Building Better Opportunities Evaluation

Annual Report 2019

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Building Better Opportunities Evaluation

COMMUNITY FUND

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Contents

Executive Summary

The National Lottery Community Fund (hereafter 'the Fund') 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 supporting the hardest to reach groups to progress towards and into employment. This report brings together evidence from the national evaluation of the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme to present an overview of the latest developments and achievements. The following sections summarise the key recent learning from the programme, drawing principally on evidence gathered since the previous annual evaluation report.

Engagement and targeting

At the end of December 2018, BBO projects had worked with 50,579 participants, achieving just over two-thirds (67%) of the total number of participants it aimed to assist over the programme lifetime. The programme is generally performing well in terms of engagement. Specifically, BBO has already exceeded the lifetime engagement targets for participants with disabilities (147%) and those aged over 50 (103%). More generally, the programme is successfully engaging with individuals and groups who are at risk of social exclusion and those that are typically harder to engage. Key factors in this engagement success include:

- The design of the BBO programme; encouraging projects to form partnerships that involve specialist organisations has worked well. The involvement of such organisations provides a clear route to access harder to reach groups, while their profile and the fact they are trusted by individuals from target groups underpins their success

- Outreach activity and building strong relationships with external referral partners, with this being particularly important for economically inactive individuals who might ordinarily not engage with programmes such as BBO.

- Using targeted social media and marketing campaigns, both of which were reported as being helpful in encouraging self-referrals. Word of mouth was also commonly noted as an effective factor in promoting engagement through peer or family relationships.

- Using local intelligence or insights to develop and target support at groups for whom existing support is either inadequate or insufficiently tailored to specific needs: for example, those with learning disabilities or health conditions.

There are some clear lessons for future programmes from the BBO experience – particularly the importance of promoting partnership development to include specialist referral and delivery partners, building trusted relationships locally, and an active focus on promotion, marketing, and leveraging success stories and positive participant experiences to encourage engagement.

Programme administration

Over time, administrative requirements have become better defined and more widely understood as the programme has entered a more stable delivery state. Equally, grant holders and partners have enhanced their capacity and knowledge to better deal with BBO programme processes. Training on what a good participant file looks like and 'claims clinics' are examples of how the Fund and grant holders have sought to pro-actively ensure compliance with ESF administrative requirements across all delivery partners. For similar programmes or contexts reliant on complex funding in the future, such approaches offer useful learning around how capacity-building support can be provided to delivery organisations. While the significant evidence requirements around BBO eligibility are inherent to the ESF, the BBO experience illustrates the need for a proportionate approach to engagement in future programmes, particularly in ensuring that the process does not draw resource away from delivery or cause unnecessary delays in providing support.

Partnerships

Partnership composition inevitably changes over the course of a longer programme. At the level of individual projects, there continues to be changes in local project partnerships. Projects reported having had partners leave partnerships early in the programme, with ESF administrative requirements typically being cited as a key reason. More recently, restructuring or internal changes within partners, organisations ceasing trading or becoming insolvent, or poor performance, were reasons for change. Project management staff were generally accepting of these changes and did not necessarily view them negatively in all cases. In some contexts, a reduction in partnership numbers was leading to smaller, more manageable partnerships and in some instances was viewed as a "natural progression for the partnership." Undertaking some due diligence to ensure the capacity of partners at the beginning, but also retaining some flexibility in the programme to allow partnerships to change are key lessons from BBO. This has allowed projects to be responsive as differing participant needs emerge, or when external factors have affected the availability of provision.

Providing support

Whilst some BBO projects are working with a broad spectrum of participants, others are focusing on more specific target groups. For specific target groups, the following has been shown to work well:

- When supporting groups with language needs, such as refugees or those from ethnic minority groups, a more informal approach to teaching English, such as through Conversation Clubs and promoting language learning as being employment focussed, has helped to increase attendance.

- Volunteering is particularly popular for older age groups. This can effectively build people's confidence and help them overcome social isolation. It is most effectively used when pursued as part of the journey towards employment, so projects need to identify appropriate opportunities across partner agencies and organisations.

- Exploring existing or potentially long forgotten skills, rather than solely focus on acquiring new ones, is a useful approach when supporting older people or refugees.

- Early support and provision to address mental health needs is essential for those with these conditions. A dual approach where participants receive dedicated wellbeing and mental health support alongside employment support has been shown to work well in BBO projects.

- Recognising the influence of family circumstances or the childcare responsibilities of women is necessary to engage effectively with female participants. Providing childcare facilities or a child-oriented event is more likely to attract women to attend sessions. Looking beyond the needs of the individual female participant and considering whether any support is needed to address any issues in the wider family can also prove successful. Once these other worries or concerns are addressed, women are more likely then to focus on their own circumstances.

Programme achievements

At this reporting point, the programme is showing good performance in terms of results and outcomes. BBO management information shows that some 5330 participants, 11% of the total number engaged to date, have moved into employment or self-employment. This is a strong performance, particularly given the nature of the target groups supported by BBO and the fact that support for many will be ongoing. In addition, the figure of 5330 participants moving into work represents an achievement of 44% of the total employment target for the programme, again a good performance at this stage of delivery.

Evidence gathered from the ongoing BBO participant survey run as part of the evaluation offers further insights into the programme's achievements to date. In terms of the effectiveness and usefulness of BBO support, just over nine in ten survey respondents (91%) reported that this was helpful in meeting their needs. Likewise, almost nine in ten (87%) participants seeking help with education or training reported benefits in this area, while the same proportion who were seeking a better idea of careers support available felt that they now had this. These figures suggest BBO support is well received in general by those the programme is supporting, as well as meeting some key training and guidance needs likely to be significant in progressing participants towards work. Survey respondents describing what was effective, helpful or important in respect of the programme typically cited the tailored nature of the support, the positive role played by supportive mentors or key-workers, and the accepting, non-judgemental approach displayed towards them.

As well as the employment outcomes demonstrated by programme MI, survey data and other evaluation evidence also illustrates the wider outcomes, progression and other changes that participants are experiencing. Improvements being achieved in participants' soft outcomes such as improved confidence and motivation come through strongly from the evidence. This is illustrated through individual participant case studies and results from the participant survey; for example, 84% of participants responding to the survey who were looking for improvements in their confidence or wellbeing had this need met. It is also clear from the broader evaluation evidence that such improvements in confidence and wellbeing are the foundations needed for other developments that bring participants closer to work.

As well as programme achievements and outcomes for those supported, evaluation evidence also demonstrates a range of positive impacts for organisations involved in BBO delivery. These include reputational capital generated from involvement in the BBO programme, typically described in terms of an enhanced or broadened reputation or profile in a local area. The strengthening of networks or relationships between partners within BBO projects was another common organisational outcome reported. Likewise, there is also increasing evidence of organisational capacity building having occurred for partners, particularly in dealing with complex funding and in terms of enhancing or improving their support offer. While those delivering BBO faced challenges in the earlier part of programme delivery therefore, linked to ESF administrative requirements, now BBO implementation has reached a 'steady state' some of the benefits of involvement are coming to the fore for organisations as well as participants.

The national evaluation is continuing, although the work plan is being re-profile due to a potential contract extension. In the remaining months, several strands of activity are planned which will expand the findings presented here.

1.0   About the BBO programme and evaluation

1.1   About the BBO programme

The National Lottery Community Fund (hereafter the Fund) 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. Through this funding, the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme was developed using a decentralised approach, with 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) involved in producing project outlines to inform the development and delivery of the programme at local levels. These outlines were used to guide the allocation of funds to 132 BBO projects that deliver interventions to address local priorities. The programme is supporting a variety of projects to improve the employability of the most disadvantaged, including helping those with multiple and complex needs with a range of support including confidence building, skills development and help with financial literacy. BBO was designed to engage the expertise and knowledge of a wide range of stakeholders through encouraging partnership delivery, thus creating positive impacts for harder to reach groups.

1.2   About the national evaluation

The Fund commissioned Ecorys to deliver an evaluation and learning contract for the BBO Programme. 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 are 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 case study visits on a sample basis to provide findings about what works and for whom.

- The above evaluation work has a strong emphasis on sharing **learning** through a programme of learning activities for grant holders. Specifically these have been designed to identify critical success factors and lessons for the Fund and delivery organisations.

This annual report draws on several pieces of work undertaken throughout 2018/9, including:

- **In-depth qualitative research:** To date 16 project visits have been conducted to collect evidence through qualitative depth interviews with the project manager(s) in the lead delivery organisation, interviews with strategic and operational staff from a range of partner organisations, and mini focus groups or one-to-one interviews with participants.

- **Participant survey:** A telephone survey is a key element of the national evaluation to explore the profile and outcomes of BBO from the perspective of participants. The survey adopts a longitudinal design, incorporating a baseline survey of 500 participants and follow up survey that hopes to engage around 200 participants. The initial wave of baseline interviews was conducted between January and February 2019, with 186 interviews completed which are reported on here. The survey will continue throughout 2019.

- **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. Two rounds of face-to-face networking events were held in 2018 in June/July and November/December. Additionally Ecorys is managing an online networking group using the Slack platform. The aim of this network is to enable projects to interact regularly outside of the more formal events, along with sharing good practice, updates and engaging in peer learning and support.

- **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 the Fund, and other outputs developed by individual projects.

1.3   About this report

This report brings together evaluation evidence to present an overview of the latest developments and achievements of the BBO programme. Specifically, it aims to:

- Map the profile of participants, their needs and the achievements of participants to date using recently available Programme level Management Information (MI) data[1] and initial results from the participant survey.

- Describe the ways in which the programme has developed more recently and to draw out any further learning from its design and implementation.

- Present further evidence on what works in engaging and supporting individuals to be able to progress along the path towards employment. Specifically, this report focuses on what works best for specific groups as an illustration of programme delivery, rather than intending to be a full account of delivery. Previous BBO evaluation reports have covered key aspects of programme delivery overall.

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1 This programme data is compiled by the Fund drawing on data returns from projects, specifically the participant entry and exit forms.

2.0   Participant overview

This chapter presents initial analysis of participant data reported to the Fund by individual projects, in terms of the range of participants engaged and the profile of their needs at the point of engagement, supported by analysis of the early results from the participant survey.

2.1   Characteristics of those receiving support

Data provided by the Fund illustrates the characteristics of participants benefiting from the BBO projects. Taken as a whole, the data suggests that the BBO Programme is successfully reaching the target groups intended; that is, those who are most disadvantaged or at high risk of social exclusion.

So far, BBO projects have worked with around 50,579 participants[2], representing just over two-thirds (67%) of the total target the programme aims to reach over its lifetime.

Table 2.1 Participants engaged: targets versus actuals

	Target	Actual	% of target
Total number of participants	81,866	54,579	67%
Number of men	39,168	28,288	72%
Number of women	42,699	26,217	61%
Number who are unemployed, including long-term unemployed	36,683	31,613	86%
Number who are economically inactive, including not in education or training	45,181	22,962	51%
Number who are aged 50 or over	13,195	13,589	103%
Number with disabilities	18,419	27,075	147%
Number from ethnic minorities	14,727	12,268	83%

In the main, as Table 2.1 illustrates, the programme is performing well at this stage in terms of engagement numbers achieved against lifetime targets, although there is some variation in terms of achievement in respect of groups. Looking at the demographic profile, the gender of participants is evenly split, with 52% being male and 48% female, largely in line with the overall national ESF programme target. However, this means that performance against the target for female engagement is slightly below that for male engagement (61% of the target being achieved against 72% respectively). Case study and other evaluation evidence does not suggest that projects are struggling to engage women as such, with some isolated exceptions. Therefore, such a difference in target achievement by gender may simply reflect wider labour market conditions and/or patterns of those coming forward for support.

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2   Programme data was accessed for the period up until the end of December 2018. Data that is more recent is not yet available due to the time lag generated from the process of receiving data from individual projects and verifying the results.

In particular, the data illustrates that the programme is performing strongly in reaching many of the groups identified in the ESF England Operational Programme [3] as those most at risk of exclusion: most notably, the over 50's and people with disabilities. Of the total participants engaged to date, a quarter are aged over 50 and half have a disability. As shown in Table 2.1, for both target groups, the engagement levels already exceed the targets set for the programme. As a result, BBO is clearly making a strong contribution to the national targets identified in the ESF Operational Programme. In addition, the programme has engaged 22% of participants from ethnic minority groups, already achieving 83% of the programme lifetime target.

Finally, the data in Table 2.1 illustrates that the programme is performing more strongly against the target for engaging unemployed individuals relative to the economically inactive. This mirrors wider evaluation evidence concerning the particular challenges in engaging those who may be more distant from the labour market and from services or support organisations aiming to promote employability. Some of the potential reasons for this, and the way in which BBO projects have sought to address the challenge of engaging economically inactive participants, are explored further below.

Reflecting on the case study visit evidence, some common themes are evident in terms of what underlies the projects' success in engaging the target groups BBO seeks to reach. Across BBO partnerships, the involvement of partners with a specialist focus or profile has proved to be significant in engaging some of the harder to reach groups in particular. Through engaging such organisations in delivery partnerships, BBO projects have been able to access an existing community of service users. This approach also appears to have the advantage of 'acceptance by association', whereby participants have been happier and more comfortable with participating in support activities provided through an organisation with which they already had a trusted relationship.[4]

The above approach has been particularly successful in ensuring the engagement of some ethnic minority groups, in that BBO delivery partners can additionally provide the specialist language skills that may be required to support referrals and engagement. Both projects that are more narrowly focused on supporting particular groups, and those with a broader profile of target groups, have used such an approach to good effect. In the case of projects supporting a broader profile of participants, the involvement of specialist organisations has ensured a targeted approach can be taken to maximise the number of participants reached.

Engaging specialist delivery partners also clearly underlies the strong performance evident in relation to participants with disabilities or health conditions. For example, the Working Progress project in Northamptonshire has DeafConnect as a partner. This charity is the only one locally that solely supports people with hearing disabilities, and so has a profile and existing connections to act as referral route for this specific group. Similarly, the BBO project in Shropshire led by Landau has engaged Enable, a specialist supported employment organisation like themselves, and Autism West Midlands as partners. This has enabled the project to reach, engage and successfully support participants who are less likely to engage with or visit mainstream services.

As the above examples illustrate, evidence gathered through the case study visits, and from local evaluations, clearly shows how the decision to encourage partnership formation to deliver BBO, specifically including specialist organisations with experience of engaging and supporting particular groups, has proved to be both effective and successful. Moreover, this highlights a potentially important lesson for any future programmes seeking to engage and support such groups, demonstrating the benefits of ensuring specialist involvement in core delivery partnerships to more effectively access and better support those facing labour market disadvantages.

Evaluation evidence also demonstrates that other wider, external, factors underlie some of the level of engagement achieved in terms of participants with disabilities and health conditions. Most commonly, changes to benefits, such as the introduction of Personal Independence Payments or the introduction of Universal Credit, has led to people seeking advice and support. The engagement of advice agencies such as Citizen's Advice as a delivery or referral partner has thus been a productive source of referrals in a number of cases.

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3   Department for Work and Pensions (2015) European Social Fund England Operational Programme 2014-2020
4   Ecorys (2018) Building Better Opportunities Evaluation: Annual Report 2018

"We get referrals from CAB, as people now need help with the change of benefit"
(Project manager)

In addition, a widely held perception of those involved in project delivery is that BBO has been successful in engaging certain target groups because of real gaps in provision, particularly forms of support specifically tailored to the needs of such groups. This is illustrated by the success of one of the five 'innovation projects' being delivered by the Moving on Tyne and Wear project. Their Autism Pathway is providing help to participants on the autism spectrum, or with a learning difficulty or disability, to improve health, wellbeing, job prospects and life chances.

"We needed to offer people something that they can't get elsewhere. We need to develop that hook so we need to find those gaps in the market like the autism project."
(Local evaluation evidence)

This project has proved popular, with a high level of referrals in the locality in which it was first tested. Due to the initial success, the project is being rolled out across the full region. This illustrates the potential benefits of piloting a support offer targeted at a very specific group, particularly where local intelligence suggests that existing support is either inadequate or insufficiently tailored to meet certain needs.

Conversely, referrals and engagements have been more difficult to achieve in areas where there is competition with other provision, or where similar offers of support are available. The Age of Opportunity project, operating across Lancashire, reported experiencing this in some locations. The existence of other provision is perceived as too confusing for participants and has been most evident when attending events or networking. To overcome this, the project has sought to encourage other organisations to work together, and have a joint stand at events for example, to be able to achieve the initial engagement with participants before deciding which organisation is best placed to support them. Such scenarios also reaffirm the importance of using local intelligence. Potentially, in respect of future programmes, they also illustrate the need for more comprehensive mapping of exiting provision in local areas at the outset – whether by those delivering support or through a more strategic coordination role on the part of LEPs.

As noted above in examining programme MI, economically inactive participants have proved a challenging target group to engage for many projects, with 42% of the total number of participants having this status. At this stage the programme is just over half way to reaching the targeted number of such inactive participants, though this is behind performance for the unemployed group. As a number of project stakeholders outlined, the key challenge with economically inactive participants is that there is no single place, such as the Jobcentre, in which to find them.

Key learning from the projects so far has been that a combination of referral routes, pro-active engagement measures, and building strong relationships with external referral partners are important to engaging those who are economically inactive. More specifically, projects have had success using outreach activity, including visiting community venues or established groups, or having BBO project staff permanently, or on an ad-hoc basis, based in local organisations or offices. Some projects have likewise also reported success with targeted social media and local press[5] as a route to achieve self–referrals, seen as particularly important for this group, or to engage those not currently involved with employment-related support services. Several projects have more recently embarked on extensive marketing campaigns, including advertising in public spaces, on public transport and on local radio. These appear to have been successful, with one project reporting it generated self-referrals from participants who they potentially wouldn't have reached otherwise as they were not engaged with any of the current referral organisations.

More generally, word of mouth has commonly been reported by projects to be a productive route to engagement. This is seen as being particularly persuasive where earlier participants have been supported and achieved positive outcomes, with this then providing encouragement for others to engage. A number of projects have developed this further, with participants contributing to marketing and communication activity, with this perceived as being an effective way of promoting BBO's potential benefits.

The New Leaf project, for example, is using 'Community Energisers' to help promote the project and communicate its benefits. These participants have used their own stories about their personal BBO journeys to help recruit others, for example by speaking at information days, attending events at community venues, and talking to potential future participants on a 1:1 basis. Similarly, ambassadors at Who Dares Works are responsible for the marketing and promotion of the project. Sometimes this can mean walking through the local towns and telling people about the project.[6] As this illustrates, using participants' stories, and even encouraging them to take a more direct role in engagement, can act as a useful adjunct to more traditional referral routes and outreach approaches, with this method appearing to be particularly useful for targeting those who are economically inactive.

Key learning on engagement and targeting

- The design of the BBO programme encouraging projects to form a partnership that involves specialist organisations and charities has worked well.

- The involvement of specialist organisations provides a clear route to access the harder to reach groups. Their profile and the fact they are trusted organisations for particular groups underlies the success.

- Outreach activity and building strong relationships with external referral partners is particularly important for economically inactive groups where there is not an obvious route for engagement.

- Using targeted social media, and marketing campaigns are helpful to encourage self-referrals. Do not underestimate word of mouth as an engagement tool, which works particularly works well when involving previous participants.

2.2   What needs do the participants have?

The BBO programme aspires to help individuals who are amongst the most disadvantaged when it comes to finding work. The programme design likewise aims to address the root causes of poverty and social exclusion that represent barriers to many individuals entering the labour market. As illustrated above, from the programme MI data BBO is reaching demographic groups that are typically the hardest to help.

Additionally, as Figure 2.1 shows, the MI also reveals that participants are presenting with other needs or characteristics that are typically associated with disadvantage. In particular, the fact that around two-thirds of BBO participants live in a household where no-one works, three in five have basic skills needs, and significant minorities have offending histories or are homeless is illustrative of the nature of the target group BBO is supporting.

Figure 2.1 Participant needs profile

64% Live in a jobless household

16% Have an offending history

60% Have a basic skills need

9% are homeless

Source: Programme data

Moreover, further analysis suggests many participants are facing multiple disadvantage, with 29% of participants engaged to date being recorded as facing two or more of the above issues. It is particularly important to bear this in mind in discussing the outcomes achieved by BBO that are examined in detail in chapter four.

Responses to the participant baseline survey (Figure 2.2) provide additional evidence of the range of needs that participants present with at the point of engagement based on reporting of the areas they were looking for help with on joining the programme.

Figure 2.2 Participant needs at engagement

Need	Percentage
Find a new job or start work	65%
Improve confidence	48%
Improve wellbeing	37%
Learn new skills	28%
Develop your skills	25%
Improve financial situation	22%
Start in education or training	20%
Have a better idea of career options	16%
Get a work experience	7%
Improve housing situation	7%
Other	6%
Start volunteering	5%

Source: Participant Survey, base= 186, multiple response [7]

As the above chart illustrates, participants are motivated to seek employment support from BBO projects, as might be expected given the nature of the programme, with 65% of participants reporting wanting help to find a new job or start work. Support needs concerning softer skills also feature highly, with just under half of participants (48%) wanting to improve their confidence and just over a third (37%) seeking to improve their wellbeing. This echoes qualitative evidence from the BBO evaluation, wherein project representatives commonly noted the importance of addressing low confidence amongst participants before addressing other issues. Learning new skills was reported by 28% of participants, 25% wanted to develop their skills, while 20% reported that they wanted help to access education and training.

Survey respondents were additionally asked specifically about what had stopped them from working in the past. The most common barrier reported was ill health or disability, reported by just over three in five (61%). The high prevalence of this barrier is not surprising given the proportion of the total participant cohort who are recorded as having a disability, and serves to illustrate further the nature of the cohort BBO is supporting. It should be noted that, in the survey, no specific definition was provided of ill health or disability, so this figure of around three in five may also include mental health issues that serve as a barrier to employment.

Evidence gathered through the case studies and other evaluation sources shows that BBO projects have clearly been responsive to such needs. As one example, the Step Forward Tees Valley project has an experienced team of 'health link' workers to support participants to better manage any psychological or physical health conditions they may have. Other barriers reported by respondents to the participant survey included lack of confidence (26%), lacking the right qualifications (6%) and lack of work experience (5%). External factors were also reported, with 12% reporting a lack of jobs available as a reason for not working.
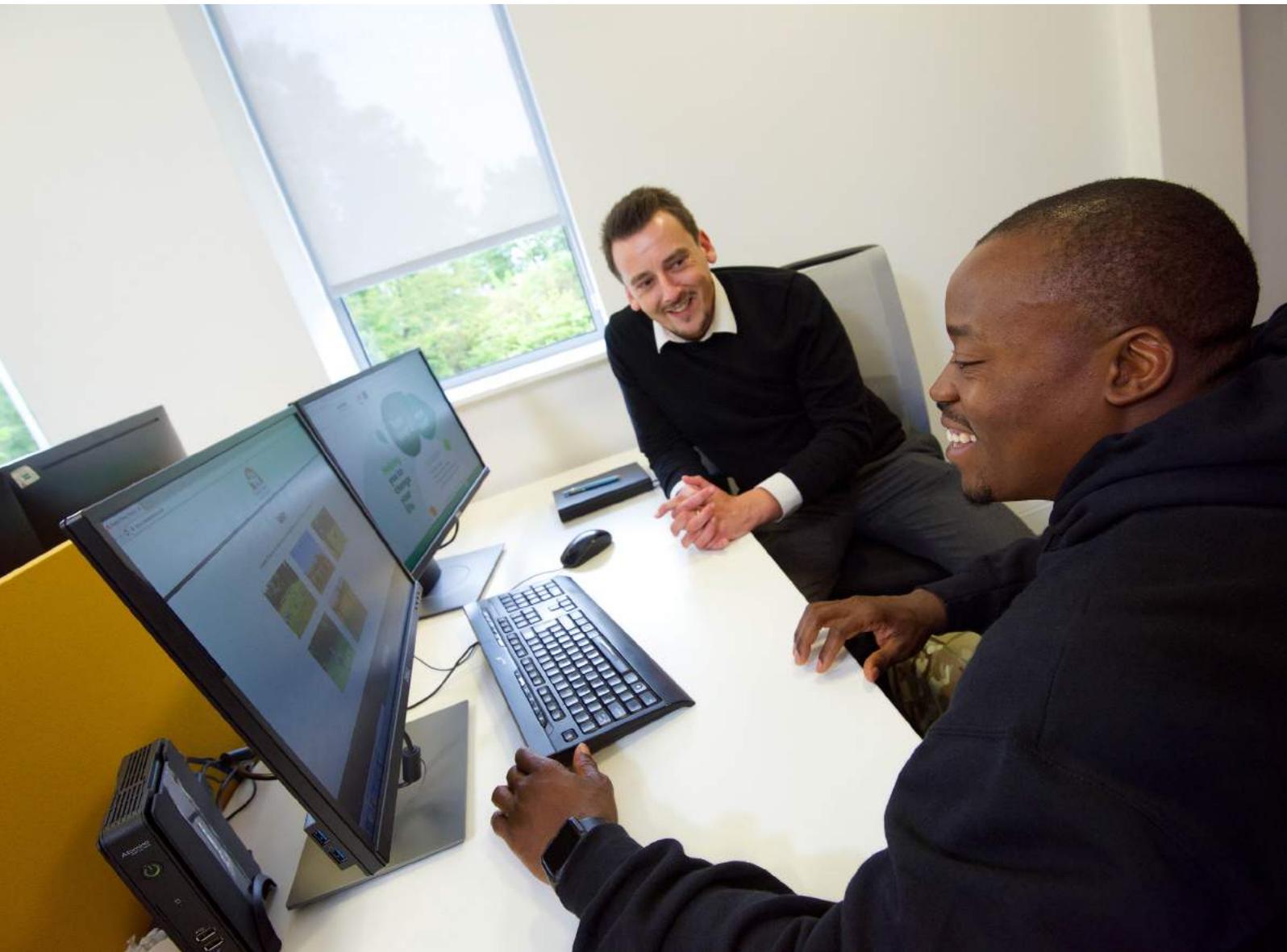
3.0 Programme developments and delivery

This chapter firstly describes some key developments in the programme's overall delivery in the last year and then takes a thematic focus, looking at what works in delivery for specific target groups. It concludes by bringing this evidence together to highlight 'what works' for BBO participants in general, and those from specific target groups.

3.1 How has the programme developed?

The BBO Programme is now into its third year of delivery. This section examines some key developments over the last year and considers the implications for ongoing implementation.

3.1.1 Administrative changes and support

Due to ESF requirements and the ESF/BBO funding model adopted, there is a programme requirement to provide high levels of evidence around project participant engagement, provision of support, actual cost for all claims made by projects, and the results achieved. Equally, in turn a specific administrative process needs to be followed. The initial programme period saw guidance and requirements around this being clarified and confirmed over time and these early issues were documented in previous evaluation reports.[8]

Several of these guidance changes were the result of the Fund working successfully with the Managing Authority (MA) to explore some of the particular areas of challenge. The Fund has sought to reach agreements or variations to the BBO programme design or implementation to make things easier for grant holders around the evidential and process requirements. Key changes agreed recently include those relating to evidencing identification and employment status, along with the evidence required to confirm an employment result.

Through the evaluation case studies, project representatives reported that they were appreciative of the perceived responsiveness of the programme team to address some of the administrative issues they raised:

"There is a genuine willingness from the programme team to accept proactive feedback and improvement suggestions."
(Project manager)

At learning events or in interviews, project staff also confirmed that several of these changes had improved administrative processes, principally by reducing the time spent by staff seeking the required evidence. The change in evidence required for key programme results was, in particular, highlighted as being welcomed:

"The change around evidence for employment is positive, not having to chase for payslips to exit someone into employment is a relief and it feels easier to claim those results now."
(Project manager)

However, concern remains amongst some projects that some of the issues leading to these changes were not initially considered in the design of the programme, and that the evidential requirements and registration process remain difficult for some participant groups, despite the changed guidance. While these issues appear to be inherent to the ESF programme as a whole, rather than BBO specifically, it was noted that they can be particularly awkward for projects working with target groups with more complex needs:

> **"Considering the programme targets, those living fairly chaotic lives, the need for them to have ready access to high levels of identification shows a lack of awareness of the difficulties this might cause and how it would actually deter those most in need of support from the programme".**
> (Local project evaluation report)

This need for participants to provide formal identification documentation, in the form of a passport, birth certificate or driving license, was the most commonly referenced challenge from this perspective. It was evident that such identification was not available at all for some participants, while for others not readily or easily available. Equally, it was noted that participants often lacked the capacity or financial resources to seek to access replacements or copies of documentation, necessitating financial and other support for this from BBO projects. The form of identification needed was also highlighted as potentially restrictive. For example, an expired passport was not deemed suitable for BBO programme eligibility checks.

While the need to confirm eligibility was understood by project staff, having to do this early in the process of engagement was also reported as challenging. The need to complete eligibility checks before offering substantive support again is understood by project staff, but in reality has the potential to undermine the engagement process. Participants who present in crisis or with an immediate need are less likely to maintain engagement if they are not able to receive support until these eligibility checks are completed. In the case of documents being accessed, it was evident that this could take a significant period of time.

This suggests that a key learning point for any future programme is the need to consider the level and complexity of eligibility evidence required, ensuring as far as possible that this is appropriate and proportionate in light of the needs and situations of target group concerned. In particular, when supporting those furthest from the labour market, facing issues such as homelessness, the acceptance of a wider range of forms of identification may be necessary to avoid excluding those who might benefit from BBO-type support. The ability to provide a level of support in the period while the appropriate checks are completed is also likely to be important in order to ensure longer-term engagement.

In the main, however, there is a level of acceptance amongst many project lead organisations of the administrative requirements and processes inherent to the ESF. Equally, as the programme is at a point where the administrative requirements have stabilised, project lead organisations have increasingly been able to focus on supporting partners to fulfil ESF administrative requirements effectively and to provide clear guidance on this. Approaches developed from this perspective include supporting and overseeing successful submissions during the claims process, and providing training or guidance on meeting the requirements of the ESF audit process.

As a specific example of the above activity, one project has developed a series of training sessions for partners and delivery staff. For all new delivery staff, a session on what a good participant record looks like is now a mandatory training requirement. Additionally, a two-hour 'claim clinic' is delivered to all partners help with the quality of claims and records. There is also a session on how to put a claim together. The project concerned reported that these sessions have helped achieve consistency across what is a relatively large partnership. Such methods represent potential good practice approaches that could be adopted by funders or partnership leads for future complex funding.

In respect of administrative requirements, one further significant finding from the evaluation is that the capacity required within projects, and at individual partners, to fulfil these requirements effectively was often underestimated. More recently, many projects have created new compliance focused roles to support administrative processes across the partnership, like the example in Figure 3.1 below. Elsewhere, in other partnerships, a re-profiling of funding for individual partners has been done to increase staff capacity to manage administrative requirements. While ideally future programmes should look to streamline and reduce bureaucracy wherever possible, these examples do offer pointers towards how certain inevitable requirements can be efficiently addressed to avoid taking attention away from front line delivery.

Figure 3.1

Practice example – enhancing partner compliance and participation

The Accelerate project, led by Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency created an Opportunity Connector role. Working across the partnership, this role provides individual partners with varying levels of support in addition to that provided by the core management team. One specific focus is on compliance with paperwork and the administrative process. The Opportunity Connector also plays a role in enhancing the partnership by reminding partners of the offer elsewhere in the partnership to ensure participants are able to progress and transition appropriately.

3.1.2 Partnership developments

At the level of individual projects, changes in the composition of local project partnerships have continued, though there is also evidence of greater stability relative to the early days of BBO delivery.[9] Analysis of partner data held by the Fund[10] provides some evidence of the scale of these changes since the programme's inception. At programme level, there are now 270 fewer partners involved compared to the numbers originally identified in projects applications. Currently, 1629 organisations are variously involved as partners across the 133 BBO projects.

Projects commonly reported having had partners leave early on in the programme, with ESF requirements typically being cited as a key reason. Most frequently, this was ascribed to partner perceptions that the level of administration was disproportionate to the level of funding available. In the last year, projects reported that they have continued to lose partners, though for a broader range of reasons and at a lower rate. Reasons cited included restructuring or internal changes, which meant BBO projects no longer fitted with an organisations' remit or forward strategy, partner organisations ceasing trading or becoming insolvent, or poor performance. In more isolated cases, the loss of specific staff resulted in a withdrawal of partners. Such scenarios illustrate some of the challenges for smaller organisations in particular, in terms of viability and the dependence on a small number of key staff.

Project management staff were generally accepting of these changes and did not necessarily view them negatively in all cases. In particular, in some contexts a reduction in partnership numbers was seen as leading to smaller, more manageable partnerships. Equally, in some cases there was an acknowledgment that original partnerships may have been too large, with too much duplication between partner roles or focus. Refinement of partnerships was thus seen as beneficial in some instances. In one such case, for example, such a change was seen as a "natural progression for the partnership."

While some of these factors can be considered beyond the control of project leads, and are sometimes unpredictable, there is some learning that might be taken from the BBO experience. In particular, some of the scenarios encountered suggest the importance of lead grant holders improving their initial due diligence, with a particular focus on ensuring that individual partners have the appropriate capacity and contingency measures to maintain their involvement. Additionally, it is clear that, as far as possible, when initially developed partnerships should be formed in light of the likely spread and distribution of funding and resources available. This appears to be significant in ensuring that required inputs and costs are appropriately covered for all partners, hence promoting likely partnership stability.

While the above findings focus on the relatively common scenario of partnerships reducing in size, there are also examples where projects have engaged the services of new partners. Typically, this involved up to three or four new partners being added, but in one isolated case 21 new partners had been engaged since the start of a project's delivery. In some instances, this engagement of new partners was to backfill capacity, while in others it was in response to gaps in services or emerging participant needs. This ability to add to the partnership during delivery was welcomed by projects, particularly in terms of ensuring they were able to respond to specialist provision that had, for example, emerged as being needed by participants:

"We're looking to go out to procure new provision to cover those areas where we are now lacking, having the flexibility to replace our lost partners is good, and otherwise we would struggle to cover all the geographies and specialisms."
(Project manager)

Retaining such flexibility to allow partnerships to change was widely seen as a key strength of the BBO programme design, and one that could usefully inform future related programmes.

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9   Partnerships in BBO were a key theme in previous evaluation reports, available here.
10   This analysis was based on collation of data on the number of partners identified in project applications and those reported by projects to be engaged with the project at May 2019.

3.1.3 Extending projects

The Fund is currently undertaking an exercise to secure and confirm extensions for many of the BBO projects,[11] either in the form of additional funding or extended delivery timescales for projects to achieve their original targets. This provides projects with an extended period in which to test 'what works' along with providing an opportunity for the programme to support greater numbers of participants.

At the time of the case study visits, not all projects had been formally notified of the outcome of the decision on additional funding, and/or the extension of timescales. Where an outcome was known, there were generally positive views about the opportunity to continue delivering beyond the originally planned end date. One project representative recognised the extension as an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base, with this having the additional benefit of placing the project in a stronger position to access future funding, hence helping to promote its sustainability:

"This is a great opportunity….this round I want to do quite a lot more baseline work so that we have more evidence moving forwards that this type of approach really works"
(Project manager)

In contrast, another project had some concerns about their ability to maintain the 'uniqueness' of their current provision with the level of additional funding they will receive. In particular, they perceived that their ability to support participants through referring to and funding specialist provision, such as counselling, may be more limited, as the cost of this provision has risen and their extension funding is not at the same level as the original grant. While such cases were less prevalent, the project concerned reported that there might be a need to prioritise who gets referrals to specialist services:

"My fear is that it will become just another employment provision because we can't provide that extra intervention...that would be a real shame."
(Project manager)

In isolated cases, projects had refused the offer of additional funding. In one case, the principal reason for this decision related to wider organisational strategies or priorities, with BBO not being perceived as being flexible enough to respond to wider restructuring and redesign work within the organisation concerned.

3.2   How are different groups being supported?

In the last year projects have continued to successfully engage and support participants. Whilst some BBO projects are working with a broad spectrum of participants, others are focusing on more specific target groups. Building on previous evaluation evidence, the following sections summarise some of the effective practice emerging in terms of reaching and supporting particular types of participants. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review of practice and does not cover all BBO target groups and/or all stages of delivery; instead, the aim is to highlight some particularly notable examples from the perspective of informing 'what works'.

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11   In the region of 121 projects will receive an extension.

3.2.1 Participants with families

While many projects are working with participants who have families, there are projects that more specifically target families and seek to deliver support that addresses the needs of others in the household. The rationale for such an approach involves resolving some wider family issues, or concerns parents have about their children, to enable participants to focus more on their own situations and the possibility of employment. As the example below illustrates, the Hopeful Families project has shown that extending support to other family members, specifically through providing support for parents and children in parallel, can be effective in allowing participants to progress.

Figure 3.2

Practice example – supporting families

The Hopeful Families project, led by Pluss and working in Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield, found that many of their participants had worries about their children's wellbeing and mental health, and that these concerns were often proving a barrier to participants moving forward. One aspect of the project reported as particularly effective involves delivery of a parallel support programme for parents and children. A local, specialist charity – Healthy Minds - was commissioned to run a 12-week youth club that intended to connect with children through different activities, such as kite making, cricket, den building and art. Mental health workers from another specialist partner also attended the sessions and the young people present were often receiving counselling from the same organisation. At the same time, parents would meet, separately to the children, and get peer support from each other. They were also able to access wellbeing sessions that incorporated elements such as mindfulness, yoga and art therapy.

One female participant, whose son attended the youth club and also had intensive 1:1 counselling support, described significant benefits from the support for her son, along with a marked improvement in his wellbeing and ability to cope following a family bereavement. Following this support and the improvements for her son, the participant concerned has secured two jobs, noting that being less preoccupied with concern for her son was key to this.

Other programmes, such as DWP's earlier ESF funded support for families with multiple problems,[12] found that in practice support was typically provided to an individual in a family context, rather than providing a family based intervention per se. The evidence from this BBO project, and others supporting families, highlights how a model can be delivered which provides genuine family-focused support, with this appearing to generate additional benefits for different family members.

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12   Department for Work and Pensions (2015) Evaluation of the Department for Work and Pensions European Social Fund Support for Families with Multiple Problems

3.2.2 Refugees and asylum seekers

BBO projects are able to work with refugees or asylum seekers with the right to work in the UK, or who have been granted discretionary leave to remain. Several specialist projects focusing on refugees and asylum seekers have identified a number of principles underlying their delivery that they perceive to be important in ensuring their work with these groups is effective.

In particular, adopting a degree of flexibility with the focus and content of training offered, and promoting sessions in a way that will appeal to the target group, has been found to enhance attendance. Staff from the Refugees into Sustainable Employment (RISE) project, led by Renaisi, noted that a more informal approach to teaching English, such as through Conversation Clubs, has resulted in better attendance than more formal means. Provision that allows participants to suggest topics to cover (such as attending a GP appointment, or preparing for a specific job interview) has also proved popular. Promoting training and learning as being employment-focussed was also reported as helping to increase attendance and take up of additional training and sessions – for example through promoting sessions as 'ESOL for Work' or 'Wellbeing for Work', as opposed to just 'ESOL' or 'Wellbeing'.

The Include-IT Mersey project, while not focussing specifically on refugees, has worked with a core group of Syrian refugees who arrived in the area because of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS). Adapting provision though the use of online translation or translators, working alongside IT tutors, has allowed participants to access the IT training offered in a way that meets their needs. Good communication and partnership work with other agencies supporting this group was also reported as being an important principle underlying effective delivery. By working in partnership with local authorities, the project has ensured that the IT sessions fit around other mandated training such as ESOL, allowing participants to access a range of provision simultaneously rather than having to choose one over another.

Across these projects, there is also evidence that building a relationship first is the most important step when working with this group, with sensitivity crucial at this foundation stage. While this is of importance across many of the BBO target groups, for refugees in particular, being mindful of prior experiences and their likely unfamiliarity with training and employment contexts in the UK was seen as important.

3.2.3 Older people

Older people represent another core BBO target group. Age of Opportunity, operating in Lancashire, is one project specifically targeting people aged 50+. Reflecting on their experience of delivery, project staff have found that volunteering is particularly popular for this age group. It was noted that this can be an effective route to build people's confidence and overcome social isolation, which was cited as a common issue for the over 50s. Project delivery staff, however, reported that such an approach is most effective when the volunteering activity pursued is part of the journey towards employment. In response, the project has worked to identify and access appropriate opportunities across partner agencies and organisations.

Another key approach reported as working well with this age group involves exploring existing or potentially long forgotten skills, rather than solely focusing on acquiring new ones. In the course of conversations, delivery staff noted that participants are sometimes surprised when they are reminded of what they can do, and in some cases do not realise they have transferable skills. As an example, during a discussion with a participant about jobs, he recounted that he had once been a driver in his twenties. The participant is now a minibus driver for one of the partner organisations. As a staff member summarised: "it is crucial to tap into the right skills that they have forgotten they had in order to help them move forward."

3.2.4 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Across the BBO programme, mental health issues have emerged as being much more prevalent amongst participants than expected. Providing early support and provision to address these needs was commonly reported by project representatives as being important to enable participants to progress. Most commonly, BBO projects are using external specialist services to address mental health issues, such as counselling services or life coaches who can support with conditions such as anxiety. BBO funding was reported to be enabling access to these services more quickly than through other routes in some cases.

Other more specialist projects are addressing mental health issues through an in-house approach. The Step Forward Tees Valley project, for example, has an experienced team of 'health link' workers to support participants. This team provides one-to-one emotional support and helps participants access a range of interventions and services for overcoming and/or managing mental and physical issues. Another project, reporting success through a specifically designed approach addressing employability and health in parallel, is outlined in more detail below.

Figure 3.3

Practice example – Supporting participants with mental health issues

In the Sheffield City Region BBO project, an in-house approach is proving successful in supporting participants' mental health needs. Specifically, a dual coaching model is used whereby participants have access to a Work and Enterprise Coach (WAEC) as well as a Health and Wellbeing Coach (HAWC). These coaches can support participants in different ways, whilst helping them to work towards the same goal. For example, the WAEC can give tips for interviews and then the HAWC can work on dealing with anxiety during an interview. Similarly, both coaches may work to increase a participant's confidence and self-esteem, but use different tools and tasks to do so. By having these separate roles, as well as specialist support to draw on in other areas, such as for debt/benefits advice, delivery staff have noted they can stay in their area of specialism (i.e. wellbeing or employment). This addresses feedback from other project staff who reported being unqualified to deal with the level of mental health needs of some participants. One of the participants on the programme described the dual coaching approach as being effective, making it all "a little bit easier to deal with", especially when they first started on the programme.

3.2.5 Disability and long term health conditions

As reported previously in chapter 2, BBO projects have achieved significant success in engaging participants with a disability or long-term health condition. The involvement of specialist partners, with a focus and track record of supporting participants with specific health conditions or disabilities, is a key aspect of the approach taken by many BBO projects to support these groups.

Involving such partners ensures participants can benefit from an organisation's experience in supporting those with disabilities, including the availability of accessible facilities, along with such organisations' knowledge of participant needs and adaptions that may be needed. Across BBO projects, there are many examples of specialist partners supporting those with disabilities alongside the core support offer. For example, the Wise Steps project in Tyne and Wear has engaged Leonard Cheshire Disability as a specialist partner to provide digital inclusion support for disabled participants. This includes delivery of basic IT training, or training on any particular hardware or software. Using this partner ensures the participants are able to quickly benefit from specialist provision they need.

In other models, the specialist partner delivers all aspects of support to a certain cohort of participants. The Bridges and Evolve projects, for example, have both engaged The Beacon Centre to support visually impaired people. Participants have benefited from a range of provision to find employment and boost their social skills, benefiting from the organisation's facilities and extensive experience of supporting this target group.

Other projects have adopted a specific model designed to support participants with disabilities or health problems, which are emerging as promising approaches to supporting this target group. As noted in the previous chapter, the Moving on Tyne and Wear project, for example, has focused one of their 'innovation projects' on developing a specific Autism Pathway. This approach is viewed as working particularly well as staff are able to deliver appropriate and targeted activities, building on the expertise of a key project partner North East Autism Society. In addition, the project has been able to use the links of partner organisations to build effective relationships with employers who have been willing to provide work experience and appropriate employment opportunities.

As with the over 50s target group, volunteering is also widely seen as a key activity that supports the progression of participants with disabilities and longer-term health conditions. Project representatives reported that such participants often lack confidence, and have more limited work experience, so volunteering can offer an important step on their journey towards paid employment. A key lesson noted in respect of this, however, is that careful thought needs to be given to ensure any work placements or volunteering opportunities are appropriate, as this staff member form the BBO Shropshire project suggests:

"We hand-pick voluntary placements to make sure that the placements are suitable for people, dependent on their needs. It is really important that it is a positive experience for the participant, to ensure it doesn't undermine the confidence building work we have already done."
(Project staff member)

Similarly, a common theme emerging from the evaluation evidence involves the importance of active brokerage work with employers in seeking to source opportunities for those with disabilities. This includes wider work to address the stigma and lack of awareness around the needs of people with a disability as a way to engage and generate potential employment opportunities. Additionally, in the case of some projects such an approach has also involved targeted work with individual employers once they have agreed to offer an appropriate placement, or employment opportunity. This typically involves discussion between the employer and Job Coach or Adviser as to the specific needs of a participant and the adaptations that may be needed. The example below illustrates the particular benefits that can be generated for those with disabilities through a 'supported employment' approach, in this case using an intermediate labour market (ILM) model.

Figure 3.3

Practice example – Supporting participants with disabilities

The two Able, Capable and Employed projects led by Groundwork London, which seek to support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in employment, offer examples of active brokerage work with employers to facilitate employment opportunities, using an ILM model. Project staff provide direct support to employers, helping them to identify and adapt vacancies within their organisations. This is often done in conjunction with matching individuals to the job opportunities, to allow the role to be tailored specifically to the needs of the participant. For example, it was agreed with one employer that a participant's working hours would include flexible rest breaks whenever needed due to an existing heart condition. Provision of a grant to employers is also core to the project model, supporting employers with the wage costs of clients, in some cases for up to six months. The ILM model was seen by project staff as providing a significant financial incentive for employers to engage, which in turn was reported as being hugely beneficial for the target group in terms of providing them with the opportunity to prove themselves whilst in a job role.

3.2.6 Women

Given the specific gender targets of the ESF programme, there is a body of evidence generated from evaluations of other ESF provision as to what works well in engaging women. Evidence from the BBO programme suggests that projects have taken on board many aspects of known effective practice. The recent learning events revealed several strategies to engage women, including using pictures of women and stories about women to enhance marketing material (including social media). In one project, a childcare partner had been brought on board to provide childcare at engagement or initial training events, to allow women to more easily engage. Another project has used a children's clothing bank as an engagement tool. It visits nurseries and children's centres and offers free bundles of children's clothes. While using this service, project staff tell people about the project.

The importance of a safe, women only space has been found to be important for the female participants supported by the Tackling Multiple Disadvantage project, led by Crisis. The project works with homeless people who statistically are 90% male, which means that the Crisis centre, where the project is located, is often a male dominated space. There was some feedback from female participants that they did not feel safe, felt slightly threatened and had experienced harassing remarks. Crisis responded by setting up a women's only space and putting signage up to highlight their zero-tolerance for harassment of any kind. This shows the importance of a suitable, safe environment being available to support engagement and the delivery of support.

To bring the above findings of 'what works' for different BBO target groups together, the box below summarises the key learning generated by the evaluation in this area.

Key learning on supporting different groups

Looking across delivery for different groups, the needs of participants often have common elements. Significant amongst these are:

- The need to build trusted relationships with participants, which can take time.

- The fact that engagement of participants is easier in places and spaces where they are familiar and feel comfortable.

- The strength of the BBO programme design in allowing projects the flexibility to provide bespoke and tailored provision and support to meet individual or group needs, with this being a key aspect that has facilitated effective support for many of these particular groups.

- The encouragement of BBO partnerships to include specialist partners, with this further enabling projects to specifically target and respond to the needs of the range of target groups BBO supports.

For specific target groups, evidence suggests that the following works well:

- When supporting groups with language needs, such as **refugees or those from ethnic minority groups**, a more informal approach to teaching English, such as through Conversation Clubs, and promoting language learning as being employment-focussed has helped to increase attendance.

- Volunteering is particularly popular and effective for **older age groups and participants with disabilities or long-term health conditions**. This can build people's confidence and help them overcome social isolation. It is most effectively used when pursued as part of the journey towards employment, so identifying appropriate opportunities across partner agencies and organisations is important.

- Exploring existing or potentially long forgotten skills, rather than solely focusing on acquiring new ones, can be a useful and effective approach when supporting **older people** or **refugees**.

- Early support and provision to address **mental health** needs is essential for those with these conditions. A dual approach, where participants receive wellbeing and mental health support alongside employment support, has been shown to work well in several BBO project contexts.

- Active brokerage with employers is essential when supporting **participants with disabilities or long-term health conditions**. This serves to raise awareness of the needs of participants and allows employment opportunities to be tailored and any necessary adaptions made.

- Recognising the influence of family circumstances, or childcare responsibilities, is often necessary to engage effectively with **female participants**. Providing childcare facilities or a child-oriented event is more likely to attract women to attend sessions. Looking beyond the needs of the individual female participant, and considering whether any support is needed to address any issues in the wider family can also prove successful. Once these other worries or concerns are addressed, women are more likely to focus on their own circumstances.

4.0   Programme Achievements

Evidence is emerging across all strands of the BBO evaluation concerning the achievements of the programme. This is principally at a participant level, but there is also evidence of changes for delivery organisations that will additionally serve as a legacy from the programme.

4.1   What has changed for participants?

Projects funded through BBO are required, as part of receipt of ESF funding, to record against a number of specific participant result indicators. These results relate to progress into or towards employment, specifically whether on leaving they are in employment, education, training, or job searching. While employment results are a key indicator for the programme, it is expected that participants will benefit more widely from the support they receive. Drawing additionally on the results of the BBO participant survey, which captures some of these wider changes for participants, the following sections examine the achievements of the programme to date, and what difference it is making for participants.

As Table 4.1 overleaf shows, at the programme level, MI data up to December 2018 demonstrates that the programme has achieved 9766 positive results in terms of the ESF indicators outlined above. Specifically, 5330 participants are recorded as having moved into employment or self-employment. This represents an achievement of 44% of the total employment target for the programme, which as discussed in chapter two represents a good performance at this stage of delivery. As noted, this is particularly the case given the nature of the target groups being supported and the range of needs many presented with on engagement. Looking at this another way, it means 11% of all BBO participants have entered employment at this stage of the programme. Wider data for the ESF Programme in the UK suggests a current employment rate of 23.7%.[13] The BBO programme performance therefore is somewhat below this, although this is not unsurprising given the nature of the target groups supported by BBO and the distance many BBO participants are from employment.

Table 4.1 Participants results: targets versus actuals

	Target	Actual	% of target
Number who move into education or training on leaving	12,090	3,130	26%
Number who move into employment, including self-employment, on leaving	12,177	5,330	44%
Number that were economically inactive move into job-searching on leaving	12,259	1,306	11%
Total	36,526	9,766	27%

Source: Programme management information data

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13   Source: Country Summary Tables: United Kingdom. Some caution is needed with direct comparison between the current BBO and 2017 AIR results.

Performance against the programme targets in other areas is somewhat lower, with 26% of the target for participants into education or training achieved and 11% of economically inactive participants undertaking job search on leaving. Feedback from projects, however, suggests that these results are typically only formally 'claimed' for participants where employment is unlikely to be ultimate destination. Many participants are, however, completing training or undertaking job search activity as part of their progression journey before entering employment. As such, these figures are likely to be an underestimate of the positive results being achieved.

Capturing the full achievements of the programme, in terms of supporting the progression of participants and wider changes for them, is not possible through the reporting of these results alone. For some participants, progressing towards employment will be, and is, as important as gaining a job, given their starting point. The results available from the participant survey provide some evidence on the wider outcomes from the programme.

Just over nine in ten survey respondents (91%) reported that the support they have received was helpful in meeting their needs (74% reporting this as very helpful and 17% as quite helpful). Meanwhile, just over half of respondents (56%) reported that the support had completely met their expectations. When asked through an open question what was the best thing about the help they had received, there was recurrent reporting of the tailored nature of the support, the supportive mentors, and the accepting, non-judgemental approach adopted by project staff. This echoes findings from the evaluations of other programmes, such as Talent Match[14], with BBO adding further weight to the evidence base for types of interventions that work for disadvantaged groups.

As reported earlier in section 2.2, on engaging with the programme participants were looking for support with varying needs. Overall, the survey results, (as shown in Figure 4.1) suggest that across the board the perception of the majority of respondents was that things had improved for them. For example, a large proportion (87%) of those seeking help with education or training reported benefits in this area. This does not necessarily mean all those participants started training. While this is likely the case for some, for other participants they are now more aware of training opportunities available.

Figure 4.1 Profile of needs at the start of provision being met
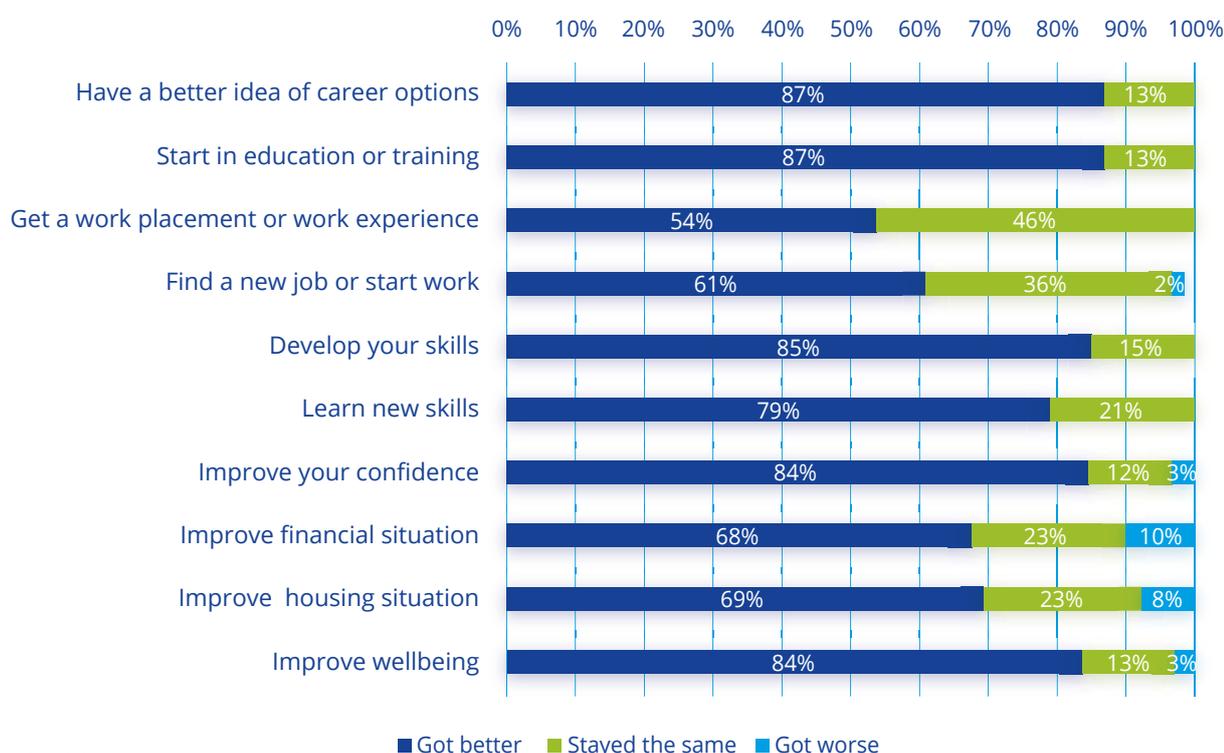
Source: Participant survey, base=various

14   National Lottery Community Fund (2018) Talent Match: Achievements and lessons for policy and programme design. See also for example Hasluck, C. and Green, A. (2007) What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 407;

For those looking for improvements in their confidence or wellbeing, this need was also largely met, with 84% of participants reporting this had got better for them. A further open question generated responses from around a third of respondents who reported that they were generally feeling better about themselves or happier with life. This is further illustrated by direct quotes from some of these respondents:

"I have been going out more and I am less anxious, it has opened up a lot of things for me."
(Survey respondent)

"I have started going to the gym and have lost weight which has improved my self-image and given me more confidence."
(Survey respondent)

"I now have more experience due to a temporary job I have been doing and more confidence in myself"
(Survey respondent)

In relation to employment related support, the results suggest needs in this area were largely met. For example, 87% of participants who were seeking a better idea of careers support available felt that they now had this. Over half (54%) of participants wanting help with work experience reported an improvement, while around three in five (61%) of those wanting to find a job reported that things had got better in this area. Again, for the latter, this may not directly be interpreted as the proportion who specifically moved into employment; nonetheless, the result can be taken positively in that it indicates some progress towards, or interest in, employment.

Supporting this is the result from a further question where participants were asked what other changes had occurred because of their participation in the programme. Some 17% (32 participants) reported that they were now working. Other responses further support the evidence that BBO provision has the potential for achieving employability progression for participants, with 58% of participants reporting that the support they are receiving will help a lot getting a job, start training or start another type of course. These initial change results also provide some evidence of the wider benefits of participants' engagement with a BBO project, specifically in terms of improvements in financial or housing situations, with 68% and 69% of respondents respectively reporting that these had improved.

While positive results from the survey are evident in the main, it cannot be ignored that in a minority of cases survey respondents perceived that some aspects of their situations have worsened. Looking at these individual cases in more detail through the open responses, there are a number of examples where participants have been supported into a job, which has then fallen through, or ended after only a short time with subsequent knock-on effects. This supports the need for providing in-work support to achieve sustainable employment, something which some but not all BBO projects include in their model of delivery. In other cases, there has been a particular crisis in an individual participant's situation, such as a housing eviction which support from the BBO project was unable to prevent.

All these survey results were gathered within 3-4 months of a participants' engagement with a BBO project. It is hoped that the results of the follow up survey will show continued positive change and sustainability over the medium term in respect of the changes reported.

4.2   What has changed for delivery organisations?

In the last year, further evidence[15] has emerged of the organisational outcomes for individual grant holders or partners due to their participation in the BBO programme. The reputational capital that has been generated from involvement in BBO was a recurring theme in the reporting of organisational benefits. For lead grant holders, this was typically described in terms of an enhanced or broadened reputation or profile in a local area. Partners also reported similar benefits, but the emphasis was typically on a raised organisational profile in a more localised area. As one partner reported, involvement in the BBO project has "given us a visual awareness in the district again". In this particular case, this was the result of the partner organisation re-opening premises in a location they had previously operated in, but which they had been unable to sustain following the end of other funding.

Other partners noted that delivering a BBO project has helped them to reinforce a quality reputation within the community though the nature of the provision being delivered, and as a result, they have become a trusted place, which in turn is supporting referrals and engagement:

"Being involved in the BBO project has really helped reinforce a quality reputation in the community. By being able to provide a really good service to people, word has trickled down."
(Partner)

The strengthening of networks or relationships between partners within BBO projects was another common benefit reported. In one example, several partners who are involved in the Age of Opportunity project, operating across Lancashire, are now meeting outside of the project and collaborating on other joint bids. The lead grant holder reflected that it is unlikely they would have met or developed the relationship without the networking opportunities offered though the quarterly project meetings, given the scale of the geography involved. Similarly, lead grant holders reported that their own strategic networks have developed because of the BBO programme and that, as a project and wider organisation, they typically have more connections and knowledge or resources to tap into now. As one project manager reported, they are now increasingly able to offer a "much more robust client journey, it's not all split and fragmented".

There is also increasing evidence of organisational capacity building having occurred for partners because of an organisation's participation in BBO. While the administrative requirements of the programme have been challenging for some, there is recognition that this in turn has had positive benefits in illustrating the need for appropriate processes and greater professionalism in the management of funding. For other organisations, their involvement in BBO projects has led to growth in staff members and even enhancements to their premises, as this partner highlights:

"We have expanded their staff, are more polished and professional and the centre has been improved physically too, this wouldn't have happened without BBO."
(Partner)

A second wave of a grant holder and partner survey is planned for 2019, which will allow the organisational benefits from involvement in the BBO programme to be captured across a wider cohort of projects and partners.

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15   Ecorys (2018) Building Better Opportunities Evaluation: Annual Report 2018

5.0   Concluding remarks and looking forward

The delivery structure of the BBO programme, in terms of partnerships and administrative processes, has continued to develop over the past year. The Fund has worked successfully with the ESF Managing Authority to achieve a number of positive changes, which have eased some aspects of the administrative processes involved and particularly the evidential requirements for the programme. It appears that, overall, the programme is into a more stable period of delivery. Likewise, grant holders and partners have enhanced their capacity and knowledge to better deal with programme processes and administrative requirements.

With the MI data available for analysis, it has been possible to better assess the overall performance and achievements of the programme to date. At the end of December 2018, BBO projects have worked with 50,579 participants, achieving 67% of the total target number of participants the programme aimed to assist. BBO is therefore performing well at this stage of delivery in terms of engagement. There is some particularly positive performance in terms of the achievement or exceeding of engagement targets for particular groups. Specifically, the programme has already exceeded the engagement targets for participants with disabilities (147%) and those aged over 50 (103%). The programme is therefore making a strong contribution to the national targets for these groups identified in the ESF Operational Programme.

Analysis of the characteristics of participants, and data from the participant survey on needs, suggests that BBO projects are certainly not 'cherry picking' participants who might be easier to help or closer to the labour market. Rather, the programme as a whole is evidently successfully engaging with individuals and groups who are at risk of social exclusion and those that are typically harder to engage in this type of support programme.

Amongst participants responding to the participant survey, there is a high level of satisfaction with the support being received, with just over nine in ten survey respondents (91%) reporting that the support they have received was helpful in meeting their needs. Moreover, reviewing the practice of projects supporting a range of different target groups demonstrates that BBO is successfully tailoring provision to meet their varied needs. Many of the key elements within the successful approaches emerging, however, are common irrespective of the particular target group supported. Likewise, they echo what is known to work more widely within the programme in terms of the importance of relationship building, the use of safe and welcoming spaces and the effective tailoring of provision to meet needs.

In terms of results and outcomes for participants, the programme is at this stage showing a good level of performance, although these outcomes cannot be solely captured by the ESF results data. Nonetheless this data shows that 5330 participants, 11% of the total number engaged to date, have moved into employment or self-employment.

This is a strong performance given the nature of the target groups being supported and the range of needs many presented with on engagement. The other employment related results (into education and job search) are showing lower levels of achievement against targets, but it is known from project feedback that these are not being claimed routinely. Rather than claiming these results, projects are continuing instead to support participants to reach an employment result where possible.

Beyond what the ESF data reveals, a range of wider outcomes, progression and other changes that participants are experiencing as a result of BBO support are evident. Improvements achieved in respect of soft outcomes such as improved confidence and motivation emerge particularly strongly from the evaluation evidence. This is illustrated through individual participant case studies and results from the participant survey, where for example 84% of participants looking for improvements in their confidence or wellbeing had this need met. Such improvements are, moreover, typically reported by project staff to be the foundations needed for other forms of progression. These range from the development of new skills, through achieving qualifications or starting in education or training, to improvements in individuals' financial or housing situations, and finally in respect of entering work.

5.1   Next steps

The national evaluation is continuing, although the work plan is being re-profiled due to a potential contract extension. The following strands of activity are planned which will allow expansion of the findings presented here:

- Completion of the baseline participant survey and follow up survey and analysis of the full dataset to determine the nature of sustainability of participant outcomes

- Further qualitative project visits to continue to explore various aspects of project level delivery

- A second grant holder and partner survey to explore learning and capture outcomes across the wider project cohort

- A series of grant holder learning and networking events, providing grant holders with the opportunity to continue to share learning and experiences with each other

- Production of further learning papers, highlighting project activity and effective practice across a number of delivery themes.

All reports and resources generated from this activity will be available on the evaluation website in due course.