



Building Better Opportunities Evaluation

Annual Report 2020

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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 37 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.

In 2019, the Fund undertook an exercise to secure and confirm extensions for many of the BBO projects, either in the form of additional funding or extended delivery timescales for projects to achieve their original targets. In total, 121 projects have received an extension to 2022.

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 explores 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 is conducting a range of activities to examine the **impacts** of the programme, including case study visits to a sample of projects 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 2019-20, including:

- **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 adopted a longitudinal design, incorporating a baseline survey of 500 participants and follow-up survey of 200 participants. The follow-up interviews were completed on a rolling basis, with final interviews in December 2019.
- **Grant holder survey:** An online survey of grant holders and their partners was implemented in early March 2020. The purpose was to capture information on the current profile of organisations involved in delivering the BBO programme and any changes, explore the role of VCSE partners and examine the organisational benefits and positive outcomes for organisations involved in the programme, as well as any challenges. In total 256 organisations responded.
- **Consultations with grant holders:** In the last year, consultations have been held with 14 grant holders, involving a mix of face-to-face visits and telephone interviews. This flexible approach to qualitative research with grant holders allowed the evaluation to explore particular themes or interventions of interest, building on the 16 case study project visits previously conducted.¹
- **Shared learning and networking:** Ecorys are 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. Face-to-face networking events were held in May/June 2019. Two further learning events in April 2020 were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 including social media posts. In addition, Programme level Management Information (MI) data² is received periodically and analysed to map the profile of participants and assess the results being achieved across the programme.

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. The report was prepared in April 2020, at the time the UK was experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, so also includes insights into how the BBO projects have adapted to the crisis. In addition to the Fund, the report is likely to be of interest to those directly involved in delivering BBO projects, as well as those with a broader interest in supporting disadvantaged groups to move towards employment.

¹ A decision was made to complement case study visits with telephone interviews to maximise the available resource and provide flexibility in engaging stakeholders across more projects than would otherwise have been the case.

² This programme data is compiled by the Fund drawing on data returns from projects, specifically the participant entry and exit forms.

2.0 Programme development and delivery

The BBO Programme is now into its fourth year of delivery. This section examines some key developments over the last year and considers the implications for ongoing implementation. It highlights examples of ‘what works’ in delivery against particular themes, such as support for specific groups, including young people and those with multiple and complex needs. It also examines how projects are responding to some of the key overarching themes of the Fund, including how it has sought to tackle social isolation, support communities to thrive and ensure people are in the lead in the planning and delivery of support. The section then looks at the response of BBO projects to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the communications issued by projects in the early stages of the crisis and the adaptations projects have successfully made to allow them to continue to engage and support participants.

2.1 Project delivery highlights

In the last year, projects have continued to successfully engage and support participants. In a previous evaluation report³ we examined some of the effective practice emerging in terms of reaching and supporting particular types of participants. Recent thematic learning papers have focused on **in-work support** and **employer engagement**, highlighting the effective work of BBO projects in delivering this type of intervention.

In a similar vein, the following sections highlight examples of BBO projects which correlate to some of the thematic areas covered by the Fund currently in terms of their strategic framework⁴ and strategic investments.⁵ This is not intended to be an exhaustive review of practice; instead, the aim is to highlight some particularly notable examples from the perspective of informing ‘what works’.

2.1.1 Social isolation

Addressing social isolation is key a theme cutting across a significant number of the BBO projects supported by the Fund; it is a core theme of the Ageing Better strategic investment⁶ and the Building Connections Fund.⁷ Social isolation amongst BBO participants is common, mainly resulting from being house bound as a result of a health condition, caring for an older relative, family breakdown, reduced income or long-term unemployment. Comments from participants when asked about their needs on engaging with the projects, captured in the survey, help illustrate some of these issues:

“After I had my stroke I felt very isolated as I wasn’t able to get out much.”

(Participant)

“I was feeling isolated and needed some direction in my life, I hadn’t worked in a long time.”

(Participant)

BBO projects quickly realised this was an early need that required addressing as part of many participant pathways. Consequently, many of the initial engagement activities offered by projects were designed in recognition of the commonality of social isolation as a barrier for BBO participants. Responses to this often included sporting activities bringing participants together, or forms of support with a health or wellbeing focus.

³ Ecorys (2019) **Building Better Opportunities Evaluation: Annual Report 2019**

⁴ The Fund Strategic Framework, available from: tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/about/strategic-framework

⁵ The Fund is investing over £500 million across England to tackle some of society’s most entrenched social problems through five long terms programmes, further details: tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments

⁶ Ageing Better aims to support people aged over 50 who are experiencing or at risk of social isolation and loneliness: tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/ageing-better

⁷ The Building Connections Fund is a partnership between Government, The National Lottery Community Fund and the Co-op Foundation which was set up in response to the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness to support projects that prevent or reduce loneliness.

For example, [Steps to Work](#) ran a range of engagement activities, including getting people playing chess, arts and crafts, and cooking, all with the intention of encouraging social interaction. [Step Forward Tees Valley](#), meanwhile, ran 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.

Whatever the activity, such interventions were widely recognised as creating a valuable impetus and reason for participants to leave the house to meet and talk to other people in a similar situation. Such activities were also reported as being helpful in building social skills and reducing isolation, in turn improving confidence. The progress achieved through support to address social isolation has often proved important for BBO participants, as one project staff member suggests:

“It’s really important to get people to actually start talking to other people, which is something they may not have done for a while. If you don’t get their confidence to grow, you’re never going to move them closer to the labour market.”

(Delivery staff member)

Other activities sought to address issues of social isolation stemming from particular delivery contexts, or amongst particular groups, as illustrated by the example below.



Practice example – reducing social isolation of young people

The [Game Changer](#) project is based in Cornwall, where the largely rural landscape and poor transport links mean social isolation is a major issue faced by the young people the project is supporting. The lead partner, Real Ideas Organisation Ltd, in conjunction with another partner, the Cornwall Food Foundation, delivered a horticultural and cooking based activity for a new group of young people coming onto the programme. The session involved starting a fire, picking vegetables and herbs from the garden and preparing and cooking food. The activity enabled participants to meet new people, create friendships and increase their confidence. This was evidenced by one young person, who reported having spoken to only four people in the previous year as a result of anxiety issues. After joining the Game Changer project, and attending the activity, he had, within the space of a day-and-a-half on the course, spoken to four or five times as many people as he had all year.

Group based activities delivered by BBO projects equally served the same purpose in terms of addressing the social isolation of participants, by creating opportunities for participants to meet people, form new friendships and have regular social interaction as this participant suggests:

“[It] Gets me out to socialise twice a week.”

(Participant)

There are also examples of BBO project activity serving as a catalyst for sustained local activity to address social isolation outside of the project. For example, a number of participants from the [Reach Out Across Durham](#) project have created their own informal groups to maintain support and contact beyond their time on the programme. Projects are increasingly alert to dependency on the part of participants, either in terms of group sessions or the relationship with those delivering one-to-one support. Peer support activities have been identified as important as a potential longer-term support mechanism in this context, given that projects are ultimately about employment rather than simply providing a friendship or befriending service.

The one-to-one support offered by BBO projects, through a mentor or coach role, also emerged strongly as a mechanism for addressing social isolation in the BBO programme. An extract from one of the local evaluation reports explains the importance of such relationships:

“Coaches listen and allow people time to tell their story, and therefore build a relationship based on trust. Participants also appreciated that they could have day-to-day conversations with their coach, and not talk exclusively about employment.”

(Project evaluation report)

Equally, participants themselves frequently commented on their mentor as being a key source of social interaction:

“Meeting her [key worker] weekly is normally the only person I talk to other than my children.”

(Participant)

“Like I said, I don’t really go anywhere or see many people, it’s nice to have a little chat.... while we’re sorting other things out as well.”

(Participant)

Another dimension where BBO projects are having a positive effect in addressing social isolation involves supporting participants to develop digital skills. In projects where this is a key focus, a common outcome reported in local evaluation reports concerns participants feeling far less isolated through making contact with friends and family as a result of being able to go online. This ability to connect through virtual means has been particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, with projects delivering virtual support and participants engaging in a variety of online activities as a way to stay connected (see section 2.3 below).



2.1.2 Young people

Young people are a core target group for many Fund investments and the BBO programme is no exception. Many BBO projects work exclusively with young people and in others they form a core target group. BBO delivery targeting young people echoes much of what was found to be effective in other Fund programmes for young people, such as Talent Match.⁸ BBO projects have demonstrated many effective ways to engage and support young people, with one-to-one support offered through a mentor or key worker approach proving particularly effective for this target group alongside a tailored support package. Where peer mentors were used to support young people that was particularly welcomed as illustrated by this participant quote captured in the survey:


“It was great to have [mentor name] helping me, as he knew what it was like and came from here too.”

(Participant)

Support to address anxiety or other mental health conditions was also a common feature of support for young people.

Across the BBO programme, several other specific interventions or activities to support young people are worthy of note. Initial engagement of young people has required projects to develop some creative approaches to attract young people. Examples include the **Empowering Enterprise** project organising a ‘social fair’ to attract young people to come and find out about activities, groups or things they can get involved in as a first step towards potentially thinking about employment. The fair involved a range of partners covering gaming, art and drawing, theatre, athletics, walking, volunteering, wildlife and the environment.

Once engaged, other projects have developed ways to enhance the development, and evidencing, of the skills and activities young people have undertaken. **Game Changer** is using digital badges⁹ with young people on the project. Engaging with a wider pilot as part of Plymouth’s City of Learning, the project is seeking to use digital badges to capture and articulate a young person’s learning or experience gained from the project. The badges are designed to be shared on social media and online CVs. With flexibility to design bespoke badges, the project is using them to evidence a young person’s engagement with the project and individual interventions as well as the achievement of softer skills. An example of a digital badge is provided below.



Construction Sector Information Activity

Issued by [Real Ideas Organisation](#)

Earners of this Cities of Learning engagement badge attended a Construction Sector Information Session and have had a range of possible job roles and employment opportunities explained to them. Earners have gained an increased understanding of pathways into the sector and have been signposted to further opportunities for training, work experience opportunities and mentoring within the Construction Sector.

Skills

Construction Curious Employment Engage Pathways Signposting

Earning Criteria

- Attended a Construction Sector information session run by Construction Industry Representative

[Plymouth](#)

Type: Experience

Level: Foundational

Time: Hours

⁸ tnccommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/talent-match

⁹ Digital badges communicate skills and achievements by providing visual symbols of accomplishments alongside data providing context about the achievement: i.e. evidence of what individuals did, and who says they did it. Further details: www.thersa.org/cities-of-learning/how-it-works#badges

The Game Changer project is using this approach with young people from 14 years old and those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), or at risk of becoming NEET, and the experience to date has been positive. The gamification of achievement of skills is reported by delivery staff to be attractive and engaging to the young people participating.

2.1.3 Multiple and complex needs

While the majority of BBO participants present with a number of barriers preventing their progression towards employment, several projects within the BBO programme are specifically seeking to support individuals with multiple and complex needs. Effective practice in the BBO programme to support these individuals largely echoes the emerging findings from the evaluation of the Fund's Fulfilling Lives Multiple and Complex Needs programme.¹⁰

In particular, the navigation process¹¹ is common across BBO projects. 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 Personal Navigator who supports them to achieve their goals in partnership with existing support agencies. The **Positive People** project in Cornwall similarly matches disadvantaged participants with multiple barriers with a Change Coach to provide individualised support. Such examples again highlight the key role of individual support delivered by key workers, with the significance of this being even more acute when those supported have multiple and complex needs and require a comprehensive support package.

While many delivery organisations were well prepared to deliver support to those with multiple needs, there is evidence that the experience of delivering support to participants with such a range of needs has further enhanced organisations' reputations and the skill set of their delivery staff. As one grant holder representative commented:

“We are the first port of call when referrers have individuals with complex needs who need ETE support. our caseworkers have become much more multi-disciplinary, which is amazing to watch.”

(Grant holder survey respondent)

Peer involvement is also a feature of BBO projects that are supporting participants with multiple and complex needs. Commonly, projects instituted a peer mentor role to provide additional support and befriending activity, alongside the professional support accessed. This was the case with the peer research project developed within Moving on Tyne and Wear (MOTW), led by partner Changing Lives. MOTW aimed to identify the barriers to employment for drug and alcohol users, and those in recovery from addiction, by undertaking peer research. The project created three paid peer researcher posts for people who had received support, leading to the creation of a report in May 2019.¹² The launch of the report was attended by local strategic stakeholders and project stakeholders hope that it will influence practice in other provision. Indeed, one external organisation has asked that the peer researchers present their findings to their delivery teams, and Changing Lives is taking forward a peer mentoring model in other programmes they deliver after the report flagged the value of such a model. Evidence from the participant survey further illustrates the positive outcomes for participants with drug and alcohol issues:

“My quality of life as improved, I am not drinking now, I am more positive about the future.”

(Participant)

“I am not drinking now, I am in recovery, so although I am not there yet, I feel that my wellbeing has improved.”

(Participant)

¹⁰ www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org

¹¹ Referral and care pathways for those with multiple and complex needs often involve multiple organisations; support is provided to identify relevant services, negotiate and organise access and advocate where necessary.

¹² The report is available here: motw.org.uk/what-we-do/our-projects/peer-research-project-gateshead

2.1.4 People in the lead

The Fund's overall strategic framework focuses on putting people in the lead (PITL).¹³ Participant involvement is central to BBO project delivery, with participants encouraged to play a central role in developing their own action plan. Beyond this, however, there are many examples where PITL is evident in BBO delivery through participants taking an active role in project delivery.¹⁴

The importance of being involved in choosing content can be seen in the work of **RISE** (Refugees Into Sustainable Employment). Their local evaluation found that where sessions offered bespoke 1:1 support, or where participants were given the opportunity to suggest discussion topics (such as attending a GP appointment or preparing for a specific job interview), there was increased attendance and popularity. In other examples, participants who are more advanced in their support journey, or have recently exited the programme, are supporting the delivery of sessions or in some cases leading groups. At **Step Forward Tees Valley**, Ambassadors have helped deliver and co-ordinate some of the project's group activity. From the project's perspective, this has proved successful as the Ambassadors are able to more easily build a rapport with participants and motivate people through their own stories. Similarly, within the **Who Dares Works** project, participants are leading groups including a community garden group and a 'socialising' group.

Peer support systems are also in place across a number of BBO projects. In the **Better Off Finance** project, participants who have been on the project have the chance to become a Money Mentor. Training is available in areas including being a community-based money mentor, being a savvy consumer and supporting Universal Credit claimants. The idea is that once participants have taken part in the course, they will go on to help other people with financial advice and support. It was also reported that volunteer peer mentors are proving vital to the success of Local Learning Perspective project.

Lastly, participants are commonly involved in helping to promote projects and communicate their benefits. At **New Leaf**, Community Energisers 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 including making short films.

2.1.5 Supporting communities to thrive

A key purpose of the Fund is that it supports communities to thrive by using funding to help create stronger, more connected communities.¹⁵ While the BBO programme aims to offer support to individuals rather than communities, there are examples where the activity of individuals, or groups of BBO participants, facilitated by BBO projects are benefiting communities.

The **Positive People** projects operating across several locations in the South West each have outcome targets relating to increasing participant involvement in their community and increasing levels of physical activity. They have identified local opportunities for participants to achieve those outcomes, whilst making a positive contribution to the local environment. Activities include litter picks or beach cleaning days, conservation activities such as tree planting and helping older people to look after their gardens. These activities increase community involvement for participants and increase their physical activity to improve fitness and mental health, as well as learning new skills. Other volunteering opportunities offered by the projects include supporting and befriending elderly isolated people.

Tangible examples of community benefit were also given by those consulted for the evaluation in terms of volunteering activities facilitated through BBO leading to improvements to community facilities. For example, **Who Dares Works** 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, participants have helped with conservation work at a local community farm.

¹³ The Fund Strategic Framework, available from: tnccommunityfund.org.uk/about/strategic-framework

¹⁴ Further examples are presented in Ecorys (2019) [Participant Involvement Learning Paper](#)

¹⁵ The Fund Strategic Framework, available from: tnccommunityfund.org.uk/about/strategic-framework

2.1.6 Extending projects

The extended period of delivery granted to a significant number of BBO projects provides a further period in which to test 'what works', along with providing an opportunity for the programme to support greater numbers of participants.

Some project representatives cited, in particular, that they viewed the extension period as a positive opportunity to refine project delivery. Results from the recent survey of grant holders found that 45% of respondents reported that their projects were making some changes to the profile of activities, or delivery approaches, in the remaining delivery phase up to 2022. When asked about the nature of these changes in an open question, the 89 grant holders who responded to the survey¹⁶ reported a range of different elements that are being refined. These involved, for example, a change to more participant-centric delivery, reported by 13 projects, improving or streamlining delivery (10 projects) and placing a greater emphasis on employment support (7 projects).

Changing partnership profiles have been a feature across the BBO delivery period to date, and projects reported changes in such profiles for the extension phase. In total, 68 of the 89 grant holder respondents reported a change in partnerships since the original application and around a fifth of these (14 projects) reported a change in partnership profiles in preparation for the extension phase.

In one consultation with a grant holder, it was reported that while the project was receiving additional funding, this was lower on a monthly basis than in the previous phase, resulting in some difficult decisions about cutting the number of partners and the size of delivery teams:

“The extension is very much needed but the reduction in funding is a challenge.”

(Grant holder)

One other project dealt with the reduction in funding by refocusing on a geographical basis, while another reported that reduced budgets in phase two would lead to more limited direct expenditure on participants.

It was clear that, for some projects, changes planned for the extension phase were performance driven. For example, representatives of several projects reported that they would be refining delivery to facilitate a greater focus on achieving engagement and results targets. For some, this was noted as involving refinements to delivery approaches and/or a focus on activity to target particular groups in the extension phase. For instance, one project reported adapting delivery to engage more economically inactive participants so as to ensure they are able to achieve targets for this group. This will involve an emphasis on exiting them into job search through shorter interventions, ensuring that they are able to job search and apply for roles once they are in a position to do so, for example when their health improves or they no longer have caring responsibilities.

More generally, across many projects enhanced work towards achieving employment related results during the extension phase was apparent; as one project representative reported:

“We are putting in place new employment workshops for staff, more information on employment services, revised participant action plans/ assessment of need re employment support.”

(Grant holder)

Others were examining the geographical reach or focus of their project. For example **Include-IT** reported that they would be relaxing the priority ward boundaries originally targeted for the extension phase.

On a related theme, one project reported that they will now give additional consideration to when or if it's an appropriate time for a participant to join the BBO project, thinking about participants' likelihood of progressing towards employment within the available timescale. The example given was potentially not engaging parents with pre-school age children who are less likely to be in a position to look for work until their children are at nursery or school, at a point beyond the end of the BBO delivery.

¹⁶ Of the 256 responses to the survey, 89 were grant holders and 170 partners. There were sections of the survey asked only to grant holders or partners so smaller sample sizes are reported in places.

Those projects that had performed better to this point in delivery were looking at enhancements to delivery in the extension phase, as this respondent suggests:

“We will be focusing more on the quality of delivery rather than targets as most of them have already been exceeded.”

(Grant holder)

One further common area reported concerning planned changes or enhancements in the extension phase involved focusing on the ‘participant pathway’ to address issues where participants are not moving forwards with their goals, or where there is a dependency on the project developing. [Working Together for Work](#), for example, have planned to introduce support interventions to participants with a fixed time period, but with flexibility if needed, to avoid the dependency that can happen with open ended support:

“We are looking at doing things a bit differently for the extension – looking at explaining it as 6 months intensive support at the outset. So, the idea is 6 months of intensive support will provide more focus.”

(Project evaluation report)

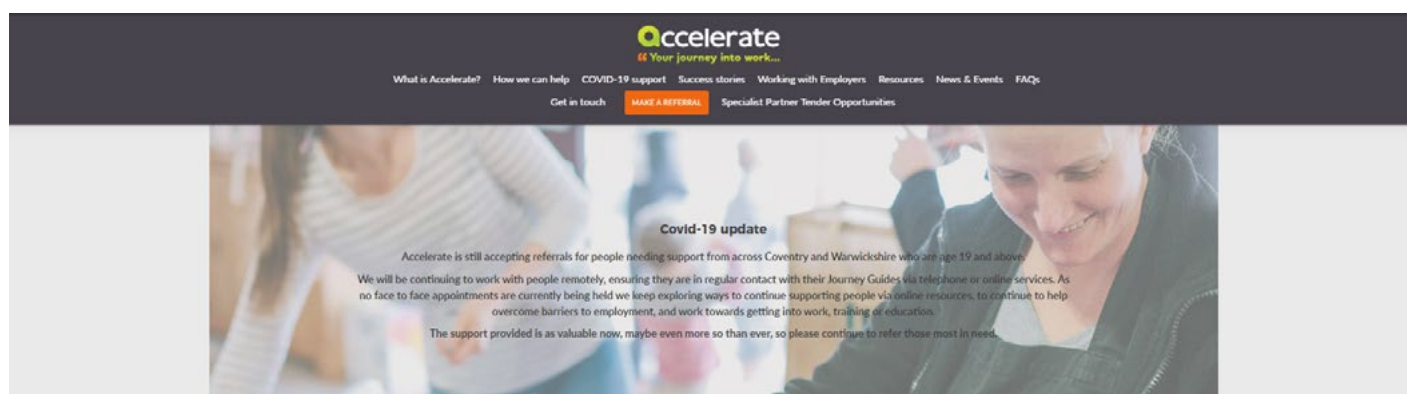
2.2 Project responses to COVID-19

From March 2020, the UK experienced an upturn in the coronavirus disease pandemic and was subject to lockdown measures to limit the spread of the virus. The Fund continued to honour its funding commitments during this time, seeking to provide increased flexibility in respect of existing grants; as such, BBO delivery has continued.

Understandably, BBO projects have had to make adaptations in terms of the focus of their support and/or the mechanisms being used. Through conversations with grant holders at the time of the crisis, or through information shared with the Fund by grant holders, it is possible to give some insight into how projects have adapted to continue to support people and communities. While not a comprehensive assessment across the whole of the BBO programme, the examples provide important learning on how frontline grant holders can effectively respond to the current context, and any future crisis situations, in terms of delivering support and potentially helping support recovery.

2.2.1 Communication

One immediate and common activity across projects was communication. Projects commonly posted updates on their websites or social media channels at the start of the crisis to give timely and reassuring messaging. The main message in these communications was that the projects were still open, accepting referrals and available to support participants. These messages were most commonly put out on social media or added to project websites, as this example from [Accelerate](#) illustrates:



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Accelerate website. The logo 'accelerate' is in green and black, with the tagline 'Your journey into work...'. Below the logo is a horizontal menu with links: 'What is Accelerate?', 'How we can help', 'COVID-19 support', 'Success stories', 'Working with Employers', 'Resources', 'News & Events', and 'FAQs'. Below the menu is a secondary navigation bar with 'Get in touch', a 'MAKE A REFERRAL' button, and 'Specialist Partner Tender Opportunities'.

The main content area features a 'Covid-19 update' section with the following text:

Covid-19 update

Accelerate is still accepting referrals for people needing support from across Coventry and Warwickshire who are age 19 and above.

We will be continuing to work with people remotely, ensuring they are in regular contact with their Journey Guides via telephone or online services. As no face to face appointments are currently being held we keep exploring ways to continue supporting people via online resources, to continue to help overcome barriers to employment, and work towards getting into work, training or education.

The support provided is as valuable now, maybe even more so than ever, so please continue to refer those most in need.

In other projects, there were more targeted stakeholder communications. The Humber Learning Consortium, which leads [Exploring Opportunities](#), launched a weekly e-bulletin for all its partners and stakeholders. In the first edition it focused on providing updates from funders on particular contracts. For BBO, this included a link to the [Fund statement issued in relation to COVID-19](#) and reassurance that the funding model for BBO, with payment in advance, would allow partners to continue to deliver.

HEADSUP CONTINUE TO OFFER OUR EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMME

We wanted to get in touch to let you know that despite everything that is happening at the moment with the Coronavirus, HeadsUp are still offering our employability service to people across Essex who wish to seek work, training or start job searching. We specifically support people who have had or are currently experiencing common mental health problems such as anxiety or depression.

Circumstances mean that unfortunately we will not be able to meet with participants face to face for a while, but we can support anyone who is referred using phone, email, video call and postal methods. Please do still refer anyone who you feel might benefit as we really can still help people to take positive steps.

Indeed, at a time when we are all required to adapt our approach to working with clients we invite you to get in touch if there is any activity that you feel might benefit from our collaboration or sharing of information. We look forward to continuing to work with you.




To find out more please check out our website
[ENABLEEAST.ORG.UK/HEADSUP](https://enableeast.org.uk/headsup)

 /!headsUpEssex
  @HeadsUpEssex
  headsup@enableeast.org.uk

HeadsUp is funded by the European Social Fund and the National Lottery Community Fund



ROAD is #StillHereToHelp!

Read on to see how we've adapted our services and access useful resources...

Hello there!

We hope that everyone is doing well and coping with the current situation in the best way they can.

Reaching Out Across Durham wanted to let you know that during these difficult times we are still here to help.

Even though we're not currently able to offer face-to-face meetings with your Navigators and Trainers, ROAD is making every effort to support existing and new participants in any way we can.

We're continuing to work with participants and those not yet enrolled with us through digital means like regular video calls and messaging, telephone support and through sharing useful resources [via our social media](#).

Whether you need support with benefit claims, debt management, CV and job searching, or just need a bit of human contact, we're still here for you!

You can contact your Navigator in the usual way, [send us an email](#), contact us through [Facebook](#), or call us on 01207 524 833.

Likewise, the [Headsup project](#) planned a series of emergency communications, including specific messages for their referral organisations and stakeholders. The main message was to inform stakeholders that they are still able to refer participants but also that the project is willing to collaborate on any joint activity that may support current or future participants.

Across the board, BBO projects quickly released communications targeting participants, mostly through their social media channels or email bulletins or newsletters. These messages typically had similar core messages to those for stakeholders, offering reassurance to participants that projects were still operating and how they are adapting to allow participants to still receive support. The newsletter sent out by [Reaching Out Across Durham](#) to its participants is illustrative of these communications.

2.2.2 Supporting partners and stakeholders

Real Ideas Organisation, meanwhile, which leads [Game Changer](#), has sought to support its stakeholders and partners through a series of webinars entitled 'Business in Extraordinary Times.' One looked at support for young people, exploring how organisations that support young people and adults are responding and adapting to the crises. Staff from the Game Changer project sat on the webinar panel, contributing key learning and best practice whilst also discussing new opportunities that are being considered in order to continue to support vulnerable people during unprecedented times. One of the webinar slides is included below.

Key learning on supporting young people

- To conduct engagement remotely you can't assume all young people have access to technology. Some may not engage with technology, while others may be limited by not having internet access, sufficient data or their own equipment.
- Now young people are at home due to lockdown, there may be a need to put support around the household not just the young person themselves.
- In choosing platforms to engage young people virtually, consideration should be given to the safeguarding aspects and how different platforms support or undermine safeguarding e.g. no capability to record conversations.
- Training is likely needed, both for staff on what it means for them for broadcasting from their own homes but also for young people on how to stay safe online.

Source: [Business in Extraordinary Times webinar, broadcast on 16th April 2020](#)

2.2.3 Supporting participants

Following the initial communications, typically projects then repurposed their social media feeds to be less about promoting what they do as an engagement or recruitment tool, and more about signposting participants to support or a mechanism for directly delivering support to participants. With face to face delivery of support largely not possible within the restrictions put in place in late March 2020, projects have had to adapt the way there are in contact with participants. Commonly this has involved swapping to the use of telephone calls, emails, online messaging or video calls to maintain in contact in terms of one-to-one support delivered by mentors or key workers.

In the main, the above approaches were reported as working well, and projects are reporting success in the levels of engagement they are maintaining. There has, however, been some learning in how structured or otherwise this support has been and can be. For example, some participants have welcomed more frequent contact at a specified time, while others prefer being in receipt of more light touch support as and when required. The successful shift to virtual methods of one-to-one contact has allowed a range of support to continue to be delivered across projects, including mental health support and money advice, all of which can more easily be transferred to an alternative mechanism for delivery.

In the case of money advice, projects reported delivering this type of provision both by telephone and video call, noting that it was generally well received by participants. In some cases, however, shorter sessions are typically now being delivered compared to the previous face-face-sessions with the focus typically on immediate financial needs as this was the key concern of participants. Delivery staff also reported they virtual sessions are on occasion more challenging as they don't have the benefit of access to paperwork that participants often brought along to appointments previously.

Where projects previously delivered group-based support or training, this has been done in varying ways and in some cases has been more difficult to translate into alternative modes. **New Leaf** reported initially to have continued their group support through the use of workbooks, completed independently by participants followed up with telephone calls. They are now looking at the use of Facebook Live as a way to deliver real time sessions with the ability for more interaction. **Game Changer** has successfully delivered group sessions for a small number of young people using the GoToMeeting platform. In the early stages of the pandemic, the project undertook an audit of their participants' situations to identify whether the young people they support had access to technology to enable them to engage. This resulted in the purchase of a number of devices for those without access.

Projects commonly reported there has been a strong emphasis on mental health and wellbeing themed support, recognising the increased need for support to help participants who are particularly vulnerable during a time of heightened anxiety and isolation. **Lots More to Offer**, which supports over 45s, for example, reported that the shift from face to face meetings to online and phone support has resulted in more pastoral support to keep participants engaged and support their wellbeing more generally. Projects reported this was particularly important currently as many participants cannot access their usual support network.

The focus on wellbeing is also evident in the range of activities and information being shared by projects on their social media channels or delivered directly to participants. Projects have typically focused on activities that allow participants to develop skills at home. For example, several projects have produced filmed versions of activities and uploaded them to YouTube or Facebook for participants to watch. These activities commonly include fitness, cooking, art or crafting, or gardening, all of which have a wellbeing focus. Some projects have a structured approach, for example **Game Changer** has a specific timetable of activities which their young people can join, while other projects are posting periodic activities. Other projects are also seeking share the range of activities and information being developed by their partners or other organisations locally and nationally. For instance, Humber Learning Consortium, which leads the Exploring Opportunities project, has collated a list of resources for online learning and help, which it has shared through social media to participants and stakeholders.





2.2.4 Delivering employment support

In general, employment opportunities have been limited in the current period, so projects have typically placed less emphasis on delivering employment related support and have focused on keeping in touch with participants and focusing on wellbeing or the development of other skills. Nonetheless, there are some examples of employability support continuing, or being adapted, recognising that some participants may still want to work. **New Leaf**, for example, has been active on social media in keeping participants informed of potential opportunities in key worker roles. Similarly, a partner in the **Exploring Opportunities** project has produced a series of short videos uploaded on their Facebook page, including one on CV tips. Other projects have sought to support participants to develop job related skills. **Routes** have adapted their approach by providing activity resources for participants relating to the employment field they have expressed an interest in. Two examples of this include providing seeds and some gardening equipment for a person interested in horticulture, whose volunteering placement at a garden centre has been postponed and providing some woodworking tools to a person whose college course in carpentry has been postponed.

Game Changer, meanwhile, has launched a series of virtual work experiences for the young people on their project. This involves employers joining an online meeting and discussing aspects of their work, such as showing examples or discussing their workplace. Young people are then set remote tasks following the meeting. This is reported to have been well received and the project is hoping to continue to deliver this type of activity in the future, in particular as a way of addressing the transport issues in Cornwall which make young people accessing work experience more difficult.

While the above examples show that BBO projects have been highly adaptable in the current context, and have been committed in continuing to support participants, the responsive and flexible work undertaken by the BBO projects has not been without its challenges. Delivery organisations have been working with reduced staff numbers in some cases. Within BBO partnerships, there have also been some isolated instances of partners that have ceased trading, or others where the organisation has furloughed some or all of its staff under the Government's Job Retention Scheme. Despite this, there is strong commitment across BBO projects to continue to provide support to participants.

Finally, there are also examples of projects which, in the period of crisis, are offering support to their wider communities. For example, Real Ideas Organisation, the grant holder of the Game Changer project, is opening their offices for short periods once per week to allow community members to use IT equipment in the office. This was done in recognition of the reliance of many people in the community on libraries as a place to be able to access computers and the internet. Project staff report that this is commonly being used by individuals to apply for Universal Credit (UC).

3.0 Programme achievements and outcomes

Evidence is emerging across all strands of the BBO evaluation concerning the achievements of the programme. This includes those at a participant level, as well as for delivery organisations.

Key findings

- BBO projects have engaged 89,969 participants up to June 2019, meaning the programme has exceeded its participant numbers target for the period to the end of 2020. The programme is continuing to reach some of the key target groups identified in the national ESF Operational Programme. The positive performance in terms of engaging participants with disabilities (currently 49% of all participants engaged) is of particular note.
- A total of 26,020 positive ESF results, covering employment outcomes, engaging in training and job search, have been achieved to date.
- The programme has exceeded its target for participants entering employment, with 14% of all participants in employment on exit, a good result given the nature of the target groups supported by BBO. The employment gained by participants shows some permanency and security, with all participants who responded to the evaluation survey and reported being in employment having permanent roles, with only one participant being on a zero-hour contract.
- Wider outcomes for participants are being achieved. Just under three quarters of all participants responding the evaluation survey (74%) reported improved confidence, with just under half (46%) reporting improved wellbeing. This improved confidence was in turn reported to have led to increased motivation, improved self-esteem and reduced social isolation.
- Organisational capacity and knowledge emerged as key outcomes for grant holders and partners. Responding to the evaluation survey, 84% of grant holders reported that receiving BBO funding has helped their organisation's capacity and 96% of partners now reported that their organisations were 'knowledgeable' or 'very knowledgeable' of complex funding, a 30% increase on their perceived position prior to applying to BBO.
- There is strong support for the role of VCSE organisations in the programme. The majority of grant holders (95%) agreed that their BBO project has been able to deliver specialist support by having VCSE organisations in the partnership, and a similar proportion (94%) agreed that the involvement of VCSE organisations has allowed the project to engage the hardest to help target groups.

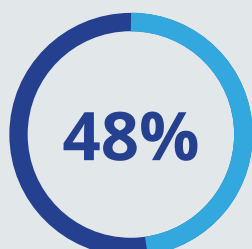
3.1 BBO in numbers

Projects funded through BBO are required, as part of receipt of ESF funding, to record progress against several 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. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 overleaf outline the overall achievements of the programme in terms of engaging participants and the positive results achieved. 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.

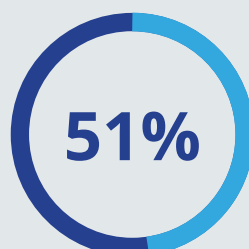
Figure 3.1 BBO engagement performance

Participant Profiles

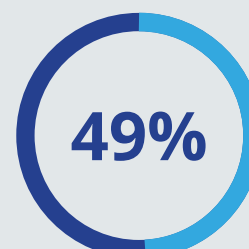
89,969 participants have been engaged by BBO (by Q2 2019)



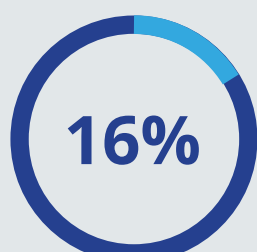
are female



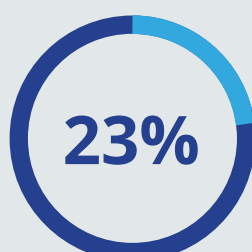
are male



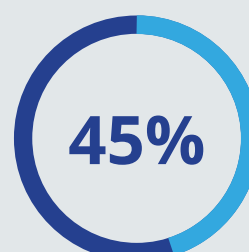
are participants with a disability



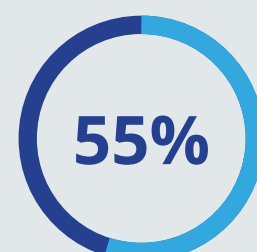
are over 50



are participants from BAME groups



are economically inactive

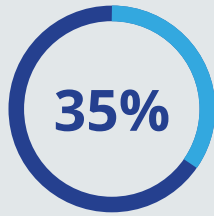


are unemployed

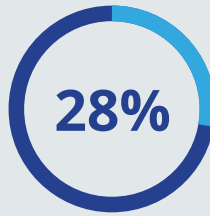
Figure 3.2 BBO results performance (up to Q2 2019)

Results

35,292 participants who have been exited the programme



in employment

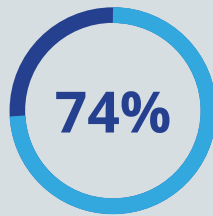


in education or training

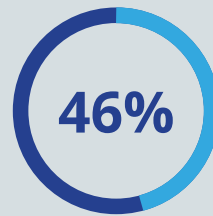


in job search

Wider outcomes were achieved



of survey respondents gained confidence



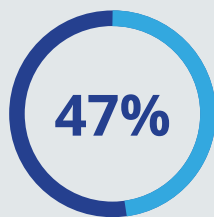
of survey respondents improved their wellbeing

Employment Results

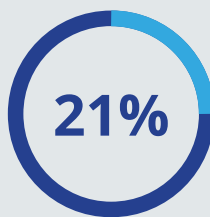
Those achieving employment result are:

48% female

52% male



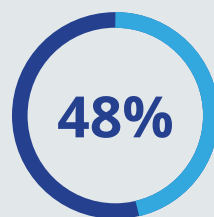
Participants with a disability



Participants from BAME groups



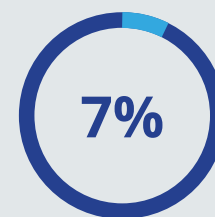
Participants with an offending background



Economically inactive on joining the programme



Single parent household



Homeless

At the programme level, MI data up to June 2019 demonstrates that the programme has achieved 26,020 positive results in terms of the ESF indicators outlined above, making good progress against the programme targets. Table 3.1 summarises progress against key targets. While there are 9,272 participants who have exited the programme without recording one of these programme results, this should not suggest that such participants have failed to make progress or to achieve outcomes. Rather, the progress and outcomes they are likely to have achieved are not formally recorded at a programme level in terms of ESF results indicators. Such outcomes and destinations, beyond those captured by the formal ESF indicators, are examined further below in section 3.1.1.

Table 3.1 Participants results: targets versus actuals

	Target	Actual	% of target
Number who move into education or training on leaving	12,090	9,764	81
Number who move into employment, including self-employment, on leaving	12,177	12,266	101
Number that were economically inactive move into job-searching on leaving	12,259	3,990	33
Total	36,526	26,020	71

Source: Programme data

Specifically, 12,266 participants are recorded as having moved into employment or self-employment, an overachievement of the total employment target for the programme. This means 14% of all BBO participants have entered employment at this stage of the programme. Given the nature of the target groups supported by BBO, and the distance many BBO participants are from employment, this can be considered a good result at this stage of the programme, albeit it is lower than the current employment rate of 23.7% for the ESF Programme in the UK as a whole.¹⁷ The BBO programme performance is therefore somewhat below the ESF average, although this is not unsurprising given the nature of the target groups supported by BBO and the distance many BBO participants are from employment.

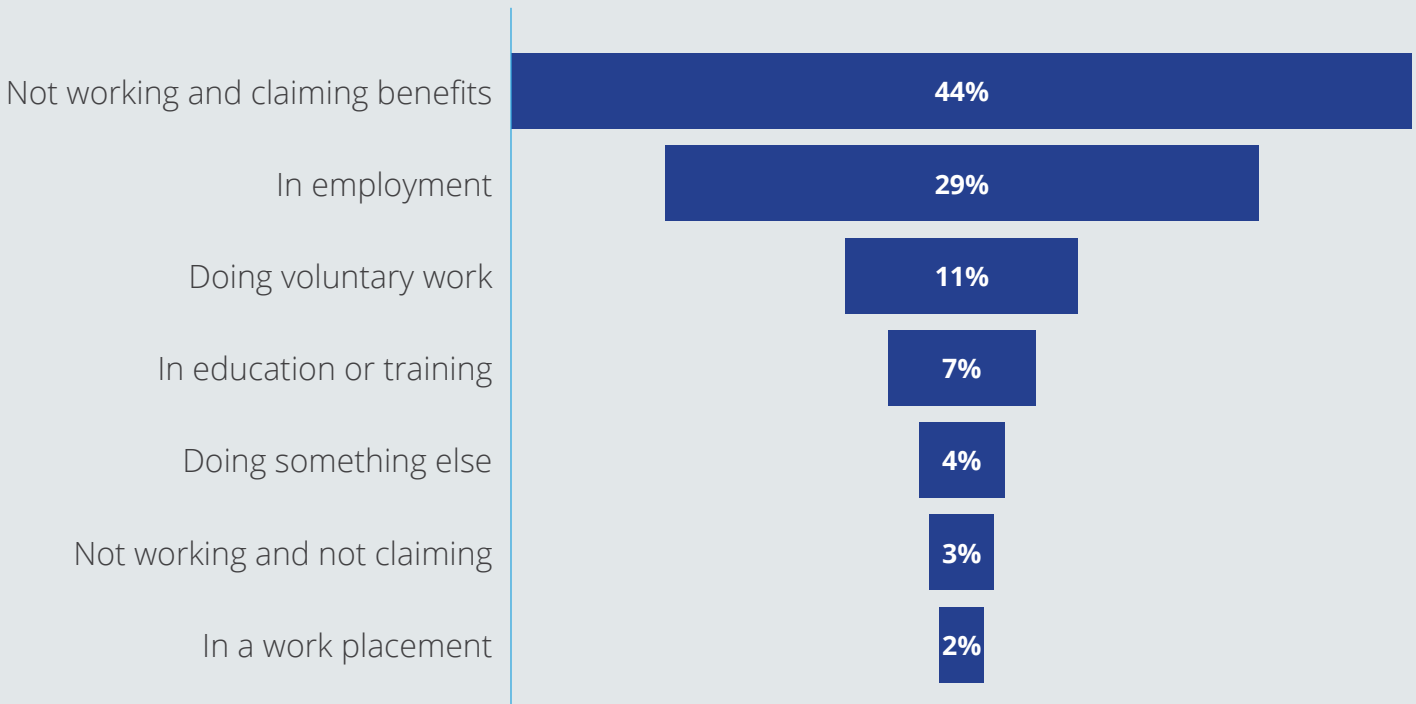
3.1.1 What has changed for participants?

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 evidence on the wider outcomes from the programme, as well as some additional evidence on the nature of the results.

¹⁷ Source: [Country Summary Tables: United Kingdom](#). Some caution is needed with direct comparison between the current BBO and 2017 AIR results given the time lag involved in the latter.

Analysis of the results for respondents who had exited support allows further analysis of the destinations of participants following support from the programme. Some 136 respondents from the total of 200 respondents to the follow up survey had exited the programme at the time of the survey; Figure 3.3 shows their destinations.

Figure 3.3 Participant destinations after exiting support



Source: Participant survey, base=136

Some 44% of participants who have exited the programme reported that they were not working and claiming benefits. This should not necessarily be viewed as a purely negative outcome, given that this group incorporates participants who are now actively looking for work, having been economically inactive prior to the programme (i.e. those who would be marked as having achieved a job search result in the programme data). The survey findings do not allow the calculation of the conversion rate of economically inactive to unemployed but of these 44% or 60 of participants, 25 reported that they have applied for jobs or attended interviews since the end of the BBO support. Three quarters of these participants reported the support they received from the BBO project has been helpful in enabling them to do this.

Just under a third of the 136 respondents who had exited support (29% or 42 participants) were in employment or self-employment, a similar proportion evident from the analysis of the programme results data. The majority of these were working part-time (71%) and only one participant reported that they were on a zero-hour contract. There was a relatively even split between male and female participants and across the age categories with over 50's, young people and over 25's all securing employment.

In terms of the sustainability and quality of jobs gained by BBO participants, 88% of those exiting the programme and in work reported having a permanent job at the time of the survey. This can be taken to represent a very positive indicator of the type of jobs participants are entering. Equally, some progression is evident, with 1 in 5 participants reporting that they had taken on higher skilled work since starting their job, and 1 in 7 reporting receiving a pay rise.

All except one participant reported that they have remained in the same job, suggesting some degree of sustainability and stability. Likewise, the majority (79%) believed they would be doing the same in 6 months' time, suggesting a desire on their part to sustain the job. It is worth noting, however, that the survey interviews took place at varying points after exit and thus cannot be used as a robust measure of 26 weeks sustainability as per the result typically monitored in ESF programmes. The survey also took place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting uncertainty in the economy, so it is likely if interviewed now participants may have less confidence in the sustainability of their employment in that current situation.

The nature and sector where BBO participants are securing employment is more difficult to assess, based on self-reported descriptions of the nature of the work done, but it appears a variety of roles have been secured by BBO participants as illustrated in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Key words reported by participants reporting the nature of work secured



Source: Participant survey, base: 42

Responses to some of the open questions in the survey indicate that moving into employment has wider benefits for participants and their families. The financial security provided from paid employment came through particularly strongly in participants' responses. However, it was equally clear that participants value the wider impacts of entering work, in terms of building a social network and the sense of independence and value this provides.

The following quotes are illustrative of these themes:

“It has made a huge difference, I now have money, I can contribute to the family budget.”

(Participant)

“For me it has built up my confidence and of course I am better off financially, I don’t have to worry so much about money.”

(Participant)

“It has helped in every way; I feel that I am doing something worthwhile and it has obviously helped with my financial situation.”

(Participant)

“It has made quite a lot of difference; it has made me more confident in myself and made me feel more valuable and independent.”

(Participant)

“I think it helped me to get my confidence back and get back into a routine, which was good for my mental health and wellbeing.”

(Participant)

“Definitely the extra income, but for me it was having a purpose, the opportunity to go out and meet people and to be a part of the community.”

(Participant)

“It has made a massive impact on my life, finding a job, and working with new people, and making new friends.”

(Participant)

The destinations of other participants who may not have secured employment are equally worthy of note, given the evidence of progression they provide. The participants who have moved into a volunteering role (11%), education or employment (7%) or a work placement (2%) all demonstrate positive outcomes which are common elements of a progression pathway towards work. This latter consideration was echoed in the sense that most participants in these groups felt that these outcomes will help them get a job in future.

Volunteering, in particular, is a common activity used to support unemployed people towards employment, with this being a feature of many employment support programmes¹⁸ and wider evidence exists to support its use as a pathway to employment.¹⁹ Of those reporting in the survey that they were doing volunteering, just over a third were aged over 50, supporting wider evidence that volunteering is a useful route for older workers to refresh skills. Volunteering is also known to bring many personal and social benefits, and this was also evident for BBO participants, as illustrated by this quote from a participant responding to the survey:

“I am working at the moment as a volunteer in my local community, which I enjoy very much, making some new friends along the way.”

(Participant)

¹⁸ Kamerade, D et al (2014) [Volunteering and employability: implications for policy and practice](#) in Voluntary Sector Review

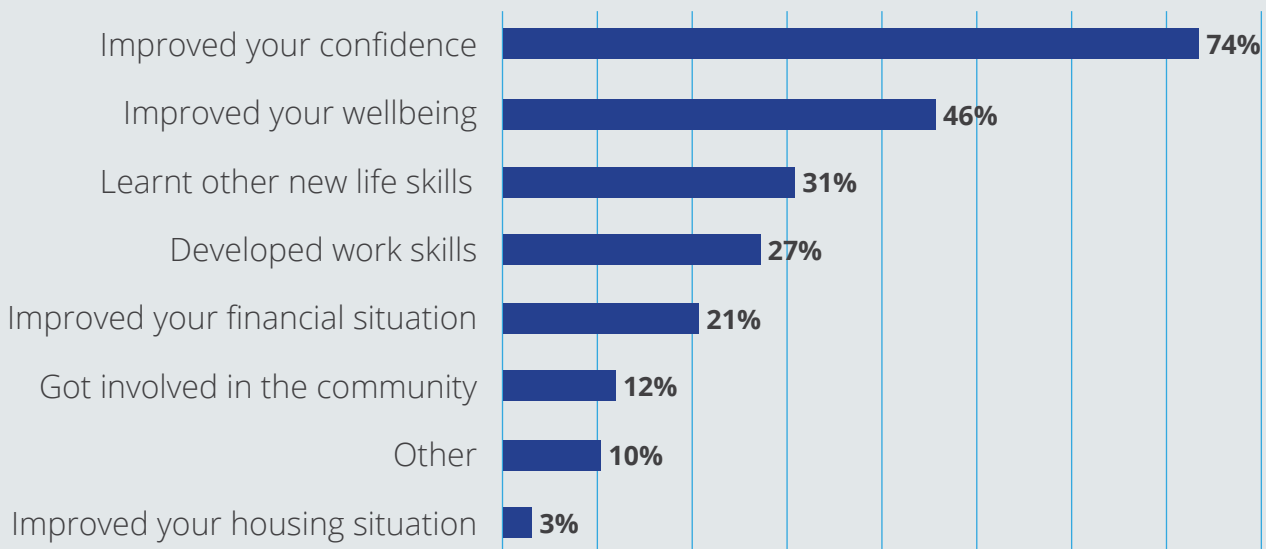
¹⁹ For example, NCVO (2014) [Volunteering: a valuable pathway to employment](#)

Even for those still receiving support amongst survey respondents, there is some evidence of positive progression and a changed outlook. Of those still receiving support (64 out of the 200 respondents), just under two thirds reported that the help received will be helpful in getting a job. When asked to specify why it would help, 68% of this sub-group reported improved confidence and 56% improved motivation, while 61% reported having a better idea of career options and 49% reported that the support received would help with finding and applying for jobs. When these 64 participants were asked what they would be doing without the support offered by BBO projects, there is evidence that participants would not have made the same progress; specifically, 1 in 10 participants reported they would still be isolated at home and just over 1 in 5 reported they would be feeling low and lacking confidence.

3.1.2 Wider participant outcomes

The participant survey captured strong evidence of the wider outcomes for participants as a result of the support from BBO projects. Figure 3.5 highlights the range of improvements reported by participants who had exited support as a direct result of the support they received. Just under three quarters of these participants (74%) reported improved confidence, with just under half (46%) reporting improved wellbeing.

Figure 3.5 Participant outcomes after existing support



Source: Participant survey, base=136, multiple responses possible

Improved wellbeing is also evidenced by changes in average wellbeing scores recorded between the baseline and follow up surveys for 200 participants,²⁰ changing from 22.6 to 23.6 using the short version of the Warwick Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS).²¹ The one point increase between the two points suggests there has been a meaningful change²² in the average mental wellbeing of BBO participants at the end of their support, resulting in an average which is comparable to the national population norms.²³

²⁰ This analysis was conducted for 200 participants for whom responses at both points were available.

²¹ WEMWBS is a scale which has been validated for the measurement of mental wellbeing developed.

²² Guidance suggests minimally important levels of change for SWEMWBS are between 1 and 3 points: warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/howto/

²³ Health Survey for England 2011 found a mean score of 23.6 using SWEMWBS. No more recent data is available due to the use of different scales in later surveys.

Across the 200 participants interviewed at follow up stage, just over half (51%) had an increase in their wellbeing scores echoing the level of self-reported improvements shown in Figure 3.5. For the remaining participants, 37% had a decrease in wellbeing and 10% showed no change. Data from the open questions indicates that the decrease for some participants is due to a change in their circumstances, or a crisis situation, as they commented on this, but it is not possible to explore this further for all participants.

Participants responding to the survey were asked to reflect on the improved confidence they had gained as a direct result of the support from the BBO and what difference that had made. Being able to apply for and undertake work or volunteer opportunities as a result of having increased confidence were most commonly reported, as illustrated by the following quotes:

“I have started volunteering my skills to other people, through my improved confidence, which I gained from the project.”

(Participant)

“I now have the confidence to be able to go to work, and hopefully improve my career prospects, the project helped me to have more confidence to be able to go back to work.”

(Participant)

Amongst the 100 participants who reported improved confidence, other outcomes were reported as a result. These included ‘feeling more purposeful or having increased motivation’ (41%), improved self-esteem (23%) and reduced social isolation (21%). The following quotes are typical of the responses received to the open question included on this theme:

“Well it has got me out and about a bit more and smiling a bit more often.”

(Participant)

It has helped a lot really, I was virtually house bound before I started on the project, it has improved the quality of my life.”

(Participant)

Other responses illustrate that participants are now feeling more purposeful in life and that increased confidence has encouraged them to think about how they would like to progress in the future:

“I was very low when I started on the project, but I am feeling more confident in myself, and although I am 66, I do not feel that I have finished with work yet. I would like to get another job.”

(Participant)

“It has helped me to realise that I do want to work eventually, hopefully in the future I will be in a position to get a job and try to build my life up again.”

(Participant)

3.1.3 What has changed for delivery organisations?

Over the course of the evaluation, strong evidence has emerged of the organisational outcomes for individual grant holders and delivery partners due to their participation in the BBO programme.²⁴ These findings were further confirmed by the second survey of grant holders and partners, held between March and April 2020, wherein increased organisational capacity and knowledge emerged as key outcomes.

Specifically, 84% of 170 partners and 76% of 89 grant holders agreed that their organisation's delivery capacity has been strengthened by involvement in BBO delivery, as illustrated by these comments in response to open questions in the survey:

“Our capacity to support and engage the hardest to reach into educational outcomes has been raised significantly. We have developed a team experienced in engaging and supporting a client group that may not engage with a college normally.”

(Partner)

“We developed a separate and substantial employability section of the organisation as a direct result of BBO.”

(Grant holder)

Further organisational benefits are evident in terms of knowledge and capacity to manage complex funding. The majority of grant holders surveyed (84%) reported that receiving BBO funding has helped their organisation's capacity to develop and manage complex projects. When asked directly about changes in knowledge of complex funding opportunities (such as ESF), 96% of partners now reported that their organisations were 'knowledgeable' or 'very knowledgeable', a 30% increase on their perceived position prior to applying to BBO.

This increased knowledge for both grant holders and partners has been accompanied by reported changes in processes and systems within organisations. Around two thirds of partner respondents to the survey (65%) and three quarters of grant holders (76%) reported that, as a result of BBO, their organisations have introduced or developed processes and systems which have had wider organisational benefit. This is illustrated by the following comment by one survey respondent:

“Our involvement in BBO has had a very positive impact on the organisation. It has strengthened its ability to develop a project from scratch and lead a partnership of organisations. Processes implemented in terms of audit, compliance and cross cutting themes (in particular sustainability) have been shared as best practise across the whole organisation.”

(Grant holder)

In addition to the opportunities presented by BBO to develop internal processes, the external profile of organisations was also highlighted as an impact for organisations involved. The majority of both grant holder and partner organisations (84%) agreed that the profile of the organisation has been raised locally through involvement in BBO Partnerships. As this respondent highlights, the involvement in partnerships has also allowed their organisation to extend its reach geographically:

“The experience of inter-organisational partnership work has allowed our organisation to develop stronger and more effective collaborations that have achieved more impactful service over a broader geography.”

(Partner)

Involvement in the BBO programme has also clearly provided a strong foundation for organisational development, with some 59% of all grant holder and partner respondents agreeing that their involvement in the BBO project has been important to sustain the organisation by providing financial resources:

“The BBO programme has provided a solid reliable fiscal stream, allowing us to be able to plan more effectively for the future.”

(Grant holder)

There is evidence that this has in turn helped grant holders be successful in securing further funding. Some 83% of grant holders reported that their organisation had applied for further funding and 86% agreed that the BBO experience had been important in their success with these funding applications. As two respondents commented:

“To be the lead on a successful BBO Project is proof that we are able to manage and deliver complex projects. This re-assures funders. We have a good reputation in our region.”

(Grant holder)

“We have gained valuable experience in delivering BBO which has been drawn upon and used as examples of best practice when completing funding applications. The whole process of applying, implementing and delivering a programme as large as BBO has allowed our organisation to demonstrate its versatility and that it has the experience and infrastructure in place when bidding for new business. An example of this is an application being recently made for further ESF funding for a brand-new project.”

(Grant holder)

Other responses to the survey suggested reputational capital was a positive outcome for grant holders and partners involved in the programme, both in respect of other delivery and devolved authorities.

“We’ve definitely Improved links and our reputation with the Combined Authority and LEP.”

(Grant holder)

“The success of our programme has raised the profile in a positive way for all organisations involved and it has strengthened working relationships and links across the whole LEP area.”

(Partner)

3.2 The value of the BBO programme

The evaluation evidence allows the value of the BBO programme to be examined from a number of dimensions, encompassing value in respect of involving the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, value for participants, and indications of the economic value BBO is likely to be generating. The following sub-sections consider these aspects in turn.



3.2.1 Value of the VCSE involvement

Grant holders and partners who responded to the evaluation survey provided strong support for the emphasis on involving VCSE organisations in the design of the BBO programme. The majority (95%) agreed that their BBO project has been able to deliver specialist support by having VCSE organisations in the partnership, and a similar proportion (94%) also agreed that the involvement of VCSE organisations has allowed the project to engage the hardest to help target groups. A further 88% agreed that the geographical reach of the BBO project has been assisted by the involvement of VCSE organisations. Other positive aspects of VCSE involvement were identified. When asked in an open question, just under a third of respondents highlighted the sector specific expertise of the VCSE as being important, along with the ability of VCSE organisations to deliver a broad range of support to participants.

While there are clearly positive outcomes achieved through the involvement of VCSEs in BBO delivery, there were isolated perceptions that the programme has, in the main, facilitated access for larger VCSE organisations, and that smaller VCSE organisations who are grant holders have found the programme more challenging. The following quote illustrates this minority concern:

“BBO was badged as an opportunity for small VCSE to get a chance to deliver ESF but I wonder how successful that ambition has been, my experience is that it requires larger organisations with wider capacity to achieve this.”

(Grant holder)

Looking more widely at the value of the programme from the perspective of grant holders and partners. There was near universal agreement (99% of all 256 respondents) that the programme and the individual projects were achieving success in engaging the genuinely hardest to help participants, as further illustrated by positive quotes from organisations involved:

“Our programme has been very successful and has demonstrated how a well-managed partnership can work closely with each other to deliver amazing results for participants. This has been the best support programme I have ever worked on, as finally something has been designed to focus on individual needs.”

(Grant holder)

“We are really pleased to be involved as we have made a huge difference to the lives of vulnerable people who are struggling with their finances and many other complex issues.”

(Partner)

Strong support (86% of 256 respondents) was also evident for the view that the support offered through the BBO programme is quite different to what else is available locally. As one survey respondent made clear:

“The BBO programme has brought a genuinely different way of working that has enabled local organisations to work together collaboratively in new ways that could previously not have been achieved.”

(Grant holder)

3.2.2 Participant perceived value

For respondents who had exited support and were able to reflect back, nearly two thirds of this group of 136 participants surveyed (62%) could not highlight anything that they felt was unhelpful about the support received. When asked, in an open question, what aspects of the support were particularly helpful, responses varied, reflecting the likely differing experiences and types of support delivered by BBO projects. While particular types of support or activities were referenced, such as a helpful mentor (41%), or job search support (21%), there was also a focus on the pastoral aspects of support. Other helpful aspects included having someone to listen to them, reported by 26%, building confidence (25%) and the encouraging, accepting approach of the project (13%). The following participant quotes further illustrate this:

“Having someone to talk to was the best bit for me, mainly my mentor at the project, who was very understanding to my special needs.”

(Participant)

“I think that it was just having someone who was focused on me and my needs.”

(Participant)

“It was good to have someone to talk to, who understands my mental health issues, and listens to me, and tried to help my situation.”

(Participant)

For the remaining 38% who reported some aspect of the help to be unhelpful, the issues raised included an insufficient period of support, courses not being particularly relevant or unavailability of specific courses that participants wanted to complete.

3.2.3 Economic value of the projects

The national evaluation of BBO did not attempt to assess the economic value of the programme or undertake a programme wide value for money assessment. The wide variety of intervention approaches makes it challenging to calculate this at a programme level. However, some local evaluations of BBO projects have included this dimension. A variety of assessment approaches have been taken locally and as such, while they are not directly comparable, they do serve to illustrate the potential value of the BBO support. It should be noted that the results presented here need to be treated with caution, and as indicative only, given that the reports and the economic methodologies deployed have not necessarily been peer reviewed and/or published in the public domain as yet.

A number of local evaluations followed a cost benefit assessment approach, calculating an overall monetary benefit based on a range of outcome areas. The scope of these assessments varied between projects. The [Moving on Tyne and Wear local evaluation](#) concluded that for every £1 spent on delivering the programme, £1.40 of benefits were generated. This included employment and training outcomes, as well as improvements in health and improved participant ability to deal with their own finances. Other evaluations had a narrower focus and looked at benefits in terms of economic savings for Government and other agencies. The cost benefit analysis undertaken for the Make Trax project found that for every £1 invested in the service, the average estimated benefit to the government and wider economy is £2.43. This is based on economic savings for the Government of the costs if a participant had remained as NEET and the loss of income to the individual participant. This evaluation did not include assessment of the value of the softer outcomes for participants or other social benefits.



Likewise, a number of projects have taken a Social Return on Investment approach in an attempt to assessing their wider social value. Include-IT approached this using wellbeing valuation techniques, resulting in an assessment that for every £1 invested in the programme £6.35 of social value has been created in terms self-confidence; better mental health and wellbeing; and reduced isolation. The social accounting methodology involved in SROI typically uses proxies for the value areas identified, which in some cases come from largely untested or unvalidated sources, so the assessments should be treated with some caution.

An alternative approach used by other projects is to assess value by generating a unit cost per participant supported. To illustrate, the Reaching out Across Durham calculated their participant unit cost to be £3117. Direct benchmarks generated from other programmes against which to assess these calculations for BBO projects are fairly limited, and subject to issues of comparability. However, previous research by the Audit Office²⁵ assessing employment programmes supporting disabled people into work suggests that this unit cost is comparable to others. The Work Choice programme, which is perhaps the nearest to BBO in terms of the participant profile from those assessed, was calculated as having a unit cost of £3800 per participant.

While direct comparison between these illustrative projects is not possible, the overall conclusion to be drawn from these examples is that in the main these BBO projects are generating positive economic value and showing comparable value to money compared to the evidence from similar programmes.

4.0 Concluding remarks and looking forward

The BBO programme is now into a second phase of delivery, with a high proportion of the projects initially funded agreeing an extended period of delivery, with most receiving additional funding. Projects have responded positively to the opportunity to extend and it has provided a focus for refinements and refocusing of project activity. In some cases, this is to address areas of underperformance, while for others the focus has been on expanding particularly successful aspects of the interventions or further enhancing the quality of the support they offer.

The latest verified MI data (up to June 2019) suggests that BBO projects are continuing to successfully engage participants, with over 89,000 participants having joined the programme by mid-2019. The target for the programme was to work with 81,866 in the initial period so this target has therefore been exceeded. The profile of these participants suggests the programme is continuing to reach some of the key target groups identified in the national ESF Operational Programme. Of note is the particularly positive performance in terms of engaging participants with disabilities (currently 49% of all participants engaged).

In terms of results and outcomes for participants, the programme continues to show a good level of performance. Programme data shows that 26,020 positive results have been achieved for those participants who have exited the programme, just under three quarters of the programme target. Positively, targets for employment results have been exceeded at this stage of delivery, with 12,266 participants in employment at exit, 101% of the programme target. Supporting data from the participant survey suggests that the employment gained by participants shows some permanency and security, with all participants who responded to the survey and reported being in employment in permanent roles and only one participant on a zero-hour contract. Moving into employment clearly has wider benefits for participants and their families beyond the financial security provided. Building a social network and the sense of independence and value from working are highly valued by participants.

Beyond what the ESF data reveals, and for those who have not achieved a direct employment result, a range of wider outcomes, progression and other changes that participants are experiencing as a result of BBO support are clearly evident. For those who have exited the programme but are not into employment as yet, their reported participation in volunteering or education and training at the end of their support shows positive progression steps. Even for those still receiving support there is some evidence of positive progression and a changed outlook. Participants typically felt that the support received will, in time, help them move into employment, as a result of providing them with confidence and skills to make the progression. Across all participants, whether in employment or not at this stage, improvements achieved in respect of soft outcomes, such as improved confidence and wellbeing, emerge particularly strongly from the evaluation evidence. Around three-quarters of participants (74%) reported improved confidence, with just under half (46%) reporting improved wellbeing.

It is necessary to note however, that the current COVID-19 pandemic may potentially present challenges to the future delivery of BBO and the profile of results and outcomes achieved in the next phase of delivery. It is likely that projects will need to make continued adaptations depending on the nature and length of any future lockdown restrictions. However, early evidence strongly illustrates how projects have successfully adapted to continue to provide support to participants through virtual means during the initial lockdown period, giving confidence that BBO projects will continue to be a source of support for participants through the Covid-19 pandemic. In some cases, the period has allowed for successful testing of alternative formats, such as the Game Changer virtual work experience sessions for young people, that may even be continued beyond the current challenging context. It is even possible that the current crisis may enable projects to reach target groups that, to date, have been more challenging. The specific crisis support being offered for some groups, for example, emergency accommodation for homeless, may present opportunities for engagement.

The current crisis may, however, also impact on external factors which may generate challenges for projects. With the UK unemployment rate expected to increase as a result of the current crisis,²⁶ it is possible that BBO projects may face increased demand, either in the short term consisting of those who lost jobs at the start of the crisis, evidenced by over two million new claims for benefits have been made since mid-March,²⁷ or later in 2020 when potential job losses are felt when the Government Job Retention Scheme is likely to end.

²⁶ www.statista.com/statistics/1107870/uk-unemployment-forecast

²⁷ resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-economic-effects-of-coronavirus-in-the-uk

The impact of the resulting economic crisis may be more firmly felt in terms of projects' ability to achieve employment results for the participants they are already supporting. Evidence is emerging suggesting that particular groups may be disproportionately affected, with many of the core target groups of the BBO programme identified as those most likely to be affected. For example, it is the assessment of the Youth Futures Foundation that young people are likely to be particularly affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic.²⁸ While no explicit evidence exists, it is possible that those with long term health conditions may face further disadvantage in the labour market, given the increased likelihood of them being directly affected by the virus or needing to self-isolate for periods which may affect employers' views of them as potential employees.

Research by the consultancy firm McKinsey²⁹ suggests that nearly 80% of workers are facing job insecurity, with many of the sectors likely to be particularly affected being those in which BBO participants have commonly found employment. UK hospitality and retail sectors have already had around 46% of workers furloughed³⁰ and the speed and degree of recovery for these sectors is unclear. In the short term at least, employment opportunities for some BBO participants are likely to be more limited, based what is known from the participant survey about the sectors and types of jobs participants are securing. The exception is in key worker roles, where employment opportunities continue to exist. This is illustrated by a slight increase in the number of vacancies posted on the Department for Work and Pensions' Find a Job website³¹ since the beginning of March, driven entirely by jobs in the health sector and retail, warehousing and delivery. BBO projects may need to (re)focus their employer engagement activity or job search support to help BBO participants access these opportunities that do continue to exist.

While there is much evidence that BBO projects have changed their delivery approaches since the outset in response to learning or wider developments, the current COVID-19 crisis has required projects to make much quicker and potentially more significant changes. It appears from the examples observed that a number of projects have managed to do this successfully, generating creative ways to support participants, some of which have the potential for continued use as the transition out of the current situation occurs.

4.1 Next steps

With the BBO projects operating over an extended timescale and the programme continuing to 2023, the national evaluation is also continuing to ensure ongoing learning and evidence is captured for the full lifetime of the programme. This continued period of evaluation will also allow analysis of the how the projects adapt and perform in the period that the UK recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. The final work-plan is in the process of being agreed with the Fund, but the following strands of activity are planned which will allow expansion of the findings presented here:

- Further waves of a participant survey with a focus on exploring the sustainability of participant outcomes
- Additional qualitative project interviews to continue to explore various aspects of project level delivery
- A further grant holder and partner survey to capture change in BBO partnerships and the sustainability of provision
- Research with wider stakeholders (LEPs, local case studies) to assess how BBO fits in the landscape of other services, or local and national service delivery infrastructure
- Continued analysis of wider evidence sources including MI data and local evaluation reports
- 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.

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