



Building Better Opportunities Evaluation:

Final Evaluation Report

September 2023



A photograph of a man and a woman in a kitchen. The man, on the left, has curly brown hair and is wearing a colorful patterned sweater and a blue and white striped apron. He is looking down at a tray on the table. The woman, on the right, has dark hair and is wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and a blue and white striped apron. She is also looking down at the table. The kitchen has large windows with stained glass panes and several white pendant lights hanging from the ceiling. The overall scene is brightly lit and appears to be a community or shared kitchen environment.

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Summary

The Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme provided joint funds of £605 million from the European Social Fund (ESF) and The National Lottery Community Fund (The National Lottery Community Fund). Across a seven-year lifespan, the programme provided grants to 132 delivery partnerships across England to support people with complex, and often multiple, barriers to move towards the labour market. Through a programme of varied activities, BBO aimed to:

- Help the most disadvantaged.
- Tackle social exclusion.
- Be focused on the capabilities of each individual.

- Lead to better coordinated services.
- Create new opportunities for work.

Ecorys was commissioned in 2016 to draw out learning from delivery and evaluate the programme using a mixed-methods approach; a full methodology is provided in the annex of the report. This is the final of seven annual reports and provides a summative overview of BBO achievements. It considers the programme's delivery methods, outputs (in terms of the number and types of people supported), and outcomes for participants and other stakeholders.

Reaching and engaging participants

Over the programme lifetime, BBO projects engaged with 181,522 people. Importantly, BBO projects successfully engaged people who would typically be considered furthest from the labour market at the point of entry to the programme:

- 49% Participants were economically inactive.
- 49% Participants had a disability or long-term health condition.
- 63% Participants were in a jobless household.

- 81% Participants belonged to a disadvantaged group.

A combination of pro-active engagement and outreach measures and building strong relationships with varied external referral partners were important success factors in achieving strong engagement with key target groups. Grant holders and partners also told us that Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations had played an important role in supporting engagement, particularly from groups who were not engaged with mainstream employment support services.

Project delivery models

There was some variation in the intervention approaches and delivery models implemented across the programme, as BBO projects tailored their approaches to local needs and the needs of their target groups. However, all projects had three factors in common which the evaluation found were critical in supporting participants to successfully move towards work:

- **One to one support**, via a key worker model built on a non-judgemental, trusting relationship between project staff and participants.
- **Flexible, person-centred support**, focused on individual participant needs, motivation and aspirations.
- **Holistic support to overcome other barriers to work such as housing, ill health or debt**, recognising that if

these barriers were not addressed then participants would be less likely to move towards or achieve sustained employment.

Alongside these approaches, working with employers to address stigma and find appropriate employment opportunities for BBO participants proved successful. Providing in-work support to help participants in the transition into employment was an effective activity for many projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw BBO projects adapt to a rapidly changed environment, with lockdown measures having a significant impact on both the labour market and delivery of the programme. Projects implemented measures to facilitate remote and digital participation and introduced new activities to support mental wellbeing.

Outcomes for BBO participants

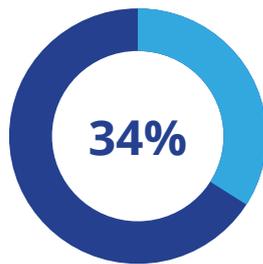
BBO-funded projects were expected to report their achievements against three key results:

- Movement into employment (including self-employment).
- Movement into education or training.
- Movement from economic inactivity to job search.

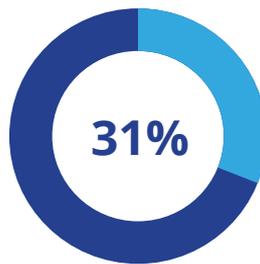
In this report, the analysis focuses on those participants who provided evidence of their exit destination on leaving the programme. This verification process enabled projects to formally record a result and was completed for 111,639 programme participants (62% of the total cohort). Analysis of programme management information (MI) data showed that of this group, 73% attained at least one of the three key programme results.

Results achieved by participants with a known, verified destination

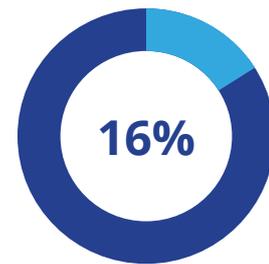
73% Total number of engagements



of participants moved to employment (including self-employment).



of participants moved to education and training.



of participants moved from economic inactivity to job search.

Groups who could be considered furthest from the labour market achieved high levels of positive outcomes; 77% of economically inactive people with a verified exit destination achieved at least one of the three main results, as did 69% of people with a disability. Participants from ethnic minorities had high levels of success, with 88% attaining a result.

There were some fluctuations on the types of results achieved by different demographic groups – the rate of employment outcomes decreased for participants over the age of 45, and participants aged between 16-24 were the most likely to enter education or training. Men were slightly more likely to enter employment than women, and much less likely to enter education or training.

Findings from the evaluation's participant survey showed that there was a good rate of sustained employment, with 30% remaining

in work around 10 to 12 months after leaving the programme. Some of this group had also seen progression in work, receiving pay rises or moving to higher skilled roles. Of those who had not moved into work on leaving BBO, 20% had applied for jobs within four to five months of leaving the programme. Half of those who had not moved into a positive destination on leaving the programme believed that the support from BBO would help them to get a job in the future.

The evaluation found that BBO had had other significant outcomes for participants. Of those who responded to the follow-up survey,

- 71% reported increased confidence.
- 64% reported improved wellbeing.
- 43% reported that they had developed new skills.

Other positive outcomes included improvements in financial situations, more involvement in the community, and improved

housing situations, all of which respondents directly attributed to their involvement in BBO.

Outcomes for grant holders and partners

Applicants to the BBO programme were actively encouraged to work in formal partnerships with other organisations to tackle the complex barriers to work faced by BBO's target participants. Across the lifetime of the programme, 1,731 organisations were involved in the 132 partnerships, with grant holders fostering new partnerships as well as engaging with existing partners. Most partnerships (57%) had fewer than five partners, although a small number had more than 20. Partnership sizes and structures regularly changed over the course of the funding period, with some partners leaving and new ones being added. Generally, respondents viewed these changes positively and as leading to improvements in delivery.

The programme was designed to facilitate VCSE sector access to and participation in the delivery of complex funding. A review of TNCLF data showed that more than half of BBO-funded organisations had VCSE status. Where organisations had private company status, they were generally not-for-profit or had specialist inputs to delivery (for example, therapists and training providers). The role of VCSE partners in reaching and engaging BBO participants was highly valued by grant holders. However, participation in the programme could be challenging for VCSE partners due to

the burden of administrative, reporting and evidence requirements associated with ESF.

Grant holders and partners reported a wide range of benefits for their own organisations from participating in BBO. These benefits included improved capacity and confidence to deliver employability projects and administer complex funding projects, developing new partnerships, and upskilling staff. They also widely reported benefits for their local areas, resulting from improved partnerships and links between local services and businesses.

Grant holders and partners reported being interested in continued delivery of employability support post-BBO, particularly in relation to some of the key principles of the programme such as one-to-one, flexible and person-centred support. There was some evidence that participation in BBO had helped funded organisations to secure funding for employment support from other sources (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships or Local Authorities). However, uncertainties around future funding (such as delays in the people and skills strand of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund) made planning for continuation activities challenging.



Conclusions

The evaluation found that BBO was effective in meeting its aims:

- **Help the most disadvantaged:** The programme was extremely successful in reaching those with multiple and complex barriers to work, and groups who were not engaging with, or who had not been successfully supported by, mainstream employment programmes. The programme exceeded set targets for engagement despite the challenges for engagement posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. BBO also made a strong contribution to the national targets identified in the ESF Operational
 - **Tackle social exclusion:** The programme enabled organisations to provide more intensive, individualised and longer-term support, which was key to its ability to tackle social exclusion, given the role of unemployment as a driver of social exclusion. The holistic approach taken by projects meant they were able to address a range of issues or barriers that individuals faced which enabled them to progress, and performance was strong in terms of positive outcomes for participants.
-

- **Be focused on the capabilities of each individual:** Projects successfully replicated existing good practice in terms of developing a support offer structured around key worker/coaching models, supplemented by specialist support as and when required. This was highly tailored and individualised with the progression journey unique to individuals depending on their starting point and personal goals.
- **Lead to better coordinated services:** There is strong evidence that BBO projects had an impact by filling gaps in existing local provision and/or adding value to statutory services supporting disadvantaged groups across their range of needs. The reputational capital generated for organisations from their involvement in the BBO programme was important for supporting better connected, effective local partnerships. However, despite some positive examples of provision being sustained, most organisations involved in BBO delivery face uncertainty in terms of ability to continue their provision.
- **Create new opportunities for work:** The BBO projects performed strongly in supporting participants into employment where that was an appropriate and

achievable outcome for them. Employer engagement was a strong feature of BBO delivery used to facilitate these job outcomes. In isolated examples, this did include working directly with employers to create new opportunities for work, but more readily involved working closely with employers to broker opportunities for individuals. This included facilitating the transition of individuals into work where additional support mechanisms were required. With BBO delivered against a changing labour market context, particularly the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, this individual level brokerage proved most effective.

The BBO achievements were a product of the diversity of activities, services, and approaches adopted across the programme overall, and within different areas. The programme was effective in delivering good evidence of what works and throughout the programme, a wealth of resources was produced by individual partnerships and at programme level. These can be found on the [The National Lottery Community Fund BBO impact webpage](#).

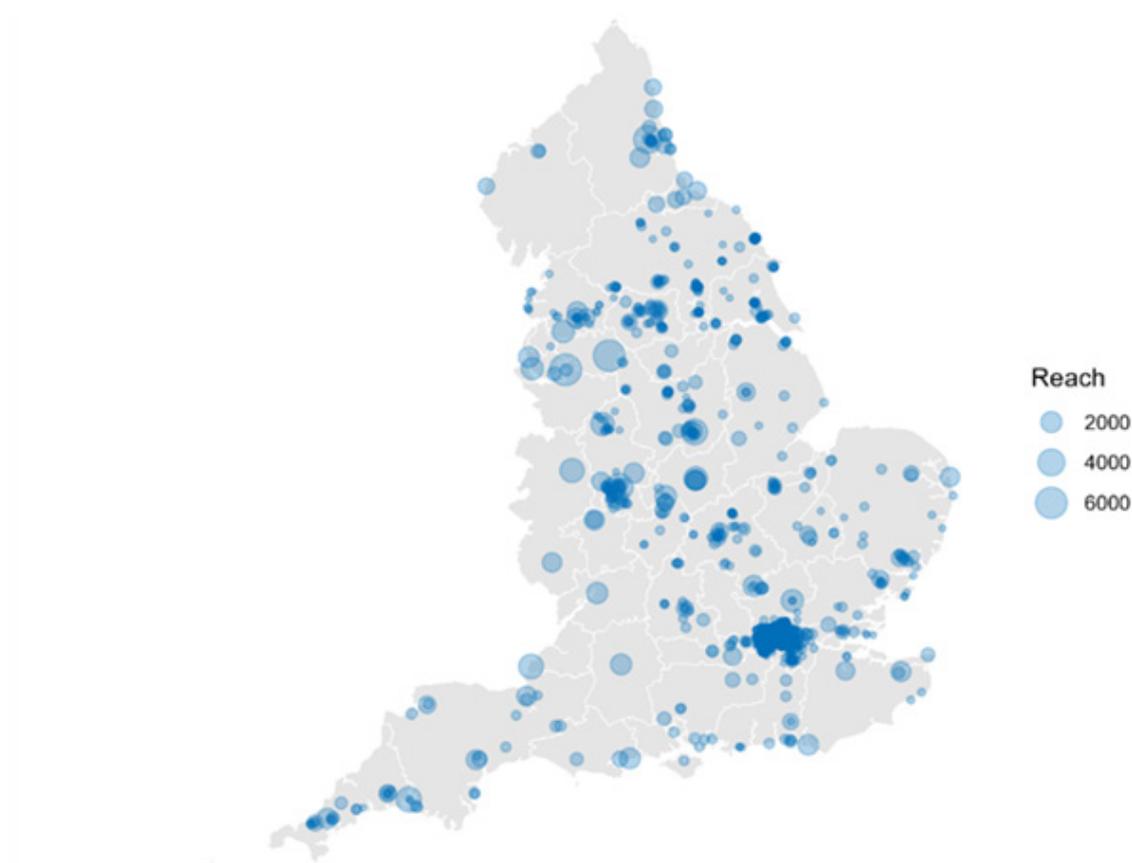


The Building Better Opportunities Programme

Building Better Opportunities (BBO) was a £605 million, seven-year programme which launched in 2016 and ran until 2023. The National Lottery Community Fund matched funds provided by 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 groups facing complex barriers to work. Oversight for the programme sat with the ESF Managing Authority at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

With this funding, the BBO programme was developed using a decentralised approach, with 39 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 for an initial three-year period. In 2019, The National Lottery Community Fund confirmed extensions for many of the BBO projects, either in the form of additional funding or extended delivery timescales. In total, 121 projects received an extension to 2023.

Reach of BBO projects, mapped to LEP Boundaries¹



How BBO worked

Projects funded by BBO aimed to improve the employability of the most disadvantaged by providing a range of support such as confidence building, skills development, and help with financial literacy. There were two essential criteria participants needed to meet to be eligible to take part in BBO:

1. Be legally resident in the UK and able to take paid employment in European Union member states.

2. Be unemployed or economically inactive² when joining the programme.

Projects were encouraged to support those with multiple and complex barriers to work, such as health issues and disabilities, ethnic minorities, people with parental or caring responsibilities, and those from jobless or single-earner households. Some LEPs also factored in specific target groups for projects funded in their area, such as young people, carers

¹ Map sources: BBO MI data. National Statistics Postcode Lookup UK Coordinates (September 2023), ONS Geography, ONS, <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/Maps/National-Statistics-Postcode-Lookup-UK-Coordinates/77ra-mbbn> and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) boundaries (May 2021, updated March 2023), ONS Geography, ONS, <https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/local-enterprise-partnerships-may-2021-en-bgc-1/explore?location=51.643705%2C-1.313398%2C7.79>. Accessed September 2023.

² If someone is economically inactive, they are not in work and either not actively seeking work or not available for work. Participants may be in receipt of certain benefits (such as Employment and Support Allowance) and could also be in training or education of some kind. They may also be retired, disabled or a full-time carer.

or people with disabilities. In total, 181,522 people took part in the programme. Their demographics and the types of barriers faced are explored more in the following chapter.

BBO projects were delivered across England by 132 partnerships which included 1,731 organisations across the whole funding period. Although single organisations were able to apply to BBO, applicants were actively encouraged to work with other organisations; together, they would have a better breadth and depth of experience to tackle the complex barriers to work faced by BBO's target participants.

Partnerships were headed by a lead organisation (the grant holder), who had legal responsibility for all funding awarded and accountability for any funding distributed to other organisations. Partnerships were expected to be formalised through partnership agreements and a collaborative approach to delivery, for example through partnership meetings.

It was also anticipated that some organisations would take a less formalised role, for example as referring partners. The National Lottery Community Fund was interested in the role of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in the delivery of BBO, and whether the programme could facilitate VCSE access and participation in the delivery of complex funding such as ESF. The payment model for BBO – via grant funding which was not dependent on outcomes or results – was expected to support this, particularly as a contrast to the Payment by Results (PBR) structures used in most mainstream employment support programmes.

Applicants to BBO responded to project outlines developed with the LEP for their area, with the aim of tackling specific local needs. However, there were five key aims BBO projects were expected to address - regardless of specific local requirements - which reflected the wider aims of the European Social Fund. These were to³:

- Help the most disadvantaged.
- Tackle social exclusion.
- Be focused on the capabilities of each individual.
- Lead to better coordinated services.
- Create new opportunities for work.

Projects were also asked to ensure that they were not duplicating existing provision being delivered by support services, mainstream organisations and statutory bodies.

The evaluation found that BBO projects used a range of approaches to support participants. The approaches were often tailored to meet the needs of specific target groups, for example including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in support targeted at refugees. The evaluation also found that there were commonalities in delivery models across all BBO projects, regardless of location or focus. These included:

- Delivery of 1:1 support with a “keyworker” model⁴.

3 https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/building-better-opportunities/general/building_better_opportunities_prog_guide.pdf?mtime=20181205164435&focal=none Accessed November 2023.

4 A key worker model usually involves a named practitioner working on a one-to-one basis with a service user, or participant. The practitioner will offer support themselves on a range of issues but will also coordinate access to other support providers or services as required.

- Flexibility and individualised packages of support.
- Holistic support.
- Tailored employment support and employer engagement work.

These approaches, and others commonly included in BBO projects such as tackling digital inclusion, financial capability and mental health support, are explored in more detail in the rest of this report.

About the evaluation

Ecorys was commissioned to evaluate BBO and gather learning from the programme from 2016. The original evaluation contract ran until 2019 – the original end date for the programme – but was extended to 2023 in line with the extension to BBO delivery.

Key research questions for the evaluation centred on whether the BBO programme works in relation to successfully moving people towards and into work, and what benefits there have been for those participating in the programme. The evaluation explored the following questions:

- What models / approaches / principles effectively support those furthest from the labour market to move along their pathway to employment?
- What difference has BBO made to the lives of participants?
- How successful has the BBO programme been in enabling the VCSE sector to access the funding?
- What difference has BBO made to existing services?
- What learning can be identified to take forward for future employment programmes?

The evaluation took a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative research with surveys and analysis of programme Monitoring Information (MI). A full description of the methodology can be found in the report annex, but broadly includes:

- **Case study visits to projects**, involving interviews, observations and focus groups with project leads, project delivery staff across different partners, and participants, plus interviews with other relevant local stakeholders.
 - **Place-based case studies**, exploring implementation and outcomes related to BBO at a locality level.
 - **Participant surveys**, repeated at different points in time to explore progress and outcomes.
-

- **Grant holder / partner surveys**, to explore the experience and outcomes of participating in BBO for those who received funding or were involved in delivery.
- **A review of project-level evaluations**, triangulating findings from the national evaluation with those conducted at a local level.
- **Learning events** (both in person and virtually) for grant holders and partners, covering a range of themes.

The evaluation has produced a range of outputs including six annual reports and a number of thematic learning papers. All outputs from the evaluation form part of the programme's legacy and are available on [The National Lottery Community Fund's website](#).

Operating in a changing labour market: responding to COVID-19

The first few years of BBO saw projects operating in a labour market context of relative stability. The employment rate for 16–64-year-olds had been climbing since 2011 and the unemployment rate had decreased fairly consistently since 2014. This was despite uncertainties for the UK economy and lower net migration following the UK's exit from the European Union.

However, in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on labour market conditions. There was a high level of redundancies on the back of lockdowns, the employment rate dropped, and unemployment saw a significant spike. While unemployment levels dropped back to previous rates in 2022 following the lifting of pandemic restrictions, there were other changes in the market: labour supply could not keep up with demand and there was a record level of job vacancies and a low level of unemployment (although in September 2023 the claimant count for unemployment related benefits remained higher than pre-pandemic levels).

At the same time, the number of people who were economically inactive had increased significantly compared to before the pandemic. Although this has now improved, there were still 8.78 million people in the UK who were economically inactive in July 2023⁵.

5 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/september2023>. Accessed November 2023.

Importantly for the provision of employment support, there have been shifting trends in the demographics of those who are economically inactive. For example, by the end of 2022 the number of people economically inactive due to long-term illness was at the highest level since comparable records began in 1993 at 30% of all economically inactive people⁶. There has also been an increase in inactivity amongst those aged 50-64, and young people. The pandemic also had a disproportionate effect on other groups, and pre-existing inequalities in the labour market were exacerbated for groups including (but not limited to) ethnic minorities, women, and disabled people). The impact on these groups was explored in more detail in our [2021 Annual Report 5](#) and our [2022 Annual Report 6](#).

Responding to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact both on the labour market and on BBO projects. In the first quarter of “pandemic delivery”, the rate of new engagement with the programme almost stopped while participants and projects alike adjusted to the impact of lockdowns, with some providers focusing on providing an emergency response to participants. However, BBO projects rapidly adjusted and returned to pre-pandemic referral levels quickly. Our [2021 Annual Report 5](#) explored how projects reinvigorated their approach to recruitment of participants, by:

- Engaging with new referral partners.
- Increasing their use of social media as an engagement tool.
- Developing new mechanisms for self-referrals, such as easy to access online forms.
- Meeting new participants outdoors to complete verification checks of identification and employment status.

Projects also explored ways to deliver their support remotely, although this proved to be a challenge for some project staff and participants alike. Some participants requested light touch support only while children were not in school, for example, while others disengaged from BBO completely. Delivery staff reported that they found it difficult to build relationships with participants over the phone, and many participants did not have the equipment or digital literacy to participate in online support through video calls.

Project activities began to lean towards digital inclusion, exploring ways to encourage remote access through the provision of equipment where possible, and through building digital skills. The pandemic also influenced an increased focus on mental wellbeing amongst BBO projects, which is explored further in this report.

6 Chris Thomas, Dec 2022, Getting Better? Health and the Labour Market. <https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-12/getting-better-chp-dec22.pdf>. Accessed November 2023.

About this report

This report draws on all strands of our evaluation activity and our existing evaluation outputs to provide a summative view of the BBO programme's achievements, linking back to the programme's initial aims. It is structured around three main themes: 1) what the programme achieved in terms of participant engagement and results; 2) what aspects of the delivery models used were perceived to be particularly important; and 3) how organisations engaged in the programme.

It also explores to what extent those organisations, and the localities they were working in, benefitted from participation in the programme. Throughout the report, where relevant, we have referred to other outputs from the evaluation where the reader can find more detail about the BBO programme approaches, challenges and context.





What difference did BBO make for people who engaged?

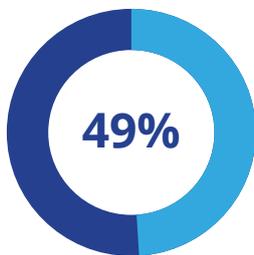
Key findings

- The BBO programme reached more than 181,522 people over the course of 7 years.
- The programme successfully moved individuals towards work. 73% of participants with a verified exit destination⁷ achieved one of the three key programme outcomes: securing employment, moving into education or training, or undertaking active job-searching from prior economic inactivity meaning they were not looking for a job or available to start work.
- BBO was particularly successful in achieving results for groups furthest from the labour market. More than three-quarters of participants who were economically inactive, and over two-thirds who faced complex barriers to work (including homelessness, ex-offender status, disability, and living in a jobless household), achieved one of the three key outcomes.
- Participants entered jobs that were sustainable in the medium term, with 79% of participants who secured work, including self-employment, staying in the same roles for 4-5 months.
- Participants experienced a range of wider outcomes from their participation in the BBO projects: 72% of participants reported increased confidence and 60% reported increased wellbeing.

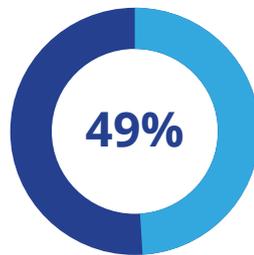
Reaching those furthest from the labour market

BBO successfully engaged **181,522** people between the start of the programme in 2016 and closure in March 2023, exceeding the programme target of 175,206.

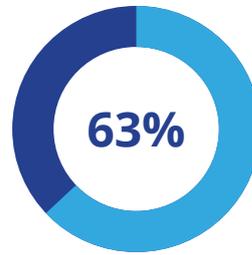
181,522 individuals supported



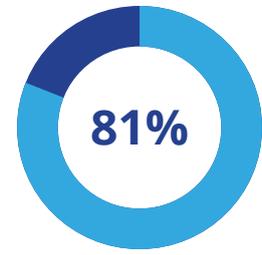
Participants were economically inactive



Participants had a disability or long-term health condition



Participants were from a jobless household



Participants belonged to a disadvantaged group

⁷ Participant results were verified through evidence provided by participants within four weeks of exit from the programme to confirm their onward destination. This verification process was completed for 111,639 of leavers (62% of the total participant cohort), allowing projects to claim a result or outcome for those participants. However, there is no known destination for 66,581 participants. It is therefore possible that more participants moved into education or training or employment on exit but had not informed the project. This issue has been highlighted in previous evaluation reports (see 2022 [Annual Report 6](#), p.55).

Programme monitoring data show that BBO was successful in engaging a diverse range of participants, including those furthest from the labour market:⁸

- 49% of participants were **economically inactive** upon joining the programme, whilst the remaining 51% were **unemployed, including long-term unemployed**.
- Almost half of participants were **male** (49%) and over half were **female** (51%). 337 participants identified their gender as 'other' (0.2%).
- 15% of participants were **aged 55 and over**.
- Almost three quarters (72%) of participants were **White British**, 9% were **Asian/Asian British**, 7% were **Black/Black British**. 3% identified as having **mixed/multiple ethnicities**, 2% identified as Arab ethnicity, and 7% identified their ethnicity as 'other'.
- 15% of participants lived in single adult households with dependent children, being **primary or sole caregivers**. 20% of participants lived in households with dependent children and no employment income.
- 38% of participants were recorded as having **no basic skills** when joining the programme. 12% had **not progressed beyond primary education** (ISCED level 1).

Participants experienced known barriers to employment: 63% of participants lived in **jobless households**; 49% of participants were **disabled**; 13% of participants had **ex-offender** status; and 8% of participants identified as **homeless** when joining the BBO programme. 41% of participants experienced **more than one of these barriers to work**, indicative of the complex challenges individuals faced moving toward work.

These barriers also intersected with other barriers to work experienced by participants. These included low levels of educational attainment, being carers (sometimes sole) of dependents, and other needs such as experiencing debt, financial difficulties or living in geographically deprived areas.

To achieve this strong profile of participant engagement, BBO projects typically focused significant attention on referral and engagement activities across the delivery period, also recognising that the intended scale of subsequent outcomes and results will only be achieved with participants on board. While some challenges have been experienced in terms of building awareness and ensuring full understanding of the eligibility requirements amongst referral partners, projects responded creatively and proactively to ensure they engaged the profile of participants targeted by BBO.

⁸ The evaluation considered approaches to benchmarking the BBO programme's performance against other employment support programmes. However, at the time of writing the final report there was no published data available for programmes with a comparable target group.

A combination of referral routes, pro-active engagement measures and building strong relationships with external referral partners are key success factors in this area. The following chapter provides more information on approaches to participant engagement. This is also addressed in the [2018 Annual Report 2](#) and [2019 Annual Report 3](#).

Despite challenges during the transition to hybrid ways of working as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (documented in the [2021 Annual Report 5](#)) and an initial drop in engagements, projects continued to successfully engage participants through to the final year of delivery. By adapting their mechanisms for engagement and support, 63,471 individuals engaged in BBO in the post-pandemic period up until the programme stopped receiving new referrals.⁹

However, analysis of the programme management information (MI) data suggests this cohort faced greater disadvantage than those who engaged in the programme pre-pandemic, likely to be confounded by the cost-of-living crisis. For example, 54% of participants who joined the programme after the pandemic and until the programme closed were economically inactive upon joining the programme, compared to 47% of those who joined before March 2020. With the evident increase of people with this status, projects continued to work flexibly and creatively to engage economically inactive participants.

⁹ For the purposes of this report, post-pandemic is defined as activity which took place after 1st April 2020.



Achieving change for individuals

Of the 181,522 participants engaged in the programme, destinations on leaving

BBO were recorded for 62% of them.

Moving towards work

BBO projects are required to report participant attainment of three key programme results. These results relate to progress into or towards employment, and specifically whether, upon finishing support, individuals are:

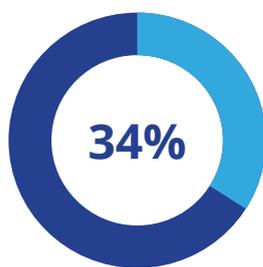
- In employment.
- In education or training.
- Moving from being economically inactive when joining the programme (meaning

that they are not looking for work or are unavailable for work) to actively job-searching when leaving the programme.

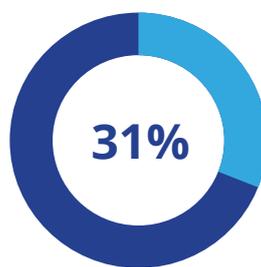
Analysis of the programme's MI data revealed that among programme leavers with a verified destination, **73% attained at least one of the three key results¹⁰** after their engagement with BBO¹¹. Where percentages of participants attaining results are referenced in this chapter, this relates to the cohort with a known, verified exit destination (that is, 62% of the total BBO participant cohort).

Results achieved by participants with a known, verified destination

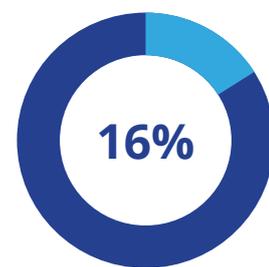
73% Total number of engagements



Participants moving to employment
(including self-employment)



Participants moving to
education and training



Participants moving from
economic inactivity to
job search

¹⁰ Some participants left the programme into education or training as well as job search or employment, meaning the total number of results achieved is higher than the total number of participants achieving results.

¹¹ Participant results were verified through evidence provided by participants within four weeks of exit from the programme to confirm their onward destination. This verification process was completed for 111,639 of leavers (62% of the total participant cohort), allowing projects to claim a result or outcome for those participants. However, there is no known destination for 66,581 participants. It is therefore possible that more participants moved into education or training or employment on exit but had not informed the project. This issue has been highlighted in previous evaluation reports (see 2022 Annual Report 6, p.55).

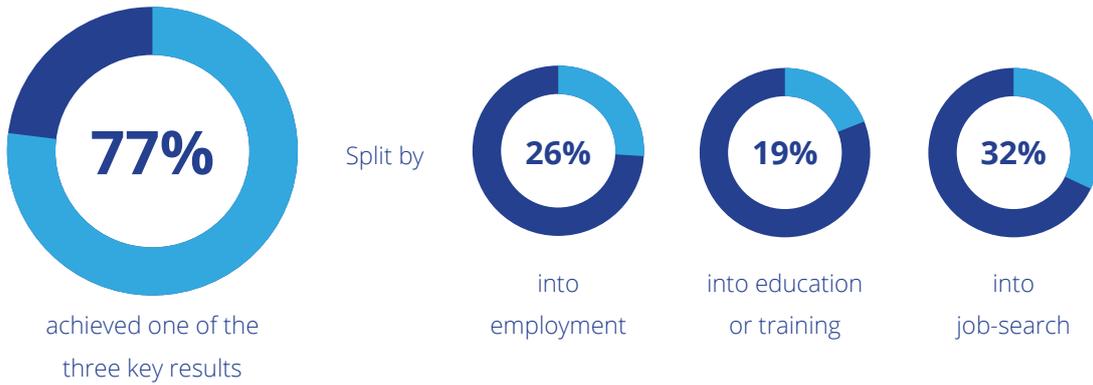
The programme successfully supported **38,001 participants into employment** (including self-employment), accounting for more than a third (34%) of participants with a verified destination. **34,656 participants were engaged in education or training** (31%) upon leaving the programme.

Positive outcomes were evident across groups furthest from the labour market. Within these groups, many participants moved into work, and others took substantive steps to start searching for employment, overcoming barriers to employment.

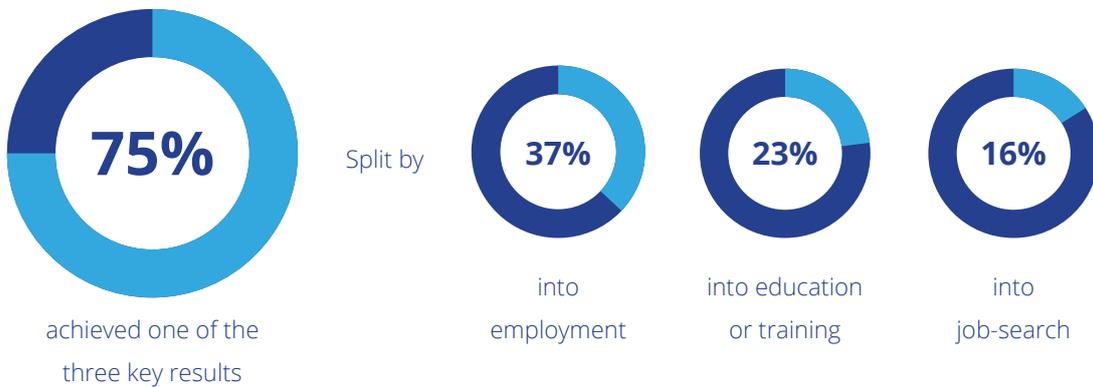


Results achieved by participant groups furthest from the labour market

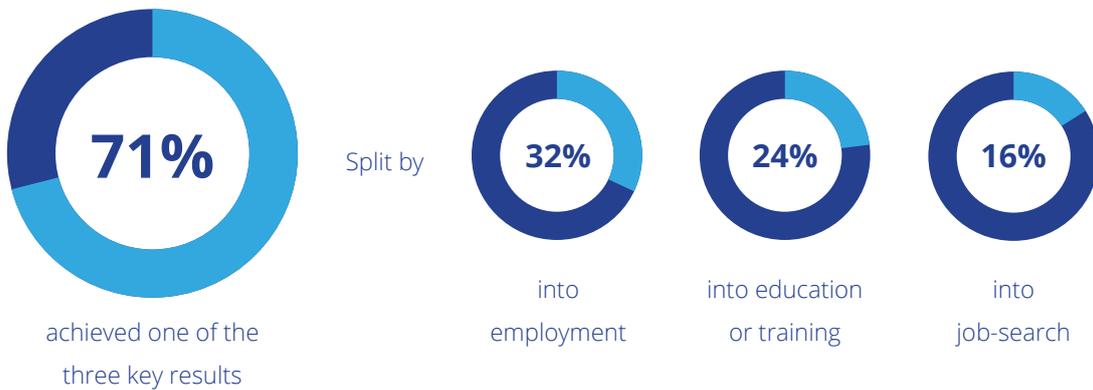
Economically inactive participants



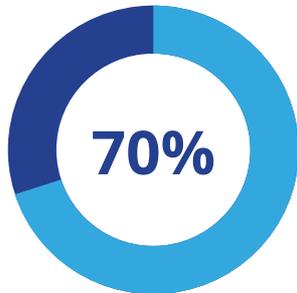
Homeless participants



Participants living in a jobless household

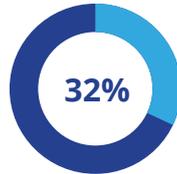


Participants with offender status

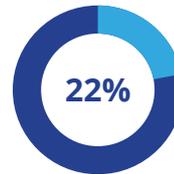


achieved one of the
three key results

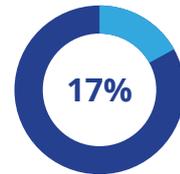
Split by



into
employment

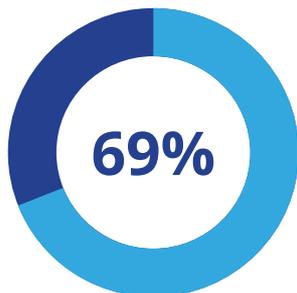


into education
or training



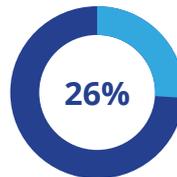
into
job-search

Participants with a disability

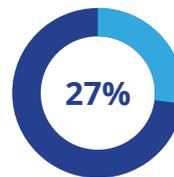


achieved one of the
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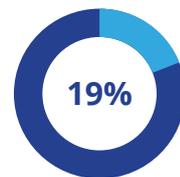
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into
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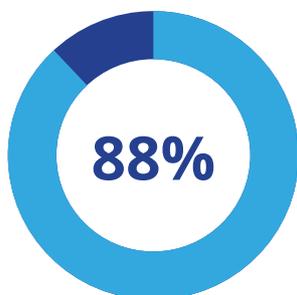


into education
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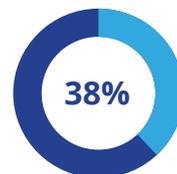
into
job-search

Participants from ethnic minorities

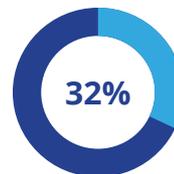


achieved one of the
three key results

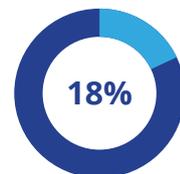
Split by



into
employment



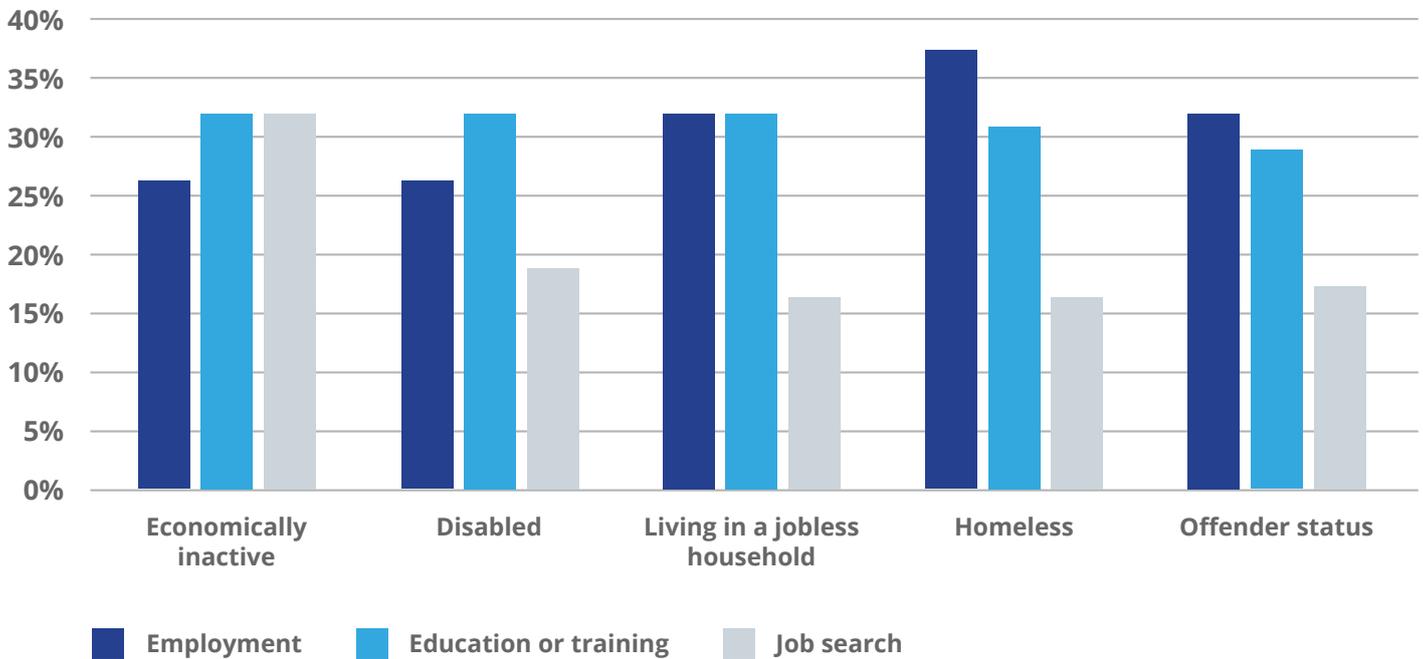
into education
or training



into
job-search

- The programme was particularly successful in moving participants who were economically inactive on joining BBO into, or closer to, work. 14,795 participants who were economically inactive when joining the programme entered work (26%) and a further 18,115 participants started actively job-searching (32%) upon exiting the programme. 18,482 formerly economically inactive participants were engaged in education or training upon leaving BBO (32%).
 - Almost half of all BBO participants had a disability. Whilst 26% of participants with a disability successfully moved into employment, employment outcomes were worse than for participants who do not have a disability (41%). Disabled participants were slightly more likely to leave the programme engaged in education or training (32%) than participants who did not have a disability (30%).
 - The programme succeeded in supporting disabled economically inactive participants to achieve results, with 19% starting job-searching from previous economic inactivity, compared to 14% for participants without a disability. Of the cohort with a verified exit destination, there was a 70% reduction in the number of people with a disability who were economically inactive from joining the programme to leaving (52,459 on joining, to 15,925 on exit). When taken in combination with qualitative findings, this would indicate that the programme had played an important role in removing health conditions as a barrier to work. We explore different aspects of support for people with disabilities further in the chapter [‘What factors made a difference for people?’](#).
-

Figure 1: Achievement of key results for groups furthest from the labour market



Base sizes: Economically inactive: 57,227; Disabled: 52,458; Living in a jobless household: 66,993; Homeless: 7,380; Offender status: 11,658.

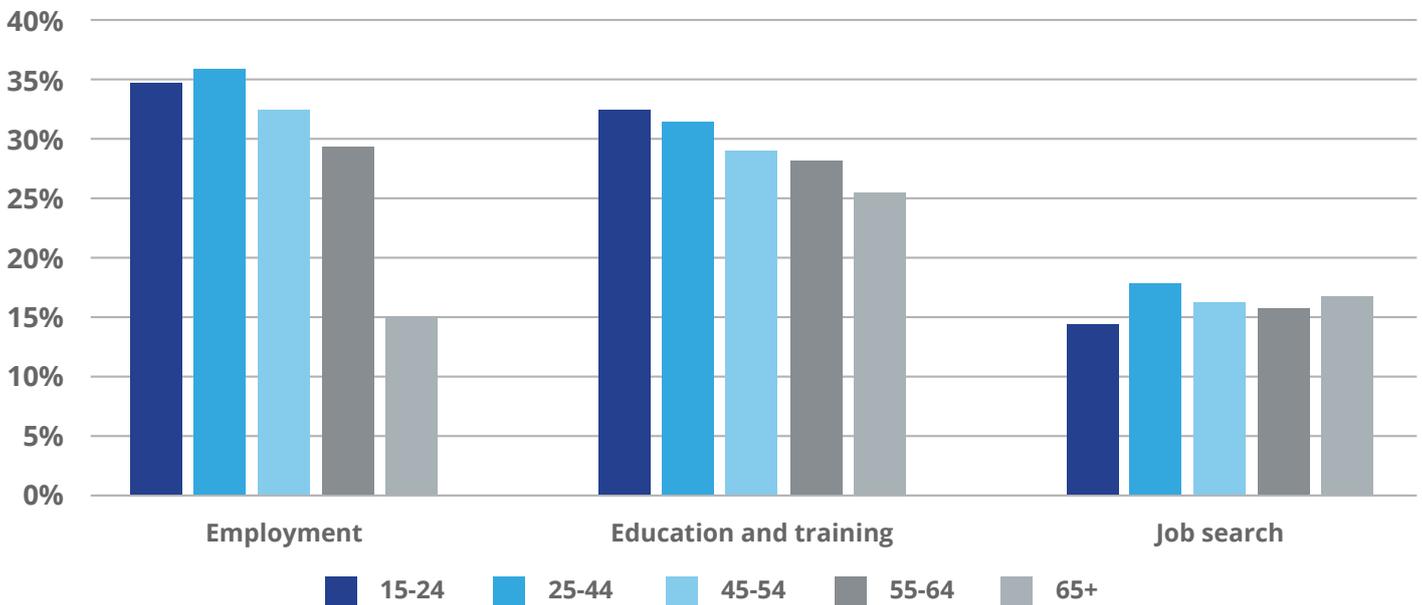
The achievement of key results also varied across demographic groups. These results must be placed within the context of the starting points of different groups:

- Black/Black British** participants were the most likely to join the programme as unemployed (54%) rather than economically inactive (46%), indicating that more of these participants were closer to the labour market than other ethnic groups. This goes some way to explain why Black/Black British participants were most likely to enter employment (44%), but least likely to be in education when they left the programme (30%). Along with the Mixed/Multiple ethnic group, they were least likely to move from economic inactivity to job-search (15%).
- Asian/Asian British** participants were the most likely to join the programme as economically inactive (61%) and least likely to be unemployed (39%), indicating that more participants from this group than other were further away from the labour market. This can explain why Asian/Asian British participants were the most likely to move from being economically inactive to actively job-searching (21%). 35% of Asian/Asian British participants moved into employment and 33% were engaged in education or training when they left the programme.
- Half of **White/White British** participants started BBO as economically inactive (50%) and the other half (50%) were unemployed. Consistent with findings from previous evaluation reports, White/White British

participants were least likely to enter employment (32%) following BBO. 31% left the programme in education or training.

- Attainment of results also differed by gender. **Men** were slightly more likely to enter employment through BBO (36%) than **women** (32%) or people who identified their gender as **other** (32%). Women were more likely to move from economic inactivity to job-searching (18%) than men, or those who identified their gender as 'other' (both 15%). Men were least likely to move into education or training (15%) compared to women (33%), or those who identified their gender as 'other' (32%).
- **25-44-year-olds were most likely to attain employment** (36%) with the support of the programme, closely followed by **15-24 year olds** (35%). However, of the 25-44-year-old age group, men had greater employment outcomes (40%) than women (33%), likely due to increased levels of caring responsibilities for women in this age group.
- The rate of employment outcomes decreased beyond the age of 45, aligning with wider findings that older people are more likely to leave the labour market after a redundancy, rather than moving into other work. Indeed, adults **aged 65 and over were least likely to enter work** (15%). As noted in [Annual Report 6](#), attitudes towards age are influential in moving people towards work, both in terms of employer perceptions and the perceptions of older people themselves.
- **Young people aged 15-24 were most likely to be engaged in education or training** when they left the programme (33%), with rates of being in education decreasing with age but remaining relatively high at 25% for adults aged 65 and over.
- Participants aged **25-44 were also more likely than other age groups to move from economic inactivity to active job-searching** (18%), however the differences between age groups were more subtle within this outcome area.

Figure 2: Attainment of key results (employment, education and training, and job-search), by age group



Base sizes: Aged 15-24: 25,728; 25-44 47,552; 45-54: 21,291; 55-64: 15,862; 65+: 1,206.

Journeys beyond BBO

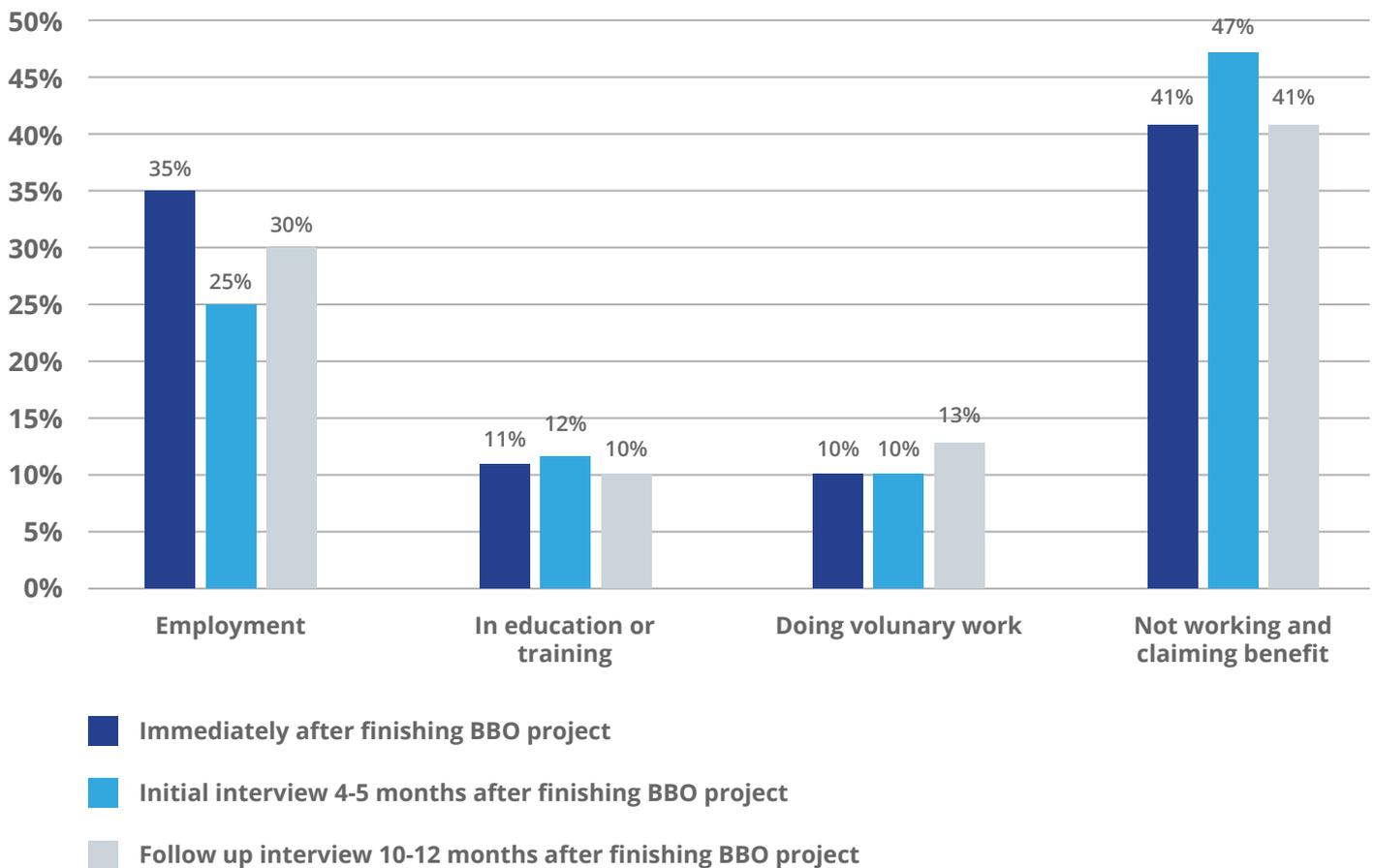
The programme evaluation also sought to explore participants' journeys beyond the lifetime of BBO support to understand the sustainability of these results. Our participant survey, conducted through telephone interviews, asked participants what they were doing immediately after leaving BBO, four to five months later, and again six-months after that (around 10 to 12 months after leaving the programme). 403 participants answered the survey at the four-to-five-month time period, of whom 158 went on to answer the 10-to-12-month follow-up survey.

Despite the relatively small sample size, having responses from the same individuals over two timepoints provides valuable insights into their evolving journeys.

Because the cohort of survey respondents is much smaller than the complete cohort of BBO participants included in the monitoring data outlined earlier in this chapter, the outcomes data from the survey are used to identify trends in destinations and journeys over time, rather than to formulate conclusions about the success of the programme in achieving outcomes.

Fluctuations in trends could be influenced by factors such as changes in participants' circumstances, economic conditions, job market dynamics, and effectiveness of support, as well as the varying characteristics of participants who responded to the survey at the different timepoints.

Figure 3: Destinations after BBO over time – all survey respondents



Base sizes: Immediately after BBO, and four to five months after: 403, 10 to 12 months after: 158

Employment

Of survey respondents who were employed immediately after leaving BBO:

- 35% of survey respondents (139) **transitioned into employment immediately upon finishing BBO**. This broadly aligns with the 34% who moved into employment across the wider programme and provided evidence of this back to the programme. This dropped to 25% at the four-to-five-month follow-up before increasing back to 30% by the time of the 10-to-12-month follow-up.
- 79% (110) of the 139 respondents who transitioned into work upon finishing BBO were **still in the same job four to five months later** and 10 had moved into different jobs. 17 were no longer working, and two had moved into education or training. This suggests that the roles participants went into were not just any job, and were sustainable for the majority of participants.

- 15 survey respondents who sustained their employment replied to our second follow-up survey. Of this group 12 had **sustained their employment** to the 10-to-12-month mark, of whom 10 participants said they believed they would continue to be in the same role in six months' time. This provides some indicative evidence of longer-term sustainable employment but caution is needed given the very small sample size.
 - The main reasons for participants not sustaining their employment were participants **resigning from the job** (59%) and **job termination** (14%). 37% of those who had not sustained their employment cited the reason as 'other', going on to describe the short-term nature of roles (for example, short-term contracts or temporary assignments), the need to relocate to other areas, and transitioning to other career paths.
 - Participants experienced some **positive changes within their employment** after BBO. These included receiving a pay rise (17%) and moving into higher skilled roles (15%). A small number (2%) of employed participants moved from temporary to permanent positions.
 - Additionally, of the 263 survey respondents who **had not moved into work on leaving BBO**, 50 had applied for jobs in the four to five months since they left the programme and felt confident about their prospects, and 19 had gone on to find work within four to five months. 11 of the 102 participants who responded to our second survey had found work within seven to 12 months, demonstrating that for some, the skills they gained through BBO supported them to enter employment further down the line.
-

James was unemployed when he joined his local BBO project. He wanted help with understanding the job-searching and application process, including writing a CV. BBO helped him with confidence-building, practicing mock interviews, and supported him with things that are difficult because of his illness / disability. James found that the empathy and compassion of his work coach helped him deal with rejections and cope with mental health challenges he was experiencing. Importantly, James thought these changes would be sustainable into the future as the project gave him the tools to cope. Within 4-5 months of leaving BBO, he had secured part-time work as a gardener. James found the job improved his mental health, and saw it as a good stepping-stone into other work.

“It [finding work] really matters. It improves my life; it makes me feel useful and proud of a job well done. It helps my mental health and eases my financial situation”

When we caught up with James 5-6 months later, he had started a new job working in maintenance. He liked that this was higher-skilled work, and it helped him get out into the community meeting people. He did not think he would have found work without the support from BBO, and felt positive about the sustainability of his improved situation.

“I feel, the way the person helped me will stick and stay with me forever. They have given me the tools to work with.”

- Of the 181 survey participants who were not in work, education or training four to five months after BBO, almost half (89) **believed the support from BBO would help them ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ to get a job in the future.**
- For those who did find work through BBO, whether immediately after the support finished or into the future, entering employment made a real, **positive difference to their lives** and the lives of those around them. They typically said that, with the help of BBO, finding work meant they were no longer struggling financially, had a routine, were more confident, and doing work they enjoyed.

Education and training

Of survey respondents who were engaged in education or training when they left BBO:

- Only 11% of our survey respondents moved into **education and training** immediately after leaving the programme, compared to 31% of the wider programme cohort. This may be due to characteristic differences between the group of participants who verified their result with the BBO programme, compared to the group of survey respondents. This proportion increased slightly to 12% by the time of the four-to-five-month follow-up, but then reduced to 10% by the final follow-up.
- Of the 44 survey respondents who were in education or training immediately after leaving BBO, 36 were **still in education or training** four to five months later, and one participant **moved into self-employment**.
- 18 respondents who were in education or training upon leaving BBO responded to the second follow-up survey. For others this may be due to moving into employment or other activities which meant they had less time available to reply to the survey.

However, of those 18 individuals, two had **moved into employment by the 10-to-12-month follow-up survey**, indicating that it may take some time to move into employment after completing education or training courses.

- Survey respondents reported **still being on the same education courses they engaged in upon leaving BBO** after four to five and 10 to 12 months. The courses included university degrees, accounting courses, NVQ qualifications, or ESOL classes.
- However, four to five months after leaving BBO, just over half of survey respondents who were in education or training when they left the programme but had not moved into work (23 of 43). This group were **optimistic that the qualifications or training they acquired would improve their future job prospects**. This optimism prevailed 10-12 months after leaving the programme, when 5 of the 6 participants who were still in education or training believed this would help them to get a job in the future 'a lot'.

“I am currently unable to work due to my health issues. However, I am looking to work self-employed after finishing my course, so I can work when I feel up to it. I am currently slowly building up all the things I need to be able to do this”

[Participant]

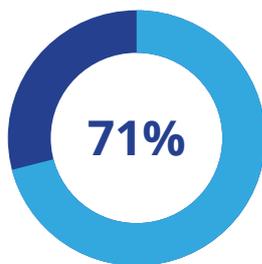
Volunteering

- 10% of survey respondents (39) were **volunteering** immediately after finishing their support from BBO. This proportion remained stable by the time of the four-to-five-month follow-up before increasing by the time of the final follow-up survey.
- Of the 39 survey respondents who were volunteering when they left BBO, 26 sustained their volunteering until the four-to-five-month timepoint. The majority (17) believed the volunteering would help them 'a lot' or 'a bit' to enter work in the future.
- Indeed, four of these participants had moved into work within four to five months. Of the 17 volunteering participants who responded to the second follow-up survey, an additional participant had moved into work by the 10-to-12-month follow-up period.

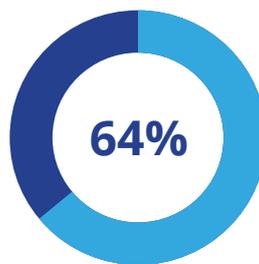
Achieving positive outcomes

Wider participant outcomes

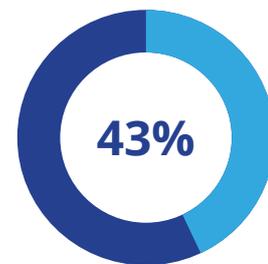
Participants who responded to the follow-up survey reported a range of positive, wider outcomes from the support they received through BBO:



Increased confidence



Improved wellbeing



Developed new skills

Although the main aim of the programme was to move participants into work, steps that enabled BBO participants to move closer towards the labour market are recognised and valued as important outcomes from the support provided by BBO. The programme expected to support participants to achieve 'softer' outcomes including increased confidence,

skills development, and improved physical and mental wellbeing. The evaluation found that:

- 71% of the participants who responded to the surveys said the support **increased their confidence**. This increases slightly to 74% for survey respondents who had entered work by the time they left BBO, compared to 70% for those

who were not working immediately after leaving the programme.

- 60% of survey respondents said the support **improved their wellbeing**, a percentage that stays roughly similar irrespective of whether or not

participants were working immediately after leaving BBO. Survey interviews with BBO participants found examples of participants reporting that they would have been suicidal, depressed, or 'not around anymore' had they not taken part in the BBO programme.

“I was in a really bad place, so bad that I was seeing mental health teams, but being on the project and having people to talk to brought me out of a very bad place”

[Participant]

- 48% of survey respondents who were working and 40% of those who were not working immediately after they left BBO, said they had **learnt new skills**. The skills included communication, teamwork, problem-solving, technical expertise, which can contribute to success within the workforce or be positive transferable skills to demonstrate through the job application process. 27% believed it

had specifically supported them to develop **work-related skills**.

- 33% of survey respondents experienced an **improvement in their financial situation**, suggesting a positive difference to their economic wellbeing. This increases to 40% when looking only at survey respondents who entered work, compared to 30% for those who did not.

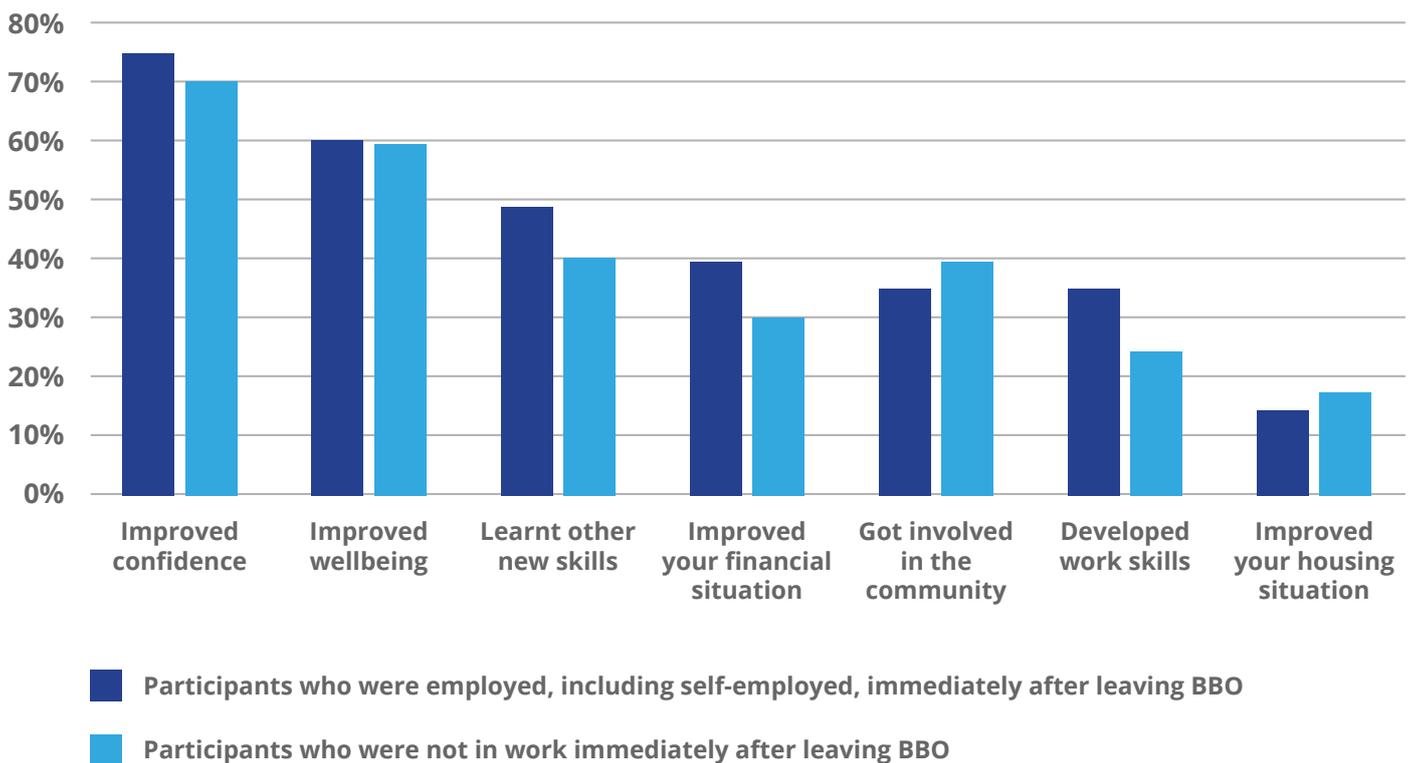
“I was very anxious about my financial situation. I am now in control of my finances which helps me to feel a lot more confident”

[Participant]

- 38% of survey respondents said they **became more involved in the community** as a result of the support. The percentage was 39% for those who were not working immediately after leaving BBO, compared with 36% of those who were working.
- At the 10-to-12-month follow-up survey, 45% of respondents attributed **improved housing situations** to BBO. This percentage is an increase from 27% of

the same participants who reported this outcome after four to five months, suggesting that housing impacts may take many months to be realised as a knock-on effect of other changes. At the four-to-five-month follow-up stage, 16% of survey respondents overall reported an improved housing situation, although this was slightly higher (18%) for those who had not entered work, compared to those who had entered work (14%).

Figure 4: Softer outcomes achieved for survey respondents, by employment status immediately upon leaving BBO



Base sizes: n=402 survey respondents (n=139 respondents who were employed, including self-employed; n=263 survey respondents who were not in work)



What factors made a difference for people?

Key findings

- A combination of referral routes, pro-active engagement and outreach measures and building strong relationships with external referral partners have been key success factors in achieving strong reach and engagement of the programme target groups.
- The core principles upon which BBO was built have underpinned effective engagement and delivery of support for groups further from the labour market or with more complex needs. These include:
 - Providing 1:1 flexible and responsive support.
 - Putting people first, tailoring support to address individual circumstances.
 - Focusing on building confidence or addressing underlying barriers before looking at progression to employment.
 - Supporting wellbeing by developing support mechanisms specifically to address mental health needs or social isolation.
 - Adapting support to respond to specific needs or preferences of particular target groups.
- Working with employers to address stigma and find appropriate employment opportunities for BBO participants proved successful. Providing in-work support to support participants in the transition into employment was a key effective activity for many projects.

Across the BBO programme, significant variation in the intervention approaches and delivery models being delivered was evident, reflecting the locally designed project outlines and varying target groups focused on by different projects. The flexible delivery model of BBO has proved crucial to its success. Projects have not been wedded to the models they had when first launched, and they have been able to evolve,

responding to emerging needs and adapting to reflect labour market changes over time.

Despite this variation and evolution, over the course of delivery key principles or common elements underpinning effective engagement and delivery of support have emerged. At the same time the programme evaluation has captured evidence of what has been important in working with some of the key target groups.

Reaching people with complex barriers to work

As reported in the previous section, the BBO programme has performed strongly in terms of reaching and engaging the target groups intended - those who are most disadvantaged or at high risk of social exclusion. To achieve this, referral and engagement activity has been an important focus for BBO projects across the delivery period. The following factors emerged from the evaluation as important in recruiting participants to the programme, but also ensuring that projects reached those furthest from the labour market:

The design of the BBO programme, encouraging projects to form a partnership that involves specialist organisations and charities, has been an important factor supporting effective referral and engagement.

Working with VCSE delivery partners has been credited with projects being able to reach groups furthest from the labour market for whom mainstream employment support was not suitable. This includes economically inactive people and those with significant complex barriers to work.

Many stakeholders noted the importance of not solely relying on Jobcentre Plus or other mainstream organisations for referrals, and how working closely with a varied range of other organisations enabled them to reach those less likely to engage with mainstream services. These organisations were often embedded within the community as part of large, trusted networks, and included housing associations, probation services and voluntary sector organisations such as Mind and Mencap.

In this way, BBO projects could 'piggyback' on an existing community of service users, and take advantage of 'acceptance by association', where participants were happy to participate in a service that was provided through an organisation with whom they already had a trusted relationship. In some cases, these more specialist organisations have also facilitated engagement through provision of particular language skills providing, for example, translated marketing materials. There was often mutual benefit, where these organisations were supporting people with issues beyond employability and referrals to BBO could compliment their work well.

“Picking them up through other means, they had lots of other activities already that they were potentially engaging in, that then helped them get into our [BBO] programme.”

[Project lead]

Outreach to the local community. Many BBO projects developed an understanding that the key to reaching key target groups was being 'out there' and going to where people are, rather than expecting people to come to them. This involved actively promoting the project through a strong social media presence and local marketing, for example, advertisements on billboards or public transport.

Common activity also included visiting community venues or established groups or having BBO project staff based in local organisations or offices (such as volunteer centres or libraries) either permanently or on an ad hoc basis. Project staff reported needing to build up credibility and develop a good reputation with these organisations to generate referrals.

BBO projects demonstrated success **in reaching out to participants through a range of activities** as the first step to engagement in BBO. The activities were intended to attract participants by offering, or focusing on, activities participants were interested in and providing a 'safe' environment in which participant involvement in more traditional employment support activities could be introduced. In these ways, project staff could start to build trust with participants and start to build participants' confidence.

Rather than offering activities to participants at providers' centres, many projects took the approach of meeting in local community venues, libraries, or foodbanks. This was particularly useful in rural areas, removing transport as a barrier to engagement. Participants valued the convenient, flexible and more neutral nature of having activities in such locations.

“One of the places I work from is a community café, and it’s a food bank as well. I’ve got a couple of customers [who], whenever they come to see me, they use the foodbank as well. So, it’s just all in one place.”

[Delivery staff]

One project created a **Hub and Spoke¹² delivery** approach, which involved a blend of one-to-one and group drop-in sessions that were delivered in Community Hubs created in venues such as local church halls. The focus was to reach people from the community and reduce isolation. The project involved other local organisations, including drug and alcohol support, NHS support to

help people lose weight or stop smoking, and volunteers to run cooking classes, book clubs, or music therapy. Showcasing provision to the community in this way was not only useful for prospective participants to learn about what they could gain from the project, but also for enabling referrals between organisations.

12 A Hub and Spoke delivery model is one in which a central “Hub” (i.e., a head office) serves as a point of connection and co-ordination for several “spokes” (i.e., localised, often smaller delivery locations)

Having dedicated staff for outreach and engagement was useful to provide the capacity projects needed to prioritise engagement, and also for streamlining the referral and engagement process. In one project, participants worked with a Development Outreach Coordinator as well as a keyworker. The “triangulation” approach between the two dedicated roles and the participant has: ensured that information has not got lost (for example, between course providers); that eligibility assessments and referrals have been smooth; and that the keyworkers have not been burdened with administrative work but can focus on providing support to the participant.

Adapting referral and engagement processes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown

restrictions was a key feature of delivery of BBO projects to ensure they could stay on track to achieve targets. This included changes to referral processes, such as:

- Introducing digital forms to receive referrals.
- Partnership-working to receive referrals from organisations that remained open during the pandemic.
- Using social media as a mechanism to engage and stay in contact with participants.
- Building on earlier programme learning, setting up dedicated engagement roles or teams, separate to those delivering support to participants once engaged.

Supporting people with complex barriers to work

Throughout the evaluation, project stakeholders and participants consistently reflected on specific core pillars of BBO delivery that have made the most difference made to people:

- Delivery of one-to-one support.

- Flexibility and individualised packages of support.
- Holistic support.
- Tailored employment support and employer engagement work.

The value of one-to-one support

The key worker model was a common approach adopted by many BBO projects, although terminology used to describe this role varied to fit with project focus, for example mentors, coaches or navigators. Across all these roles, the relationship between participants and keyworkers has often been one of trust, understanding, and commitment.

An overwhelming majority of BBO participants reported that simply having somebody to talk to was the most helpful aspect of support. Participants have valued being given the space and time to talk through their personal issues and goals with a dedicated keyworker, with many feeling seen, listened to and understood, rather than judged.

“[The most useful thing about the support was] Having someone that is around and could talk to on a personal level and not being swapped to different people all of the time.”

[Participant]

Equally, participants frequently commented on their keyworker as being a key source of social interaction, with the one-to-one support offered by BBO projects, through a mentor or coach role, emerging strongly as a mechanism for addressing social isolation in the BBO programme¹³.

The relationships built between keyworkers and participants enabled projects to offer appealing activities to support engagement. Keyworkers built a good understanding of participant interests, and would not force participants into activities which were not relevant to their goals or interests.

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

[Participant]

Many participants noted a contrast between BBO and other services because of this:

“They were there for me when I needed somebody. Other services weren’t really there for me. They just speak to you and chuck you aside. [BBO] has continuously been there for me when that’s what I needed. Without that, I would still be just as lost as I was before. But I don’t feel as lost now. They’ve really benefitted my situation.”

[Participant]

¹³ This theme is examined in more detail in the [2020 Annual Report 4](#).

The one-to-one support delivered by keyworkers enabled participants to open up about personal issues, including mental health, financial difficulties or relationship concerns, which all have the potential to act as barriers or undermine the ability of an individual to focus or progress with moving into or towards work. One participant described during an

evaluation interview how their keyworker was trustworthy, making them feel like they mattered, and that the relationship was like a “metaphorical arm” around him during his time of need. Keyworkers emphasised that a unique aspect of the programme has been the scope for taking the time to listen to people and get to know them.

“If I need to sit with a participant for two hours and give them empathy, listen to their heartache, their story, [I will] sit and listen. And I think that’s what they like.”

[Delivery staff]

For many keyworkers, the delivery model has enabled a strong relationship to be formed with the participant,

creating the basis for meaningful engagement and sustainable outcomes.

“it’s all about rapport building and communication, and honesty, integrity, and humour. I think I come across as very genuine- I have done this work [because] every person I’ve worked with has really mattered to me... that creates a far stronger relationship and a commitment... I’d like to think that my commitment to them has created their commitment to me and [the project].”

[Delivery staff]

The flexibility to offer person-centred support

A strength of the BBO programme design has been to allow projects to have the flexibility to provide bespoke and tailored provision, and to support to meet individual or group needs. The skills and commitment of delivery staff, combined with this flexibility in the BBO funding model, has enabled projects to work in a strong person-centred way.

A diagnostic assessment was a common successful element across BBO projects, whereby projects undertook an individualised assessment of needs. This initial element was critically important to ensure appropriate support is subsequently delivered. There are examples of a range of specific tools being used by BBO projects for this needs assessment, typically with tools being specifically designed dependent on the particular focus of the project.

Project staff highlighted the need to introduce and conduct any assessment carefully so as not to discourage the participant. Approaches that worked well included assessments being completed over several meetings, or project staff approaching assessments through a conversational approach and completing the specific paperwork afterwards. Further information on approaches used by BBO projects for needs assessment and action planning are examined in the [2018 Annual Report 2](#).

Project staff and participants alike appreciated the flexibility that enabled them to get to know each other well, and spend time planning the participants' journey towards employment, taking all aspects of their life into consideration.

“What I want to say about [BBO project], the beauty about it was that we were able to pace the individual’s journey. We were able to give that quality of time to them. We were able to work with them at their pace, so they weren’t getting overwhelmed, and I think that’s what made us different and that’s what made BBO different.”

[Project lead]

Delivery staff often spoke of small steps taken on an individual’s unique journey. No matter how far the participant may have been from employment, delivery staff would put the participant first and tailor the support to their

individual circumstances and goals. This often meant prioritising foundations such as their mental health, finances, or housing situation before considering employment or training.

Although some projects had broad guidelines for how long participants should be engaged in BBO, most delivery staff and partners interviewed told us that they felt they had the ability to support participants

for as long as they needed to without a specific cut-off point.¹⁴ For those involved in the evaluation, this has proven crucial to participants feeling genuinely supported on their journey towards employment.

“At no time did I feel pressured, forgotten about, or anything like that.”

[Participant]

BBO has operated against a backdrop of complex political and economic developments over the past few years. Whilst the programme has reached those furthest removed from the labour market, many have noted the difficulties in maintaining engagement from those with multiple complex barriers throughout the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and changes to employment support funding nationally.

Delivery staff told us that recognition of what the participant is going through was vital to support retention, as well as remaining consistent and committed despite sporadic engagement from people facing multiple challenges in life. Delivery staff reported that the flexible, non-mandatory nature of BBO enabled them to re-engage when ready.

Holistic support to overcome other barriers

BBO projects had a broad understanding of the causes of unemployment and economic inactivity – and the barriers to being in work – which enabled partnerships to provide support across a range of issues impacting participants’ lives, beyond employability. Many partnerships developed services to respond to underlying factors contributing to barriers entering and remaining in the labour market.

For example, a number of projects developed financial capability projects providing support on budgeting, benefits advice and debt management, which in turn improved wellbeing and helped participants to focus on securing employment. Projects described this approach as addressing foundational needs on the path to employment which were not covered by other local support.

¹⁴ The programme’s monitoring data shows that on average, participants were engaged with the programme for 8.8 months.

“I think BBO is fantastic in actually addressing the underlying needs and giving participants that time.”

[Project lead]

There was evidence from BBO projects that a priority in the early delivery of support to the BBO target group is to focus initially on building confidence and self-belief. It is widely recognised that addressing these softer skills is essential before participants typically can think about other goals. BBO projects delivered many varied and creative ways to provide this initial confidence building activity including through sport, arts or crafts or social activities¹⁵.

Projects also recognised that many participants, particularly those economically inactive, were experiencing social isolation. Therefore, regular social interaction between participants and delivery staff, or between participants, offered an important early positive impact for those engaged and was seen as supporting their ability to move towards employment or education or training. This was a key focus of the delivery by many

projects following the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to recognition that lockdown restrictions had led to social isolation, loss of confidence and increased anxiety around social interaction for many participants.

Working with specialist partners, particularly those from the VCSE, has meant that the value of a one-to-one keyworker has been complimented by specialist support from other organisations, resulting in wrap-around support for participants. In line with the person-centred approach, BBO partners provided support in the individual's area of need, whether that be processing trauma with mental health specialists, or working on ESOL and digital skills provision. A common example of this has been a perception emerging from interviews that mental health organisations have been the 'golden thread' in supporting those furthest from the labour market.

¹⁵ More information and examples of these approaches were examined in the [2018 Annual Report 2](#).

Supporting people with mental ill-health

Our previous evaluation reports have flagged an increasing level of mental health needs amongst participants. Respondents to the participant survey frequently reported how difficulties with their mental health had prevented them from finding work, but also the significant impact these problems had had on their day to day lives. These findings were reflected in interviews with project stakeholders, who frequently expressed how staff had seen higher levels of mental health needs in the participant cohort than first anticipated, and particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Projects have responded by routinely supporting wellbeing and providing a safe place for participants to share their concerns, but also by creating additional packages of support specifically to address common mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. In our [2022 Annual Report 6](#), we describe how one project had developed specific tools and approaches to support young people, not least by involving a specialist mental health organisation in their BBO partnership to provide access to therapy where needed. Other projects mirrored this approach or created specialist posts in existing partner organisations. In some cases, projects developed new tools to help participants focus on their mental wellbeing.

“I spoke to someone who helped me with my wellbeing and helped me to deal with my mind chatter (lost in one’s own thoughts)”

[Participant survey response]

The majority of BBO participants joined the programme with low self-esteem, often feeling defeated by their complex barriers to work. For one delivery partner, helping participants to see themselves and their life experiences in a positive way was the key to getting them on the path towards employment. A delivery staff member from a partner organisation described a powerful reframing activity delivered during group sessions:

“One of the activities that I do quite regularly- I ask people to write on the board attributes that they displayed to help them through adverse situations. For example, [being] homeless, rough sleeping, or being vulnerably housed. People shout out words to me like, they were resilient, they were resourceful, they were patient, or able to make friends. They know that they’ve done these things to survive. When my board is covered in words, I rub out the bit in the middle and write in “what employers are looking for”. And you see you see the penny drop for people when they realise- “actually I’m not useless, I’m all the other things”.

[Delivery partner]

Project stakeholders highlighted how the flexibility of the BBO model had allowed them to shift their approach to delivery, allowing them to positively respond to the escalating presentation of mental health conditions amongst participants, with life-changing results in some cases.

“They really helped with my mental health. They organised some very interesting courses and with their help, I have improved my social life. Honestly, I don’t think I would be here [without the support], I would have ended my life I think.”

[Participant]

The evaluation also explored how the BBO programme demonstrated effective practice in terms of reaching and supporting particular types of participants.

Notable examples from the perspective of informing 'what works' are detailed below, with further information available in the [2019 Annual Report 3](#).

Refugees and asylum seekers

Some specialist BBO projects focused on refugees and asylum seekers and identified a number of principles underlying their delivery perceived to be important in ensuring their work with these groups is effective. Adopting a degree of flexibility with the focus and content of training offered, and promoting sessions in a way that will appeal to the target group, was found to enhance attendance. For example, a more informal approach to teaching English, such as through Conversation Clubs, was found by projects to result in increased attendance. Provision that allows participants to suggest topics to cover (such as attending a GP appointment, or preparing for a specific job interview) also proved popular. Across these projects, there was also evidence that building a relationship first is the most important step when working with this group; being mindful of prior experiences and their likely unfamiliarity with training and employment contexts in the UK was seen as important. Good communication and partnership work with other agencies supporting this group was also reported as being an important principle underlying effective delivery.

Older people

Project staff found that volunteering was particularly popular for older people. It was noted that this can be an effective route to build their confidence and overcome social isolation, which was cited as a common issue for the over 50s. Another key approach reported as working well with this age group involves exploring existing or potentially long-forgotten skills, rather than solely focusing on acquiring new ones. Delivery staff flagged that addressing perceptions around the abilities of older people in the workplace was important, reducing negative views from potential employers and participants themselves.

Disability and long-term health conditions

The involvement of specialist partners, with a focus and track record of supporting participants with specific health conditions or disabilities, was a key aspect of the approach taken by many BBO projects to support these groups. Involving such partners ensured that participants benefited from organisational experience in supporting those with disabilities, including the availability of accessible facilities, along with such knowledge of participant needs and adaptations that may be needed. As with the over 50s target group, volunteering was also widely seen as a key activity that supports the progression of participants with disabilities and longer-term health conditions. Project representatives reported that such participants often lack confidence and have more limited work experience, and volunteering can offer an important step on their journey towards paid employment. A key lesson noted in respect of this, however, is that careful thought needs to be given to ensure any work placements or volunteering opportunities are appropriate in terms of accessibility and reasonable adjustments at work.

Young people

One-to-one support offered through a mentor or key worker approach proving particularly effective for this target group, alongside a tailored support package. Support to address anxiety or other mental health conditions was also a common feature of support for young people. Projects developed ways to enhance the development, and evidencing, of the skills and activities young people have undertaken. For example, one project used digital badges to capture and articulate a young person's learning or experience gained from the project. The gamification of achievement of skills is reported by delivery staff to be attractive and engaging to the young people who are participating.

The BBO funding structure was acknowledged as important in being able to provide this holistic support approach. Projects were paid for their work regardless of outcomes achieved; the programme did not follow a PBR model, as many Government-funded, mainstream employment programmes do.

The flexibility afforded by the funding model enabled projects to work in a participant-focused way and to achieve softer outcomes which precede entering employment, education, or training.

“Once you end up in an outcome driven payments [approach], that is highly competitive and you take away more room for innovation”

[Project lead]

Project stakeholders involved in the research noted they had seen participants make significant changes in their lives without necessarily getting a formal programme result, and many noted that

taking longer to exit into employment, having worked on various personal issues beforehand, often paved the way for more meaningful and sustainable results.



“We’ve had people on [the project for] 18 months that turn their life around, but we may have not got a result but, actually they are in a better place. I think that’s something we’ve learned... there’s a hell of a lot of work that needs to be done for a lot of these people before they’re even beginning to be in the place to think about going into work. I don’t think that’s very well understood.”

“We’ve had people who wouldn’t leave the house, they won’t go to work but they are [now] volunteering. They’re making a contribution to society and they’ve changed their lives. That’s such a valuable thing. We should’ve measured that.”

“There’s a young man who had a major mental breakdown at university and ended up in being sectioned, and when he got home, he didn’t leave his bedroom for three years. But now he’s now working for St. John’s Ambulance. That’s an amazing step forward. Some [participants] don’t get into work, but they still make amazing journeys.”

[Project lead]

Tailored employment support and employer engagement work

With the focus on moving participants towards and into employment, BBO projects have taken practical steps to remove barriers to work and ensure that participants can comfortably access the labour market. This has ranged from courses on job searching, CV writing, interviewing, and industry specific training to removing practical barriers, often related to participants experiencing low incomes. Generally, this involved projects covering costs for work equipment, haircuts, work clothes or shoes, and paying for transport or childcare. This individualised budget approach was developed in-keeping with the person-centred approach of BBO.

Employer engagement has been a core component of BBO support, described as essential to ensure there are pathways for people to progress into work in BBO funding applicant guidance. As noted in a [previous learning paper on this theme](#) completed by the evaluation team, employer engagement has been a key activity which has supported the results achieved through BBO. This has focused on the practical issues of making contact with employers to raise awareness and to encourage them to offer jobs, work placements, and other opportunities to participants.

BBO projects have engaged employers through both collective and individual job brokerage. The former has involved working directly with employers to understand their needs and how their participants may be a good fit. Whilst this has been successful to some extent, BBO stakeholders suggested that individual job brokerage often worked better for their cohorts; that is working with employers based on participants' individual requirements and aspirations. Individual job brokerage has

provided participants with a greater sense of personalisation concerning their job choices and preferences, and the job opportunities could be better tailored to suit participants needs, thereby helping to sustain engagement.

Projects undertook wider work, actively working with local employers to change attitudes towards certain groups and raise awareness of how best to support them as employees. Encouraging wider change in attitudes to certain groups (for example, people with neurodivergence, disabilities, or mental health conditions) has meant that benefits can extend beyond the reach of the programme, and has helped employers to understand the needs of their employees better, such as mental wellbeing, which may catalyse a change or improvement in the company culture.

For example, one project developed seminars for employers around inclusive recruitment and employment, non-traditional routes into the labour market, and workplace adaptations/ reasonable adjustments. They have focussed on supporting employers who want to improve their recruitment practices but who had barriers in their systems that made it hard for all people to apply.

Many different BBO projects also included some element of **in-work support** within their delivery model. For some this was incorporated into their original project design. There were examples of:

- **Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model** projects being used to support people with common mental health issues into employment. It takes a 'place then train' supported employment

approach, which differs greatly from more traditional models where a ‘train then place’ system is advocated.

- **Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) models** through which participants undertook paid work in specially established temporary jobs. The ILM model allows projects to pay a participant’s wage. During this time, they can be supported by staff, giving them a chance to get used to the job and show their value to the employer.

For other projects, the in-work support element evolved as the need for it has been identified. This included:

- **Support with work-related matters** including advice given in relation to workplace behaviour as well as help dealing with work-related issues. Participants have variously been supported with understanding general work etiquette and customs they may not be familiar with, which has helped them settle into their workplace. Another way BBO participants were supported was through requests for reasonable adjustments to be made in

the workplace. More rarely, job modelling by BBO staff was provided to participants that they would not otherwise be able to get from employers. For example, a job coach worked initial shifts with a participant to provide role modelling for tasks, meaning the participant could learn by receiving direct instructions.

- **Support with non-work-related matters** was also evident across BBO projects. In many cases this was a continuation of the holistic support provided to participants before entering employment. This included financial support whilst participants are in-work including support with budgeting, finance plans and understanding payslips. Participant wellbeing was also an area which was supported, including helping participants to adjust to their new daily routines as well as with family difficulties which may occur as a result of them entering work. This typically took the form of continued contact with participants even after formal support had ended to ensure they had a successful transition into work and that exit from the project did not happen too abruptly.

“By just exiting them off, sometimes it can send people into a meltdown, especially when they’ve gone into work and it’s still new, and that’s what we’re trying to avoid. We wanted them to be able to sustain it”.

[Project lead]

Practitioner summary: what works

BBO project delivery has generated a significant body of evidence of what works in providing support to the economically inactive, those further from the labour market or facing more complex barriers to work. The following key learning points provide some tips on practical approaches or designs that could be considered in other programmes:

Overall design and support approaches

- Factor in time to build trusted one-to-one relationships with participants.
- Initial engagement of participants is easier in places and spaces where they are familiar and feel comfortable, so consider the location of initial meetings and activities.
- Build relationships and include specialist partners in delivery where possible to specifically target, and respond to the needs of the range of target groups.
- Undertake initial needs assessment in a gentle and staged way to ensure participants feel comfortable and open up on their needs and the issues they face.
- Focus initial activities on building confidence and providing opportunities for social interaction.

Supporting particular target groups

- When supporting groups with language needs, a more informal approach to teaching English (such as through Conversation Clubs) and promoting language learning as being employment-focussed has helped to increase attendance.
 - Volunteering is particularly popular and effective for older age groups and participants with disabilities or long-term health conditions. This can build their confidence and help them overcome social isolation. It is most effectively used when pursued as part of the journey towards employment, so identifying appropriate opportunities across partner agencies and organisations is important.
 - Exploring existing or potentially long forgotten skills, rather than solely focusing on acquiring new ones, can be a useful and effective approach when supporting older people or refugees.
-

- Early support and provision to address mental health needs is essential for those with these needs. A dual approach, in which participants receive wellbeing and mental health support alongside employment support, has been shown to work well in the majority of BBO projects.
- Active brokerage with employers is essential when supporting participants with disabilities or long-term health conditions. This serves to raise awareness of the needs of participants and allows employment opportunities to be tailored and any necessary adaptations made.

Working with employers

- Having a key member of staff whose role is primarily focussed on engaging employers and building relationships is useful to maintain their engagement.
 - Employer engagement should be factored in from the beginning of the project and, if possible, any pre-existing links with, or leads to, employers, identified and drawn upon as early as possible.
 - Designing a formal policy or approach will mean that contacts are not lost if there are staff or partner changes, alongside providing a guide for new staff to use when approaching employers.
 - It is important to support the employer, too. Employers can be nervous about working with people with complex challenges and causing offence or harm. As such, it is beneficial to raise awareness about different participant needs and appropriate responses.
 - Where in-work support is provided, think in advance of the transition and link in early with others who can continue providing support.
-



What difference did BBO make for funded organisations?

Key findings

- Grant holders and partners reported a wide range of benefits for their own organisations from participating in BBO, including improved capacity and confidence to deliver employability projects and administer complex funding projects, developing new partnerships, and benefits for their local areas as well as upskilling staff.
- Partnership sizes and structures changed over the course of the funding period with some partners leaving and new ones being added. Generally, respondents viewed these changes as leading to improvements in delivery.
- The role of VCSE partners in reaching and engaging BBO participants was highly valued by grant holders.
- Grant holders and partners reported being interested in, and planning for, the future delivery of employability support post-BBO.

This chapter of the report explores how BBO grant holders established their delivery partnerships, as well as how being involved in the BBO programme impacted them

and the local communities in which they operate. Importantly, it also covers how grant holders and partners plan to continue the provision of their activities post-BBO.

Development of BBO partnerships

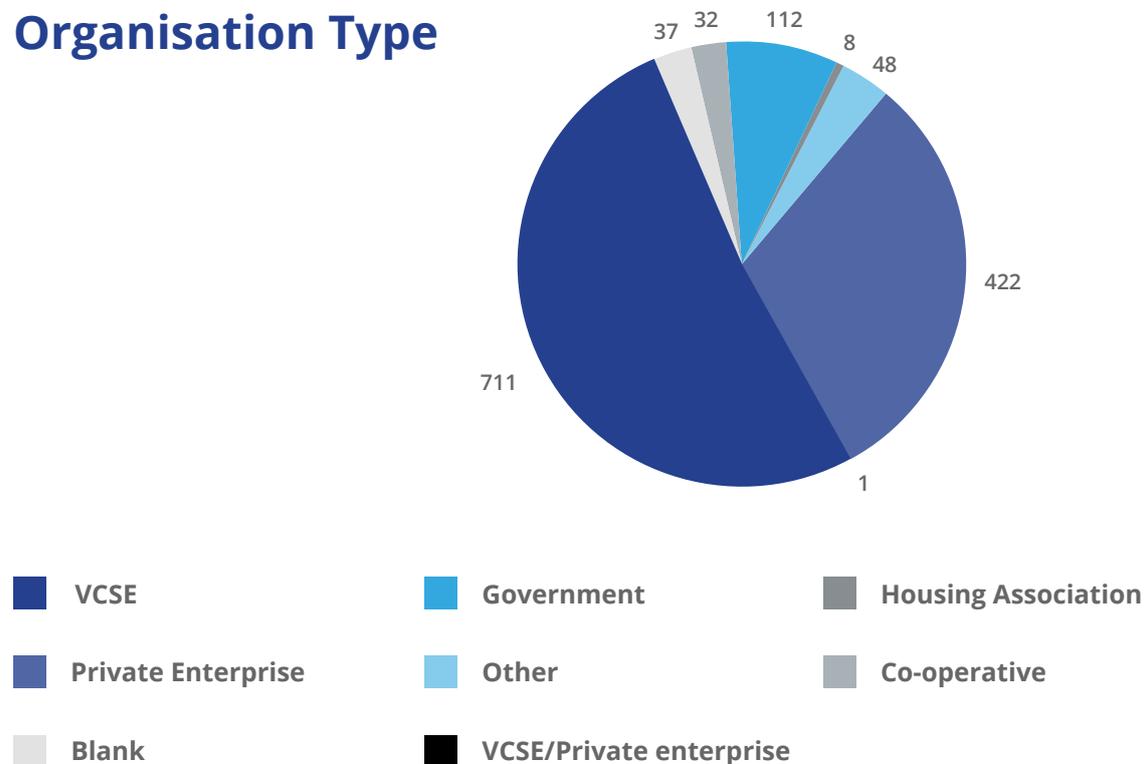
The BBO programme was an opportunity for grant holders to foster new partnerships as well as work with existing partners, coming together to deliver employability support that met the needs of those furthest away from the job market.

The BBO programme was designed to engage the local knowledge and expertise of a wide range of stakeholders, but particularly to increase participation of the voluntary sector in delivering complex funding. Data gathered

by The National Lottery Community Fund on all partners who participated in the programme is presented in Figure 5 and shows BBO was successful in this aim. The programme attracted organisations from across different sectors and with different legal status, but the VCSE made up more than half of the participating organisations. Where organisations had private company status, they were generally not-for-profit, or had specialisms to offer partnerships (for example, therapists or training providers).

Figure 5: Breakdown of BBO partner organisation type

Organisation Type



Source: The National Lottery Community Fund partnership monitoring data. N = 1371

Note: The private enterprise category includes companies limited by guarantee, a legal status often used for not-for-profit organisations. Other private enterprises in this category include organisations such as training providers.

The partnerships developed for the purpose of this programme were based on a mix of pre-existing relationships with organisations as well as new partnerships. Grant holders with pre-existing relationships with partners included these partners because they already had established trusted working relationships and their ethos' aligned with BBO's aims. Likewise, grant holders also saw the importance of including new organisations in their BBO partnerships. For example, those with specialist knowledge or were locally embedded in communities and able to add value and support with accessing people furthest away from the job market. The grant holder survey conducted for the evaluation showed that a

large majority of grant holders and partners (92%), believe that their involvement in the BBO programme has played a role in fostering new partnerships and collaborative relationships.

The evaluation found that partnership structures varied across the board. The grant holder was typically the lead organisation, responsible for the management and strategic direction of the partnership but often also took a major or leading role in delivery. Partner organisations took on the role of either a delivery partner with very closely aligned activities to the lead organisation, or a referral partner.

Working with VCSE partners

As previously mentioned, VCSE partners played a significant role successfully reaching and engaging hard to reach groups. Grant holders¹⁶ spoke highly of their VCSE partners, commonly noting that they brought invaluable expertise and access to their target group which allowed BBO projects to provide tailored support to clients. Many VCSE organisations have established local connections which

made them suitable delivery partners for leading outreach activities, vital for initial client engagement, as well as being optimal referral partners given their close links with local services. Grant holders emphasised that VCSE participation in the programme (either as grant holders themselves, or partners) enabled them to engage groups of people who they would otherwise have struggled to engage with.

“A big positive is that working with various VCSEs has helped us to provide wrap around support for our participants. Different VCSEs have different expertise and by signposting to local groups and other charities when needed has helped us to meet the varying needs of individuals.”

[Grant holder]

However, grant holders also experienced challenges working with VCSE partners due to different ways of working, lack of capacity to deliver or lack of previous experience.

- For example, smaller VCSE partners struggled to comply with the administrative, reporting and evidence requirements of BBO funding¹⁷. Partners commonly agreed that they struggled with the amount of paperwork, particularly the extensive evidence requirements, adding that they lacked the administrative

systems to effectively meet these requirements. They also indicated feeling frustrated that this placed additional administrative burden on them which took time away from delivering activities and providing support to participants.

This was particularly challenging where partners were delivering support to participants with limited English language skills and complex needs. Grant holders often provided additional support and guidance to partners through regular

¹⁶ Many grant holders were VCSE organisations as well.

¹⁷ The inclusion of ESF funding in the BBO programme meant that reporting and evidence requirements were much greater than is usual for The National Lottery Community Fund funding.

meetings and capacity-building support to develop monitoring processes.

However, this was time-consuming, and some grant holders noted that a lot of additional time was spent on managing partner data.

- Another challenge grant holders faced was establishing effective channels of communication with VCSE partners, particularly when they were going through internal changes. For example, a number of smaller organisations faced

staff turnover due to financial pressures, and this made it difficult to track who to liaise with and maintaining an established point of contact. Partners also found it challenging to establish good working relationships with project leads during the early stages of their BBO projects. For example, some partners mentioned that there was poor communication amongst partners and confusion about different roles and responsibilities. However, some partners reported improvements over time as ways of working were established.

Partnership size and changes

Whilst partnership sizes varied across the board, data from our grant holder survey (see Table 1 below) shows that 57% of grant holders developed small partnerships of

up to 5 partner organisations, followed by a smaller proportion (24%) that partnered with 6-10 partner organisations.

Table 1: Number of partner organisations grant holders are directly worked with on BBO projects

| Number of partners | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|----------------|
| 0-5 | 57% |
| 6-10 | 24% |
| 11-15 | 8% |
| 16-20 | 8% |
| 21+ | 2% |

(n=51)

Over the 8 years of funding which included a delivery extension agreed in 2019, each BBO project encountered changes within their partnerships. Our research shows that the impact of these changes was mostly positive, and the transition was manageable. Grant holders commonly reported that changes in their partnership structure led to more efficient delivery, improved performance across their partnership and helped them reach BBO targets. Some changes happened before delivery started but a significant amount happened much later, particularly during the extension phase.

The main change BBO partnerships experienced was a change in the number of partners for reasons including:

- Some partners **voluntarily withdrew** from their BBO project upon realising they lacked capacity to deliver. Some grant holders mentioned that smaller partners in particular underestimated the delivery and outcome requirements as part of the funding. It was reported that some partners struggled with meeting the BBO funding requirements as they did not align with their own way of working.
- Other **partners were experiencing internal changes to their business structure**, for example, going into administration, as well as internal staff changes and inability to fill key posts.

This meant that they felt unable to commit to the requirements and expectations of their BBO partnerships at the time.

- However, some **partners were also removed** from projects by grant holders due to poor performance. This particularly happened during negotiations for the extension phase, which gave grant holders an opportunity to reflect on performance of every partner organisation up until that point. Respondents from the grant holder survey also mentioned a lack of engagement and cooperation with the grant holder and the rest of the partnership as a reason for removing partners from the partnership.

Respondents from the grant holder survey commonly mentioned that, in most cases, new partners were introduced to fill in gaps from the changes outlined above. This was particularly important when replacing partners with very close community links who could provide access to harder to reach groups. Those who chose not to replace old partners did so because they thought that the partnership would work better if it were smaller, basing this decision on the needs of the project at the time of the funding extension in 2019.

Benefits for grant holders and partners

Grant holders and partners overwhelmingly reported a wide range of positive impacts resulting from their participation in

the BBO programme, some which are linked to potential longer-term impacts (see section on [Sustainability](#)).

Improved capacity to deliver

The BBO programme was successful in improving the internal capacity of grant holders and partners to deliver, with 84% grant holder survey respondents stating that BBO has significantly strengthened or at least improved their delivery capacity. Grant holders and partners were grateful for this funding opportunity as, importantly, it allowed them to reach people furthest away from the labour market, which some mentioned they would have struggled to achieve if not for the BBO programme. This can be linked to being encouraged to partner with VCSE organisations as well as using the funding to hire new staff. Indeed, 70% of grant holder survey respondents agreed that the BBO programme has been vital for providing financial resources to sustain their organisations. The findings from the qualitative data show that grant holders used part of the funding to hire new full time staff to deliver BBO projects.

The BBO programme supported grant holders and partners to build capacity to adopt a hybrid model of delivery. Despite the challenges previously outlined (see section on [‘How did partnerships develop?’](#)), BBO funding supported partnerships to deliver remotely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- By offering hybrid (in person and virtual) support to clients, particularly those harder to reach or with complex needs, grant holders and partners developed new skills and adopted innovative strategies that allowed them to offer a more client-led service.
- A key learning point from delivering support both in person and virtually, even post-pandemic, was that hybrid working facilitated flexible delivery and gave participants choice and a preference. Many grant holders and partners indicated that they will take this learning forward when planning future delivery.

Building capacity to manage and administer complex funding

90% of grant holders and partners agreed that being on the BBO programme has contributed to improving their capacity for managing complex projects. Some grant holders and partners stated that the BBO programme was their first experience of managing a long-term grant, while others

had engaged in PBR contracts to deliver employability support. Some grant holders and partners expressed a preference for the grant funding, stating that this was a more appropriate model for supporting groups with complex barriers than PBR.

The BBO programme provided an opportunity to deliver new or different employability activities, and as a result enabled grant holders to develop and test new ways to support the hardest to reach groups in their communities. This opportunity provided learning that can be adapted for the delivery of other employability projects in the future.

Additionally, respondents in our grant holder survey reported that the BBO programme was their first experience managing a large-scale project. This meant that the programme was also an opportunity to build their track record which may help them to secure future funding. This issue is explored further in this report in the section on [Sustainability](#).

“It has given us grant funded experience on a large capacity, which involves working with communities. We have created innovative ways to engage with the hardest to reach communities.”

[Grant holder]

Developing strong partnerships

92% of grant holders and partners believe that their involvement in the BBO programme has played a role in fostering new partnerships and collaborative relationships. The evidence indicates that some grant holders felt strongly that that, due to their trusted partnerships, they felt more confident to apply to new funding opportunities in the future. For

example, by developing relationships with new organisations, BBO grant holders now have a wider pool of potential partners to engage with for future partnerships. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that some partnerships will be maintained in the long-term via new funding opportunities (see section on [Sustainability](#)).

“The BBO funding has allowed [our organisation] to retain experienced staff to work on the project as well as build partnerships with new organisations, develop systems used across multiple areas of the organisation and apply for future funding opportunities.”

[Grant holder]

Benefits for local systems

Our grant holder survey shows that 87% of grant holders and partners felt that participation in the BBO programme has resulted in a heightened local profile. They thought that BBO made them more visible in their local communities and at times, increased their reputation. This is supported by our qualitative findings which show that grant holders and partners became more aware of local projects and services and have built relationships with local organisations.

- Newly established links with local services were particularly beneficial for BBO project delivery. For example, where BBO projects were aware of other similar employability services locally, they attempted to work with them rather than compete with them, by establishing relationships and understanding their support offer.
- Some BBO projects mentioned that where unsuitable referrals were made to their project, they could potentially refer people onto other local services. Evidence shows

that these local links were also beneficial for participants already engaged in BBO who needed additional support in response to changes in personal circumstances. Examples included becoming at risk of homelessness, taking on caring responsibilities, developing severe mental health issues or immigration-related issues.

- BBO projects were therefore able to lean on relevant local services to provide specialist support whilst continuing to provide participants with employability support.

Additionally, grant holders and partners made links with local businesses and volunteer groups, which they could coordinate with to try and secure employment or volunteering opportunities for BBO participants. There is evidence to suggest that by developing these links with local businesses, some BBO projects worked with local businesses to get them to consider their workplace practices and recruitment methods to become more inclusive employers.

“We have been able to reach a wider section of the local community, by being able to offer more bespoke support tailored to the individual needs. It has also provided the organisation with an opportunity to further develop our reputation in the area of employment support and training.”

[Grant holder]

Cross cutting themes

A key aspect of ESF funding are two embedded cross-cutting themes: 1) sustainable development, focused on preserving, protecting and improving the environment and 2) equal opportunities and non-discrimination. Every BBO project was required to fully integrate these two themes into their development and delivery.

A range of documents were produced by The National Lottery Community Fund and the Managing Authority to help BBO delivery organisations develop these themes. In 2017 Ecorys hosted a webinar, the slides for which are available [here](#). The National Lottery Community Fund also took learning from BBO to inform their recent guidance on [Making an Environmental Action Plan](#)¹⁸.

Grant holder organisations took a variety of steps to ensure the themes were embedded in their work, such as developing subgroups, appointing theme “champions”, creating action plans and developing policies.

Equality and diversity, particularly in relation to ensuring fair and equal access to the programme, was well-embedded in BBO practice; this report has already explored the mechanisms projects used to engage those who faced particularly complex barriers to participation. Because equality and diversity was already a core part of their ethos, some grant holders noted that the sustainability theme had instead been their primary focus, and had been a useful driver to encourage change across partnerships.

Activities for sustainability included minimising travel through localised delivery, encouraging the use of public transport and the development of recycling schemes. Others built the theme into the activities they developed for participants, such as beach cleans and sessions exploring cookery and reducing food waste. However, some also noted that the high paperwork burden of the programme perhaps ran counter to the sustainability theme itself.

Sustainability of delivery

Our grant holder survey showed that only 44% of grant holders and partners planned to continue BBO-funded activities, either in full or partly, with a further 38% unsure about future plans; the remaining had no plans. Our qualitative findings support this as it indicates that that grant holders and partners had a desire to continue delivering employability support to groups that need it, but many were unsure about how.

Grant holders and partners were particularly interested in continuing to engage groups of people they struggled to meet BBO targets for, and generally address any gaps from their BBO project provision. Additionally, they felt that they would not be able to replicate their BBO projects – the flexible, person-centred delivery model which BBO facilitated is rarely feasible with other sources of funding which are often more prescriptive in their approach.

¹⁸ <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights/differences-we-make/difference-we-make/learning-from-communities-tips-ideas-and-solutions/making-an-environmental-action-plan>. Accessed December 2023.

Some grant holders and partners also noted that post-BBO they would like to shift the focus of their delivery, for example to include new or different target groups who were not included in BBO's remit. Interviewees highlighted the following approaches to continue delivering employability activities post-BBO:

- **New employability support projects:**

some grant holders and partners will use the learning from delivering their BBO projects to develop new and more specific projects. These will have a more targeted focus and may include pre-employability support for economically inactive people, employability support for specific groups such as carers, people at risk of homelessness, and young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

- **Continuation of BBO projects at a reduced scale:** other grant holders and partners mentioned that they will aim to continue delivering activities from their BBO projects with slight variations, for example, at a reduced scale but to a more

general population; that is not just those furthest away from the job market.

Respondents to our grant holder survey commonly expressed that they would like to offer employability activities from their BBO projects that they perceived had worked particularly well. This included one-to-one sessions with a designated point of contact and small group support sessions. Whilst they indicated that they would want to provide employability specific support, such as CV and cover letters, supporting with access to training and education, job-search support, they also highlighted the importance of delivering support specific to people's needs. For example, their support offer would also be tailored to their identified target groups and could include digital inclusion, ESOL, mental health support, housing, debt and welfare advice and immigration advice.

The few who indicated that they had no interest in continuing to deliver employability support post-BBO explained that it was due to uncertainties around securing future funding.

How will these employability activities be funded?

Our grant holder survey found that the BBO programme enabled 62% of grant holders and partners to secure additional funding for supporting their organisations, with 90% of those emphasising the important role BBO played in helping them secure more funding. For example, some mentioned that they have secured funding via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund¹⁹, a local authority (LA) or the DWP. Others also commonly said that they are actively looking for additional funding opportunities to continue delivering

some BBO activities but noted that this has been challenging in a landscape where funders such as local authorities have tight (and reducing) budgets.

Additionally, some grant holders reported that they have been directly approached (e.g., by a LEP) for similar funding opportunities due to their involvement in BBO, which supports the findings that the programme increased the visibility of grant holders with key partners and organisations in the area, as well as potential participants.

¹⁹ The [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) is a £2.6 billion programme announced by the UK Government, which succeeds the old EU structural funds.

In April 2022, the UK Government made public their plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which will replace the European Social Fund, and other European Structural Funds such as the European Regional Development Fund. The investment to support people and skills strand of the UKSPF is most closely aligned to ESF. It aims to complement mainstream employment support provided by DWP by focusing on the provision of employment support to those who are economically inactive. It also makes provision for the development of skills for both unemployed and economically inactive people.

The prospectus for UKSPF recognises the need to provide focused support to people aged over 50, people with a disability or health condition, women, people from an ethnic minority, young people who are NEET and people with multiple complex needs, including those who are homeless, care leavers, ex/ offenders, people with substance abuse problems and survivors of domestic violence. At the time of the grant holder survey (December 2022) 68% of respondents had engaged with their local authority regarding UKSPF funding plans.

Our evaluation found that some grant holders and partners have been more actively engaged than others in conversations about UKSPF. For example, local authority grant holders were more widely involved in the development and commissioning of UKSPF, and as part of this were considering how the UKSPF fits with current local provision. Other ways that grant holders and partners engaged with UKSPF funding plans included early planning consultation exercises such as workshops and panels.

However, findings from our grant holder survey suggest that the meaningful engagement with the UKSPF had been limited at that point in time. Our evaluation findings indicate that even those who had formally expressed interest in applying to the UKSPF to continue delivering employability support were also looking at alternative funding opportunities. For example, some mentioned that securing funding via UKSPF would mean changes to their delivery model including involving fewer delivery partners and scaling down delivery, given that the funding available through UKSPF is much less than that awarded by BBO.

Overall, providing employability support generally remains an ongoing priority for grant holders and partners post-BBO. They will use the learning and insights from the last 7 years of the programme to inform their future activities and apply for funding to deliver to people who need to access this support.

“The biggest impact is the opportunity to develop new support services for [our service users] and [our organisation] has gained a huge amount of learning from the project that can be taken forward – employment support is part of the new strategy (this wasn’t a priority previously), and this has been influenced by involvement with BBO.”

[BBO grant holder]



Conclusions

There were expectations for the BBO programme as a large-scale, long-term programme to provide investment in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth, particularly for groups facing complex barriers to work. These expectations included impact for individuals and the organisations involved as well as the evidence base.

Overall, **the BBO programme was effective in achieving its aims** as follows:

- **Help the most disadvantaged**

The MI data shows that the programme was extremely successful in reaching those with multiple and complex barriers to work, and groups who were not engaging with, or who had not been successfully supported by, mainstream employment programmes. 181,522 people took part in the programme, exceeding set targets, despite the challenges for engagement posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The high rates of engagement with people who were economically inactive are testament to creative and adaptable project approaches to reaching people through, for example, engaging with specialist partners and developing outreach and communications campaigns that reached people in their local communities.

BBO made a strong contribution to the national targets identified in the ESF Operational Programme, by performing well in reaching many of the groups identified in the ESF England Operational Programme as those most at risk of exclusion: most notably, the over 50's and people with disabilities.

- **Tackle social exclusion**

The design of the programme in terms of enabling organisations to provide more intensive, individualised and longer-term support was an extremely positive aspect and key to its ability to tackle social exclusion, given the role of unemployment as a driver of social exclusion. BBO provision was characterised by the development of holistic, tailored approaches to meeting the needs of participants, built on trusted relationships between delivery partners and with external support organisations. This holistic approach taken by projects meant they were able to address a range of issues or barriers that individuals faced which enabled them to progress.

The programme performed strongly in terms of positive outcomes for participants, with 73% of participants with a verified exit destination achieving one of the three key programme results: securing employment, moving into education or training, or undertaking active job-searching from prior economic inactivity. These are all important factors in tackling social exclusion and evidence that these participants made progress in moving out of a position of social exclusion. In particular, the employment outcomes achieved (34% of participants with a verified exit destination in employment on leaving the programme, and the evidence of sustainable employment) are clear evidence of the programme's success in tackling social exclusion.

Equally important, however, were the range of wider outcomes experienced by participants from their participation in BBO, notably 72% of participants reporting increased confidence and 60% reporting increased wellbeing.

Addressing these foundational needs was necessary before further progression was possible for individuals, and a further significant achievement of the programme, and it is also one that was often cited as missing from other mainstream programmes by both participants and delivery staff.

- **Be focused on the capabilities of each individual**

Projects successfully replicated existing good practice in terms of developing a support offer structured around key worker/coaching models, supplemented by specialist support as and when required. This was highly tailored and individualised with the progression journey unique to individuals, dependent on their starting point and personal goals.

- **Lead to better coordinated services**

The design of interventions delivered by BBO projects were clearly developed to respond to specific local needs identified in the project outlines produced by LEPs to inform the programme's funding decisions. As such, there is strong evidence that BBO projects had an impact by filling gaps in existing local provision and/or adding value to statutory services supporting disadvantaged groups across the range of needs they may have.

BBO projects were delivered across England by 132 partnerships which included 1,731 organisations across the whole funding period. While some existing partnerships delivered BBO projects throughout the lifetime of the programme, there was evidence of new and additional networks and relationships being built through the course of BBO delivery.

This was both between organisations directly involved and those working locally in parallel to serve the target groups.

Evaluation evidence demonstrated other positive impacts for organisations involved in BBO delivery. These include reputational capital generated from involvement in the BBO programme, typically described in terms of an enhanced or broadened reputation or profile in a local area. Likewise, there is also evidence of organisational capacity building having occurred for partners, particularly in dealing with complex funding and in terms of enhancing or improving their support offer.

The BBO delivery period and organisational outcomes achieved from the programme provided the potential for a legacy of better coordinated services. There is evidence that this will be sustained in some places but the achievements and progress under the BBO programme have potential to be significantly undermined by the time gap, short funding period and more limited funding available under the successor UKSPF programme. Despite some positive examples of provision being sustained, most organisations involved in BBO delivery face uncertainty in terms of ability to continue their provision.

- **Create new opportunities for work**

The BBO projects performed strongly in supporting participants into employment where that was an appropriate and achievable outcome for them. Employer engagement was a strong feature of BBO delivery used to facilitate these job outcomes. In isolated examples, this did include working directly with employers to create new opportunities

for work but more readily involved working closely with employers to broker opportunities for individuals. This included facilitating the transition of individuals into work where additional support mechanisms were required. With BBO delivered against a changing labour market context, particularly the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, this individual level brokerage proved most effective.

BBO's achievements were a product of the diversity of activities, services, and approaches adopted across the programme overall, and within different areas. The programme was effective in delivering good evidence of what works and throughout the programme, a wealth of resources was produced by individual partnerships and at programme level. These can be found on the The National Lottery Community Fund BBO [impact webpages](#).





Annex: Methodology

Ecorys was commissioned to evaluate the Building Better Opportunities Programme in 2016. An original evaluation contract was in place to cover activity up to 2020, with an expectation it would deliver an end of programme report in December 2020. With a decision made to extend delivery of the programme, the evaluation contract was also extended. This extension happened before the end of the original contract allowing a stock take of data collection to date. Evaluation research activities therefore undertaken in the extension contract

included a continuation of some planned data collection but also some adaptations and additional elements, such as interviews with underperforming projects described below.

The following provides an outline of all evaluation activity complete since 2016 which has been used variously to produce the annual reports and learning resources. This final summative report has drawn on data collected from all evaluation activities completed since 2016.

Research with grant holders and stakeholders

Grant holder survey

An initial wave of a grant holder survey 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. 256 organisations responded.

A follow up survey was completed in 2023 with 209 responses. This second survey covered a range of themes: the geographical scope of their delivery; roles; activities; changes in partnerships since inception; ability to deliver specialist provision; views on their involvement in the BBO programme; sustainability and further funding opportunities; and views on the achievements of BBO.

In-depth research with projects

Over the course of the evaluation period, qualitative research with projects has been completed. The scale and focus of this work has varied depending on evaluation needs and focus at any given point, but ultimately this work had the aim to engage

organisations, partners and delivery staff working across partnerships to capture wider views from a range of stakeholders beyond lead grant holders and to allow the evaluation to explore in-depth aspects of delivery.

Case study visits to projects

Case study visits have been undertaken across the evaluation. They were completed where it was felt there was merit in a particular model of delivery, which warranted further exploration or to explore delivery for particular target groups. Resource was allocated to visit projects, collect evidence, and undertake high quality in-depth interviews. As part of the visits, lead organisations were asked to identify a cross section of partner organisations including VCSE providers, private sector providers, training providers and employers. This was complimented with interview or focus group consultation with participants as appropriate.

The visits included projects that were successful in piloting particular approaches or that demonstrated innovative practice. Sampling was conducted using intelligence from the Fund, outcomes from learning events and a review of evaluation reports. At each stage, the sampling frame considered projects that engaged in evaluation activities in previous phases to ensure a range of projects were involved. 28 case study visits were conducted across the evaluation, 12 of which were in the extension phase. These 12 visits comprised of 91 interviews in total.

Ad Hoc telephone interviews with projects.

Over the course of the evaluation 40 consultations have been completed with grant holders to gather greater detail on current themes for the evaluation, or to capture mini case studies. This was used when the activity examined is only one element of a project,

thus not warranting a full case study visit. In addition, a further 25 grant holders submitted further information in writing through feedback forms to gather more details on project experiences during the pandemic.

Unsuccessful project interviews

In the early stages of the evaluation in 2016, 15 interviews were conducted with organisations that were not successful with a bid to secure funding from BBO. The aim of these interviews was to help inform how effective the programme has been in widening access to ESF funding, and how this could be enhanced, by gathering direct feedback

from organisations that were not successful. Specifically, the interviews sought reflections on the application process as well as other factors perceived to have resulted in the unsuccessful decision. These interviews were covered in our first [Annual Report \(2017\)](#).

Telephone interviews with underperforming projects.

We undertook a programme of telephone interviews with underperforming projects to sensitively establish any barriers which may have contributed to their underperformance. This was undertaken at two points in 2020. The first wave captured those who were not in receipt of extension funding, and as such were closing, or those only in receipt of an

extended delivery timescale. The second wave captured those whose performance in the extension period was lower than expected. This data was triangulated with quarterly reports and conversations with The National Lottery Community Fund to understand any contextual issues.

Wider Stakeholder strand

Across the evaluation phases, there was interest in establishing how the BBO fits into the wider employment support

landscape, the wider stakeholder strand consulted with external stakeholders to capture this external view.

Locality case studies

The evaluation undertook case study and desk research into how the BBO sits within local landscapes. We undertook consultation in four localities, conducting 4-6 telephone interviews. The consultations included representatives from local authorities, along with a range of local support infrastructure organisations such as local stakeholders with

a role in mental health along with primary and secondary care provision, Jobcentre Plus, housing support organisations or local disability organisations. The locality case studies were conducted in 2022 and 2023, with the aim of understanding the sustainability of BBO's legacy and future prospects for localities.

LEP consultations

The localised design of the BBO programme meant that LEPs were a key stakeholder group. However LEPs were not involved in the initial evaluation. In the extension to the evaluation, we consulted with LEP representatives to explore their perception of the programme and how it fits into the local support landscape. This enabled the evaluation to further assess the fit of the BBO programme within

the local nexus of provision, as well as the contribution of the BBO programme at the LEP level (including to the implementation of LEP strategies). We undertook 9 interviews with LEP representatives in 4 areas (both locality case study areas and non-case study areas). This enhanced the case studies and broadened the geographic scope. Sampling was undertaken in conjunction with the Fund.

Consultation with national stakeholders

To compliment locally focussed work, we dedicated a small amount of resources to consult three wider stakeholders to capture evidence about the wider context BBO sits in. The sample for these interviews was agree

with The National Lottery Community Fund and included the Managing Authority and representatives of umbrella organisations in the employment support sector.

Consultation with programme staff

Over the course of the evaluation, periodic consultations have been conducted with programme staff, including:

- Seven interviews at the start of the evaluation and programme to gain an understanding of programme development, key issues, priorities, challenges and risks and to help prioritise key thematic areas for the evaluation.
- Two focus group sessions were conducted in the initial evaluation period involving The National Lottery Community Fund Funding Officers with a responsibility for managing BBO projects. The initial group

in 2017 involved Funding Officers who had direct experience of the application process to capture their perceptions of the successes and challenges grant holders may have experienced in the first phase of programme delivery. A second focus group in 2018 engaged many of the same Funding Officers to capture reflections on delivery and perceptions of any issues grant holders faced in the subsequent period.

- In the latter stages of the programme, we captured the reflections and learnings from BBO staff through evaluation meetings and learning events to capture learning as programme delivery evolved.

Participant Consultation

As the primary beneficiaries of the programme participants have been a key focus of the evaluation. We have undertaken two strands

of consultation with participants to explore the breadth and depth of their outcomes.

Participant surveys

An initial telephone survey was completed under the original evaluation contract. The focus was 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.

A second participant survey was completed as part of the extension evaluation contract. The survey design encompassed sustainability in

order to reflect the shift in focus toward the end of the BBO. The survey was conducted on leaving the BBO programme and 6 months later a follow up was conducted. The baseline survey reached 403 participants and the follow up reached 158. Participants were contacted 4-5

months after leaving BBO and the second wave was conducted 10-12 months since leaving the programme. Screening at the beginning of the survey established demographics, whether they exited the project and gaining informed consent to be re-contacted.

Participant case studies

Prior evaluation showed the impact of the programme through individual participant case studies conducted as part of the case studies. Later we sought to maximise existing data which came through projects and collated the many participants case studies

produced by individual projects to inform our overall evaluation. This provided greater depth to our knowledge of the support available to participants and provided depth and expansion to our evidence base around participant progressions and outcomes.

Desk based and existing evidence

Alongside the primary data collection undertaken as part of the national evaluation,

there were existing and parallel strands of data that this evaluation has built upon.

MI and comparative data analysis

Programme level participant MI informed the evaluation providing a comprehensive dataset on participants and their characteristics. MI data covered 181,522 individuals and collated a range of characteristics including employment status, demographics, educational

attainment, skill level, level of deprivation in local area, and dependent children. The MI data also captured participant exit destinations. This data was shared by The National Lottery Community Fund at key points.

Partnership profiling desk research

We have collated and coded data held by The National Lottery Community Fund on partners involved in each BBO project in order to examine the number of partners

involved, the range and type of organisations involved, and where appropriate, the size of involved organisations. This was gathered at two points in 2017 and 2022.

Review of local and national evaluation reports

Many BBO projects conducted local evaluations; systems were established for published local evaluation reports to be shared with Ecorys. 126 reports were received and systematically reviewed, categorised by target group / the focus of the project. This review informed a range of evaluation activities, providing a key source of evidence for annual reports and supporting the production of learning papers and case studies.

Other non-BBO evaluation reports were reviewed to ensure emerging BBO findings were informed by and contextualised

in respect of other employment programmes, such as other ESF evaluations conducted at DWP and EU level.

We also considered other DWP employment schemes that support similar target groups to BBO. The evaluation team kept abreast of any emerging evidence from academic research or other programme evaluations delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund, Local or National Government or VCSE organisations, which focus on similar target groups to BBO or utilise comparable intervention models. These were compared with BBO where appropriate.

Analysis

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data collected through the interviews and case studies was collated into analytical themes to present the information in a logical and common format. Content analysis was then undertaken at reporting points to

draw out emerging themes and compare issues and outcomes across the programme. Following the extension of the evaluation, NVivo was used to support qualitative analysis.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data primarily comprised project monitoring data supplied by The National Lottery Community Fund and the survey data. The analysis involved a number of methods ranging from basic descriptive statistics to the use of statistical measures to compare two samples.

Cross-tabular analysis was produced to demonstrate how many participants were involved in funded activities, the length of participation in the programme and demographic characteristics. Multivariate analysis was conducted to establish the role of participant characteristics in outcomes and to isolate factors which correlate with outcomes.

Triangulation

With the breadth of data available, the evaluation triangulated the qualitative and quantitative data at reporting points to address the evaluation questions and evaluation criteria. Triangulation in this sense

refers to the application and combination of several methodologies in the study of a common theme or question, and the adoption of an analytical approach to bring these together in developing key findings.

Learning events and resources

The evaluation contract also included a strand to deliver learning activities, with grant holders and programme stakeholders the primary audience.

In the main, this took the form of 12 learning events delivered in total between 2017 and 2023. In the early phase of the evaluation, these were delivered face to face, typically with three events being held in different geographical locations each time, to ensure access to geographically dispersed projects. The events delivered since 2020 were exclusively held online in response to COVID-19 restrictions and for efficiency reasons.

The learning events aimed to provide an opportunity to disseminate emerging findings from the national evaluation but also to provide a forum for local learning to be shared by projects. This was typically done through project presentations, discussion groups and networking. External speakers were also engaged periodically to deliver presentations of interest to grant holders.

To capture learning from the events and to bring together evaluation evidence on particular themes, a series of learning papers were produced by the evaluation team. These covered the following themes and are available on the The National Lottery Community Fund [BBO impact webpage](#):

- Successfully managing complex funding
 - In work support
 - Employer engagement
 - Participant involvement
 - Cross cutting themes
 - Participant case studies.
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