ partnership working.

Table 4.2 Partnership working: selected good practice examples

Good practice examples relating to partnership working
<p>The Who Dares Works BBO partnership in Cornwall has developed a Partnership Charter. As a representative of the project outlined concerning the partners and the charter: <i>“All 17 of them, they're all social enterprises, we all have similar ethos and values and we felt it was important to try and pull that together, not least because we're all a little bit fed up of programmes that deliver a really great job but actually when they finish, there's no difference, no change.”</i></p>
<p>Steps to Work, lead partner for the BRIDGES BBO project in the Black Country take a proactive approach to partnership support including facilitating and encouraging peer support and the exchange of good practice; as a representative of the project outlined: <i>“We did a massive amount at the beginning and we have continued to do that and we're actually just talking about skilling-up, some refreshers. We do a lot by email ... and then we've actually done a lot on a one-to-one basis where either the partner has been to us ... or we've gone out ... We'll pick a subject and then pick a, speak to a partner, that is doing really well in that area and we'll ask them to deliver something during the steering group meeting as an example of good practice, you know, 'This is what we do.' So it's not just us, we actually get the partners to share information as well, what they've found works...”</i></p>

5.0 Outcomes and Results

This section covers qualitative evidence on the outcomes and results of Building Better Opportunities that have emerged to date, including a focus on individual participant outcomes as well as those for grant holders, partner organisations and the wider local community.

5.1 Participant results and outcomes

In the context of BBO, results relate to what the participant achieved as a consequence of their engagement with a BBO project. They include aspects such as moving into work, starting to job-search or entering education or training. These targets are fundamental to European funding and as such are given some priority by Big Lottery Fund. However, programme guidance recognises that not every participant will achieve a result. BBO projects therefore also capture evidence and report to Big Lottery Fund on project outcomes. The specific outcomes pursued by a project are tailored to capture the specific types of progress participants may make, but typically include increased self-confidence, volunteering or communication skills.

Comprehensive quantitative data against key targets is not yet available to the evaluation team; feedback on participant outcomes and results was therefore gathered through qualitative interviews with provider staff and participants along with existing project-specific evaluation reports. As a result, evidence should be treated as indicative at this stage.

Currently, with many projects having been delivering support for around a year, project representatives tended to feel positive in terms of achieving the BBO outcomes that were set, but less positive in relation to the ESF results targets. However, this was not necessarily the case for all organisations:

“We’ve got outcomes and we’ve got results. Outcomes, yes, they’ve just been smashed. Results are the hard targets and we are starting to get those now”. (Project manager)

“We’re doing really well. I think across the project we’re working with over 350 participants and that’s performing against target to date and 100 of those have moved into employment”. (Project manager)

“I think we’ve got some outcomes around changes for people with mental health and they are well over where we expected to be with them simply because of the number of people we’ve had into the project I think with mental health issues, so we’re fine with that. In terms of results into work and into training, I think we’ve got about 14, at the moment, which is roughly where we thought we would be”. (Project manager)

5.1.1 Breadth of outcomes

Projects generally welcomed the ability to provide project-specific outcomes and the range of outcome measures that were available. Project representatives appreciated the ability to record soft and hard outcomes and, hence, to fine-tune their approach based on their expertise and the

needs of individual participants. One Project Manager referred to the ability they had through BBO to focus on the “underlying stuff”, which they perceived as fundamental and important for sustainable outcomes, rather than dealing solely with pursuit of an employment goal. This approach was also felt to reduce pressure on organisations as they did not necessarily need to provide evidence for an outcome within a short time period. Comments reflecting this theme emerged frequently and included:

“What this project benefits from is the fact that there are outcomes for the varying stages of people's development. So rather than it just centring on a job, which is obviously the end goal, the fact that we can record a lot of the outcomes of that person's journey...[it] just means that we can show their development better” (Project manager)

“I think being able to, for some people, go 'Actually, we're going to focus on the soft outcomes for you', being able to do that has been incredibly useful, particularly for the people with things like mental health problems, or family issues.” (Project manager)

“The focus on capturing ‘softer outcomes’ for participants and the programme more generally is a clear strength” (Local project evaluation report)

“That's what's really quite exciting about delivering ESF with the Lottery because of those outcomes and those changes alongside the results. So you could really feel that you're not just ticking those boxes, you're actually really trying to change things sustainably. (Project manager)

The view that, overall, outcome measures combined with results targets were well designed to reflect project activity was, however, not universal. For example, delivery leads at one organisation felt that there were some possible outcomes that were not included, meaning that the full impact of their work was not being recognised:

“It's a shame, really, that the results only fall into job search, employment and training; because, the people we're working with, those outcomes and results like people who maintain accommodation after being street homeless for years and years are not being captured.” (Partner organisation manager)

5.1.2 Achieving results and exiting participants

A number of projects felt that achieving certain results targets was complicated due to the evidencing requirements that were in place. Equally, the difficulty of securing evidenced results was also reflected upon:

“We're seeing results, we're seeing impact already, we love what it's brought into [our area], we love what it's brought to our sector, but boy, it is hard.” (Project manager)

A number of Project Managers also noted specific ESF requirements that meant they could potentially not fully support their clients, most notably the need to achieve exit from the

programme once certain results were achieved, and the lack of flexibility to change the outcome being claimed. An ESF result can only be counted once, which some partners felt undervalued the potential effectiveness of the project. An example reported in a local evaluation report suggests that *“if a coach chose to ‘exit’ a client at training, and that client subsequently went on to gain an employment outcome [but this was outside of the 4 week period following leaving the project within which outcomes can be claimed], this would not be reflected in the key performance measures; this was felt to be detrimental to the project.”*

A separate issue for a number of projects was being able to provide the required evidence of results for participants. A number of Project Managers noted that when participants entered employment, it could be difficult to get in contact with them or to get hold of the required evidence within the four week period in which evidence was required:

“They'd suddenly go into work. You're trying to capture something, they don't want you to come and see them after work or on a Saturday and it takes a while to actually get hold of them or get the evidence”. (Project manager)

“There's this balance between does the employer actually know that they've had all of that support and is that okay with the participant? So we're trying to get their permission to approach an employer and actually gathering that evidence, that real evidence that you need to prove an exit, is probably one of the most difficult things actually.” (Project manager)

Positively in the period following these interviews and the production of this report, a change in guidance has been issued by Big Lottery Fund which has relaxed the evidential requirements, allowing self-declaration to be used.

5.1.3 Outcomes and results for individuals

Despite these challenges in evidencing results, strong evidence is emerging from across projects that demonstrates the positive impact that BBO is having with participants in many cases, as illustrated by the direct participant quotes and examples reported by project staff:

“I never imagined that I would get this far. It was an amazing experience to go down to London and be there in the studio showing them my portfolio. A massive thanks to Wise Steps for helping to make it possible, I couldn't have done it without them. Working with my Wise Steps coach has made me realise that there is help and support available, which has helped me to progress and achieve my goals”. (Project participant).

“We got a gentleman who used to work in London in a high powered job, and had a nervous breakdown five years ago, and hasn't been able to go to work since. A coach has been working with him for six months, gradually meeting him more and more and more, and we've got him to do some voluntary work, which he said changed his life again because it's him feel like a worthwhile human being, and he's just got a full-time job at the new shopping centre that's been opened”.(Project manager)

"Now that I have a job, I have inspiration, I can hold my head up high, I can feel good about myself. I'm going to work! ...I am in a much better place than I was – I'm a new man!" (Project participant)

"The wall I had built up started to slowly come down. Positive People had so much belief in me and this boosted my confidence - just having someone there was 100% what I needed." (Project participant)

"I've had a few people gone to jobs as well. People who would never have envisaged themselves going to employment, and they have, and the look on their face. They're like, 'Yes, I'm going to work, and I loved it.' They ring you and say, 'I had a really good day.'" (Delivery staff member)

Based on evidence from evaluation interviews and participant evidence published/shared by projects

Projects have also developed individual case studies of participants, either in written form (see below) or more creatively as short films, such as the promotional film by the [Age of Opportunity project in Lancashire](#). These films, while largely intended to act as promotional and engagement tools, provide some evidence of the range of positive outcomes achieved and the significant difference BBO projects are making at an individual level.



Jeff came to Step Forward in March 2017. He was in his 50s but hadn't worked since the age of 16. Jeff had left school early and struggled with English and maths. He had suffered with ill health most of his adult life and when was referred to Step Forward Tees Valley he felt useless and thought he had no chance at of moving forward.

He had little ambition and some financial issues which were a concern. His navigator Lisa worked with him to build his confidence and helped Jeff to enrol in a English and maths courses. He really enjoyed the courses and this inspired him to have aspirations for the future.

Jeff always had a passion for cooking and loved to cook for family and friends but never had the confidence to pursue it as a career. Receiving the support from Step Forward helped him find that confidence and he is now enrolled at Hartlepool College to start a culinary skills course.

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Step Forward Tees Valley published case studies

5.2 Organisational outcomes

Working as part of a BBO project has generated a number of distinct outcomes for individual grant holders or partners. A common theme emerging from the interviews conducted to date was the organisational capacity building that had occurred as a result of the grant holder's involvement in leading a BBO project:

"I think to have had this experience of running a project this size with that number of partners has been an amazing experience for us. As an organisation it's allowed us to develop, and I didn't realise the extent that that would happen". (Project manager)

There is also evidence of organisational capacity building having occurred for partners as a result of an organisation's participation in BBO. As this comment illustrates, benefit for smaller organisations in particular are being noted:

“One of them particularly, in West Cornwall, were very, very grassroots community based ... [and have] completely turned around and now is raving about the project. We've helped them to set up systems, so that for their sessional workers, they've now got proper contracts for them, we've up skilled somebody there to be able to do their claims which has helped the wider organisation.” (Project manager)

One grant holder also reflected on the reputational capital that has been generated from involvement in the BBO programme and how it has potentially helped the organisation to be seen to have a wider interest beyond its core business.

“It is a high-profile contract, given the value and the scale of it. That's been positive for [housing association]. I think it also raises the profile that housing associations aren't just about housing but are also interested in making a difference to move all local people where they need to be.” (Project manager)

As reflected in the previous chapter, the partnership focus of BBO was seen as providing benefits via increased communication across organisations, or through providing experience that might help them access future funding. As project representatives outlined concerning involvement with BBO:

“I think this is putting them [smaller organisations] in good stead. I mean, unfortunately, we're now coming out of Europe but with commissioning changing, I think it's putting them in good stead for what could come up in the future... Because all of our partners work together.” (Project manager)

“That's one of the things that we actively encourage is our partners to talk to each other, which is then setting up partnerships for the future.” (Project manager)

One tangible example of this comes from the Better Off Finance project, led by the Women's Organisation, where several of the partners have been successful in together applying for further ESF funding. Specifically, eight of the eleven original BBO partners will be delivering an Advice Skills Academy which aims to enhance capacity and staff development within the advice sector in Liverpool City Region. Two of BBO partners are additionally also involved in a second project, sitting on a programme partnership for the Civil Society Involvement project which is seeking to provide a voice for the third sector at the Growth Programme Board. The partnership development work and exposure to ESF funding that occurred through the BBO project is perceived by the grant holder to be have been an important factor in achieving this subsequent funding.

As reflected in the earlier discussion in chapter four, another benefit noted was the opportunity for best practice to be disseminated across organisations within a particular partnership:

“It's a great opportunity to share good practice. Everyone has come from their own area of expertise, more clients with mental health problems, more accommodation based services...the employment academy so there are different opportunities for learning and development there.” (Local project evaluation report)

Project Managers also tended to speak positively about how BBO provided the opportunity to train or upskill project staff, often between and across project partners:

“They [partners] are finding that they're sharing resources. We've had a few members of staff doing work shadowing across different organisations to learn new skills. The partners have been sharing training opportunities, so a number of members of staff, we don't pay for it through the project, but if there's been staff training opportunities, it's been easier to access each other's training and things like that.” (Project manager)

On occasion, providing staff training required a creative approach to inter-organisational working. One organisation noted that as they aren't allowed to pay for staff training, they would use their partner meetings as an opportunity to discuss various issues in depth (e.g. mental health awareness, dyslexia) as a means of building capacity amongst partners in a systematic manner. On occasion, partnerships took more direct approaches to developing connections and potential joint-working. For example, one organisation co-hosted a conference for 80 people across local organisations to enable them to work together in new and different ways as part of a deliberate approach to promote effective collaborative working.

5.3 Community or wider area outcomes

Tangible examples of community benefit were given in terms of volunteering activities facilitated through BBO leading to improvements to community facilities. For example the Who Dares Works project in Cornwall provides opportunities for participants to gain practical and work related skills through its Who Dares Builds scheme. Where appropriate the partner leading this scheme uses the opportunity to provide volunteering support to local organisations. For example, a group of 10 participants recently helped with conservation work at a local community farm.

Coming through more strongly in respect of community outcomes was the key role the BBO projects are playing in meeting gaps at a community level. In particular it was highlighted that the ability of BBO projects to offer intensive but flexible provision made it distinct from existing support which is perceived to be inflexible and more punitive in its delivery:

“I think, because of the flexibility, it has bridged a gap. Where there was a gap where people could just be left, the flexibility of how we actually run this project allows participants to have a bad day and know that they've got the support to actually come back and move on, and, also, it's because they move at their own pace without any pressure.” (Project Manager)

There were other examples where project staff highlighted that the specialised offer of some BBO projects – in the example below the focus on financial capability – also served to offer something not currently available in the local area:

“It's a great project and it feels really good to be able to offer some quite intensive support for people. There aren't many projects out there that - this is the only project at the moment in this area that's offering that much support for somebody around their money”. (Project manager)

Another project manager spoke positively of the links that they have been able to create with other external organisations due to the flexibility inherent in the BBO approach, which in turn is perceived to be enhancing the support available to participants who are in contact with statutory services:

“We're finding that BBO has brought, particularly to some participant groups, another option that wasn't there before, and a lot of external partners, who aren't part of delivering BBO with us, but work with our groups, for example, the Probation Service, the Prison Service, they have basically snapped the hand of our key workers off. They can't believe it that somebody's come to engage with their organisation and said, '...I've not got a structured set programme that needs to be delivered to a young person, but I can work with that young person to do whatever they need to move the barriers.' They've not had that before. They feel quite wowed”. (Project manager)

6.0 Concluding Reflections

While it is relatively early to draw strong conclusions about the effectiveness of the programme, it is possible to identify some emerging learning, outcomes and potential impacts from projects and programme.

BBO projects have typically focused significant attention on referral and engagement activities to date, recognising that the intended scale of subsequent outcomes and results will not be achieved without participants on board. Overall, this is going relatively well. While some challenges have been experienced, projects have responded creatively and proactively to ensure they are engaging the required profile of participants. A combination of referral routes and proactive engagement measures, allied to building strong relationships with external referral partners, are key success factors in this area.

The design and interventions delivered by BBO projects have clearly been developed to respond to the specific local needs identified in the project outlines produced to inform the programme. As such, there is evidence that projects are having an impact by filling gaps in existing local provision and/or adding value to statutory services supporting disadvantaged groups across the range of needs they may have. In particular, the design of the programme in terms of enabling organisations to provide more intensive, individualised and longer-term support is a positive aspect. Projects are also successfully replicating existing good practice in terms of developing a support offer structured around key worker/coaching models, supplemented by specialist support as and when required. BBO provision is characterised by the development of holistic, tailored approaches to meeting participant needs, built on trusted relationships between delivery partners and with external support organisations.

Reflecting this theme of relationships, there is evidence of strong working partnerships being forged to deliver provision. Moreover, the partnership models established are, in a number of cases, helping to generate spin-off benefits from BBO activity, along with promoting the expansion and sustainability of the support activities established through the programme. This illustrates the potential for BBO to act as a catalyst for the development of additional support networks and provision for its target groups, including enhancing the capacity of the VCS sector to offer such support. Partnership working is also central to projects' ability to draw on a wide range of delivery organisations, often with specialist skills, to enhance the wraparound, holistic support offered to BBO participants. While much of the evidence in this area is positive, it is also fair to say that partnership working has not been without its challenges. The most prevalent concern issues with the administrative requirements of participation, leading, in some cases, to partners initially identified at the bid stage subsequently dropping out of partnerships.

More broadly, due to the ESF and BBO funding models, there is a requirement to provide high levels of evidence around project participant engagement, provision of support and the outcomes achieved. The initial period of delivery has therefore clearly been a challenging time for many projects, with guidance and requirements being clarified and confirmed over time. The challenges stemming from programme bureaucracy need to be recognised and not underestimated therefore.

However, the programme has now reached a point where at least some of these challenges have been addressed and, possibly linked to this, positive impacts are increasingly apparent which are evidence at a number of levels. In line with the evaluation's focus on outcomes rather than gathering harder evidence of impact, there is evidence of impacts for individual participants, in terms of addressing barriers and supporting individuals to achieve positive outcomes. For delivery organisations, there is evidence of enhanced organisational capacity both for grant holders and their partners and potential impacts around a raised profile and reputation as a result of participation in the BBO programme. Delivery organisations are also benefiting from new and enhanced partner arrangements with specific examples of successful access to additional funding streams as a result of the relationships developed through BBO. For local communities, there are direct benefits stemming from the community-based volunteering opportunities BBO provides. Potentially more importantly there are emerging impacts in terms of BBO filling gaps in provision for the harder to reach target groups by providing more flexible and tailored provision and by integrating with local services. All of this offers a solid basis for achieving further positive benefits as the programme continues to develop.

Annex A – Evaluation Research Questions

Topics for investigation	Evaluation questions	WP1 Scoping and design	WP2 Evaluating access			WP3 Evaluating impact/Outcomes	
		Desk review of programme data	Survey of grant holders	Interviews with successful grant holders	Interviews with unsuccessful applicants	Qualitative research with a sample of projects	Participant survey
Access and barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the characteristics of delivery partners? How far as the fund been effective in securing involvement from VCSE organisations with particular specialist experience of working with the hardest to reach groups? What are the perceived barriers to participation and how have these been addressed by the Fund and by partners? What the lessons to date for facilitating access to widen participation amongst organisations with no or limited experience of ESF? 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Working with ESF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the issues that partnerships have faced in improving their understanding and experience of working with ESF? What challenges and risks have been identified and how successfully have these been addressed? What are the lessons to date on managing the use of ESF during project implementation? 		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Partnership arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the nature of partnerships that have been formed to access the BBO programme? To what extent are these proposed partnership arrangements in applications being delivered in practice? How effectively is the programme reaching organisations that are new to ESF and stimulating new partnership arrangements? What are the critical success factors in mobilising new partnerships? How far do partnerships reflect the focus of the programme on harder to reach groups? What are the lessons to date for partnership formation and working? 		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Delivery arrangements including outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main features of partnership delivery models and how are these intended to make sure that funding benefits harder to reach groups? How the expertise of partners with particular experience of target groups being harnessed? How are participants being reached and recruited? 		✓	✓		✓	

Topics for investigation	Evaluation questions	WP1 Scoping and design	WP2 Evaluating access			WP3 Evaluating impact/Outcomes	
		Desk review of programme data	Survey of grant holders	Interviews with successful grant holders	Interviews with unsuccessful applicants	Qualitative research with a sample of projects	Participant survey
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective are communication and outreach approaches? What outreach approach are effective for what groups and why? 						
Profile of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the key characteristics and needs of participants? To what extent have the identified hardest to reach participants been engaged and retained in activity through the programme? What are the main identified barriers to labour market participation for these participants? How are individual needs being assessed and responded to? 	✓		✓		✓	✓
Intervention approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the key features of the interventions being supported? To what extent are interventions evidence-based? How is support packaged to meet the needs of participants with multiple problems, both overall and sequentially? How effectively are participants supported with childcare needs? Are interventions being progressed according to plan? What intervention approaches work best for what types of participants? How are complex and multiple needs being addressed? How is BBO investment being used to fill gaps or enhance existing provision? What is the role of BBO interventions in supporting the achievement of broader ESIF plans? How is provision linking to other provision locally and other ESF provision Has BBO caused any confusion or difficulties for the delivery of other provision? 			✓		✓	✓
Employer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What approaches are being used to engage employers to provide pathways to employment? What is the existing capacity amongst delivery partners to be responsive to employer requirements? What specific interventions are being used to mobilise employers to support the aims of the programme? 		✓			✓	

Topics for investigation	Evaluation questions	WP1 Scoping and design	WP2 Evaluating access			WP3 Evaluating impact/Outcomes	
		Desk review of programme data	Survey of grant holders	Interviews with successful grant holders	Interviews with unsuccessful applicants	Qualitative research with a sample of projects	Participant survey
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the characteristics of employers that are actively engaged and what benefits are reported? What are the key success factors in engaging employers effectively? 						
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effectively is the programme contributing to improvements in soft outcomes for participants? What is the performance in engaging participants in the programme? What is the progress of participants in moving into education and training? What is the progress of participants in moving into job readiness support? What is the progress of participants in moving into job search activity? What is the programme of participants in moving into employment and self-employment? What is the quality of education, training and employment opportunities? How specifically are BBO interventions contributing to these outcomes? To what extent do outcomes vary based on factors such as delivery models, intervention type and target groups and why? To what extent would outcomes have been achieved anyway (deadweight) 	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How far are outcomes expected to be sustained and is there variation by intervention type or target group? How is provision supporting job retention? How far is provision embedded in wider activity that will support sustainability? How far is the programme building sustainable partnerships that will continue beyond the lifetime of the programme? What are the critical success factors in sustaining outcomes? 		✓	✓		✓	✓

