



Leeds City Region Employment Hub: Final Evaluation

May 2022

Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Evaluation aims, context and methodology	7
2. The Employment Hub Programme and its Central Functions	9
2.1 Programme rationale, aims and targets	9
2.2 Structure and partnership	10
2.3 Central functions	11
3. Local Employment Hubs	15
3.1 Bradford Employment Hub.....	15
3.2 Calderdale Employment Hub.....	20
3.3 Kirklees Employment Hub	24
3.4 Leeds Employment Hub.....	29
3.5 Wakefield Employment Hub.....	33
3.6 York Employment Hub.....	37
4. Beneficiary Survey and Perceptions	42
4.1 Survey methodology and sample	42
4.2 Reasons for engaging with Hubs and the support they offered	43
4.3 What was good about the support provided and what could be improved	44
4.4 The impact of support and advice	45
4.5 Overall perceptions of the support	48
5. Business Survey and Perceptions	51
5.1 Survey methodology and sample	51
5.2 Business size and sector	51
5.3 Businesses who did not employ following engagement with an Employment Hub	52
5.4 Businesses who did employ following engagement with an Employment Hub	54
6. Performance and Data Analysis.....	60
6.1 Programme level outputs and results and appropriateness of ESF targets	60
6.2 Performance against targets by locality	65
6.3 Performance on Business Rate Pool results and appropriateness of targets	70
6.4 Impact, Additionality, Spend and Value for Money Analysis	73
7. Overall Conclusions, Lessons and Good Practice	79
7.1 Overall Conclusions	79

Executive Summary

The Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Employment Hub Programme began in January 2019 and ran until December 2021. Utilising European Social Fund (ESF) and Combined Authority Business Rates Pool (BRP) funding and match from local authorities, the programme aimed to:

- support young people aged 16-24 who are further from the labour market and face challenges to develop skills, confidence and employability, and to help them on a journey towards or into education/training or employment; and
- engage with business with the aim of stimulating apprenticeship places or job vacancies; providing opportunities for the target group and helping businesses to meet labour needs.

The model established to achieve this was based on a central team in the Combined Authority leading on overall programme management and centralised marketing; and six local delivery Hubs in Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield and York, led by local authorities and with local delivery partners in two areas (C&K Careers in Kirklees and Leeds Beckett University in Calderdale).

The programme underwent a mid-term review in April/May 2020 to assess progress from the start to the end of March 2020 – a period unaffected by COVID-19 – and to inform the remainder of delivery. This final evaluation, completed between November 2021 and April 2022, includes delivery up to the end of the programme in December 2021, which in contrast was a period dominated by the pandemic. The purpose of this report is to assess the programme’s overall impact and to draw out lessons and areas of positive practice that can be applied in future interventions. Both assessments were completed by Les Newby Associates Ltd and Nicky Denison of Wordfern Ltd.

The table shows the programme’s delivery against its output and result measures.

Measure	Target	Achieved	% Achieved
ESF Outputs			
Participants (below 25 yrs of age) who are unemployed or inactive	6,294	5,919	94%
Males	3,208	3,458	108%
Females	3,086	2,461	80%
Unemployed, including long term unemployed	4,322	4,803	111%
Inactive	1,972	1,116	57%
Participants from ethnic minorities	800	2,063	258%
Participants with disabilities	566	1,138	201%
Participants without basic skills	1,384	1,832	132%
Single adult household with dependent children	252	241	96%
ESF Results			
Participants gaining basic skills	200	54	27%
Participants (below 25) in employment including self-employment, or education/training upon leaving	2,706	2,156	80%
Participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving	1,000	555	56%
BRP Results			
Businesses Engaged	5,000	4,217	84%
Apprenticeship places created	1,800	941	52%

The main overall conclusions we draw from this final evaluation are that:

- i) The Employment Hub programme responded to identified needs** – especially those of unemployed or inactive young people facing disadvantage with barriers that require ongoing and intensive support. It did this whilst navigating two very different climates in terms of how attractive these young people are to potential employers. Everyone involved should be commended for their part in maintaining delivery under those circumstances.
- ii) The model of a central team combined with local Hubs leading delivery worked well overall but was not without challenges.** It builds on strong coordination and programme management from the centre and allows alignment with local partnerships and provision which are often already in place and tuned to local circumstances. However, the model is reliant on good local delivery. Where Hubs perform well, so does the model. But it can be let down if delivery is weak in individual Hubs. The lack of a payment by results lever has a mixed impact linked to this (see section 2.1).
- iii) Hubs, and the programme, responded creatively and effectively to the pandemic. However, the impact of COVID-19 on Hub operation was pronounced and will have significantly reduced outputs and results.** Changes included a shift to online delivery; fewer job opportunities; and new DWP programmes impacting on referrals, and to more time-intensive support and fewer outputs.
- iv) Performance against targets was strong in many respects given the challenging context but varied significantly across geographies and output and result measures.** Key points are:
 - **The programme hit or was very close to hitting most output measures, including supporting 5,919 unemployed or inactive participants.** Performance was excellent on engaging participants with disabilities and those from ethnic minorities, and strong for unemployed people, males, and those without basic skills. Outputs were below target for engaging females and (to a greater extent) inactive young people.
 - **The programme was below target on its three ESF results measures,** although helping 2,156 people into employment or education/training (80% of target) could be viewed as an achievement given the challenging context.
 - **A significant but below target volume of BRP business engagement results** were achieved.
 - **Performance varied greatly by Hub,** with one Hub (Kirklees) exceeding nearly all of its outputs, most of the others hitting five or six out of nine, but with one (York) only achieving one target. There was similar variation in results targets, with Kirklees standing out on sustained employment results, while Wakefield was the only Hub to hit its apprenticeships target.
 - **Key reasons for reduced outputs and results initially included late starts, limited capacity and difficulties getting referrals.** However, during COVID-19, the tough economic, operational and labour market context will have suppressed delivery. Given this, there would have been a strong case for allowing a reduction in programme level targets without financial penalty.

- v) **Goals for creating apprenticeship opportunities was admirable but difficult in practice (even pre-pandemic) and not a good fit for the target group.** Apprenticeships often are not the best solution for the young people targeted or for the businesses recruiting them. Other employment or work experience models may be better initially. COVID-19 significantly impacted on apprenticeship starts, with any available being secured by the candidates far closer to the labour market.
- vi) **The programme is estimated to have achieved a gross economic impact of approximately £48.1 million, and net economic impact of approximately £41.5 million** over two years. Given spend of £8,628,538, the cost per person entering employment or education/training was £4,002; while that for participants sustaining employment for six months was £15,547 and the cost per apprenticeship place created was £9,170. Based on the programme's cost and its net economic impact, it achieved a healthy **Return on Investment of £4.80 per £1 invested.**

Specific insights and lessons have also been identified around main themes covered in the evaluation:

Programme management and central functions

- **There is clear benefit from having a central element built into the model and this is valued by localities.** It provided a key role in local Hub contract management and helped to facilitate networking and sharing of ideas across the network, albeit the latter could be amplified.
- **There are mixed views on central marketing.** Leading with local branding and messaging but recognising Combined Authority programme investment and joining up with LEP products/services and individual support for local Hubs where helpful seems sensible.
- **Central recruitment of businesses is best channelled via existing LEP business support mechanisms and advisors** who can have direct dialogue and offer clear advice and signposting. This is far more impactful than blanket marketing or outsourced cold calling.

Local Hub model, positioning and capacity

- **Capacity is vital** – having enough (and suitably experienced and able) people working in Hubs from the start is central to delivery. Where not in place, the scale of delivery suffered.
- **Staff in local Hubs should be commended for their efforts to adapt to home-working and to pivot delivery online** – there was a great response to an unprecedented challenge which at times extended to effectively supporting clients on wellbeing issues as well as employability.
- **Building on and fit with existing provision and partnership structures** is key. It brings local alignment, consistency and coordination, and enables better reach, a good stream of referrals, multi-agency expertise, and a clearer and more impactful offer to clients.
- **A clear focus on young people as opposed to being business facing** helped Hubs to position and direct efforts, build effective partnerships, and focus on identifying individuals' aspirations around which they can be supported and from which business talent matching can take place.

- Operating **all activity under the umbrella of local employment and skills ‘front doors’** helps to join up local services, supporting targeting of cohorts and moving people seamlessly to and between programmes that best suit their needs, while ‘hiding the wiring’ to ease client engagement.
- For some Hubs there were **significant issues in securing the evidence** required to claim outputs and results. This reduced the final totals and should be planned for in future programmes.

Referrals and routes to young people

- **Establishing strong relationships with Jobcentres** early, including co-location, was crucial in driving referrals. Closure of Jobcentres and refocusing of DWP work coaches towards Universal Credit during the pandemic had a big impact on this and illuminated their importance for referrals.
- **Partnership with others delivering local employment and skills and children and young people services** proved valuable in reaching young people as part of a joined-up approach. This included schools, colleges, careers organisations, local NEET groups, pupil referral units and SEND provision.
- A **proactive, outreach centred approach based on going out to communities** rather than expecting them to come to you - or to the city centre – enhanced Hub reach and effectiveness.

Providing support to young people and making it effective

- **Reaching inactive people is difficult and takes time.** There can be ingrained anti-work attitudes and complex, sizeable barriers to address. Success is about a journey not a quick fix and will take time and persistence. New programmes like Kickstart took on those who are more readily employable and increased the proportion of those further from the labour market within the Hub’s clientele – typically leading to more time needed per client and lower outputs/results.
- **Flexible, individualised provision** is important. Hubs strove to provide this rather than offering pre-set provision or chasing outputs at the expense of what is right for a young person or business.
- **One to one, face to face support generally worked best,** is most demanded by young people, and although more time/cost intensive, delivers good outcomes. COVID-19 pivoted provision to online, which Hubs delivered well, but had drawbacks of less rich communication, inappropriateness for group sessions and digital exclusion challenges. A hybrid approach is likely to be beneficial.

Participant perspectives on provision

- **The main reasons young people engaged with Hubs were to access careers advice and guidance and/or to get a job.** However, the benefits they cited were wider than this and included confidence building, health and wellbeing and overcoming barriers to work.
- Good points identified by clients included friendly, non-judgemental support delivered by people who understood their needs and could help them with solutions. **Over 80% rated their experience of engaging with a Hub as good or excellent** and would recommend it to others.

- The main elements that (a minority of) young people said could be improved were outcome oriented and focused on **more access to local employers, and support that better led into employment**, self-employment, training or an apprenticeship.

Business engagement and perspectives on provision

- **Relationships, dialogue and effective talent matching with employers** are key to persuading them to take on young people, with the main reasons for businesses engaging being to give young people a chance, and to position the business for future growth. Ongoing in-work support is needed to reassure employers and to underpin sustained employment for individuals.
- **A half of businesses surveyed employed someone following Hub engagement**, with benefits including capacity to deliver for customers, enabling growth, and energy and enthusiasm. Most of these businesses rated engagement with the Hub as excellent or good, but this proportion fell to below 50% for those that did not recruit. Suggested improvements included a clearer offer and better communication, swifter service, and more support once a young person was in post.
- **Close to 90% of businesses were happy on balance with their decision to take someone on via the Hub**. Where problems were reported, these concerned unreliability, poor performance or attitude. 92% of these businesses would definitely or probably engage with a similar service again.

1. Evaluation aims, context and methodology

This report is the full and final evaluation of the Leeds City Region Employment Hub Programme, which is described in section 2.1. It follows on from a mid-term review in spring 2020 and draws conclusions about the benefits and impacts of the programme, as well as lessons that could be applied to other investments in the future, in or beyond the city region.

The mid-term review covered the period from the start of the programme in 2019 to the end of March 2020. Apart from some of the final month when the virus had started to loom large, this period of the programme was unaffected by COVID-19, which meant the report neatly reflected a 'business as usual' style phase of operation.

Clearly, the picture was very different for the remainder of the programme from April 2020 to December 2021. In this time, COVID-19 and associated restrictions came into full force, both nationally and with extended local arrangements in places, including in the city region, where infection rates were peaking. This substantially affected the running of the programme, the vast majority of which had until that point been delivered face-to-face, making many activities not possible and others needing to be transferred immediately online. Hubs needed to navigate in a shifting landscape around which they had very little if any control and varying dependent on outbreaks and restrictions, with ongoing impacts on ability to deliver and consistently engage and keep contact with a client group who require a more intensive level of intervention.

This was also happening within a much changed economic and labour market context, where even at the end of the programme the number of people claiming out of work benefits – and within that, the number of young claimants (aged 16-24) – across Leeds City Region remained higher than the pre-crisis level (February 2020). Employment opportunities have been constrained for many sectors affected by lockdowns and wider economic uncertainty has impacted on jobs, apprenticeships and recruitment more widely throughout the programme's operation.

The programme has also needed to operate in its latter half in a climate of people being significantly socially impacted by COVID-19. Research has shown this to have had marked effects on individual wellbeing, with these impacts being greatest amongst certain groups of people, including young people, those from BAME communities, and those who are already amongst the worst off in society based on existing challenges they may face linked to their physical and mental health, employment status, or living environments.

A further major change in context since the mid-term review was the introduction of Government schemes such as furlough and DWP programmes designed to help people back into work – notably Restart, Kickstart and the National Careers Service Job Fuse. These have led to a substantial amount of provision targeting the same or similar clients as the Employment Hub programme and have changed the dynamic around business support, particularly where they are founded on offering business a wage subsidy. This is the case with Kickstart, which may make it a more attractive offer to many employers than that already established through the Employment Hub programme.

The result has been a noisy field of employment and skills support provision. Many Hubs were impacted by a significant drop in referrals as DWP Jobcentre work coaches channelled young people to the Kickstart route; as well as by having a cohort that is further away from the labour market and who need more intensive support. The predominant view shared by the Combined Authority and local Hubs, is that national DWP provision has undermined and duplicated local ESF programme delivery. However, this is not universal, and at least one Hub has been able to support Kickstart beneficiaries and increase its outputs/results from doing so.

Because of this changed context and the wide-reaching impacts, including on employment opportunities, this evaluation is structured so as to reflect the operation of the programme before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have done this by focusing evaluation interviews with Hubs and central elements of the programme near the end of the programme in late 2021 on the question of what has changed since the mid-term review in spring 2020 (i.e. in a COVID-19 affected context), as well as overall points about issues, achievement and lessons learned. Reflecting that, the report structure and its content in sections that are about operation of local Hubs and central functions, is essentially split into two halves – firstly a recap of the base position at the mid-term review point, and then an update on changes, developments and overall observations for the second half of the programme and from a final and overall standpoint. The report’s section on data analysis also compares the final position to that at the end of March 2020, while conclusions and recommendations take into account the changing context that has affected the programme.

The methodology for the research comprised interviews with the central programme and each local Employment Hub as well as online surveys of programme beneficiaries and businesses, including those who provided employment opportunities to participants. The interviews and surveys were completed in late 2021, while data analysis was completed using data from late April 2022. The relevant sections of the report further detail the approaches that were used.

2. The Employment Hub Programme and its Central Functions

2.1 Programme rationale, aims and targets

In March 2018, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority worked with local authority partners to submit an application to a European Social Fund (ESF) call titled Routeways: Developing Young People. The application was approved in October 2018, and in January 2019, the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LCR LEP) Employment Hub programme was launched, having secured ESF investment of £4.5m, matched by £4.5m from the Combined Authority's Business Rates Pool (BRP) and local authority contributions. The programme's end date was 31 December 2021.

From its inception, the programme's primary aim as a DWP contract was to support young people aged 16-24, with an overall target set of servicing 6,294 participants below 25 years of age who are unemployed or inactive. As reflected in the contracted outputs and results (see below), there was a strong focus on those typically harder to reach and further from the labour market and preventing them from becoming NEET or moving them into EET if they already are. This core focus remained the same throughout the programme, however, with the onset of COVID-19, there were two changes.

Firstly, a change request was submitted by the Combined Authority to DWP to reduce the 'Unemployed (including long term unemployed)' target from 4,406 to 4,322; and to increase the 'Inactive' target from 1,888 to 1,972. With both changing by +/- 84, there was no overall change in the total number of participants supported. The rationale for this reflected the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market. Secondly, the age bracket was opened up to allow Hubs to support people of any age. That said, delivery partners were not paid for any individual that they supported who was above 24, and in reality, there was far less demand for support from this older cohort than was anticipated.

The Combined Authority also wanted a business engagement element, building on the success achieved through previous LCR Apprenticeship Hub investment. Hence, in bringing forward the 50% BRP match, there was also a contractual requirement for Hubs to engage businesses with the aim of stimulating apprenticeship places or job vacancies.

A decision was taken at the point of application to adopt a funding model that was not based on achievement of outputs (a choice that is outlined in DWP/ESIF guidance) – in other words, there was no requirement for Hubs to achieve outputs in order to get paid. This has significant benefits in allowing them to spend the intensive amount of time needed to make a real difference to the cohorts of young people being targeted. It also recognises that additional 'hand holding' is required when working with businesses in encouraging and then supporting them to take on these young people. This is in contrast to a 'payment by results' style contract that can implicitly prompt quantity over quality. The downside is that it partially removes a useful incentivisation and contract management lever and the ability to encourage individual Hubs to push on with delivery if they are falling behind. The ESF contractual clawback clause in place that could be enforced if programme outputs and results are not met, may have the same effect but is a more of a crude and last resort measure.

Table 1 shows the contractual output and result requirements for the programme.

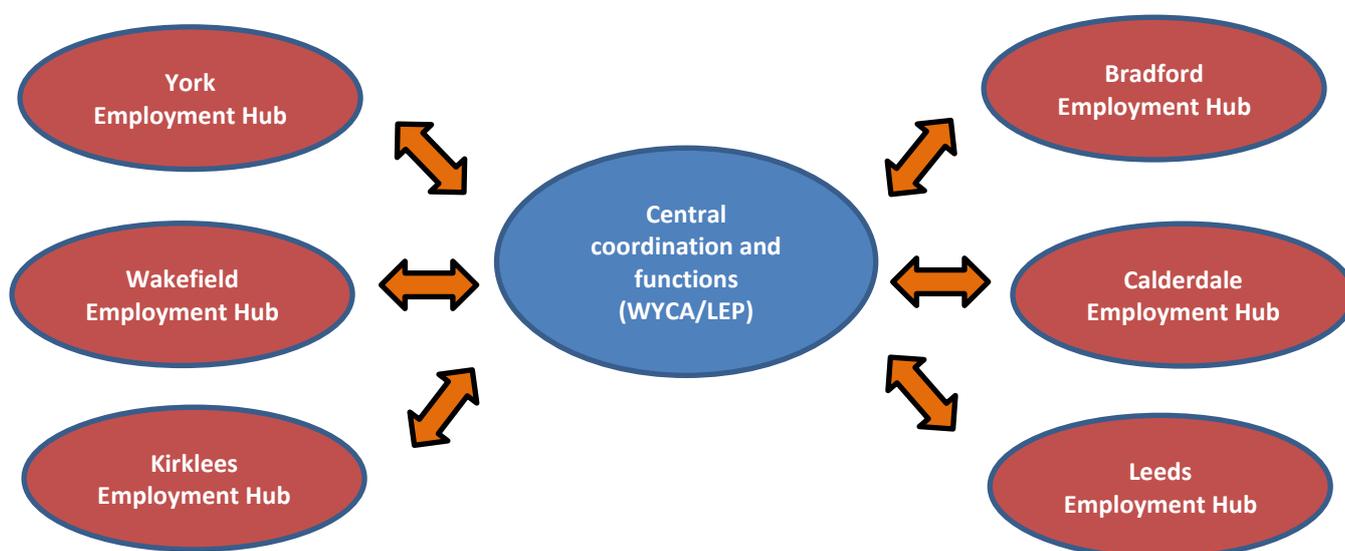
Table 1: Summary of Output and Results Targets

ESF Outputs (incorporating the March 2020 change request)	Target
Participants (below 25 years of age) who are unemployed or inactive	6,294
Unemployed, including long term unemployed	4,322
Inactive	1,972
Participants from ethnic minorities	800
Participants with disabilities	566
Participants without basic skills	1,384
Participants who live in a single household with dependent children	252
ESF Results	
Participants gaining basic skills	200
Participants (below 25 years of age) in employment, including self-employment, or education/training upon leaving	2,706
Participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving	1,000
BRP Outputs	Target
Business engagements	5,000

2.2 Structure and partnership

Based on experience, the Employment Hub model recognised that effective and impactful interventions with individuals and businesses are best delivered locally. Hence it was structured on six local authority led Hubs with a central team in the Combined Authority responsible for overall programme management in the city region and with DWP. Two further delivery partners aligned to Hubs; C&K Careers in Kirklees and Leeds Beckett University in Calderdale, as they form part of the skills delivery mechanism in those localities. The programme was funded for the whole LCR geography, and whilst there were not individual Hubs in Craven, Harrogate and Selby, they were still eligible for individual and business support via informal arrangements between the centre and partner agencies. No changes were made to this delivery model between the mid-term and full evaluation reports.

Figure 1: The Central Programme and Local Employment Hubs



2.3 Central functions

The Combined Authority's role in leading the programme's central functions was three-fold.

2.3.1 Overall positioning, coordination and learning

The Combined Authority played a key role in supporting development of the case for this intervention and its local authority led delivery model; securing the bulk of the necessary match funding and in so doing relieving the pressure on local areas to do so; and positioning it as a "*flagship programme*" within its business and skills support offer, helping give profile and kudos from a political perspective.

On an ongoing basis, the central team acted as the overall coordinator of the programme, and there were no substantive changes to this approach between the mid-term and full evaluation report. This role included facilitating dialogue between Hubs, including via a six-weekly Steering Group attended by a range of representatives from the central team, from each Hub and DWP's local Partnership Manager. This provided a forum to discuss delivery, new opportunities and performance matters and allowed Hubs to be aware of each other's practice, strengths and challenges and to encourage exchange of ideas and learning.

Hubs report that coming together in this way has been helpful, especially as everyone grappled with the overnight shift to online delivery in the face of COVID-19, and instilled a positive team approach, although sharing has in fact been relatively limited in reality. This is an area that could be extended in future programmes, especially where there may be elements that are performing better than others and may have good practice to share in terms of how they have done this, or where Hubs have had notable success in overcoming a particular barrier or working with a particular cohort.

2.3.2 Management, contracting, and monitoring

The central team has been responsible throughout for programme management across the board and with individual Hubs including:

- working with Hubs at the outset as they established their structures and activities;
- agreeing Hub output, result and finance positions and signing contracts;
- monitoring overall and individual progress and performance in contract delivery (via Evolutive) and the reporting of this to DWP; and
- holding monthly meetings with individual Hubs to discuss staffing, project delivery, budgets, performance against targets and any necessary response measures.

The Combined Authority was the interface between Hubs and DWP with responsibility for overall contract management, reporting and finances as the accountable body. At the outset, and as reported at the mid-term point, this had both ups and downs, with the team being aware of the impact this had on how the central function was perceived by Hubs. On the one hand, the team were able to provide valuable support to Hubs in negotiating output and result terms and in dealing with confusion over funding allocations that led to delays in signing contracts. On the other, they were bound by the rigid requirements demanded of an ESF funded intervention that were robustly enforced by DWP's own contract management function. At times this resulted in the centre being perceived by Hubs as "*inflexible.*" Early days changes in key personnel at the Combined Authority, and processes and

systems that had to evolve over time rather than be in place from the start, also appeared to have made the centre seem *“overly process driven.”*

Whilst this element of the central role did not change over the course of the programme, the central team’s role in contract management, monitoring and profiling outputs and results, and liaison with Hubs and DWP became more pertinent as time went on and as issues around COVID-19 came to the fore. Since the mid-term report therefore, the team has worked very closely with Hubs to help manage and monitor impacts on the programme. This included implementing a process for working very closely with those Hubs needing to increase delivery in line with targets, using monthly contract reviews, monitoring and recovery plans where necessary to drive this.

All Hubs reported having a good relationship with the central team, noting it as *“challenging but fair.”* There was a sense from some that this relationship had evolved later in the programme to be *“less partnership and more contract management mode”* but this was not presented in a negative light and Hubs reported open dialogue and support where needed, and a sense of working together to find solutions. Programme management will also have helped in supporting improvement in one Hub (Bradford) that was well behind schedule in March 2020 (see 6.2) and affecting overall performance.

2.3.3 Central marketing

The Combined Authority provided a central marketing function throughout. Retaining a strand of centralised marketing was a corporate decision taken by the Combined Authority to recognise the level of investment provided by the organisation and its leadership in getting such a programme in place. The aims of the central marketing were focused on delivering activity that targets businesses and individuals across the full LCR geography and drives them to either the LEP (for business) or LCR FutureGoals¹ (for individuals) websites where they can find out more about the Employment Programme and sign up to it. Up to the mid-term, the core strands of activity included:

- One large campaign, launched in January 2020 that primarily used social media advertising as the most effective way to cover a large area within budget. A report prepared by the commissioned agency showed that the campaign performed well and achieved its key performance indicators.
- Development of brand and imagery to be used by all Hubs alongside the necessary EU logos as part of obligations attached to that funding, with the central team overseeing that all artwork developed and used locally was consistent with the central brand and EU guidelines.
- Commissioning of outsourced marketing lead generation (CQM Learning Ltd) to recruit businesses.

A number of important messages had already emerged around the central marketing at the point of the mid-term review. These continued to influence the shape and application of the central marketing up to the programme’s completion.

¹ FutureGoals is the LCR’s umbrella campaign that brings the portfolio of employment and skills products together in one place and is designed to provide individuals with local labour market information to inform, inspire and support them to choose their career paths; point them to the right skills and experience to start work or change career, upskill or retrain; and provide links between education and employers.

Firstly, tensions existed between the rationale for central marketing and the benefits of using a more localised approach. From the outset, Hubs used their own brand identities to communicate their Hub as part of a wider local package of employment and skills support to reach young people and businesses. Hub engagement with and use of central marketing has always therefore varied, and there were early issues around which should take precedence locally, with Hubs not always sharing local material for sign off. The overall impression from Hubs is that they prefer a locally led approach, specifically to avoid risk of diluting or confusing local messages, and even more so during the pandemic when local communications were significantly ramped up in order to support people and communities through the crisis. A balance was struck by the mid-point that continued thereafter whereby Hubs in the main used central material as secondary; with local material at the fore, and with the Combined Authority recognising that local identity and messages are often well recognised, embedded and relevant to people and partners based in those places and so have good traction.

Secondly, there was mixed success in the use of central marketing to recruit businesses to the programme. Web content did generate good interest from business. However, converting that into actual engagement with the programme was hard and not as impactful as the team would have wanted. Mitigations were put in place, including repositioning the Employment Hub as part of the LEP's wider business support offer to raise its profile and ensure it was directly promoted by Growth Managers and business advisors who could receive enquires, offer advice and direct them to relevant Hub leads. Furthermore, outsourced lead generation procured in March 2019 via CQM Learning was found to be of limited impact. In August 2019 the contract was terminated ahead of its scheduled April 2020 completion by mutual agreement. It was noted in the termination agreement that: *"This decision has not been taken lightly and has been taken in consultation with CQM. Having undertaken several reviews and delivery adjustments, unfortunately the current climate within the business community means that CQM have not been able to meet the required programme expectations despite their best efforts."* The central and Hub view was that this sort of 'cold-calling' did not fit with the more targeted and informed dialogue needed with businesses to support and encourage them in taking on young people from the desired cohorts.

Central efforts to target young people, adults, parents and teachers via FutureGoals also came under some scrutiny that led to adjustments from the mid-term point. Feedback was that the site's content erred towards those aged 15/16 looking for inspiration and preparation around the world of work and did not have sufficient information to support a 'NEET to EET' journey or to guide older cohorts. The team worked hard to address this by doing two core things from the mid-point. Firstly, at the start of the pandemic, they immediately adjusted content to be clear that Employment Hubs were available to support you if your job was at risk or you had become unemployed no matter what your age. The idea was to immediately make the site less focused on young people so as not to alienate any older visitors. Secondly, in spring 2021, FutureGoals was relaunched, splitting the careers support page into pages for 11-15 year olds, 16-24 year olds and for 24+ year olds, each with appropriate messaging recognising that each audience is looking for different things and have different requirements.

The onset of the pandemic also brought an enhanced focus on driving traffic via paid social media which had already proved to be the most successful approach, including a focus on Facebook and Instagram. The team report there being far greater traction with individuals than with businesses,

perhaps reflecting the new economic climate the programme found itself in. The team were able to use social channels to target cohorts with some success. For example, a drop off in 15-24 year olds enquiring about the programme was spotted and hence the team worked with an agency to create a TikTok video to target this group specifically. Targeted work was also done for female and inactive cohorts. Pay per click advertising was also used to drive a more constant flow of traffic to FutureGoals and subsequently to convert interest into sign-ups.

When asked if the team would do anything differently in future similar interventions, the view was that there would be benefit in launching a far bigger central campaign focused on the offer, backed by case studies, and aligned to wider messaging on skills and employment including the Mayor's stated priorities. This would clearly require resource and backing from local areas in order to be successful.

2.3.4 Lessons in respect to the Employment Hub's central functions

1. The central team is **highly experienced in both programme management and a 'hub and spoke' approach to delivering skills interventions** in the city region. It provided useful and proactive support to individual Hubs as they moved through a complex set-up process and into very challenging times with the onset of the pandemic and ensuing difficulties with delivery.
2. There is value in having **one organisation – in this case the Combined Authority – responsible for engagement with DWP** to prevent discussions being splintered, multiple and perhaps conflicting. However, at times this put the central team in a difficult middle position that inevitably had pressure points.
3. The **central team facilitated valued Hub interactions** but that could have gone further in terms of shared learning, specifically in terms of driving referrals/enquiries and converting them to sign ups amongst target cohorts.
4. The fact that this programme was **not funded on a payment by results basis was helpful** in giving Hubs the time they needed to work intensively with some of the hardest to reach young people in their districts; however it did remove a key lever in performance management.
5. **Defining central and local marketing positioning, roles and responsibilities** from the outset and agreement on the mechanics for making that work saves time and unhelpful overlaps. An approach that **uses local brand and messaging but that recognises Combined Authority programme investment** and joins up with complementary products/services delivered by the Combined Authority/LEP seems sensible, with the central team having a greater focus on supporting local Hub campaigns where helpful and in ensuring required EU recognition.
6. **Recruitment of businesses from a central perspective is best channelled through existing business support mechanisms and advisers** who can have direct one to one dialogue and offer appropriate advice and signposting. This is far more impactful than a blanket marketing approach or outsourced cold calling as it allows for more intense brokering and streamlines the support offer to reduce confusion.
7. **Paid social media**, including on Facebook and Instagram, by far has the greatest impact with individuals especially when backed by case studies relevant to target cohorts.

3. Local Employment Hubs

3.1 Bradford Employment Hub

Aims, Model and Context

The context in Bradford when the programme was devised and when the local Employment Hub started operation was of a lower employment rate and higher benefit claimant levels in the city than in most of Leeds City Region. There was seen to be a “*cliff edge at age 18*” in the support available, including for those with low qualifications, and making them vulnerable to poor job outcomes at this point. Additionally, apprenticeship levels in the district had not bounced back after the ‘levy year dip’, and unrelated to that, were already low within Asian communities (a position that is not unique to Bradford). The Employment Hub presented a good opportunity to respond to this spread of issues and its aims were twofold – to help unemployed people into work; and to improve awareness of apprenticeships in schools, address any limiting attitudes towards them (e.g. gender stereotypes), and increase business uptake.

Bradford sought to build on existing, successful structures in developing its Hub model, in particular:

- The ‘ICE’ (Industrial Centres of Excellence) team, which had been working with schools on technical education and pathways for several years. The Hub project linked into this and expanded its capacity and work on apprenticeships.
- SkillsHouse, which had successfully worked on employer engagement (including filling vacancies), and which was used as the base for the core of the Hub team.

Up to March 2020, the model for the Hub was to have a team of 11 people. But in practice, reaching full capacity proved difficult because of delays in recruitment, losses of staff, and failures to recruit to key posts. The reasons for this are unclear and in part down to bad luck, but also involve a risk-averse approach to early recruitment, and possibly unhelpful perceptions of the city.

The Hub’s model changed little from the outset up to March 2020, with the ICE team focused on work with schools, SkillsHouse leading on Employment Services work, and partnership with Jobcentre Plus and Connexions Bradford also key to operation and referrals into the Hub. However, since the mid-term review and the onset of COVID-19, significant changes were made to improve performance (including on outputs which had been low) and to respond to the new context. These included:

- Widening the spread of provision across the district to include Keighley JCP, Eastbrook JCP, Westfield JCP, Bradford Vibe and Keighley Youth Hub.
- Improving the structural alignment of the Hub, especially once Connexions moved in-house (previously it was contracted out), which helped to maximise efficient working and outputs.
- The Council investing an additional £1million per year in SkillsHouse from the start of the 2021/22 financial year (if with a lag after that to operationalise) to enable an early-help, locality based approach.
- Additional resource secured with the increased capacity enabling the programme to move on from the initial difficulties in recruiting that hampered early progress, and enabling a rigorous skills offer to individuals, which will be maintained after ESF funding.

Alongside the COVID-related and labour market changes in context described in section 1, the introduction of new Government programmes has been especially important to the Bradford Employment Hub. Specifically, the introduction of the Kickstart programme has had a large and positive impact, as the council has been the gateway to both the DWP Kickstart programme and an internal Bradford council one. The Hub has provided support to Kickstart beneficiaries as part of this role, enabling those people to be included as Hub outputs. This is markedly different to how Kickstart has affected Hubs in some other areas.

Additionally, the context for Hub operation has involved other ESF programmes running in parallel to it in Bradford, including on mental health, and a NEET focused programme. There may have been some overlap between these and the Employment Hub, however, the NEET programme in question runs jointly with Kirklees and Leeds, and overall is not thought to have had a major impact on the Hubs and their outputs.

Targeting, Marketing and Engaging Young People

From the outset, the Bradford Hub principally focused on the goal of helping young people into employment, and this did not change over the period of its operation.

The approach to achieving this in the period before COVID was largely based on gaining referrals from others, principally Jobcentres, but also Connexions, voluntary and community groups, and via SkillsHouse links to business. Of these, Jobcentre claimants were expected to be the main source, but this was slow to materialise, and only reached the level expected in 2020 once the Hub succeeded in having somebody in each of Bradford's three Jobcentres every day. Other routes for referrals such as Aspire Igen, the National Careers Service, community centres in the district and Connexions brought in relatively low numbers, and many of the young people engaged through Connexions had Education, Health and Care Plans and required intensive support.

The programme evolved after the mid-point review to notably increase its locality-based work, with far less reliance on the city centre. This improved the Hub's improved connection to parents, both in terms of being in the right setting to engage with them, and enabling it to identify and tackle other barriers such as language that were restricting the Hub's reach. Overall, the Hub has been very successful in reaching a range of communities, including high performance in delivering outputs for participants from ethnic minorities.

In the first half of its operation, local marketing of the Hub was beset by problems which may have reduced its reach. For example, an ambitious new web site did not work as planned and the Hub's Facebook page was suspended because of 'user negativity' at one point. However, marked improvements were implemented as the programme evolved, with much better use of and impact from social media, and a more proactive approach. That included use of WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter, and the Hub reported a lot of interest via the social media routes it had used to advertise opportunities. The impact of social media also included ripple effects from posts being shared. Additionally, the SkillsHouse website was improved so that all vacancies were on it, whether for jobs, courses, apprenticeships, kickstart opportunities, voluntary positions or work

experience. This reflects local partners' ambition for SkillsHouse to be the one stop shop for residents of all ages seeking support to access work.

Links to the central marketing team were valued from the start of the programme, and the Hub noted that it retweeted posts from the LEP and had gained some referrals from the LEP, where those contacting it had a Bradford post code.

Approach and Activities

Before COVID, the Hub's support for the young people referred to it involved:

- an initial face to face interview and assessment
- group sessions on topics such as preparation for employment, CV writing and interview skills
- referral to specialist support if needed, or one to one support if required
- brokerage to employers and colleges to try and find work and education opportunities (e.g. vacancies found through SkillsHouse, Jobcentres or online sites such as Indeed)
- support and/or advocacy on behalf of young people when they submit job applications

The principles behind these services remained the same once COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions impacted, but inevitably the way in which they were delivered changed – most obviously for the face to face assessments and group sessions – which had to move online. This was not straightforward and came with challenges and drawbacks, given the target cohort, many of whom experience 'digital poverty'. Partly this was about inadequate access to laptops and equipment (even when free ones were intended to be available, they were not always in stock), but also about access to the internet and the costs of Wi-Fi connections and data. Mobile phones, which many young people own, are an inferior alternative for tasks such as typing job applications. Additionally, young people could not enter libraries or other centres to access IT equipment for free.

"Working with people on benefits for job search could be a problem because of them having costs for data or big connection issues. We're still suffering the effects of digital poverty now".

Online, home-based working also affected staff and how they worked. The Hub said it had had to be creative about how they engaged with clients through IT, which was *"a massive challenge - we've had to teach ourselves how to use this stuff, as have young people."*

Despite the pressures of the pandemic, the Hub widened its offer, especially in the last six months of the programme as restrictions eased, and by the end of the programme was drawing support from the breadth of the SkillsHouse offer for example utilising Skills for Work for literacy and numeracy provision.

While even by November 2021, face to face delivery had not yet fully resumed, notable benefits were reported *"in the last three months or so"* as the Hub was able to provide support face to face in jobcentres again, as well as in youth hubs in Bradford and Keighley:

“It’s made a massive difference, as 90% of communication is from body language and you pick up a lot when sat in front of them - whether they understand and are engaged, rather than just hearing yes or no on the phone.”

Importantly (and as previously noted) more activity was based on going out into communities in the later months of operation. The Hub put on sessions – physically or online – focused on CV writing, interview skills, job search, etc. as routes into the programme offering easily accessible and practical support. Likewise, attending events in the community provided a good (if variable) route for referrals when that became possible again (“some work out really well, such as 18 referrals at an NHS recruitment event, others less so”).

Finally, the crossover with Kickstart had a major impact, with the Hub providing pre-employment support (e.g. skills for work) and in-work support (including pastoral support) for six months for Kickstarters moving into employment, and an action plan for each person, as well as progression support toward the end of the programme. Benefits included engaging 200 young people via Bradford Council’s internal Kickstart scheme, and over 100 in what was described as a ‘Kickstart bonanza’ in September/October 2021.

Connections to, and work with, businesses remained consistent across the programme and involved:

- reaching businesses via SkillsHouse connections and some sector bodies
- brokerage between businesses and young people through SkillsHouse as well as colleges, adult education and apprenticeship providers
- encouraging “*more open-minded employers*” who the Hub know to recruit young people

During most of 2020 and the first half of 2021 after COVID hit, the context was of higher unemployment and fewer vacancies than previously, with many staff on furlough and large numbers of expected redundancies. This, combined with low jobs density in the city historically, made it harder to secure employment opportunities for Employment Hub clients. However, it was noted that progress on the Businesses Engaged target was assisted by being able to recruit employers through a range of programmes (including Kickstart and the Careers team, who also work with employers) and SkillsHouse and because there is in-work support available.

Performance

At the mid-term review point the Hub was a long way behind where it should have been on outputs and results, and had only delivered 25% of the targeted participants, 3% of the target for economically inactive people, and 11% of the target for participants accessing employment or education/training. While its business engagement performance was much stronger, the Hub faced major challenges, which resulted in it producing an Improvement Plan to raise future outputs and results.

Given that position, the Hub achieved a very impressive turnaround by the end of the programme, with a marked upswing in delivery. It achieved 98% of its target for participants, and exceeded targets for most sub-groups including unemployed participants, people with disabilities, and those from ethnic minorities. It did, however, continue to struggle to reach economically inactive participants (10% of the target was achieved) and single parents.

More widely, business engagement remained fairly strong (95% of target) and Bradford had the best conversion rate from engaging businesses to creating apprenticeships of any Hub. There was also a large improvement in the number of participants in employment or education/training on leaving (83% of target achieved), although this did not fully feed into strong improvement in those in employment after six months, which was only 23% of target and lower than most Hubs. In part, this reflected time lag issues as many of those securing employment did so in the last six months of the programme.

Reasons for the positive turnaround where it was achieved reflect a range of factors, including many outputs linked to Kickstart participants; more face-to-face delivery and presence in local communities when COVID restrictions lifted; and changes in staff and capacity which enhanced ability to deliver, backed by commitment to do so. This is also likely to reflect programme management messages making clear the issues the Hub faced and potential consequences if these were not addressed.

Overall insights and lessons

1. Adopting a **proactive, outreach centred approach based on going out to communities**, rather than having a city centre focused offer, has enhanced the Hub's reach and effectiveness, including with BAME communities. This has included co-locating with local Jobcentres, where links were initially slow to operationalise, but have since boosted outputs.
2. COVID restrictions presented tough challenges, which the Hub responded to, but exposed the difficulty of depending on online engagement with the target group given widespread 'digital poverty'. **The value of face-to-face contact** in achieving richer communication and better outputs became all the more clear in this context.
3. **Recruitment, capacity and having a good staff team in place** is critical to delivery but was a challenge at start-up and for a significant period of time thereafter. The team in place later on in the programme made up ground from previous underperformance, and clarity and motivation about the need to avoid clawback and to meet targets assisted with that. Having more people in post has brought in ideas, experience and networks to build on, as well as extra capacity.
4. **Improved management, alignment and promotion** have helped to reach more young people and to engage with and support them effectively. Enhanced online presence and more proactive use of social media in communications, as well as use of networks, has assisted that.
5. **Making Kickstart count** has been crucial to the Hub's success later on in the programme. Providing support to those on Kickstart has assisted young people and businesses, and meant that Kickstart being in place has added to Hub outputs rather than detracted from them.
6. **Working with young people is a 'long game'** involving complex needs. Many would rather talk to somebody than go on a programme, and anti-work attitudes can be entrenched.

3.2 Calderdale Employment Hub

Aims, Model & Context

The Calderdale Employment Hub was established with clear goals to:

- reduce youth unemployment, especially amongst those who are NEET; and
- support skills gaps in business, especially through apprenticeships.

The Hub was designed to offer integrated provision that would also support links between schools, careers advice and business, including through working with Growth Managers working with business, and Enterprise Advisers on careers and routes into work: *“The whole idea of the Employment Hub is to be a one stop shop where any individual or business would come for support, and behind the scenes the Hub would sift through their needs and put them in touch with the right programme and support”*.

The Hub’s structure was based on a partnership between Calderdale Council and Leeds Beckett University, which has a business centre in Halifax. Throughout the programme, the council focused on reaching young people aged 16-18 (mainly through schools and colleges) and those aged 18-24 (through routes including jobs centres and C&K Careers), while the university focused on businesses and recruitment within them, including apprenticeships. Overall, the Hub structure was intended to employ five people, but for much of the time up to March 2020, it had to run with three full time staff, before getting to a “happy medium” position for a period, and then losing two staff during 2021. This meant that there have been gaps in capacity for a significant proportion of the Hub’s operation.

As well as overall context changes noted in section 1 and the move to online delivery and major shifts in the labour market, specific ways in which the post COVID-19 context changed and affected the Hub included:

- The council’s Business and Skills service had to prioritise delivery of pandemic related grants and support, preventing work with the Hub in the way that would otherwise have occurred.
- Kickstart and other DWP programmes had a major impact on the Hub and reduced referrals from partner organisations.
- The ‘psychological landscape’ changed – for example how people in the target group’s confidence, aspirations and expectations changed after COVID-19, and uncertainties about how young people would respond to changes in the employment market.

Targeting, Marketing and Engaging Young People

The Hub sought to connect to and support both young unemployed people and businesses, and parts of its operation focused on each, although with activity slightly skewed towards the young people element. Routes to engaging with business included referrals from the LEP and proactive sourcing by Leeds Beckett University (including ‘door knocking’ approaches). The centrally outsourced business lead generation also provided a good number of leads, although those could not always be converted into engagement.

Pre-COVID-19 routes for contacting young people included working with schools (who had been *“really good, very receptive”*); careers advice (e.g. via C&K Careers); through council resources such as

customer support centres and libraries; and outreach work. During this period, young people were also reached through a 'Get Organised' event, community groups (although fewer than expected by this route), and through Jobcentres (where some clients faced complex challenges such as drug/alcohol problems or a criminal record).

The advent of COVID-19 meant that new or adapted routes to engagement were needed, and these included:

- Participation in two virtual versions of the annual 'Get Organised' event for year 11 students in local schools about what to do after GCSEs. These were especially important given that the Hub was unable to go out to schools and were reported to be a good way of gaining clients.
- Stronger links with adult learning, which allowed the Hub to look at how to link to people coming in from this route (although in practice most of this cohort were aged 25+).
- Connections to a business start-up manager who began work in late 2021, as well as to others working with business, which could be used to advertise the whole spread of support available
- Knowledge exchange with colleges.
- More in-depth follow-up work on people who were already on the books pre-COVID-19, to see if there was further opportunity to connect them to support or vacancies.

The Hub reported that the central LEP marketing had not worked particularly well for them and had not resulted in a large number of referrals, in part because they felt it was not well geared up for the different local areas except Leeds.

Approach and Activities

From the outset to March 2020, the customer journey and support for a young person the Hub offer involved:

- a face to face meeting with an Employment Support Officer
- a diagnostic which covered needs, aspirations and the full range of IAG considerations
- a plan of what support was needed
- provision of support as required, e.g. on CVs, pre interview preparation and mock interviews, cover letters, IAG tutorials, and practical things such as ensuring somebody has an email address and a signature, or improving interpersonal skills (e.g. eye contact)
- connecting young people to vacancies that became available and help with applying for them
- continued support in the workplace, face-to-face where possible

For businesses, the support process provided by Leeds Beckett University during this period usually involved:

- a meeting to assess needs and opportunities, including awareness of apprenticeships
- communication of other support available to the business (e.g. via the LEP)
- researching apprenticeships the business could benefit from (frameworks, providers, etc.)
- helping them with recruitment processes where needed, e.g. on job descriptions and adverts and help with recruitment days

Following the onset of COVID-19 impacts and restrictions, the Hub sought to offer the same service as previously but online. However, elements such as job clubs and groups sessions which need face-to-face contact to work and which had worked well before were not been possible. This made reaching some people more difficult (*“the challenge has been getting our client group in front of us”*) as many clients don't like video calls and prefer telephone, which can be less effective for communication and trust building. Additionally, this is a potential barrier to accessing work with employers often using online interviews, hence the Hub's activities extended to educating people on how to do a virtual interview, and preparing them for home working.

As other Hubs have also reported, support on mental health and wellbeing unavoidably became a significant part of the Hub's engagement with clients after COVID-19 and during lockdowns. As well as presenting challenging situations for Hub employees to respond to, the Hub needed to consider what sort of job is right for a person, whether they are at the job-ready stage (because of mental health and wellbeing considerations) and to seek to draw on specialist advice when possible and appropriate. In-work support was also strengthened reflecting the above and other challenges.

Additionally, in response to reduced referrals, the Hub adopted a new plan of action focused on business engagement to find vacancies and routes for Hub clients to access these, which was described as having worked quite well.

Across the programme, the Hub observed that there can be a gap between hard to reach young people and businesses seeking motivated, high quality apprentices. Hence, discussions with businesses sought to open up thinking around how vacancies could be filled, for example other options that might reach unemployed young people for whom apprenticeships may not be the best route. Doing this can involve challenging assumptions about employing somebody who is not fully 'job ready' and making sure the business knows about the skills a young person has (that may not be obvious) and support they can access to help. The Hub found that *“quite a lot of businesses are receptive in principle, but they need a match to prove it”*, and that offering work experience is sometimes a good first step.

Performance

At the mid-term review point, the Calderdale Employment Hub had mixed performance on target measures. It had met or exceeded most of its participation based outputs for that point in time, including the headline measure of participants. However, performance on some groups (e.g. single parents) was below target, whilst the main challenge was in translating participation outputs into results for people moving into employment or education/training and sustaining this for six months.

At programme end, this split between good performance on outputs, but weaker performance on results measures remained. The Hub achieved 97% of its participants target, and met most other outputs targets including exceptionally strong performance on single parents (420% of target) and economically inactive participants (164%) – both the highest proportionate achievement by any Hub. However, the Hub was significantly below target on results and business-based measures. It achieved 61% of its target for participants moving into employment, education or training on leaving; 49% of the target for sustaining this for six months; 5% of the target for participants gaining basic skills; 55% of target for businesses engaged and 8% of target for apprenticeships created.

Reasons for strong performance where that occurred included the benefits of work in schools in reaching an economically inactive cohort, and using the home working environment as an opportunity to intensively scrutinise opportunities to support caseloads of unemployed and inactive people. Factors that undermined results included the difficulty of logging people as having progressed because of document requirements – e.g. a signature. The Hub estimates a third to a quarter of results may have been lost because the registration was not returned, and this factor will have subdued results for other Hubs too.

All Hub customers were advised that the programme was finishing at the end of the December and invited to enrol on Inspire or Gainshare to allow them to continue their support towards securing work, education or training. Around 50 customers took up on this offer and were transferred onto Inspire. The ones who didn't have been disengaged but were sent information about services through either Inspire or Gainshare and invited to get back in touch should they require help.

Overall insights and lessons

1. Reaching a NEET cohort can be very hard, especially if inactive and not claiming benefits. **It takes a lot of time and support to get people in this target group ready for employment**, and this proved particularly difficult with the loss of 'first rung' jobs and work experience in sector such as leisure and hospitality during COVID-19. In-work support is key to prevent drop out.
2. **Schools were receptive** and working with them (as well as colleges, careers organisations and Enterprise Advisers) and through careers events proved good ways of reaching young people.
3. **Face to face support** worked well for young people and for businesses, and enabled building of trust and relationships more effectively than video calls and especially phone calls.
4. **It became harder to work with JCP** as the Hub was not seen as a priority compared to new DWP programmes. While Kickstart provided a better route into apprenticeships for some young people, by taking on those who were more job ready, it meant the Hub's client group had more challenges and intensive support needs, and reduced the outputs and results delivered.
5. Staff adapted well to enormous change, online provision and **challenging new roles including mental health and wellbeing support** as part of their one to one engagement. This has improved staff confidence and agility, but it is also important to consider their welfare and to balance needs.
6. Home working provided time and space to carry out **in-depth follow up** of people who were on the books but had not received support. This was time-intensive but *"very, very useful"*.
7. **Having the right capacity is vital** – this was a challenge at times and reduced activity and results.
8. **Partnership and relationships** are important and have worked well, including with the University.

3.3 Kirklees Employment Hub

Aims, Model & Context

In Kirklees, the initial positioning of the Employment Hub was based on filling a gap left for helping unemployed young people because the local ESIF 'Works Better' programme targeted those aged 25+, and the previous local authority Apprenticeship Hub provision had ended. Although the number of people who were NEET locally was quite low, the barriers for those in that position were high and likely to grow without engagement and support. Hence, the Hub provided an opportunity to help that target group (aged 16-24) to build their skills, confidence and capacity and move towards, but not always directly into, employment.

The context for the Hub changed with COVID-19, with raised youth unemployment and challenges and caution amongst businesses, with *"employers retreating into themselves for a period"* and *"apprenticeships practically disappearing overnight."* As elsewhere this presented a very challenging labour market context for much of 2021 and 2022, especially as the impact of lockdowns was especially tough for sectors such as hospitality and retail, which often offer first job opportunities, while others such as manufacturing (which is prominent in Kirklees) were not running at full capacity. Additionally, during the localised system of lockdowns, Kirklees was one of the first districts to be put under strict lockdown restrictions and one of the last for them to be lifted. This impacted enormously on participant engagement, relationships with employers and the creation of opportunities/vacancies.

The other major change of context has been new national programmes such as Kickstart. It was initially a challenge to work out the Hub's role and positioning given the change, and Kickstart did not *"knit together quite as well with the Employment Hub as it could have done if we had more time to plan."* However, the Hub settled into a role as a gateway for placements onto Kickstart - that meets employability needs for those not ready to go direct onto Kickstart and refers onto it.

Whilst the context and delivery mechanism (online) may have changed, the model for the Hub has remained consistent. This is founded around partnership between Kirklees Council and C&K Careers, with whom the council had a strong existing relationship and service delivery arrangement, and which has valuable experience in supporting residents under 25. Distinctive and complementary roles for these partners are clearly in place whereby:

- C&K was responsible for all participant focused activities, to get people onto the programme and move people into employment where possible.
- Kirklees Council managed ESIF compliance and engaged with businesses to identify opportunities for apprenticeships and employment.
- Kirklees Employment Support Officers (not funded by the Hub) added to the support from C&K advisers if participants had additional and time sensitive support requirements, such as urgent help with a CV or a mock interview. This flexible support added value and boosted partnership working.

A good relationship and seamless working was apparent before and after COVID-19 impacted upon the programme, and both partners see that they were *"very much working as Kirklees even though we are*

two organisations.” There have been no major changes to this structure overall since the start of the project, and the level of capacity/team size has been largely unchanged.

Targeting, Marketing and Engaging Young People

The Hub maintained a young people focus from start to finish. However, as another project (‘Youth Engagement Progression’) was already meeting the needs of 16-18 year olds, the Hub mainly targeted those aged 19-24. Three ways of identifying and engaging participants within this group were used.

- Existing contact routes - C&K Careers identified young people who could benefit from the programme through referrals into it from other parts of C&K Careers, and through pre-existing networks, relationships and programmes. It had a strong foundation in place for reaching young people, including the target group, without having to rely too much on other routes.
- External referrals- this was a useful route for engaging clients, but become more difficult to gain post-COVID-19 because of the changed position with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and a changed landscape of other provision, including Kickstart and Restart, and also as community routes were often not open due to COVID-19 restrictions. Adapting to this more difficult position for referrals was “*a long slog and a challenge*” to achieve, and the Hub looked at different routes to reach potential clients, including links to Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing pre-apprenticeship scheme, which offered one year of combined work and study and involved Kirklees College.
- Marketing and visibility – marketing was seen as hard in a pandemic context, and it was felt that regional marketing and some of its messages (including an all-ages focus) did not work well for Kirklees and led to very few new young people accessing Hub support. Local visibility and trusted brands (e.g. the council and C&K Careers) were seen as more important, alongside positioning Hub support as part of the Employment and Skills element of local COVID-19 response.

Approach and Activities

The Hub took a “*person centred approach*” which “*focuses on where they are as a person at that moment in time, and gets young people who aren’t engaged with anything, engaged with something.*” That was seen as being the start of a journey to prevent them from potentially being out of employment for life. Hence, the Hub was driven by the needs of disadvantaged young people. Partners felt that it would be difficult to be equally led by business needs (although they were still relevant), which would usually involve helping firms to access the “*most obvious*” candidates (more qualified and usually more readily employable) and would miss priority needs in Kirklees.

The process and support for young people was tailored to the individual and involved:

- an initial interview/assessment to get to know the client and their needs and establish rapport and a relationship
- creation of an individualised action plan that is “*best for them*”
- provision of a range of support in line with needs, using what is most suitable from a range of options

- seeking an opportunity with an employer and offering six months in-work support on a one to one basis

This approach remained broadly the same before and after COVID-19, with the main change being delivery methods and support options. Before COVID-19, these included one to one support; pre-employment work (e.g. on confidence, communication, interview skills); building interactive and transferable skills; standalone workshops; twice weekly job clubs; mock interviews with feedback; and access to specialist provision from partners where needed.

After the pandemic and associated restrictions, job clubs and group sessions/workshops were no longer possible, and online group work did not work well. One to one online support was labour intensive but worked better, with contact every couple of weeks which helped with young people's mental health and wellbeing during lockdown as well as employability skills, etc. This included pre-COVID-19 elements such as mock interviews with feedback, access to specialist provision from partners where needed, and development of interactive and transferable skills. Kirklees Council had already been working towards having a 'mobile and agile' workforce and all staff were fully equipped to be able to work from home immediately, which enabled a seamless service to participants.

Whilst there was less face-to-face support, some did continue when possible, especially for the groups who needed it most. These were typically the most vulnerable and furthest from the labour market and/or those who had IT based barriers or needed mental health and wellbeing support. As of autumn 2021, more services were returning to face-to-face for other participants too.

As not all participants had the IT skills and equipment needed to log into programme support or for job interviews, the Hub helped with this where possible, for example through support from the Kirklees 'Barrier Breaker' fund and council provision of Chrome Books. Links to its Digital Hub programme were especially valuable in North Kirklees, which utilised community venues and provided training, and also provided a referral route into the programme.

Further challenges included upskilling careers advisers to be able to deliver online, and increased case load, with people staying on the programme for longer because of continuing needs and flux. Coupled with greater capacity required to deliver more one to one support, this has created a high workload.

For businesses, Kirklees Council's Business Engagement Team 'generated' vacancies by engaging with employers, exploring their needs and working with them to be able to utilise young people who had greater barriers and may not appear to be the most obvious candidates. This process involved working on recruitment techniques so that young people were not filtered out by initial screening, and sometimes "*appealing to the CSR side of a business*" to give young people opportunities, as well as building an ongoing business relationship, including links to wider business support. Apprenticeships were introduced into conversations with businesses when appropriate – although it was noted that they are often not the right route because of the qualification levels sought, or because they present too many challenges at once to the targeted young people given the base they have started from.

Finding opportunities with employers became more of a challenge after COVID-19 and required doing more work on what was available in the labour market. In-work support also became more important, with onus on a flexible approach that could allow movement into something else after a first placement should this fall through or not be ideal.

Performance

The Hub had achieved excellent performance against the full spread of its outputs and results at the mid-term review stage before the impact of COVID-19, and exceeded all of its targets for that point, including on the key measure of participants. The Hub continued its strong performance across the programme, although reflecting the challenging context, that achievement did dip on some measures.

At headline level, the Hub supported just under 1,150 participants and achieved 103% of its targeted output on this measure. It also met and sometimes considerably surpassed targets for all but one subgroup of participants, and achieved well over double the target for participants with disabilities and over three times the target for those from ethnic minorities. The one output target missed was females, which was 91% of target.

On results, the Hub comfortably hit its target on participants in employment including self-employment, or education/training upon leaving (achieving 121% of the target). It was one of only two Hubs to hit this target, and the only Hub to be on target for those sustaining this at six months after leaving. Performance on that was exemplary, at 148% of target, and with the numbers achieved not far below those for the other Hubs combined. This is likely to reflect the Hub having made a much quicker start than others in delivering, and hence being in a far better place when COVID-19 struck. The Hub did significantly fall short of its target for participants gaining basic skills (53% achieved), but this was still the highest percentage achievement by any Hub. It engaged with nearly 1,000 businesses (112% of target) and created 161 apprenticeship opportunities (51% of target).

Besides the fact that the Hub was able to hit the ground running from the start of the programme, success on outputs and results reflects the way in which delivery has utilised the existing partnerships, experience and activity of the council and C&K Careers. The Hub further stresses that high output levels have not been at the expense of quality and impact: *“we’ve had an eye on results from day one so that we deliver and have focused on the whole journey and people’s needs, not just on outputs.”* Excellent performance on participants with positive outcomes six months after leaving backs that up.

Kirklees has a follow up project planned to provide tailored support for young people (aged 15-24) when the Hub ends. ‘Youth Engagement and Progression 2’ is a partnership programme and is expected to be branded as Employment Hub in Leeds and Bradford and Works Better 1525 in Kirklees.

Overall insights and lessons

1. A clear focus on young, disadvantaged people and an ethos around **an individualised, flexible approach** based on what is best for an individual or business has been central to success, with

employment for the target group seen as a journey not a destination. Keeping engaged with unemployed young people – whatever the changing context – has also been important.

2. A **strong delivery partnership and pre-existing networks, relationships and programmes** have helped greatly in reaching participants and providing organisational expertise to build on. Specifically, the partnership between the council and C&K Careers has been highly effective, with clear roles, openness and trust, and experienced and able staff in place.
3. Kirklees **responded well to the challenges of the pandemic and online working**, assisted by the council having already been working on enabling working from home, and access to flexible funding (outside the Hubs programme) to address IT barriers. Online provision worked well for some young people but not others, with one-to-one online provision much more effective than group work, and face-to-face having benefits in terms of richer communication, interaction and insights. A hybrid approach is sensible.
4. **One to one support** has been the thing that young people have most wanted and appreciated. It is labour intensive and hence more costly but worked very well
5. **Engaging with the inactive is a challenge**, because by their nature they are hard to identify and reach. The pandemic and associated context changes (including new JCP programmes like Kickstart) increased the proportion of those who are further from the labour market within the Hub's clientele, as other programmes took on those who are more readily employable. This led to more time needed per client, and a likely lower chance of sustained employment results.
6. **Securing apprenticeships is difficult** for this client group as they can be hard to secure (given competition) or be too challenging. The pipeline of apprenticeships also dried up during the pandemic making this route more difficult still.
7. Maintaining a **focus on results** and planning for those from day one has been central to success – both in meeting client needs and helping them into work, and for output figures.

3.4 Leeds Employment Hub

Aims, Model & Context

All employment and skills support offered by Leeds City Council sits under the banner of the Leeds Employment Hub. A number of individual programmes form part of this, one of which is 'Routeways'. This is the original name given to the LCR Employment Hub and the name that is still used to refer to this programme in Leeds. Other elements include the NEET Youth Engagement and Progression programme (jointly delivered with Bradford and Kirklees) and mental health support for young people.

Bringing all programmes together under one umbrella means that if you are 15+ and looking for work, apprenticeships, further learning or training in the city, you can enter the Leeds Employment Hub and be assessed and directed to the most suitable programme to help you. It acts as a single front door, "*hiding the wiring*" for clients by providing a streamlined offer with a shared set of eligibility criteria and paperwork. The Council is clear that this makes it easier for customers to navigate what could otherwise be a fragmented offer and addresses the overall aim of supporting young people to improve their skills and increase their prospects of moving into sustained employment. This approach has remained consistent throughout the LCR Employment Hub programme.

Twenty advisors support delivery of the full suite of Leeds Employment Hub programmes. Pre-COVID-19, they were based out of jobshops, colleges, and community centres. They were also physically based in Jobcentres around the city, meaning that they were directly linked into work coaches there, which in turn generated the bulk of referrals received by the Hub.

Whilst the number of advisors has remained the same, the onset of COVID-19 forced the delivery model to change significantly. From the point of the first national lockdown in March 2020, all Jobcentres were immediately closed, and DWP staff were re-directed to focus not on getting people into work, but on getting new claimants set up on Universal Credit. This had two impacts – firstly that advisors were no longer able to co-locate to deliver face-to-face provision, with all activity and engagement shifted online to ensure as much delivery as possible could continue; and secondly, that what had been a very healthy flow of referrals received to the programme from Jobcentre work coaches, stopped. It was not until September 2021, when social distancing eased, that Jobcentres began to allow third parties back in to deliver joined up services and some presence in Jobcentres was re-established. This was however limited to two core centres – one in the city centre and one outside the city centre in Seacroft – and at reduced frequency.

It is also important to note that this was further compounded by the launch of DWP's own directly funded mainstream provision – primarily Kickstart – and given that ESIF funded programmes are designed to be "*the fund of last resort*," Routeways was unable to compete. It is the local view that these DWP COVID-19 response measures massively impacted on local provision.

Targeting, Marketing and Engaging Young People

In keeping with the above, all employment and skills activity in the city is marketed under the Leeds Employment Hub brand which communicates the overall offer with nuancing when needed for specific strands. This brand is well established and recognised and gives consistency and coherence with the

city's overall narrative. For Routeways, the specific focus in Leeds has been on 19-24 year olds, with other age ranges catered for via other strands of the Leeds Employment Hub suite of activity, in particular the NEET Youth Engagement and Progression programme. Given the city's demographics, there was not a great need to specifically target messaging at BAME communities or at individuals living with a disability. There was however some targeting directed at lone parents via the Stronger Families team and via proactive engagement in setting such as food banks.

Central Combined Authority marketing has tended not to be used so as not to detract from the Leeds brand. From the outset, Leeds did not advocate the need for central marketing, with a view that, whilst it may be appropriate for Hubs elsewhere, the structure of the Leeds approach (with the LCR Employment Hub/Routeways element only making up 10-15% of the overall Leeds Employment Hub) means that having an additional central brand adds a layer of complexity that can be avoided.

Leeds report that some referrals were received via the central marketing route during the pandemic, but that at least half of these were general enquiries i.e. people who were often in work but who were looking for advice on issues like furlough. This was based on a message from the Combined Authority that *"if you need help in any way, contact your local Employment Hub, they are there to help you."* These referrals were not therefore specifically from people who were unemployed and looking to access Leeds Employment Hub or specifically Routeways services, meaning that these people were not eligible for support via ESIF and advisors had to find other ways to support them. That is not to say that this support was not needed and valuable, but in the context of this evaluation, it did not contribute to output or outcome targets.

As noted above, the other major source of referrals to the programme in Leeds was the Jobcentre and this proved – up to the mid term evaluation – to be a very helpful and seamless way to move people into programmes. However, given the shift in focus of DWP staff, between March and June 2020 there were almost no referrals from Jobcentre work coaches. For this period, the only enquiries that were being received were from people who had seen the offer on social media and who were getting in touch without being referred. The team ramped up their social media activity and carried out as much time-point focused activity as possible, for example, capturing people on results day when they are looking to make a transition, at the annual Leeds Apprenticeship Recruitment Fair held in February/March, and at the end of the national furlough scheme. Where possible, they used physical presence to engage people face to face, including at food banks, religious venues, and colleges.

Activities and Approach

The emphasis of the programme in Leeds has remained consistent i.e. working with clients on a one to one basis to identify their needs and to provide them with the right IAG and support needed to make informed choices and so to progress. The fact that the ESF contract is not payment by results has always meant that advisors can work more intensively with clients, giving them much needed time to break down issues and barriers. Furthermore, as all employment support sits under one umbrella, clients can be directed where suits them best: *"they might have come in looking for an apprenticeship but actually end up on something else more suited to them – it doesn't matter what the outcome is from a contract perspective."*

It is the nature of the support provided that has changed in emphasis. Pre-COVID-19 it included for example working with a client to diagnose their ambition and then working closely with a college or training provider to match the client to a suitable course to help them to progress. Between March 2020 and August 2021 however, people were getting in touch because they *“were worried about where their next meal would come from.”* The service received many calls from people struggling with mental health and there was significant signposting to mental health services. The team also became heavily involved in the coordination of food parcel distribution, and for around six months the focus was very much *“do what you can to help people.”* There was a *“massive need for support but a different kind of support,”* with it being far more pastoral in nature and centred on offering guidance to people around managing their daily lives. The Hub’s senior management team met regularly to review ways of working and what works to continually adapt the model and allocate resource accordingly.

There remained a legacy of COVID-19 flavoured support late into the programme, with many people continuing to be worried about or feeling the impacts of the pandemic, for example through redundancies or unstable work. This was compounded by there being for much of the time, a very limited number of learning and work opportunities to pass people on to, with colleges shut or providing a reduced offer and businesses remaining reticent to taking new people or commitments on. It was only in the closing months of delivery, that young people increasingly began to return to asking about what roles were available, how they could progress, how they could join an apprenticeship, matched by a steadier flow of opportunities starting to emerge. This was matched by a return wherever possible to pre-COVID-19 work on school engagement and activity around IAG on apprenticeships, including at the annual apprenticeship fair.

The existence of Kickstart gave businesses who were willing to provide opportunities an alternative route thereby reducing the number of people the programme could work with. The Hub noted that the incompatibility of DWP and ESIF client systems also made it hard to spot opportunities for referrals. This was in contrast to pre-COVID-19, where business engagement was highly proactive, with the wider Leeds Employment Hub umbrella typically reaching between 300 and 500 firms a year, and centred on job and opportunity creation, with advisors speaking to employers who are recruiting and then talent matching at all levels. At that time, although there was no specific targeting, there was typically more traction with larger firms and key accounts, with it being harder to encourage smaller firms to take people on.

Performance

Up to the mid-point, the Hub had made good progress overall towards its targets, despite a later than planned start. In particular, there was strong performance on participation amongst ethnic minority individuals and those with a disability, to the extent that by the end of March 2020, the Hub had already exceeded its full targets for each. It was also performing well on participation amongst those without basic skills. This high performance continued, and ultimately three output targets were significantly exceeded – 277% of target on BAME, 222% on disabilities, and by 184% on basic skills. The team are rightly proud of the support they were able to offer these cohorts who were amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic; and this success helped the Hub to achieve 98% of its overall participation target by the end of the programme.

The Hub had less traction in two areas of participation. Firstly, on the inactive side, achieving 43% of its target, likely due to the Council running the NEET contract alongside which prioritised 15-18 year olds who are more often in the inactive bracket (as opposed to the 'Routeways' programme which focuses on 19-24 year olds, the majority of whom are on active out of work benefits). Secondly, on single adult households with dependent children, achieving 67% of its target. The team held a view throughout that this target was not the right outcome for the Hub, with these individuals able to access more appropriate support via other programmes such as Stronger Families. The team did, however, have success in accessing these individuals during the pandemic through the proactive work that they did around food banks and food delivery to the most vulnerable people and places.

The Hub recognises that conversion from participation outputs to results has been lower than they would have expected to have achieved – 9% of target achieved for participants gaining basic skills; 75% for participants moving into employment, education or training; and 41% for participants being in employment after six months. Delays in starting delivery, the time taken to gain a basic skill and the pandemic's impact on the numbers of available work and learning opportunities have driven this. There have also been challenges in gathering evidence, with a not insignificant number of people progressing but the team being unable to reach them to secure the relevant signatures.

Overall insights and lessons

1. The **way that the contract is constructed provided essential flexibility** for advisors to spend the time needed to work with people facing significant barriers, meaning too that people who have never been supported before are being and that people are less likely to drop out of provision – if something is not working, they can be moved to something more suitable.
2. Operating **all activity within the Council under one umbrella** gives the ability to flex, target and seamlessly move people to the provision that suits them best. Having multiple separate streams and/or external provision makes this far harder, and although administratively it is harder for the Council, it is far easier for the client. It also allows for joining up across the Council e.g. on Youth Services, GIS analysis, and business facing teams; and across city partnerships in areas such as domestic violence and trafficking.
3. Leeds **responded well to shifting to online working required by the pandemic** and established a well functioning hybrid model which allowed them to work differently with different cohorts. There is merit in retaining the best elements of this but with caution urged as it is important to *"get young people out of their bedrooms."*
4. **Co-location within Jobcentres** is a highly efficient way to manage the flow of people into and around employment and skills support programmes. The complete drop off in referrals at the onset of COVID-19 however shows that there is a danger of over-reliance on Jobcentres for referrals and there is scope to consider how this can be mitigated should the need ever arise again.
5. There have been **significant issues in securing the evidence** required to claim outputs and specifically progressions into results that has undermined the final picture on outputs and results and this needs to be considered in future programmes.

3.5 Wakefield Employment Hub

Aims, Model & Context

Wakefield's Employment Hub evolved from the predecessor Apprenticeship Hub which had successfully worked with business to create apprenticeships with candidates who were closer to the labour market and typically not vulnerable or facing disadvantage. The Employment Hub addressed this, reducing NEETs and supporting harder to reach young people into meaningful career pathways. It took a broader view than apprenticeships, recognising that they are not the right route for everyone; and focused on enhancing existing online IAG provision to have greater impact on those already or at risk of becoming NEET. Whilst engaging with and supporting businesses is still an important goal, the Hub primarily faces towards young people and understanding their needs and career goals.

The Employment Hub is part of Wakefield's 'Step Up' employment and skills front door. Its focus on young people is complimented by equivalent support for adults (delivered with Calderdale), and a stream on in-work support for those wishing to upskill at any age. It is staffed by a project manager, two Careers Advisors, two Business Engagement Managers and a project support officer. Having dedicated, qualified Careers Advisors was an important lesson from the Apprenticeship Hub, and vital in supporting the focus on young people. Business Engagement Managers take on responsibility for individuals from Careers Advisors once they are ready to move into a role, supporting them with their transition. This model has remained consistent throughout, bar some additional resource brought in towards the end to support with gathering contractual evidence of people securing employment.

As with other Hubs, the changing context brought about by COVID-19 had a big impact on the model of proactively getting out into communities, education settings and business to promote the Hub offer. While the team was very successful at shifting provision online, it was far from their preferred approach of being very visible and using *"good old fashioned door knocking."*

The launch of Kickstart was also a challenge. The Hub acted as a 'gateway' for Kickstart, with staff completing paperwork and submitting potential vacancies to DWP on behalf of business. The subsequent waiting period prior to employers finding out if the Kickstart place was granted impacted on recruitment, with employers understandably holding off on recruitment until they knew if they would receive a paid-for position. If they did not, they would often walk away stating they did not have the finances to recruit; or would get frustrated with waiting and withdraw the vacancy. From a participant perspective, despite the positive working relationship, there were a considerable number of occasions where a Hub participant was put forward to a Kickstart position, but the Hub was not informed. This often meant the Hub missed out on an outcome because a young person may be put forward and offered a role without the Hub learning of it until it was too late to claim an outcome. This could have been an oversight by Work Coaches; or because the Hub was just one of multiple gateways responsible for generating Kickstart vacancies so Work Coaches were unable to tell where the referral had come from and hence an outcome could not be attributed.

Targeting, Marketing and Engaging Young People

At the programme's start, the Employment Hub placed priority on communication and marketing, with all local branding and imagery in place, including postcards sent to business and young people; social

media via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn; and a radio campaign. These channels continued to be used throughout, with a local Employment Hub brand alongside the Step Up front door, and with central FutureGoals and LCR Employment Hub brand and logos included and promoted where appropriate.

The approach to targeting and engaging young people was driven by the Hub's focus on networking with and aligning to DWP and Jobcentres (which produced the lion's share of referrals) and to teams leading local work on Connexions, support for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, looked after young people and youth offending teams, all of which proved to be reliable and consistent sources of referrals throughout. This strong partnership-led referral process helped drive results and the team is proud *"not to have gone for quick wins and to be helping those furthest from the labour market."* Producing good results also helped news of the service by word of mouth.

The team were very successful in engaging businesses and subsequently creating opportunities pre-COVID-19. Targeting took place via referrals from Growth Managers and Key Account Managers, but also – and very effectively – via the team's approach to *"door knocking different areas to directly ask businesses what skills support they need."* This was seen to have had greater impact than cold calling, especially when this was commissioned centrally at the start of the Hub programme. It has also been key in terms of persuading businesses from a Corporate Social Responsibility perspective to take on harder to reach young people where there has *"definitely been a more mixed response;"* as well as in managing business expectations about what a young person can realistically offer from a skills and experience perspective, especially when the firm is looking to pay the apprenticeship minimum wage.

However, when the pandemic hit, the business engagement focus switched overnight to prioritise business survival grants administration. Although there was a different emphasis, relationships with business were still built, including with those that had not been in touch with the service previously, meaning that as the pandemic began to ease, the team were able to revert to talking to business about the Hub offer more proactively, helped by opportunities for young people beginning to emerge again.

Activities and Approach

Wakefield's Hub was up and running quickly, with staff in post allowing them to *"hit the ground running"* once funding was in place. The team was very proactive in the early days at targeting partner agencies to *"get the team known and to drive referrals;"* and in engaging with DWP to establish co-location in the district's four Jobcentres resulting in *"a strong working relationship and understanding of what we each need to achieve, something we have learnt from previous programmes."* This strategy was so effective, that pre-COVID-19 the team needed to step back due to an influx of referrals. In response, the Business Engagement Managers got more involved in supporting young people to help manage Career Advisor caseloads and also to give extra support to employers recognising more hand-holding is required in supporting young people further from the labour market to sustain employment.

During the pandemic the team was able to continue to leverage and benefit from its links. Despite being part of the Council's Economic Growth & Skills team, it remained very closely linked to Children's & Young Peoples Services and its activity such as Pupil Referral Units, the Virtual School system for looked after children, youth offending services and Early Help Hubs. It also retained work, albeit virtually, with schools, colleges, providers and SEND provision, and wider programmes such as Go

Higher and the Enterprise Advisor Network. It has since the early days worked very closely with the NEET Strategy Board and attended a monthly partnership based NEET clinic (coordinated by the local Care Leavers team), bringing together practitioners to look at cases and to *“ensure every opportunity to join up, catch young people and support them.”* This continued to be held virtually during the pandemic, and alongside a Red/Amber/Green triage system that was also put in place to triage clients at the point of referral to ensure they were directed to the most appropriate support, is seen to have had real benefit in discuss cases and spot opportunities for intervention because anyone from the extensive network can make a referral into the Hub.

All provision, including at one-to-one and small group levels, was very quickly shifted to be online, with an immediate halt to Jobcentre presence that did not recommence until July 2021. Careers Advisors were still able to meet with individuals, often accompanied by the source of the referral (usually a practitioner with whom the young person has been working and built up a level of trust with) to carry out an initial grading to gauge distance from the labour market and allowing a tailored plan to be developed. The nature of support offered however did see a shift in emphasis. Pre-pandemic this had been in areas such as CV writing and interview techniques; IAG and signposting to training; and access to a barrier breaker fund to support with costs such as clothing and travel. However, the team noted an increase in anxiety amongst clients and hence ran online sessions focused on building confidence – *“there seemed to be a far greater need for this than help with career guidance and CV writing.”*

There has been a lot of work with schools to focus on NEET prevention. In this way, they have been able to access young people when they are coming to end of school and risk becoming NEET. Bridging this gap has been a core focus, and whenever possible in accordance with COVID-19 precautions and legislation has been done in communities e.g. at the Youth Support Hub at The Hut in Airedale. Children and Young People Services locally have looked to the Employment Hub to provide solutions for young people at risk, able to give them dedicated support to help get them to the next step.

The team have always met weekly to discuss caseloads, to talent match candidates to roles, and to identify target businesses based on the needs and aspirations of young people coming through. The approach has evolved, with learning embedded as it emerges, and staff empowered to try new ideas. Whilst the shift online has worked, there is no doubt that the lack of face-to-face contact has had an impact on the team’s ability to gather results. It has made it hard to collect the necessary wet signatures, compounded by people being on furlough and not replying to emails despite hard chasing, and with little the team could do to counter this. Young people themselves have also been unwilling to engage and reluctant to submit signed documents – *“they don’t understand why it is needed.”*

Performance

At the mid-term point, the Hub had made good progress across the breadth of outputs and was exceeding some profiled targets, helped by a prompt start to delivery. The Hub continued this strong start, closing the programme with 128% of its overall participation target achieved. When this is broken down, it significantly exceeded its targets for unemployed participants (145%); participants with no basic skills (166%); and in particular for participants with disabilities (304%), with the team attributing this to the close working relationship with the Council’s SEND team. It exactly met its target for BAME participation; and achieved two thirds of its single adult households target (68%).

The Hub performed very well on its business outputs – engaging 846 businesses (141% of target) and creating 248 new apprenticeship places - 115% of target and the best of any Hub by some way. On results, the Hub’s greatest success has been in achieving 102% of participants moving into employment, education or training; with 65% in employment after six months. It achieved a third of its participants gaining basic skills target (33%). The team faced evidence collection challenges and worked very hard in the closing stages to chase necessary paperwork, including taking on additional resource and directly visiting businesses to secure signatures. Issues related to the extent to which Evolutive (the shared system for capturing results) was fit for purpose were prominent and the team reported frustrations around tackling this to ensure accurate reporting of results.

Overall insights and lessons

- 1. Commitment to building a strong delivery team and structure, a clear offer and a robust multi-agency partnership approach** from the outset is essential in securing referrals and ensuring that the most vulnerable young people can access opportunity. In this way, the programme has plugged a gap locally, especially during COVID-19 when others have not had the right resource and has shown what can be achieved when partners work together.
- 2. It is important to get the balance right between face-to-face and digital delivery.** There is room for both, however online only services do not effectively engage hard to reach NEETs. Young people want and need a more direct and personal approach and for advisors to have the time needed to work intensively with them. Similarly for businesses, in person engagement can have greater impact, especially in terms of persuading them to take on harder to reach young people.
- 3. Early engagement with schools is important** to ensure that Hub support is on the radar when post-16 options are starting to be looked at. This avoids ‘losing’ people after results day and helps capture people who are on the brink of becoming NEET.
- 4. Talent matching is taken seriously** – getting it right is key to ensuring that the candidate recruited can be retained and to generating new and repeat engagement from business. Opportunities need to be right for both parties, and given the target cohort, a lot of hand holding is needed.
- 5. Business engagement driven by local intelligence is far more effective than cold calling,** and businesses need more persuading, aligned to a CSR message, around drawing candidates from the harder to reach pool of young people.
- 6. There is need to balance resource between young people and business facing staff** in order to maintain quality for those who need more intensive one to one input. The reality is, that in a more resource intensive NEET environment, you need more resource.
- 7. There needs to be consideration of how evidence gathering** can be made easier, backed by behind the scenes systems that make the recording of information easier.
- 8. Kickstart had a significant impact on the Hub** – both in terms of creating a significant administrative and management burden but also in terms of skewing business recruitment intentions, and on the flow of participant referrals and ability to claim outcomes.

3.6 York Employment Hub

Aims, Model & Context

The initial expectation in York was that this programme would build on the successful business engagement model of the predecessor Apprenticeship Hub. As the ESF focus on engaging young and unemployed people and not solely on apprenticeships became clear, York needed to adjust to fit the call but at the same time ensure it was building a programme that would be appropriate in a city with relatively low unemployment compared to the rest of Leeds City Region, and as such supportive of the city's ambitions for its economy.

With the onset of the pandemic, York faced a very significant impact on apprenticeship opportunities given the extent to which these are concentrated in the city's hospitality, retail and leisure sectors – all sectors amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic. Numbers of vacancies fell from around 80 per week to less than 20 in March 2020 and did not begin to recover until spring 2021, with competition for places being fierce and meaning that young people further away from the labour market were less likely to be considered. Throughout this time, the team sustained virtual business and participant support, adapting well to changes in the employment market and participant profile thanks to the skills of advisors in working with these cohorts. When vacancies started to return in face-to-face jobs, many learners were reluctant to apply, especially those who faced increased anxiety as a result of lockdowns. Identifying young people who were NEET or at risk of becoming so also became harder as they were being home schooled.

It is important to note that the York offer also operated in the context of provision via the York & North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Comparisons were made to the Accelerate programme that was commissioned at the same time and led to a distinct offer being up and running, targeting the same cohort. Work was undertaken around the mid-point of the programme to map the landscape of provision, engagement, and funding (including all ESF, ESIF, LCR and York & North Yorkshire LEP funding) to make targeting clear, reduce confusion, make referrals and signposting easier, and to maximise the impact of strong existing local relationships with schools, JCP and other programmes.

The model was designed to have a Skills Adviser and Skills Officer supporting the running of the programme; a Business Engagement Adviser (BEA); one (FTE) Learning, Skills and Employment Advisor (LSEA) based within York Learning, leading 18+ engagement; and two part-time (0.5 FTE) Learning and Work Advisors (LAWA) based in the Council to focus on the 15-17 inactive cohort. However, a delay in the initial contract being signed meant that recruitment could not move forward in time for the start of the programme.

Based on the fact that the programme's unemployment target was particularly challenging in York due to the city's low unemployment rate at the start of the pandemic, additional resource (1.5 FTEs) was also recruited to target and support this complex cohort. Efforts were also made in May 2020 to recruit a further LAWA to focus on those aged 15-17 at risk of becoming NEET, but the recruitment process meant that this post was not filled until September 2020. A change in staff also resulted in some loss of embedded knowledge and continuity. With these factors combined, the York Hub did not have full capacity, running at least one FTE down and with added complexity caused by changes in staffing over the period of the programme.

Targeting, Marketing and Engaging Young People

There was limited marketing and communications activity up to the mid-term point, instead focusing on establishing referral networks with other services and partners, drawing on established local relationships. There was some confusion related to York calling its programme FutureGoals (not Employment Hub), which was understood to be the intended name for the LCR programme. York's 'Hub' has not necessarily aligned therefore to the LCR banner used by the Combined Authority. York report receiving few referrals/enquiries from the centralised marketing, which needed to have an element which was more York facing to recognise that York learners do not see themselves as part of Leeds City Region.

Strong marketing skills in the team aided subsequent work to communicate the programme to maximise its reach and impact. This included using flyers, business cards and press releases with feature articles on apprenticeships and case studies. Social media was used successfully, including in targeting specific groups and points in time e.g. results day, LinkedIn to target business and business intermediaries, paid adverts on Facebook directed at parents, cross-posting on other Facebook groups and a Facebook 'Next Steps' live session. A Let's Be York Skills page was also developed on the Council's website to help direct enquiries. Pre-pandemic, a number of recruitment events and job fairs were held that proved successful, however, these had to stop and online alternatives did not generate the same levels of interest. A Career Ready Programme was also aligned, targeting 6th Form students who did not wish to progress on to university but who needed support in gaining employability skills. The Council itself offered a number of 'taster days' for young people to understand what it would be like to work in there.

In terms of specific targeting, the team leveraged their relationship with JCP (a member of the York steering group), to secure referrals, however it was hard to get traction on this. Partly this was due to not being co-located within Jobcentres to the same extent that other Hubs were and partly because the local Jobcentre did not pass on referrals directly to the Hub due to GDPR, instead, telling their clients about the offer but leaving it to the client to follow up and get in touch, which they often did not do. It was hoped that the national roll out of DWP Youth Hubs would provide an opportunity to establish a city centre hub where services could co-locate and potentially lead to an outreach model via community hubs. The Opportunity Centre (providers of the York & North Yorkshire LEP's Accelerate programme) had been identified as a location and all parties were keen to co-locate but mitigations needed in line with the COVID-19 risk assessments meant this did not come to fruition within the timescale of the Employment Hub programme. The impact of this was that York's Hub had no physical front door, and no ability to *"literally send people over to the next desk there and then."*

In relation to inactive and NEET cohorts, there was a need to support young people with specific identified needs to achieve ambitious, realistic and informed learning and employment goals. The Hub therefore worked with the Youth Justice Service, resulting in some intensive one-to-one interventions; and through the Council's restructured Specialist Learning and Employment Adviser Team who were aligned to the city's pupil referral unit, young people in care and those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The latter element came about late in the programme's delivery and hence was unable to make a full contribution, but certainly helped referral routes and surfaced a greater number of young people with whom to work. The Council also ran a very successful one-year contract with

Blueberry Academy (completing in summer 2020) to deliver specialist support into work for people with an EHCP, and as a result exceeded its target on supporting people with a disability.

Approach and Activities

The Hub used one-to-one engagement with businesses to generate opportunities and vacancies. A relationship with Make It York and with advisers promoting the LCR Age Grants to SMEs helped provide a route for targeting and creating a 'no wrong door' approach for York employers. The BEA worked to raise awareness through intermediaries, by being very active on LinkedIn, attending networking events and engaging businesses in a workshop during York Business Week 2019, 2020 and 2021.

This continued through the pandemic, however, despite various approaches, including acting as a recruitment agency for businesses, the opportunities generated attracted limited take up by young people. Reasons for this vary between sectors and across apprenticeship levels but feedback from individuals, employers and training providers suggesting that there was:

- perception that career pathways within sectors that remained susceptible to future lockdowns were less secure;
- buoyancy in the local job market that made job opportunities without training but with a higher salary more attractive than an apprenticeship;
- factors linked to uncertainty as to how many of people on furlough would have otherwise applied for an apprenticeship;
- fewer young people in York opting for the apprenticeship route, choosing instead to remain in Further or Higher Education – influenced by the reduced number of apprenticeship vacancies seen in the first half of 2021 and the continuation of Centre Assessed Grades; and
- hampered attractiveness of the programme to businesses due to the launch of Kickstart which covered employees' salaries, National Insurance and pension costs.

There were two elements of the focus on individuals, both of which benefited from advisers being able to apply a tailored approach depending on the specific needs of the individual they were working with. Firstly, on the 18+ unemployed cohort, pre-pandemic, the LSEAs provided support on employability such as CV writing, job searching, confidence building and anxiety management through one to one support and small group work. Clients had a dedicated adviser, often with the relationship having been initiated at the Jobcentre. Working as closely as possible with Jobcentre Work Coaches on the Youth Obligations programme and with charities such as RESTORE York who were able to promote the Hub to the people they were working with, helped advisers to target eligible 18-21 year olds and to work in partnership to identify and address their specific needs and barriers to work. In March 2020, this shifted online however appetite for support from this cohort during the pandemic was limited, perhaps as these individuals may have been home schooling their children and hence were unavailable for work.

Towards the mid-point of the programme emphasis was also put on the inactive 15-17 cohort and targeting those not supported by provision elsewhere. This included working with young people lacking in confidence, those diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum, or identified as being at

higher risk of becoming NEET. These young people received one-to-one support tailored to their needs to help progress them into an apprenticeship or further education. During the pandemic, the team found that their focus needed to be on retaining these individuals in the programme, providing them with a significant amount of support around mental health and anxiety as opposed to trying to move them into work opportunities. Some of this support was delivered face-to-face as and when COVID-19 rules permitted, with the team using door step visits at people's homes as a way to reach them. Other activity included working in partnership with the three schools in the city with no 6th form provision to reach people and successfully facilitated group sessions on site; promotion at events such as the York Jobs Fair, Apprenticeship Taster Day and the York Apprenticeship Recruitment Event; and linkages to the city's NEET Strategy Partnership.

Performance

The Hub was behind on overall outputs at the mid-term review, in good part due to the time it took to get the model up and running and issues related to staff turnover and recruitment. Positive impacts from remedial action taken at that point were starting to be seen, with re-profiled registration targets on track, suggesting that efforts to adjust the approach and leverage strong city relationships were bearing fruit. However, it was at this point that the pandemic hit and the upturn in the trajectory did not hold in the new operating context, meaning that the Hub missed most outputs and results targets. It did, however, have notable success in regard to participation by individuals with a disability, with the target for this well exceeded, thanks to a specific sub-contract put in place with a specialist delivery partner. The lifting of restrictions and ability to get back into schools in quarter four of 2021 provided a late boost, with the Hub increasing performance against its registration target for the inactive profile.

As other Hubs have reported, it is also important to note that reported performance against targets is different from 'actual' performance. Advice regarding paperwork and evidence requirements changed during the programme, resulting in a proportion of registrations and/or outcomes that could not be counted. This is despite the team dedicating time to contacting previous participants and even offering a small incentive to those who provided the newly required evidence. There are valid questions to raise as to the appropriateness of the contractual targets to York's socio-economic context which, even in 'normal' times, would have been challenging to achieve. A switch in York's unemployed and inactive targets to align with the needs of the city more closely, proposed via the Combined Authority to DWP pre-pandemic, was later found to have not been approved, further hindering the team's ability to achieve targets.

Lessons & Looking Ahead

1. Having a **clear offer and delivery model from the outset**, focused on where the programme could work with partners to add value and cross-refer clients, would have been beneficial and allowed the Hub to hit the ground running. Instead time was lost while this was retrospectively established (these could only be put in place once contacts had been signed), hindered by changes in key personnel that meant lack of stability and consistency.
2. The team has been **beset by recruitment and capacity challenges**, compounded by thoroughness of the Council's recruitment policy and the double-edged sword of not having the confidence to

recruit given underperformance and the risk of clawback. Having a robust team in place from the outset, including strong programme management and understanding of ESIF, is essential.

3. The **relationship with Jobcentre Plus** has been positive, however – notwithstanding COVID-19 restrictions – greater co-location and presence beyond the city centre and clarity on GDPR issues around passing clients on to the Hub could have stimulated greater numbers of referrals.
4. **Aligning to the NEET Strategy and partnership in the city**, and latterly to the Council’s restructured Specialist Learning and Employment Adviser Team, has been helpful and created a route for targeting and referrals.
5. **The one-to-one and more intensive support the team provided is essential in this type of programme**, especially for those furthest from the labour market or who have confidence and anxiety barriers. This suggests a quality over quantity approach and demands some flexibility in order to help support people in the most meaningful way.
6. Focusing on this cohort requires a **strong focus also on traineeships and pre-apprenticeship provision** as many of the target young people are not yet ready for an apprenticeship but could be with a little extra support – there is a gap in this provision locally.
7. **Encouraging businesses to consider recruiting young people who may have additional needs has been more challenging, especially in a crowded market.** The focus for business engagement should be more recruitment centred and based on specific vacancies that young people can be talent matched to – with outcome targets reflecting the need for more brokerage / employer support.

4. Beneficiary Survey and Perceptions

4.1 Survey methodology and sample

We designed and delivered a short online survey to elicit views and insights from individual beneficiaries. This was sent out via the six Employment Hubs at the beginning of December 2021 and was open for completion until 31 December 2021, with Hubs also asked to send out a reminder for completion mid way through.

As some Hubs did not provide data on the number of people surveys were sent to, we do not know the exact number invited to participate or the overall response rate. However, the survey went out to at least 2,174 learners who had been engaged by Employment Hubs, and was completed by 86 learners, a maximum response rate of 4.0%. The table shows the details for each Hub.

Table 2: Beneficiary survey responses by provider

Employment Hub	No. of beneficiaries sent to	No. of survey responses	Response rate
Bradford	50 minimum	30	Data not provided
Calderdale	360	1	0.3%
Kirklees	1,134	27	2.4%
Leeds	500	13	2.6%
Wakefield	130	3	1.5%
York	Data not provided	4	Data not provided
Hub not stated		8	
Total		86	Maximum of 4.0%

The response to the survey varied notably by Hub and a significantly greater number of responses were gained from individuals who had been supported by the Hubs in Bradford and Kirklees, which together accounted for nearly two thirds of returns. A middling number of survey responses were received for Leeds, but figures for Wakefield, York and especially Calderdale were very low. The low figure in York will in part reflect the low number of participants it had engaged with compared to other Hubs (see section 6). The reasons for lower returns in some areas appear to be due mainly to the number of beneficiaries that Hubs sent the surveys out to, with this being high in Kirklees for example but quite low in Wakefield. York did not submit a figure for how many beneficiaries the survey link was sent to, but the data suggests this may well be relatively low compared to the number of participants they have helped. This level of variation in responses may reflect factors such as how far Hubs have been able to keep up to date records and stay in touch with beneficiaries whom they have supported, as well as the mechanics of promoting survey completion.

It has not been possible to calculate the overall response rate given two Hubs did not provide figures for how many beneficiaries they had sent the survey to. However, for most of the Hubs where figures could be calculated, the response rate was around 2%, hence the overall survey response rate is likely to have been of this order. This rate will in part be due to GDPR reasons preventing the use of a prize

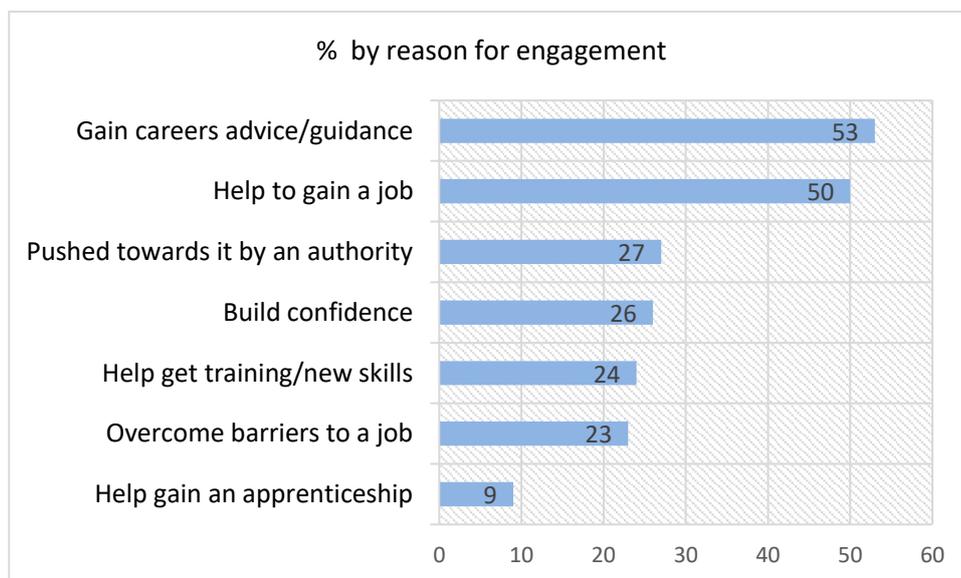
draw as an incentive, and also reflect the fact that some of those the survey went out to will have been engaged many months ago, and hence that their experience will not have been a recent or current one to report on.

Naturally, the overall beneficiary survey results that follow will reflect the proportion of those completing it who had experience of different Hubs. In this, respect, overall results will be skewed towards provision by the Bradford and Kirklees Hubs, which accounted for 58% of the surveys completed. For key relevant questions (e.g. overall recommendation levels) or where comments relate to specific experiences, we indicate variation by Hub, but note that the relatively low numbers mean that results are indicative rather than statistically robust.

4.2 Reasons for engaging with Hubs and the support they offered

Survey respondents were asked why they contacted or engaged with the Hub and its support and presented with a menu of options, from which they could select as many as applied.

Figure 2: Reasons for engaging with/contacting Hubs and their support services



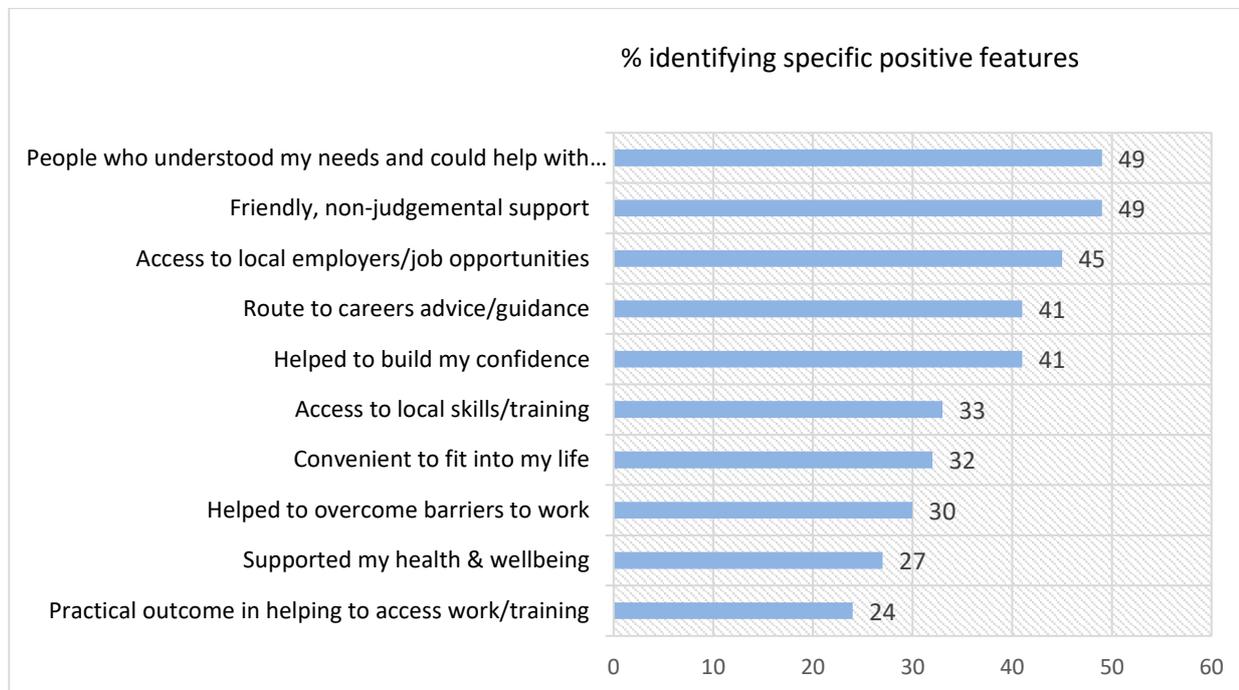
Two reasons for engaging with Hubs dominated and were selected by around a half of respondents - to help get a job, or to help gain careers advice and guidance. One in ten said they had been seeking help towards getting an apprenticeship. Four other reasons were each selected by around a quarter of those responding, three of which were about factors that would lead to a job – confidence, skills and training and helping to overcome things that ‘hold me back from getting a job’. While most of the reasons selected were about the pull of the hub offer and participants wanting to gain support, a quarter said they had been pushed towards taking it up by an authority such as Jobcentre Plus.

Other reasons for respondents for engaging were to get help with a CV (one respondent), or that the support was associated with doing or gaining a Kickstart placement (three respondents).

4.3 What was good about the support provided and what could be improved

Figure 3 shows positive features respondents identified about the support they had received. Again, this is based on being able to choose from a menu of options or to add other reasons that applied.

Figure 3: What was good about the support you received?



Participants typically identified multiple features that were good about the support they had received. All of the options offered were signalled as plus points by a significant number of people and five of them were identified by more than 40% of respondents. The aspects rated as positive most often related both to the type of support offered and its practical benefits (e.g. access to employers/job opportunities, careers guidance, training) and to the way in which it was delivered – in a friendly, non-judgemental way by people who understood client needs and could help them with solutions. That highlights the importance of quality of provision as well as output numbers, and that this is important to the client groups. Wider benefits from the support were each identified by around 30% of respondents, indicating the importance of factors such as confidence, health and wellbeing and overcoming personal barriers to work.

Achieving practical outcomes that would help in accessing work and training was selected by a quarter of respondents as a positive feature. The fact that it was not more highly ranked compared to other benefits may reflect the fact that respondents selected other similar answers instead (e.g. access to job opportunities, access to skills/training) or could be because a significant proportion had not gone onto sustainable work or training as a result of the provision, but gained other benefits they valued. This corresponds with the results in the data section that shows numbers of participants to be notably higher than the numbers entering sustainable work/training.

The results of a follow-on question asking whether anything could be improved also relate to this factor. Overall, the results were very positive, with 60% of the 76 respondents to this question saying

that nothing could be improved. However, of the improvements identified (again, selected from a menu of options) the two most frequently selected factors were outcome oriented – ‘provide more access to local employers’ (selected by 14%) and ‘better lead into employment, self-employment, training or an apprenticeship’ (selected by 12%). Table 3 shows the results in full.

Table 3: Could anything be improved?

Suggested improvements	No. of responses	% of responses
Provide more access to local employers	11	14%
Better lead into employment, self-employment, training or an apprenticeship	9	12%
Communicate with us better or more clearly	8	10%
Better quality and/or range of guidance and support	7	9%
Provide services and support face to face (where not available)	7	9%
Better support to help me get a job – e.g. on CV writing and interview skills	6	8%
Better help me to gain a specific skill	5	6%
Better lead into training or education options	5	6%
Provide services and support online (where not available)	4	5%
Provide better support once I was in work	3	4%
Make it more convenient to fit into my life	2	3%
Nothing it could do better	47	60%

Apart from the points about practical outcomes already noted, the main area suggested for improvement was better communication, although this was only noted by 10% of respondents. A proportion of those who had not been able to access online support said they would like that as an option (5%); while 9% said they would like face to face provision where that had not been possible. The very low numbers (3%) calling for support that ‘better fits around my life’ suggests that provision was actually very good in this respect, with ten times more respondents identifying the convenience of provision as a plus point than as something to improve.

4.4 The impact of support and advice

Overall, 81% of respondents said that the advice or support they received had helped them with work or training opportunities. This indicates a large majority of participants had either secured a job, apprenticeship or training or felt that it was helping move them along a journey to doing to. Further questions explored what impact the support had had on those receiving it in more detail.

4.4.1 Proportion moving into a job, self-employment, an apprenticeship or work experience

The survey asked those respondents who said that the support had helped them with work or training opportunities whether they had secured a job, an apprenticeship or work experience since receiving support. Of the 63 respondents, 79% had secured one of these outcomes, with 21% gaining a different positive outcome – usually taking up training/education, but also including two respondents who had gone into self-employment or started a business (both of whom had sustained that for at least six

months). This suggests that an employment related outcome is the type most frequently created through the programme, but with a significant minority gaining benefits in relation to training and skills that will better position them for employment in the future.

Of those moving into a job, an apprenticeship or work experience, 50% said they had sustained that for at least six months and another 22% had not yet reached 6 months but were still in the employment they had gained. A further 12% said they were not in employment for six months but had moved into education/training, while 6% had moved into a different job. Overall, that equates to 90% of those who secured a job/apprenticeship/work experience having a lasting positive outcome to date, with just 10% saying that gained that their employment had lasted for less than six months and that they were now not in employment or training. Importantly, this suggests that data on achieving sustained employment results to date (which shows this to be only 16% of the those entering employment or education/training on leaving – see 6.1) is likely to underplay the proportion of beneficiaries who gained a lasting positive impact.

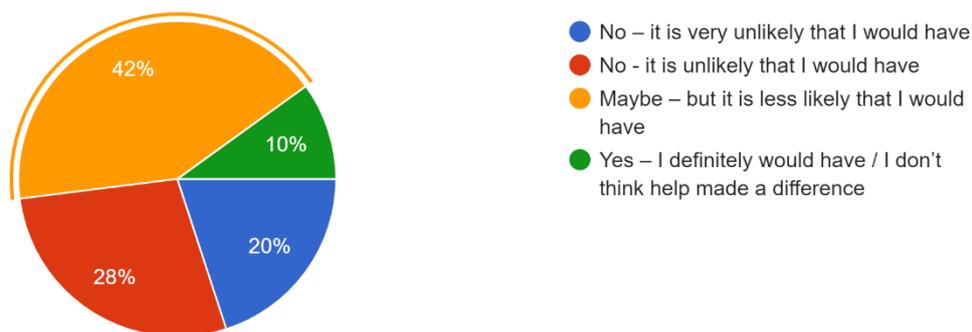
4.4.2 Additionality – what would have happened without Employment Hub support?

The survey asked those who had gained a positive job/apprenticeship/work experience outcome how likely that would have been without the help or advice received. This is important in assessing how much added value the programme has brought, and the difference it has made compared to what might have happened anyway if it had not been in place. Figure 4 shows the results.

Figure 4: Additionality – how far did support from the Hub create the positive outcome?

Do you think you would have got that specific job, apprenticeship or work experience without the help or advice you received?

50 responses



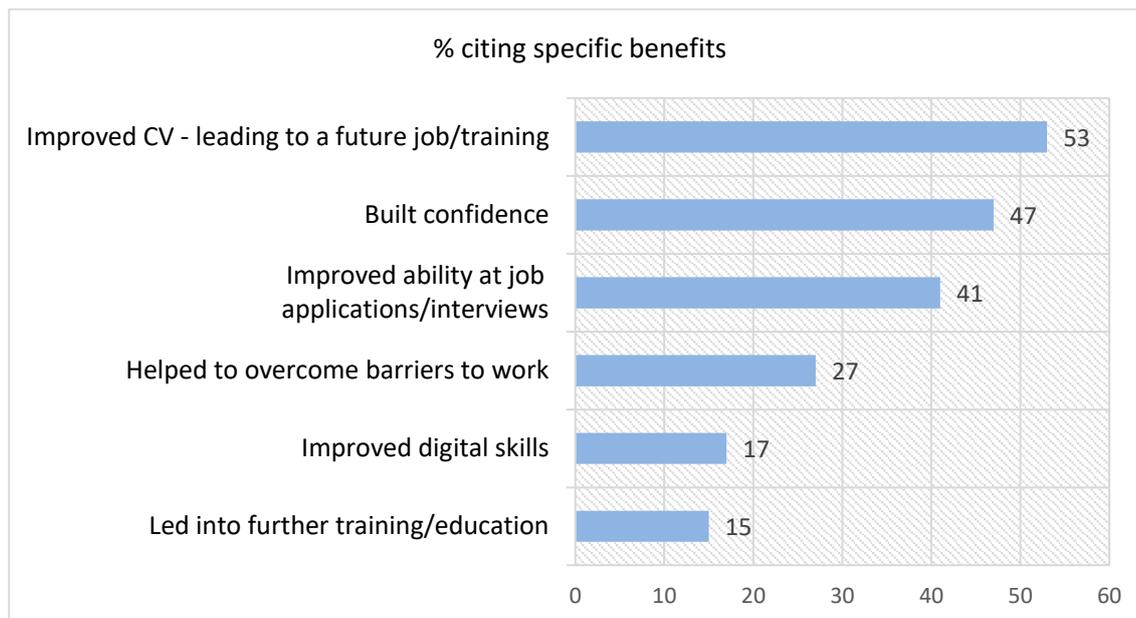
48% of those who had gained a job/apprenticeship/work experience placement said that this would have been unlikely or very unlikely without the support they received. A further 42% were uncertain about whether they would have done but thought it less likely that they would have done without the help received. The remaining 20% felt they would have definitely secured their employment outcome without Hub support. In all cases, it should be noted that these figures are based on perceptions only. Hence, some of those who said they would have gained employment anyway may have undervalued the role of Hub support, and the benefits they gained from it in terms of skills, confidence, ability to present at interview, and connection to the work opportunity itself may have helped them secure an

opportunity at least partially or sooner than may have otherwise occurred. Likewise, some of those who said they would have been unlikely to gain work may have done so.

4.4.3 Other benefits from support

Those receiving support were asked whether the help, advice or support received had helped them in any other ways beyond tangible work outcomes. Figure 5 shows the results, based on the proportion of respondents selecting as many as they wished from a menu of possible benefits.

Figure 5: Wider benefits



On average beneficiaries selected two of the range of potential benefits presented, and often these reinforced what they had described as good points about the support they had received (see 4.3) – for example in relation to improving confidence (cited 47% of respondents as a benefit) and to helping them to overcome things that ‘held me back from getting a job’ (cited by 27%). Alongside the high numbers noting improved confidence as a benefit, the top rated response was having an improved CV which they thought would help them to get a job or training/education in the future (53%). Another 15% said that support had already led them into further training/education. 26% said there had been no wider benefits.

Two areas also highlighted where support had improved skills and abilities – most notably job application and interview skills (41%) and to a lesser extent, digital skills (17%). These would be expected to help people to gain and advance in work in the future and correspond both to the support Hubs said they offered, and in the case of digital skills, to the way in which support was offered online for much of the programme.

4.4.4 Why some people felt support had not been of benefit

The minority of respondents (15 people, 19%) who said that the help, advice or support received had not improved their work and opportunities were asked why that was the case. By far the main reason given – by 53% of this subsample – was because it had not connected them to employment or training.

This connects with the large proportion of people who said that gaining a job or training was their main reason for engaging with Hub support (see 4.2) and reinforces the main suggested improvements that respondents pointed to across the whole survey – more access to local employers and better leading into work or training. The only other reason suggested by more than three respondents was that the type or quality of the support offered was poor (stated by 4 of the 15 people who had not benefited), while two respondents said it did not meet their skills needs and two suggested that the quality of advisers they worked with was poor.

4.5 Overall perceptions of the support

Two questions sought to assess overall Hub performance in terms of how the service offered was rated by its beneficiaries and whether they would recommend it to others. The two charts below show the results.

Figure 6: Overall rating of Hub engagement and support

Overall, how would you describe your experience of engaging with this support?
78 responses

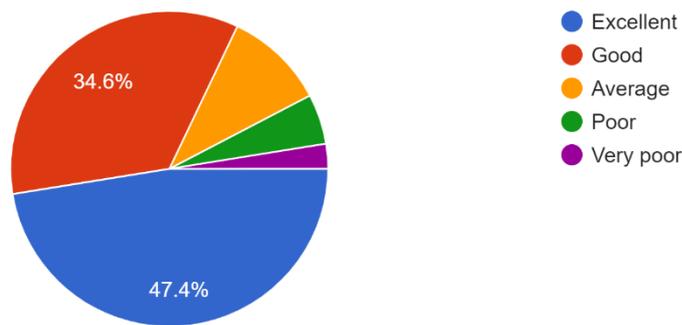
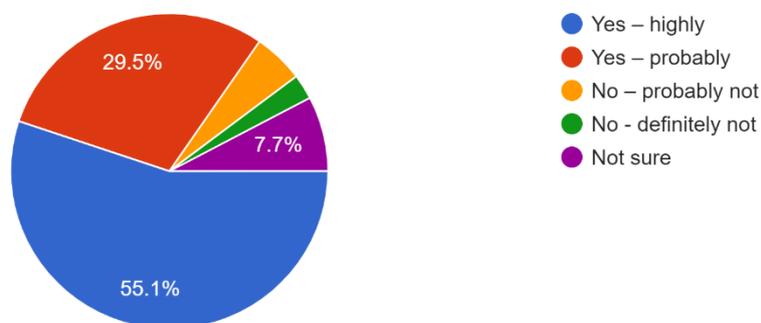


Figure 7: Would you recommend the Hub to others?

Would you recommend it to others seeking support to access employment or training?
78 responses



Overall, just over four fifths (82%) of the 77 respondents who answered this question rated their experience of engaging with a Hub as good or excellent, with most of these (47%) saying it was excellent. A further 11% said it was average, while 4% described it as poor and 3% very poor.

The picture in terms of whether Hub users would recommend it to others seeking support to access employment or training was similar. 85% would recommend it, with most of these (55%) saying that they would highly recommend it. 8% were unsure about whether they would recommend it or not, while 7% would probably (4%) or definitely (3%) not do so. Most but not all of these were the same people who said that services were poor, however two of those saying Hub services were poor would still recommend it to others; while two who said the services were average said they would probably not recommend to others.

If survey respondents are representative of Hub clients overall, these findings suggests that a large majority of users have valued the service offered, and that around a half of participants highly valued it and would recommend it strongly to others.

Whilst having five survey respondents said that Hub provision was poor/very poor, and five who said they would probably or definitely not recommend it, are low numbers, it is still useful to look at whether there are any factors behind this. In this respect, more in-depth analysis shows that:

- For four of the five people saying that Hub services were poor, one of their reasons for engaging with the Hub initially was because they had been pushed towards the support by a Jobcentre or other authorities. In three cases this was their only reason for engaging with the Hub.
- All of the seven people who rated services as poor and/or would not recommend Hub services said that the support received had not helped them with work or training opportunities, and (in all but one case, where improved confidence was noted) that it had not led to any wider benefits.
- The main reasons given for why these people said that Hub services did not help them were that it did not connect them to work or training (four people) and that the type and quality of support was poor. Additionally two criticised their adviser, one of whom said that they had been pushed to an apprenticeship even though they had explained it was inappropriate due to financial reasons.

The finding about those who rated services as poor/very poor being pushed towards the Hub rather than drawn to it is an interesting one, as excluding this group, only 1% of respondents rated Hub services as poor/very poor, and 89% rated them as good or excellent. This probably reflects the fact that some of those pushed towards the Hubs by bodies such as Jobcentres may resent being there or cynical about whether it will help them. Further analysis of the 20 respondents who were pushed towards engaging with Hubs shows that:

- For 8 out of the 20, the push factor was the only reason for them engaging
- 13 out of the 20 said Hub support had helped them with work and training opportunities
- 11 secured a job, apprenticeship or work opportunity as a result, none of whom said this was likely to have happened anyway (all said it was unlikely or maybe would have done)

- 13 identified wider benefits from engaging with the Hub, typically 2 or more each
- 14 rated services as excellent or good compared to 4 rating it as poor or very poor

This shows that this group tends to be polarised. A minority felt that they were not helped with work or training, that no wider benefits occurred, and that Hub provision was poor. However, the upside is that the majority – around 70% of this group – may have been unlikely to engage with the Hub otherwise, gained valuable support and often employment, and thought the Hub was doing a good or excellent job.

5. Business Survey and Perceptions

5.1 Survey methodology and sample

We also designed and delivered a short online survey to elicit views and insights from businesses who had engaged with the Employment Hub programme. This was sent out to businesses via the six Employment Hubs at the beginning of December 2021 and was open for completion until 31 December 2021, with Hubs also asked to send out a reminder for completion mid way through.

Two Hubs did not provide data as to how many businesses they sent the survey link to. We do know that it was sent to a minimum of 1,932 businesses, with 94 responses received, which would equate to a maximum response rate of 4.9%. However, given data gaps it is not possible to predict the exact overall survey response rate. Variations in response rates may reflect the fact that some of those the survey went out to will have been engaged many months ago, or on other programmes besides Employment Hubs, and hence that their experience will not have been a recent or current one to report on. It may also reflect how far Hubs have been able to keep up to date records and stay in touch with business beneficiaries. The table shows the details for each Hub.

Table 4: Beneficiary survey responses by provider

Employment Hub	No. businesses sent to	No. survey responses	Response rate
Bradford	193	22	12.2%
Calderdale	170	1	0.6%
Kirklees	540	15	2.8%
Leeds	860	38	4.4%
Wakefield	Data not provided (min. 8)	8	Data not provided
York	161	10	6.2%
Total	Min. 1,932	94	Maximum of 4.9%

Given the variation in returns, and the fact that a significantly greater number of responses were gained from businesses who supported by the Hubs in Leeds and Bradford than in Wakefield or Calderdale, it is important to stress that the analysis below is indicative and reflective of the proportion of those completing it who had experience of different Hubs.

5.2 Business size and sector

Nearly half (48%) of businesses responding to the survey employed 1-9 people. The remaining half employed 10-50 (28%); 51-250 (16%); and more than 250 (9%). Businesses operating in Health and Care, Education or Public Administration accounted for the largest single number of responses at 21%. The 'other' category shows as a significant number of responses. On analysing this, respondents have in the main been in areas that could in fact have been included in one of the main sectors given. Examples of 'other' categories include passenger transport, cyber security, travel, finance, social media, and hospitality. Four of the 19 classed themselves as charities. The table below shows the full breakdown of business responses by sector.

Table 5: Primary sector of business operation

Primary sector of business operation	No. of responses	% of responses
Health and care, education or public administration	19	21%
Manufacturing	13	14%
Information & communication, arts / entertainment / recreation	10	11%
Business administration, finance, property or professional / technical	9	10%
Accommodation or food services (including hospitality)	8	9%
Construction	6	7%
Retail	5	5%
Transport & storage, motor trades or wholesale	2	2%
Agriculture / forestry or mining / quarrying / utilities	1	1%
Other	19	21%

After gathering this basic business information, we routed the remainder of the survey based on the response businesses gave to the question: *‘Have you employed anybody in any capacity, including in an apprenticeship or work experience placement, as a result of engaging with an Employment Hub?’* We received an exact 50/50 yes/no split in response to this question – 47 businesses had, and 47 had not. The survey analysis that follows is based on this routing.

5.3 Businesses who did not employ following engagement with an Employment Hub

5.3.1 Reasons for not employing

For the 50% of businesses who had not employed anyone as a result of engaging with a Hub, we asked why not. We provided four core multiple choice options, which together received over 60% of responses were as follows:

- No suitable job or work experience opportunity arose or could be created: 13 or 28%
- A suitable opportunity arose, but no applicants the Hub had supported applied: 8 or 17%
- Applicants the Hub had supported applied, but were not suitable for the opportunity: 5 or 11%
- Applicants the Hub had supported applied and were suitable, but not the best candidate: 3 or 6%

We also provided an ‘other’ option for responders to specify any reason other than the above four options for not employing anyone. We received 18 individual answers to this which can be categorised into five groups:

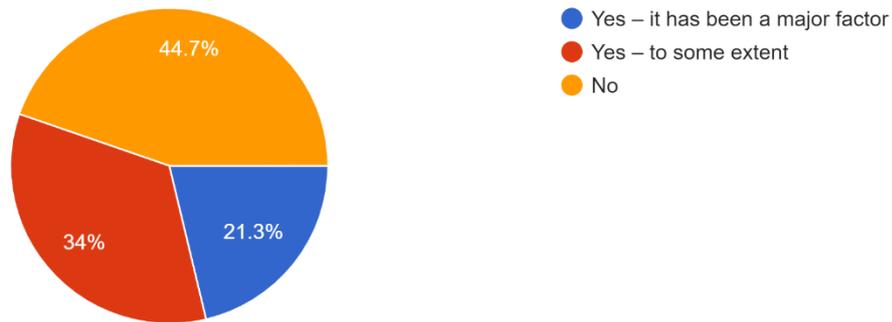
1. Five responses suggested that business circumstances had changed; had taken a conscious decision not to proceed; or were not looking to recruit.
2. Four responses noted that their relevant Hub had not followed up with them, suggesting that there were missed opportunities to secure an outcome.
3. Three responses had not employed anyone as yet but will in due course.
4. Three responses did not select the candidate because they a) failed other aspects of the selection; b) did not show up to interview; or c) had lack of appetite to work.
5. Three responses specifically referred to Kickstart and their application being either underway or rejected.

We asked the same 47 businesses if COVID-19 had been a factor in preventing suitable job/work experience opportunities from arising in their workplace. Just over half – 55% - answered that it had influenced them, either as a major factor or to some extent. The remaining 45% said that it had had no bearing.

Figure 8: Impact of COVID-19 on employment intentions

Has COVID-19 been a factor in preventing suitable job/work experience opportunities from arising in your workplace?

47 responses



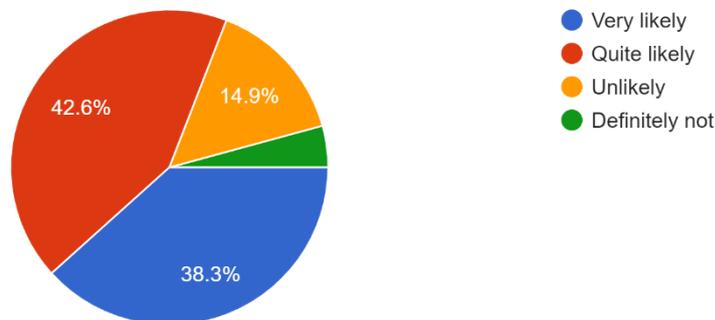
5.3.2 Future employment intentions

We then asked these businesses how likely they would be to considering employing or providing work experience for somebody who had been sourced through an Employment Hub or similar initiative in the future. Encouragingly, 81% said that they were very or quite likely to do so. It was unlikely for 15% and a definite no for just 4%.

Figure 9: Future employment intentions

How likely would you be to consider employing/providing work experience for somebody who had been sourced through the Hub or a similar initiative in the future?

47 responses



5.3.3 Experience of engaging with the Employment Hub

Finally, we asked these businesses to describe their overall experience of engaging with the Hub, the results of which are shown in the figure below. A moderate number (17%) felt that they had had an excellent experience, which is in itself interesting given that they did not go on to employ anyone. A quarter of responses had a good experience. The most frequently rated response was of an average experience. It is important to reflect on the 13 businesses who felt that their experience had been poor or very poor. We provided a space for responders to give an open text answer as to why they had responded as they did. Figure 10 below presents these responses and gives helpful flavour to these less positive responses.

Figure 10: Experience of engaging with the Hub for businesses who did not go on to employ

Overall, how would you describe your experience of engaging with the Hub?
47 responses

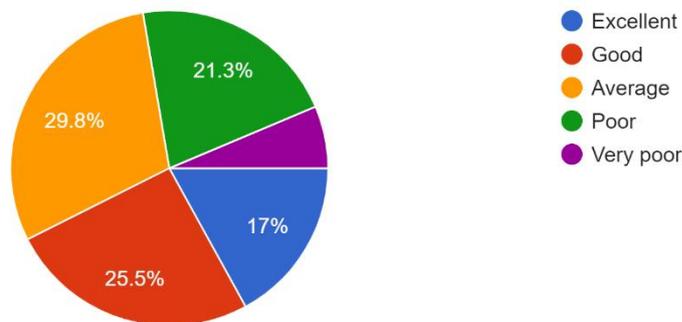


Table 6: Experience of engagement

Positive feedback	Frequency point made	Negative feedback	Frequency point made
Knowledgable, helpful Hub staff	6	Slow / poor quality service by the Hub	6
Quick response / good service by the Hub	3	Quality or attitude of candidate, including not attending interview	5
Good referrals of potential candidates	2	Issues with the offer or confusion on what the Hub/offer was	4
Good communication between Hub and business	2	Lack of communication between Hub and business	3
		Issues with Kickstart of confusion on Hub link to Kickstart	3
		Let down by lack of candidates	2
		Lack of courses for potential apprenticeships	1

5.4 Businesses who did employ following engagement with an Employment Hub

We asked a range of questions to the 50% businesses who did go on to employ someone (in any capacity) who had been supported by a Hub.

5.4.1 Numbers of people employed by role type

We asked businesses to tell us how many people they had taken on who had been supported by the Hub broken down across four employment types as shown in table 7 below. Responses showed 143 people being employed, with the greatest number (87 or 61%) in Kickstart roles, followed by jobs that were not apprenticeships (27 or 19%).

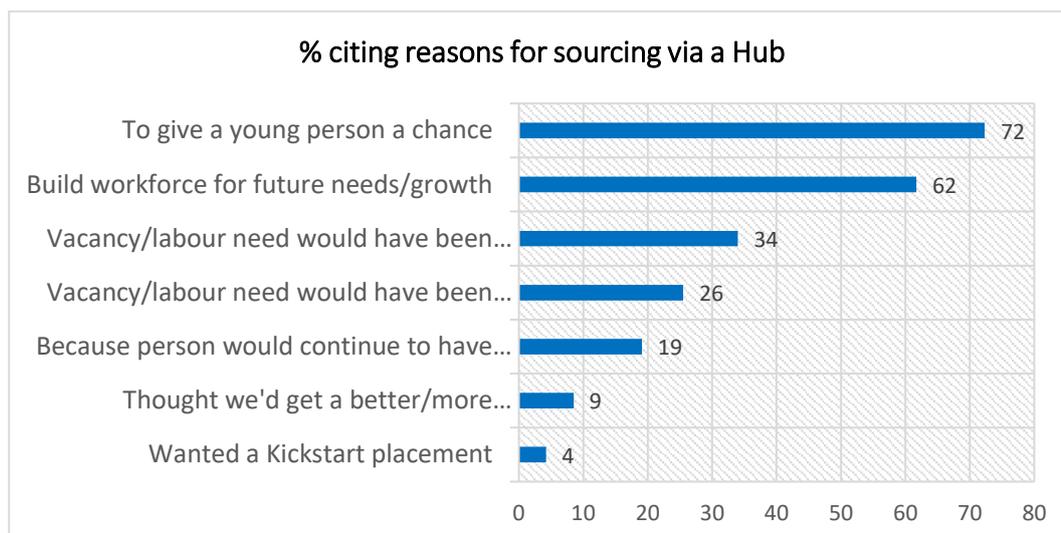
Table 7: Breakdown by employment type

Role type	Number of people employed						Total	%
	1	2	3	4	5	8		
Apprentice	8	0	1	1	0	0	15	11%
Kickstart	18	9	8	1	3	1	87	61%
Work experience	4	0	2	1	0	0	14	10%
Job but not an apprenticeship	11	5	2	0	0	0	27	19%
Total							143	100%

5.4.2 Reasons for recruiting via the Employment Hub

We asked businesses to identify why they had looked to the Hub in order to recruit. People were able to tick all reasons that applied. Two reasons clearly attracted the highest number of responses – ‘to give a young person a chance’ (34 responses) and in order to ‘build the business workforce ready for future needs and growth’ (29 responses). Three further options were also popular – ‘filling a vacancy/labour need that would have been hard to fill at all otherwise’ (16 responses); ‘filling a vacancy/labour need that would have been slower or more expensive to fill otherwise’ (12 responses); and ‘because we knew that person would continue to have support through the Hub’ (9 responses).

Table 8: Reasons for recruiting via Hub

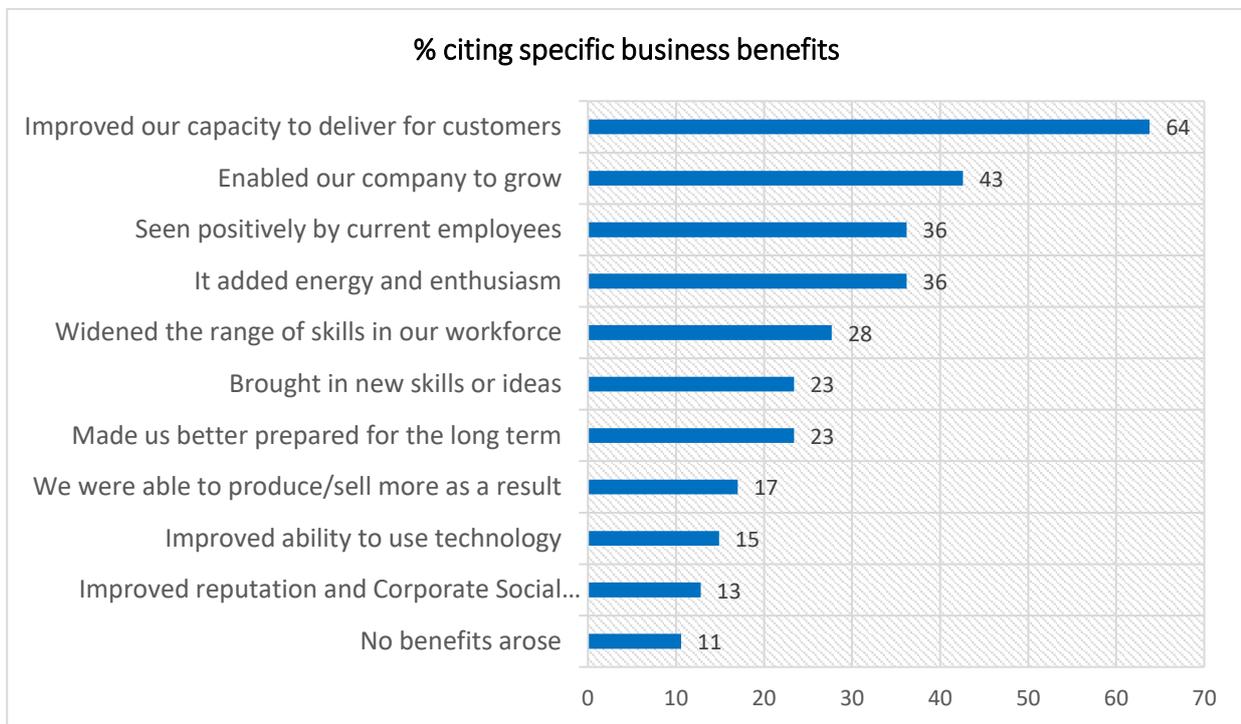


5.4.3 Benefits arising from employing via the Employment Hub

The most frequently cited benefit arising from taking someone on via the Hub by some distance was to improve capacity to deliver for customers. Other reasons that scored highly clustered around either business growth, future proofing and widening skill sets; or around less tangible but important

business values of adding energy and enthusiasm and being seen more positively by existing employees. The table below shows the full breakdown.

Table 9: Benefits arising from recruiting via Hub



It is interesting to look at business views on how far these benefits would have occurred regardless of whether anyone had been taken on via the Hub. Only a fraction of people (9%) believed that all benefits would have occurred anyway; with another 15% believing that at least three quarters of benefits would have occurred. A higher proportion of people – 45% in total – felt that between half and quarter of the benefits would have happened, while 15% said the benefits would not have arisen at all.

Figure 10: Additionality

In broad terms, how far do you think these benefits would have occurred anyway even if you had not taken on one or more person through the Hub?

47 responses

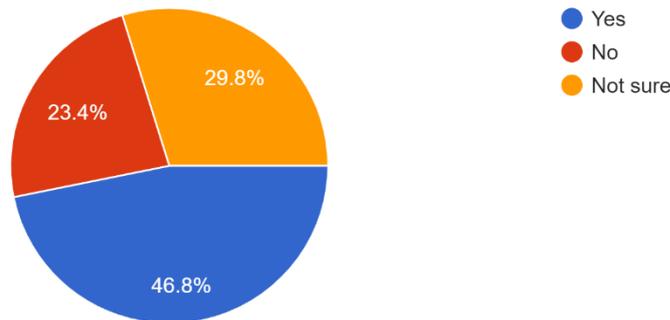


Close to half of responses (47%) felt that their business had benefited financially as a result of employing someone supported by the Hub that would not otherwise have occurred. The other half were more or less evenly split between answering no or being unsure although tended to lean to the latter suggesting that additional financial benefit has been achieved.

Figure 11: Financial benefits

Have there been, or will there be, any financial benefits to the company as a result of employing someone supported by the Employment Hub that would not otherwise have occurred?

47 responses

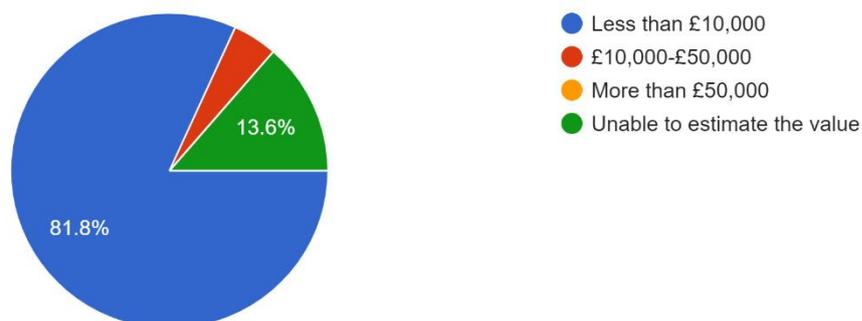


We asked these business to indicate the scale of financial uplift, with the vast majority – over 80% - pitching it at less than £10,000.

Figure 12: Estimated value of financial benefits

Please could you estimate the rough value of these benefits to date?

22 responses



5.4.4 Issues associated with people taken on via the Employment Hub

Over 60% of businesses said they have had no issues or problems with the people they have recruited via the Hub. Only three other issues were reported more than once – unreliability, poor performance or productivity, and bad attitude. Single answers were given to issues linked to the latter such as lack of enthusiasm and making a poor impression with customers; as well as two businesses that cited the recruit swiftly leaving the role and leaving them with a vacancy and a feeling of wasted time and effort.

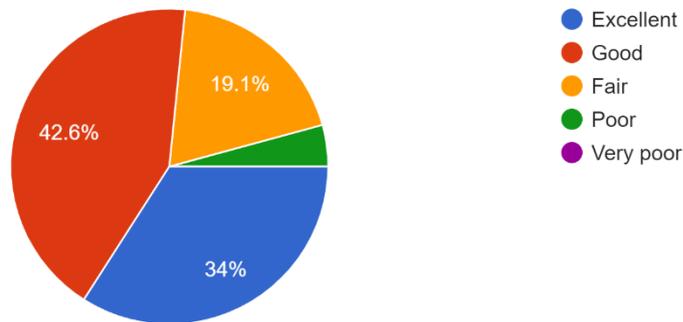
5.4.5 Experience on the whole, improvements and willingness to recommend

When asked if they were happy on balance with their decision to take someone on via the Hub, close to 90% (41 businesses) answered yes. Only one business answered no, with the remaining five being uncertain. Three quarters rated the Hub as either excellent or good as a body to engage with and in terms of the job it does in helping businesses and young people. A further 19% rated this as fair. Hence most of these businesses regarded the Hub positively, and very few viewed the Hub as poor.

Figure 13: Rating the Hub and its role

Overall, how would you rate the Hub as a body to engage with and in terms of the job it does in helping businesses and young people?

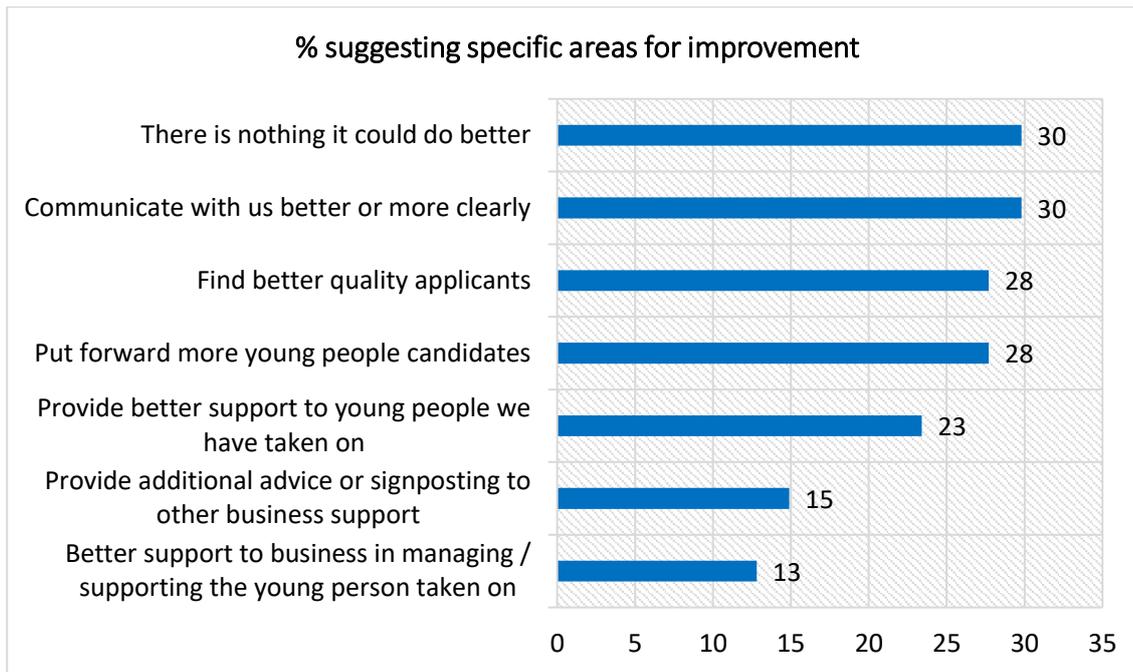
47 responses



Areas that were flagged by businesses as potential areas of improvement are shown in figure 14. One of the five highest scoring options selected was that 'there was nothing the Hub could do better' with 30% of businesses selecting this option. Four other areas attracted the highest number of responses:

- Communicate with us better or more clearly
- Put forward more young people who we may interview or take on
- Find better quality applicants
- Provide better support to young people who we have taken on

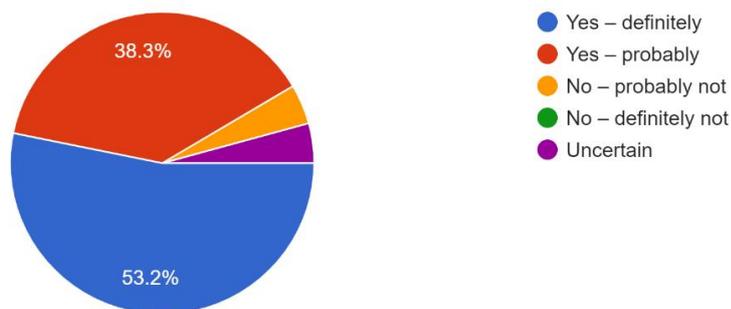
Figure 14: Areas for improvement



Finally, we asked if the business would engage with the Hub or a similar service in the future. Again, the response was overwhelmingly positive, with 43 businesses (92%) replying yes definitely or probably. Of the remaining four, two were uncertain and two answered 'probably not'. Nobody answered 'definitely not'.

Figure 15: Future engagement intentions

Would you engage with the Hub or a similar service to it again in the future?
47 responses



6. Performance and Data Analysis

6.1 Programme level outputs and results and appropriateness of ESF targets

6.1.1 Overview of performance on ESF measures

The Employment Hub programme had targets for a set of ESF outputs and results, as well as a scheduled profile for delivering those across the programme up to its end in December 2021. Overall targets were broken down into the contribution that individual Hubs would make towards them (see 6.2), and these too were broken down by quarter. Table 10 shows overall programme level achievement against all ESF output and result targets, as well as on the BRP businesses engaged target, which is shown for completeness here and analysed in more depth in section 6.3.

Table 10: Overall end of programme achievement against targets

Measure	Target	Achieved	% of Target Achieved
ESF Outputs			
O2 – Participants (below 25 years of age) who are unemployed or inactive	6,294	5,919	94%
CO01 – Males	3,208	3,458	108%
CO01 – Females	3,086	2,461	80%
CO01 – Unemployed, including long term unemployed	4,322	4,803	111%
CO03 – Inactive ²	1,972	1,116	57%
O5 – Participants from ethnic minorities	800	2,063	258%
CO16 – Participants with disabilities	566	1,138	201%
O6 – Participants without basic skills	1,384	1,832	132%
CO14 – Single adult household with dependent children	252	241	96%
ESF Results			
R3 – Participants gaining basic skills	200	54	27%
R5 – Participants (below 25) in employment including self-employment, or education/training upon leaving	2,706	2,156	80%
CR06 – Participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving	1,000	555	56%
BRP Results			
Businesses Engaged	5,000	4,217	84%
Apprenticeship places created	1,800	941	52%

² As noted in section 2.1, a change request was submitted and accepted for two slight changes to ESF outputs, and these are incorporated in the data in Table 10. The changes raised the target for participants from the Inactive group (CO03) by 84 participants, and reduced that for participants who were Unemployed, including long term unemployed (CO01) by the same amount (i.e. 84). The rationale for this reflected the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market, but as things panned out, the change has slightly increased the level of underperformance on the target for participants who were economically inactive.

Overall, the programme achieved (and exceeded) five of its nine participation based targets and was only just under target (at around 95%) on two further outputs, including the headline overall measure of participants (below 25 years of age) who are unemployed or inactive. Overachievement was particularly marked in terms of engaging participants from ethnic minority backgrounds and participants with disabilities. Numbers reached were more than double the target for both groups, demonstrating considerable success in reaching a diverse audience. The project also performed well in reaching male participants; those who were unemployed; and those without basic skills.

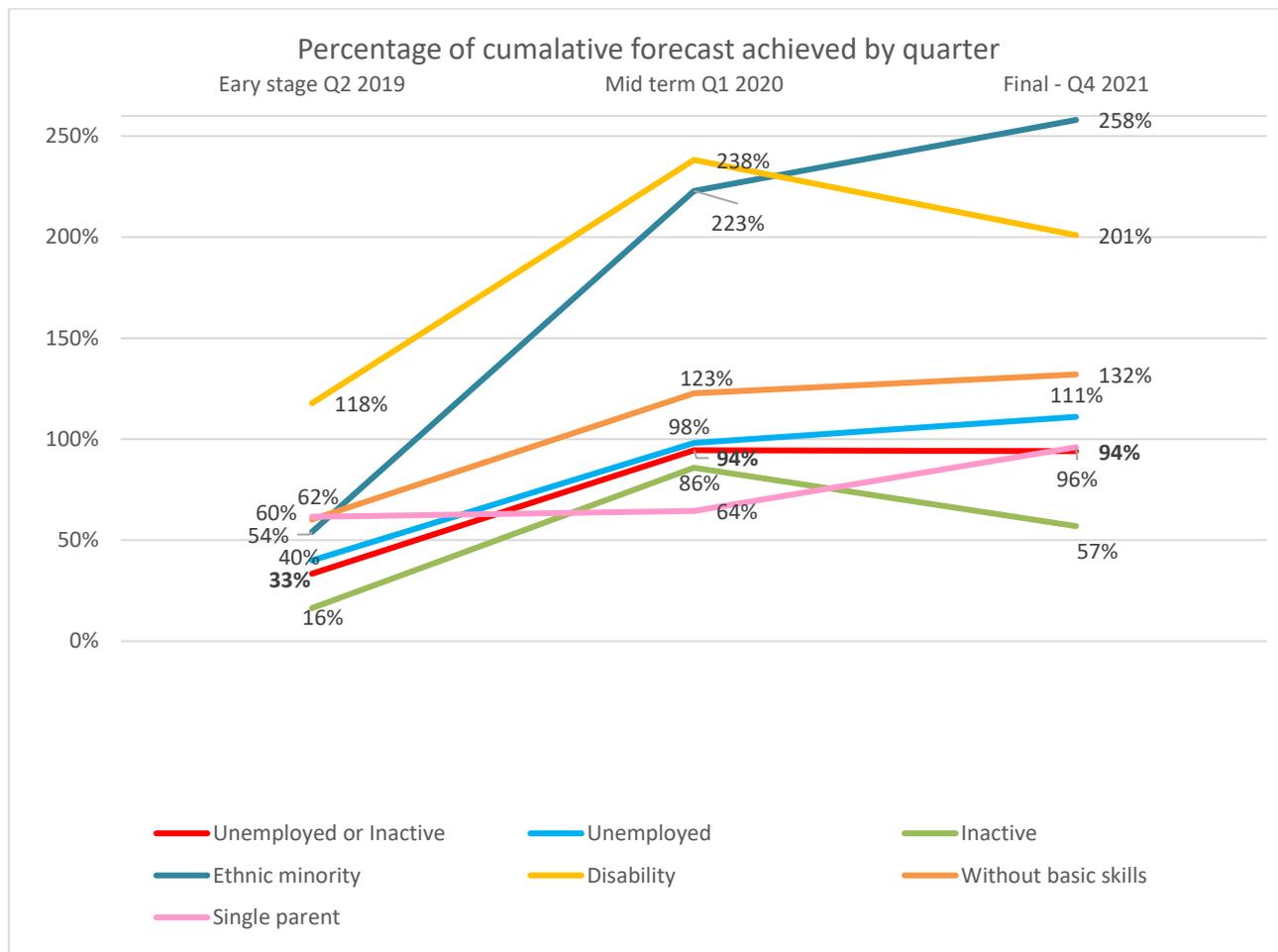
The programme missed two output targets by a significant margin, those being female participants (80% of target) and those who were economically inactive (57%).

In terms of results, the programme helped over 2,150 people into employment including self-employment or education/training upon leaving. Whilst a significant number, this was 550 below target. Achievement on the two other results measures was also below target and by a greater degree. The programme achieved 56% of its target for participants in employment (including self-employment) six months after leaving; and only 27% of its target for those gaining basic skills. This in part reflects the challenging economic and labour market context linked to COVID-19. Performance on these and other outputs and results measures is further discussed in section 6.1.3 on the appropriateness of targets and that should be taken into account when assessing success or otherwise.

6.1.2 Performance over time across the programme

Figure 16 shows a summarised picture of how performance on participation outputs has varied at key points across the programme, with these being the early stage of the programme (Q2 2019); at the point of the mid-term review and up to COVID-19 restrictions beginning (Q2 2020); and at the end of the programme (Q4 2021). The graph shows the percentage of the cumulative outputs forecast to that point that had been achieved for key outputs measures.

Figure 16: Cumulative performance over time against forecast outputs at key milestone



The chart shows that cumulative performance improved notably by the mid-term point after a slow start in Quarters 1 and 2 (January-June 2019). This fits with the fact that some Hubs had delays in contracting and getting started and/or had capacity issues. It suggests that without COVID-19 related impacts, participation measures that were already above target would have been likely to remain so, while those just below and on a gradually upward trajectory (unemployed and unemployed or inactive participants) would have been expected to rise to meet target levels by the end of the programme.

In reality, the chart shows that on most measures, cumulative progress on outputs compared to that scheduled changed relatively little between the mid-term review point and the end of the programme. That suggests that COVID-19 impacts may well have suppressed increases that may otherwise have taken place, certainly when messages from Hubs about the difficulty of engaging participants during initial lockdowns is taken into account, before online operation had fully taken off.

The change between mid-term and end of programme achievement was greater for some outputs than others, and those where the most notable changes were observed include:

- **Single parent participants** – outputs increased from 64% of target at the mid-term to 96% at the end of the programme. This suggests that online operation may have made access easier for this group overall, despite the pressures of home schooling that will have impacted for many in this

group during lockdowns. We also know that some Hubs successfully engaged this cohort through their coordination of food parcels and presence at food banks.

- **Economically inactive participants** – outputs decreased from 86% of target at the mid-term to 57% at the end of the programme. The reasons for this are not wholly clear, but will reflect the fact that economic inactivity increased nationally during the pandemic,³ partly linked to health issues. Additionally, the number seeking a job fell (linked to there being fewer employment opportunities available during much of the pandemic), making the economically inactive more difficult to engage through employment support programmes. Greater barriers for the inactive around online access and lack of digital skills, equipment or Wi-Fi may also have played a role. In terms of programme activity, COVID related school closures made it more difficult to engage with inactive young people/school leavers, while young people in this group may have enrolled directly onto full time courses in sixth forms/colleges as a ‘safe route’ post lockdowns and hence did not need support.

Other output measures where there was a smaller increase in outputs between the mid-term point and the end of the programme included unemployed participants, those with a disability, and ethnic minority participants. However, for the latter group already high output levels did increase significantly further, in part driven by strong delivery by the Bradford Hub towards the end of the programme, who were very effective in reaching this cohort.

The position on results was noted as challenging in the mid-term review, with achievement of forecasts at that point ranging from 66% for people in employment when leaving the programme, to 15% for those being in employment six months on at that point, while achievement on those gaining basic skills was 41% of the target. On two of these measures, the proportion of targeted results achieved increased by the end of the programme – to 80% for participants entering employment, and to 56% for those in sustained employment. This could be seen as positive progress (despite falling short of the target) given the challenging labour market and economic and social contexts during the second half of the programme.

6.1.3 Appropriateness of ESF outputs and results targets

Up to the mid-term review and start of COVID-19 impact in March 2020, the position was that the programme was well ahead of target on two outputs (ethnicity and disability based participation) and significantly below it for one measure (single parent participants). However, for most outputs it was fairly close to target, despite a slow start in many Hubs. Results were notably further behind target, especially for being in employment after six months. Wide variation between local employment Hubs also demonstrated that the most effective Hubs were able to deliver on nearly all measures.

Given this scenario, our view is that at that mid-point, the targets were largely appropriate, but with potential for modest increases in those for participants from ethnic minorities and participants with a disability. Additionally, the employed at six months target was looking very challenging given the inability of five out of six Hubs to deliver against it at that point. However, the time lags involved coupled with delayed starts meant it was too early to be conclusive at that point.

³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/january2022#economic-inactivity>

While up to March 2020 the context for delivery of the programme was largely as would have been expected when the programme was conceived and its targets were set, this changed massively with the onset of COVID-19 and associated lockdown restrictions and economic impacts. These have been noted in section 1 on context, and their likely impacts for most of the period from March 2020 to summer 2021 and beyond include:

- **Inability to deliver face to face because of lockdown restrictions.** Online delivery may have widened access for some groups once this was normalised, but evidence from Hubs (who have consistently noted the advantages of face to face delivery for engaging with these cohorts, and the problems of digital exclusion) is that this is outweighed by the negatives and will have suppressed participation outputs, including those that stemmed from group sessions and events.
- **A very challenging labour market with few employment, apprenticeship and work experience opportunities available** from employers, especially in 'first rung' sectors such as retail and hospitality. The push factor (and hence referrals) from job centres was also reduced during this time reflecting the lack of vacancies. This tight labour market context will have impacted severely on programme results related to entering and sustaining employment. The gradual increase in vacancies after summer 2021 will have counteracted this to a point, and an upswing in outputs at this point and when face to face operation started to become viable again was evident. However, this period was not long enough to make much difference to the employed after six months result, and the overall impact of well over a year with far fewer work opportunities available will have been to suppress employment based results.
- The **introduction of Kickstart and other mainstream DWP programmes** has been double edged. For most Hubs, Kickstart was effectively in competition with them and reduced participant numbers and subsequent employment and skills results. It also meant that the Hubs' cohorts were further away from the labour market and needed more intensive support. This would have reduced outputs and results from a given level of capacity. The exception was the Bradford Hub, which was able to claim outputs based on support provided to Kickstart participants, with outputs increased significantly because of this. Bradford's ability to do this (at least in good part) reflected the fact that a Bradford council Kickstart scheme that was also in place and that SkillsHouse was the main gateway for this and the national Kickstart scheme in Bradford. The Hub therefore had access to the young people going on to Kickstart, and was able to provide support to them. Elsewhere, although Hubs referred participants to Kickstart, reasons for not gaining outputs and results from doing so included 'a considerable number of occasions' when Hub participants were put forward for a Kickstart position and offered a role, but the Hub was not informed at all or until it was too late to claim an outcome. On other occasions, multiple bodies referred a single individual onto Kickstart and the Hub's role was not always attributed. Hence, while Bradford did benefit significantly from its Kickstart connections, the overall impact of Kickstart on the Employment Hub programme was to make hitting targets more difficult.
- **Online operation made it more difficult to verify outputs and results** as it became harder to gain the required documentation, with participants dropping off the radar making it hard to track what

they have done and whether employment had been sustained. This is also likely to have made achieving targets more difficult.

Taking all these factors into account, our judgement is that participation outputs, and especially employment based results would have been significantly and negatively affected by the changed COVID-19 context. Hence, a reduction in (DWP) expectations about the outputs and results that could have been achieved would be appropriate, with this most pronounced for employment-based results and especially the target based on being in employment six months after leaving.

Additionally, we would note that it is unrealistic to have set such specific targets for male and female participants (which together sum to the exact total of all participants), and for unemployed/inactive participants where the same is the case. The statistical likelihood of attaining the precise splits required between these cohorts if the overall target was achieved, but not overachieved by far, is remote. Hence, the way these ‘paired’ targets were set made it highly likely that one or other element of them (e.g. male or female) would not be hit.

6.2 Performance against targets by locality

6.2.1 Outputs

Figure 17: Total Participants outputs – number delivered and % achievement of target by Hub

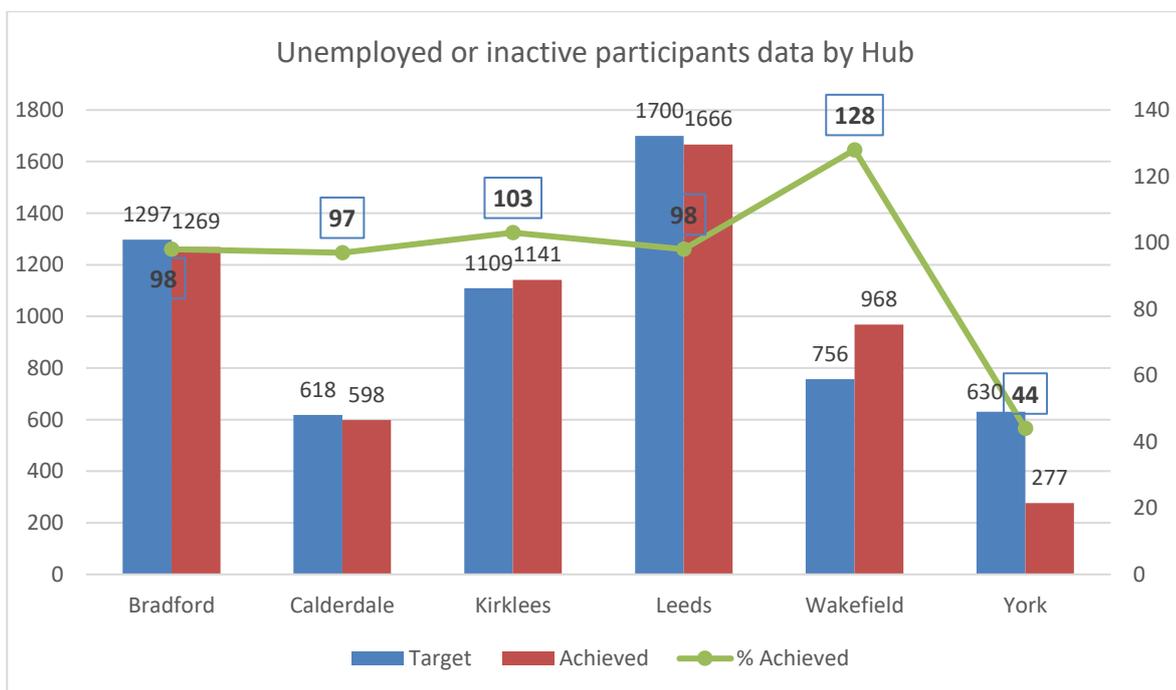


Figure 17 illustrates the variation across Hubs in performance in delivering against local targets on the key participation output of the number of unemployed or inactive participants. It shows that:

- Two Hubs (Wakefield and Kirklees) hit their targets, or significantly surpassed it for the former
- Performance in Leeds, Bradford and Calderdale was very close to target, but marginally below
- In York, achievement was just below a half of the targeted level

At programme level, the two ‘overachieving’ Hubs achieved sufficiently more participants than required to make up for the minor deficits in the three nearly on target Hubs, but not for the larger deficit in York. The pattern of relative performance across the Hubs was similar to that at the mid-term review, but with an impressive rise in Bradford (which was at 25% of target at that point) and significant falls in Kirklees and Calderdale from well above target (around 130% in both) to just above or below it respectively.

Table 11 further explores performance across Hubs and shows the performance of each on the full range of outputs in terms of number delivered and the percentage this is of the forecast.

Table 11: Output performance by Hub

Output Measure – participants who are:		Employment Hub					
		Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	York
Participants	Achieved	1269	598	1141	1666	968	277
	% of forecast	98%	97%	103%	98%	128%	44%
Males	Achieved	723	327	648	963	617	180
	% of forecast	109%	104%	114%	111%	160%	56%
Female	Achieved	546	271	493	703	351	97
	% of forecast	86%	90%	91%	84%	95%	31%
Unemployed	Achieved	1232	293	925	1447	767	139
	% of forecast	136%	68%	103%	122%	145%	59%
Inactive	Achieved	37	305	216	219	201	138
	% of forecast	10%	164%	103%	43%	89%	35%
From ethnic minorities	Achieved	782	127	485	599	96	23
	% of forecast	474%	161%	344%	277%	100%	29%
With disabilities	Achieved	153	108	243	340	207	87
	% of forecast	129%	193%	243%	222%	304%	153%
Without basic skills	Achieved	295	170	323	688	278	78
	% of forecast	103%	125%	132%	184%	166%	56%
Single parents	Achieved	20	102	48	46	21	4
	% of forecast	38%	420%	107%	67%	68%	15%

As already discussed, performance on the overall participation measures was close to or above target in all Hubs except York. The text below summarises variation on each of the participation measures for specific cohorts.

- **Males/Females** – all Hubs except York exceeded the target for males, however, none hit their target for female participants, although all but one were reasonably close to doing so. Interestingly, the proportion of female participants was consistent across Hubs, at between 35%-45% and this suggests there are structural reasons for this and challenges that apply to all Hubs.
- **Unemployed/Inactive** – four out of six Hubs hit their targets for unemployed participants, while four of six fell short of their targets for economically inactive participants. However, what is most

striking is how much the balance between these two audiences varied by Hub. For example, Calderdale was the most successful Hub in reaching inactive participants (164% of target) and did far better on this measure than for reaching unemployed participants - which most other Hubs had found easier. In contrast, in Bradford 33 times more participants were unemployed rather than inactive, with 136% of the target hit on the former measure but only 10% on the latter. Leeds and Wakefield also had a similar pattern if to a much less marked degree. These differences are likely to reflect the targeting and methods used to reach participants, for example work with schools in Calderdale and outputs connected to Kickstart participants in Bradford.

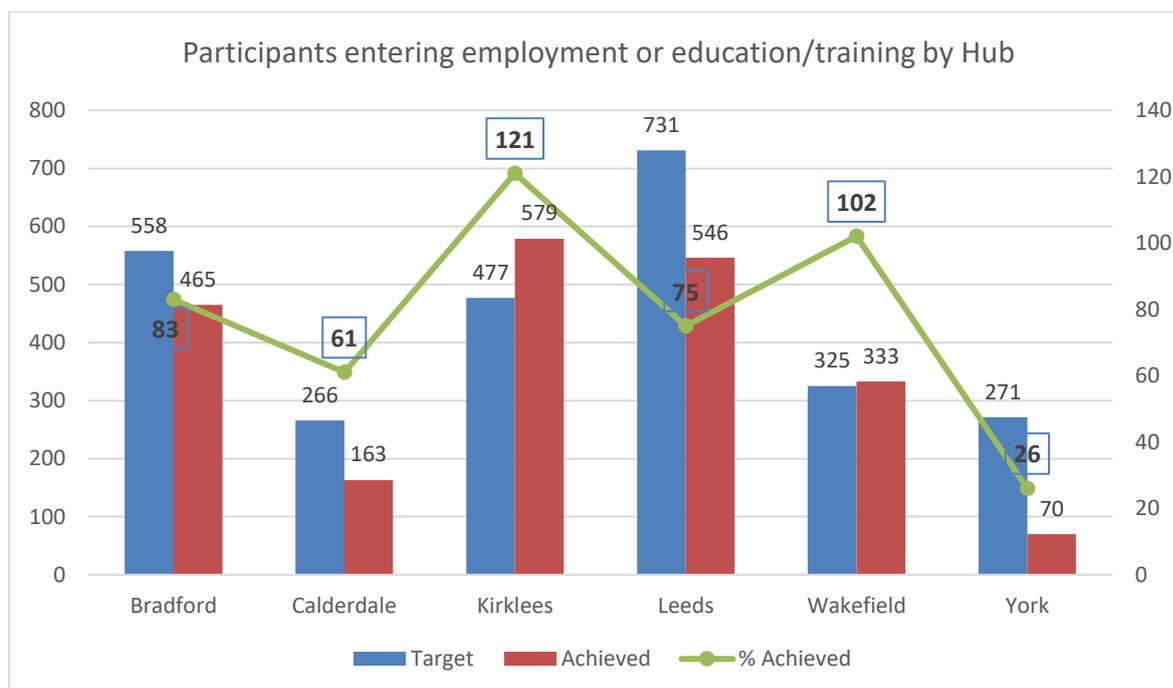
- **Participants from ethnic minorities** – while York missed this target and Wakefield was exactly on target, all the other Hubs substantially exceeded their targets – by more than threefold in Kirklees and well over fourfold in Bradford. Much of this variability will reflect the way in which targets were set (a flat rate of 13% of participants from ethnic minorities for each Hub regardless of local demographics) rather than necessarily the actual targeting and performance of individual Hubs. Hence, in York and Wakefield where a relatively low proportion of the population identify as an ethnic minority group other than White British, meeting this target would have been much more difficult than in Bradford where 36% do not identify as White British, and in Kirklees and Leeds, where the proportions are 23% and 19% respectively.⁴
- **Participants with disabilities** – all Hubs comfortably met this target, ranging from achieving 129% of the target in Bradford to 304% in Wakefield.
- **Participants without basic skills** – all Hubs except York met this target, with greatest proportionate achievement of the local target in Leeds (184%) and more modest overachievement in Bradford (103%), Calderdale (125%) and Kirklees (132%).
- **Single parents** – four Hubs missed their targets on this output, often by some way (e.g. 38% in Bradford and 15% in York). However, the position was dramatically different in Calderdale which achieved 420% of its target and accounted for over 40% of all local Hub outputs on this measure.

6.2.2 Results

A second set of performance measures and ESF targets is based on how far participation in the programme by target groups translates into tangible results in terms of participants moving into employment (including self-employment) or training/education; participants sustaining employment for at least 6 months; and participants gaining basic skills. The former of these is the most significant in volume in terms of programme targets and figure 18 shows performance on it by Hub.

⁴ <https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/code/briefings/localdynamicsofdiversity/geographies-of-deprivation-and-diversity-in-leeds-city-region.pdf>

Figure 18: Participants in employment or education/training upon leaving



At the point of the mid-term review there was a striking difference between three Hubs that had managed to achieve significant results on this measure and three that had not – with the combined results from Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield accounting for 93% of all the results achieved at that point. Elements of this pattern remained in place at the end of the programme, for example in terms of the highest achievement against targets being in Kirklees (121%) and Wakefield (102%); whereas performance in York was much lower (26%) and only slightly above that at the mid-term review (16%). However, performance improved substantially in Bradford (rising from 11% of target at mid-term to 83% at programme end) and to a slightly lesser extent in Calderdale (a rise from 9% to 61%). The overall position between Hubs levelled off somewhat, with most of them achieving significant levels. Table 12 shows performance on the other two results as well as on this measure.

Table 12: Results performance by Hub

Results Measures		Employment Hub					
		Bradford	C'dale	Kirklees	Leeds	W'field	York
Participants in employment, education or training on leaving	Achieved	465	163	579	546	333	70
	% of forecast	83%	61%	121%	75%	102%	26%
Participants in employment 6 months after leaving	Achieved	47	48	260	110	78	12
	% of forecast	23%	49%	148%	41%	65%	12%
Participants gaining basic skills	Achieved	21	1	19	5	8	0
	% of forecast	50%	5%	53%	9%	33%	0%

At the mid-term review, only Kirklees had achieved any results for participants moving into sustained employment six months after leaving. By programme end, Kirklees had sustained its strong performance on this measure and three other Hubs had achieved significant progress in catching up after a slow start - Wakefield, Calderdale and Leeds met 65%, 49% and 41% of their targets respectively. However, results in Kirklees still accounted for nearly a half (47%) of all outputs on this measure and the Hub deserve praise for this achievement which supports a key long term outcome, and which indirectly attests to the quality of provision as well as the numbers receiving it (because employment would not be sustained if there was a poor fit between participants and the employment they moved into).

While below target performance in most Hubs and the programme overall on this measure is disappointing, this will have been heavily impacted by the challenging economic and labour market context linked to the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions, which dramatically reduced new employment opportunities (as discussed in 6.1). Significantly lower than expected performance on results would be expected across the board because of this. The issue of time lags and delays will have compounded this. While the performance of the Kirklees Hub shows that achievement of good outcomes was possible, it was notable that they hit the ground running and were ahead of other Hubs in helping people into employment by the time COVID-19 struck. This will have eased the task of gaining sustained employment (especially with furlough in place), whereas the time windows for helping participants into employment and sustaining this for six months in a context of COVID-19 impacts and restrictions would have been more complex and challenging. This is especially the case as the time taken to source a participant, meet them, prepare a support plan, deliver the support, find, secure and start employment, and then sustain it for six months may well take a period of nine months or more.

In addition to delays, other factors that may have inhibited progress on participants moving into and sustaining employment may involve questions about the effectiveness of the support provided, the suitability of the participant-employer match, or the proportion of participants who entered education/training rather than employment (including self-employment). We do not have data to make judgements on these questions as part of this evaluation, however, the general sense was that Hubs were 'doing the right thing' and trying to secure good quality support and individual/business matches rather than chasing quantity of outputs alone. Feedback from surveys also supports this.

As was the position at mid-term, all the Hubs struggled to achieve results on participants gaining basic skills, with three hubs achieving less than 10% of their target on this measure, and the other three (Bradford, Kirklees and Wakefield) achieving 50%, 53% and 33% respectively. This is in some ways surprising as Hubs were successful in engaging participants who were without basic skills, and hence had reached people who needed help. However, there was a considerable gulf between the number of such participants (1,832 based on local Hub data) and the numbers supported to gain basic skills (54), which was only 3% of the relevant participant total. Clearly there were major challenges in helping participants to gain basic skills. Reasons will include factors such as digital exclusion which impacted greatly given online provision during the pandemic; impacts on the volume and range of provision available; and the difficulties of supporting clients with multiple challenges and sometimes

ingrained inertia or negativity around moving toward employment (which a number of Hubs noted). More broadly, it can be argued that DWP qualification achievement rates for this target are not achievable by the majority of the client group and that the lack of local ‘roll-on, roll-off’ provision (most provision has in the past has been based on enrolment by academic year) limits access.

6.3 Performance on Business Rate Pool results and appropriateness of targets

Alongside ESF output and results, the programme and individual Hubs had Business rate Pool (BRP) two additional targets – businesses engaged and new apprenticeships created – to reflect the match funding provided through the Combined Authority.

6.3.1 Business engagement

Table 13 shows performance on business engagement overall and by each Hub.

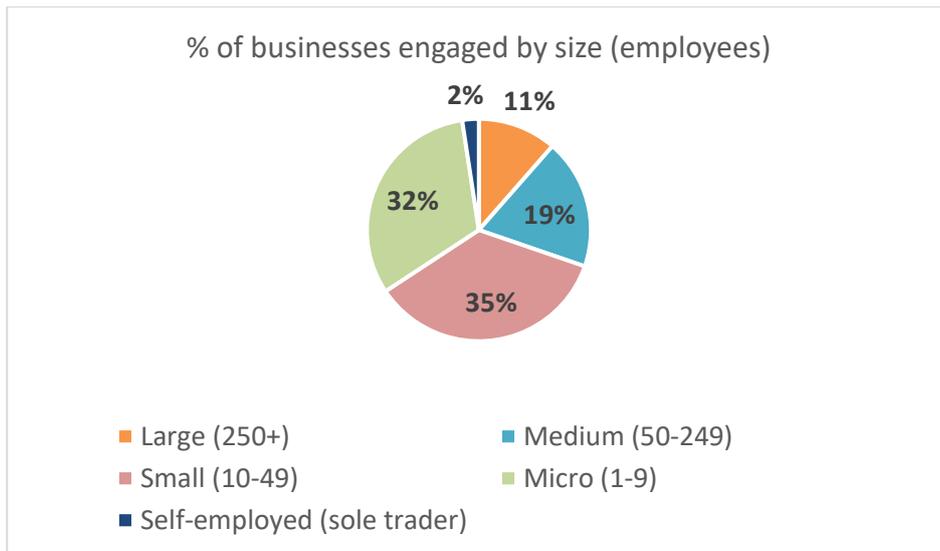
Table 13: Business engagement results

Businesses Engaged by end of March 2020 (Q5)	Target	Achieved	% of Target Achieved
Total (All Hubs)	5,000	4,217	84%
Bradford	1,030	975	95%
Calderdale	490	268	55%
Kirklees	880	986	112%
Leeds	1,350	872	65%
Wakefield	600	846	141%
York	500	270	54%

At the mid-term review, 83% of the overall forecast for businesses engaged had been achieved, amounting to 1,625 businesses. Performance at the end of the programme was very similar to this in proportionate terms, with 84% of the target achieved. There was significant variation between Hubs, especially at the top end, where Wakefield’s achievement of 141% of its target was some way above that achieved by any other. Kirklees was the only other Hub to hit its target, although Bradford was also close.

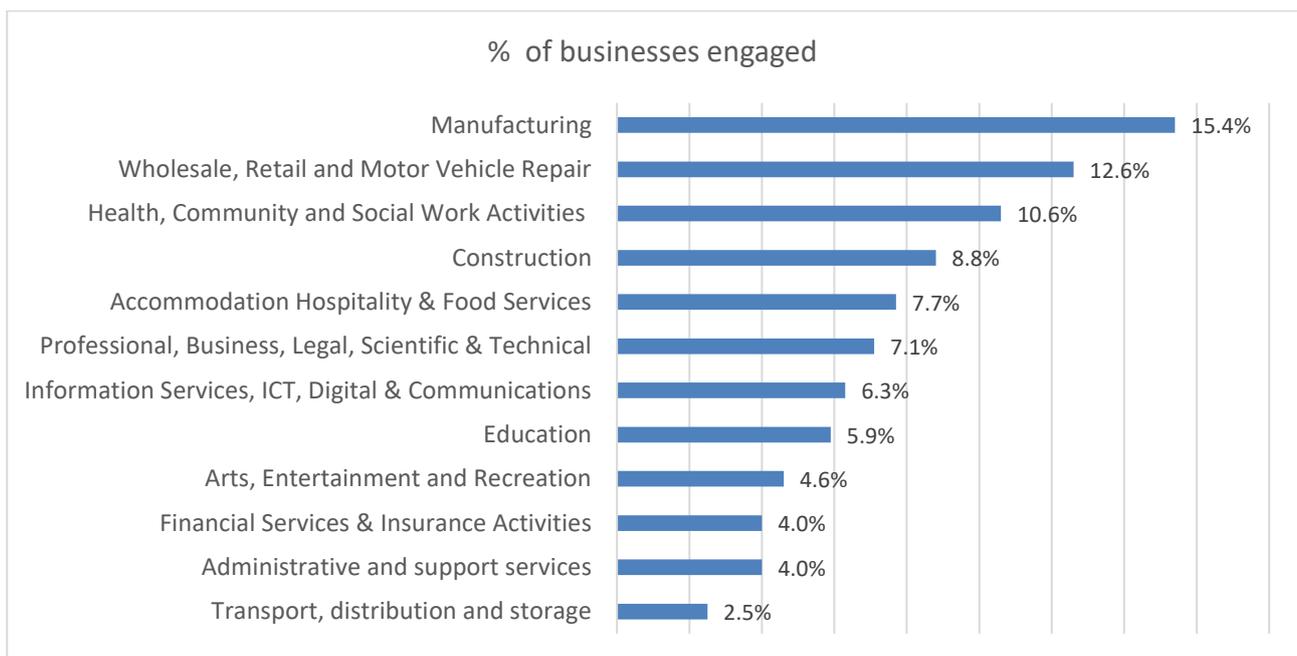
In terms of businesses engaged, a wide spread of business sizes and sectors were reached without any strong concentrations on particular types of business. Manufacturing businesses were the most commonly engaged, and comprised 15% of the total, while small and micro businesses made up two thirds of those engaged. Figure 19 shows the split of businesses by size, while figure 20 shows the proportion of businesses engaged by sector.

Figure 19: Businesses engaged by size band



NB: Data is based on those businesses who provided data on their number of employees/size

Figure 20: Businesses engaged by sector



6.3.2 Apprenticeships created

Data was monitored for the number of new apprenticeships created (advertised) due to contact with employers through the programme. The table below shows this for each Hub and as a proportion of the number of businesses engaged.

Table 14: Apprenticeships created in total and as a percentage of businesses engaged

Hub	Apprenticeships created (advertised)			Apprenticeships as % of businesses engaged
	Target	Achieved	% of target achieved	
Total (All Hubs)*	1,800	941	52%	22%
Bradford	371	133	36%	40%
Calderdale	177	14	8%	5%
Kirklees	317	161	51%	16%
Leeds	486	297	61%	34%
Wakefield	216	248	115%	29%
York	180	88	49%	33%

Overall, the 4,217 businesses engaged advertised 941 apprenticeships following contact with the programme. Wakefield was the only Hub to hit its target for apprenticeships created, with three others achieving between a half and two thirds of their targets, but performance lower in Bradford and especially Calderdale. Bradford was though successful in achieving a high conversion rate between businesses engaged and apprenticeships created (40%). This proportion was consistent at 30%-40% for four Hubs (including Bradford but significantly lower in Kirklees and especially Calderdale).

The level of variation observed in apprenticeships created suggests that there were notably different approaches being taken in different areas, for example in how much onus is placed on apprenticeships within business engagement or the type of businesses engaged. But equally, some Hubs were very clear that apprenticeships were not the right pathway for many Hub clients, for example because clients were not ready for this level of work/learning, and that this may not therefore create a positive outcome for the participant or the business.

As with Employment Hub targets overall, achievement of business based targets will have been affected by changes in context affecting the programme, especially related to COVID-19 and a collapse in employment (including apprenticeship) opportunities. As noted in 6.1.3 on appropriateness of ESF targets, we consider that this change in context will have made business engagement more difficult with many firms in survival mode, and more sharply reduced how far businesses would be likely to create apprenticeships or to take on new staffing commitments. There would have been a strong case for this to be reflected in a downward review of apprenticeship targets connected to the programme, and possibly a slight reduction in businesses engagement targets too.

6.4 Impact, Additionality, Spend and Value for Money Analysis

6.4.1 Impact

The approach to calculating economic impact is complicated by the programme's focus on its outputs and results in themselves, rather than necessarily what these lead to in outcome and impact terms, such as the financial value of these results in economic (GVA) terms or return on investment. In the absence of specific identified impacts that were sought, our treatment of economic impact considered three potential areas of benefit:

- i) Unemployed or economically inactive young people entering employment, education or training
- ii) Business benefit from recruiting Hub participants
- iii) The long-term value of apprenticeships

Of these, the first on progression into employment, education or training has been the prime focus for Employment Hubs and will be the core area for assessing economic impact. We do this below through review of relevant literature and assessments that put a value on this, focused on the fiscal benefit to the individual and to society through reductions in benefits payments and increases in taxation revenues, and the economic benefit from having more people in work in businesses.

While the programme sought to engage with businesses, and for them to ideally benefit through employing a Hub participant, this was not the main area of benefit. In reality, it is recognised that in some cases a business may be contributing to society through taking on an employee, rather than receiving support per se, especially in the short term. We explored how far businesses were benefiting or expected to benefit through our online business survey and this could in theory be used in estimates of the resulting financial/economic benefit and impacts. However, the method used to estimate economic impact is already based on business benefit from having people in post, and hence it would be double counting to apply this.

On apprenticeships, it is difficult to assess impact because there is not data on whether the apprenticeships created were filled, and if so, whether they were filled by Hub participants and whether they were successfully completed. Additionally, the method and data used to assess benefits combines apprenticeships with other employment, and hence it is included as part of that rather than separately assessed.

The most up to date analysis we identified of the economic impact of young people moving from unemployment into employment, and which was undertaken after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, was a study by the Learning & Work Institute (LWI) – *Facing the Future: employment prospects for young people after Coronavirus* – which contains estimates of the cost of higher youth unemployment, from 2021 onwards.⁵ This uses three different approaches/types of costs:

- Economic costs (based on the output that is lost because more young people are unemployed rather than being in work)
- Fiscal costs (based on lost tax receipts and additional social security benefits that are paid out as a consequence of more young people being unemployed)

⁵ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/prolonged-youth-jobs-crisis-is-set-to-cost-uk-economy-almost-7-billion-next-year/>

- Long term scarring (the long run anticipated future impacts of youth unemployment on individuals' subsequent chances of being in paid work and their wage levels when in work)

The report is clear that the results of the three approaches cannot be added because they use different methodologies. Given this, we consider that it is helpful to apply the first and second options separately – economic and fiscal benefits – as the former relates most directly to economic impact in GVA terms, while the latter is also useful as it relates well to the logic chain for the difference made by the programme and the impacts that follow from assisting young people to enter sustained employment. However, if an overall single economic impact figure is required, we suggest that the economic benefit figure is the most appropriate.

The LWI analysis calculates the total economic and fiscal costs of additional youth unemployment from 2021 to 2025, based on there being an additional 230,000 unemployed young people in 2021 compared to 2019. The approach in an analysis of the Future Jobs Fund,⁶ uses two years of benefit (for 2021 and 2022) as a timespan to calculate benefits for based on the length of programme, and we also use that duration for this analysis, covering the period 2021-2022.

The LWI report estimates the economic costs of an additional 230,000 unemployed young people during this period would be £12.8 billion. Dividing this by the 230,000 unemployed young people it is based upon produces a figure of £55,739 per person. For fiscal costs, the equivalent total is £5.4 billion, which equates to £23,478 per person.

Both of the above figures are based on assumptions that young people move into employment (not education/training) and that this is sustained. These factors therefore need to be taken into account to produce an appropriate figure.

Unfortunately the results measure (and hence data tracking) for the young people leaving the programme entering employment or education/training does not distinguish between these destinations, and hence programme level data is unavailable. Lacking this, the best proxy we can apply is based on the beneficiary survey, where one question asked respondents about which route applied to them. 79% of respondents said they had moved into employment, work experience or an apprenticeship and hence we will apply this figure, with the assumption that those completing the survey are representative, and that those completing work experience are likely to move into a job subsequently.

The second question is how long is employment sustained. The results data for those sustaining employment for six months would in theory be a good basis for this. However, time lags and the back end loading of a high proportion of project employment based results mean that this would be likely to miss a sizeable proportion of those who were employed after the programme but had not yet reached the six month point at the programme's end, or been registered as so. Given this, we instead use a further beneficiary survey question which asked about the duration so far of the job, apprenticeship or work experience they had moved into. 50% said they had sustained that for at least six months and another 22% had not yet reached six months but were still in the employment they had gained, and

⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/223120/impact_s_costs_benefits_ffj.pdf

6% had moved to a different job. To allow some slippage for a proportion of those in work now not sustaining that, we reduce that to an estimate of 50%.

Applying the 79% and 50% filters combined gives a figure of approximately 40% of those entering employment or education/training on leaving who could be expected to be in employment for two years or more because of the programme. Applying that to the benefit per person figures previously presented provides an estimate of:

- Economic benefit – £22,296 per person
- Fiscal benefit - £9,291 per person

We have triangulated these figures against data from Public Health England's *Movement Into Employment: Return on Investment Tool* that allows for estimation of benefits from moving an individual from unemployment into sustainable employment.⁷ That puts the combined financial outcomes to the individual, society and the exchequer per person returning to work in England as £38,600, of which £12,000 accrues to the exchequer (akin to the fiscal benefit above) and £23,100 to society (akin to the economic benefit calculation above). The similarity of these figures supports their veracity as a reasonable impact estimate.

Based on the final results figure for the Employment Hub programme of 2,156 people entering employment or education/training on leaving, that produces gross programme level economic impact estimates of:

- Economic benefit – £48.1 million
- Fiscal benefit - £20.0 million

We now consider additionality factors and how these gross figures translate into net benefits, before looking at that in value for money terms.

6.4.2 Additionality

We have considered additionality primarily in relation to the benefits of individuals moving from unemployment into employment, self-employment or education and how far this would have been likely without Employment Hub support. We combined four sources of information and intelligence in doing this:

- Data from the beneficiary survey on how likely young people would have been to have had a positive outcome without Hub support
- Data from the business survey about how likely businesses would have been to employ those receiving Hub support (or anybody else for the same positions)
- Literature review about standard/typical additionality for this type of activity
- Logic based judgements in terms of gross to net calculation and additionality factors – for displacement, substitution and leakage, as well as consideration of multiplier effects

We have considered whether five separate factors should be applied in gross to net impact assessment for this programme. These, and the conclusion about whether and how they should be applied, are:

⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772596/Movement_into_employment_report_v1.2.pdf

Deadweight/Reference Case – this is the estimate of what level of target outputs/outcomes would be produced anyway if the intervention did not go ahead – the ‘do nothing’ scenario. For this programme, survey data informs estimates of deadweight. Specifically, 48% of those in the beneficiary survey who had gained a job/apprenticeship/work experience placement said that this would have been unlikely or very unlikely without the support they received. A further 42% were uncertain about whether they would have done but thought it less likely that they would have done without the help they had received. Assuming that around a third of this latter group may not have gained employment otherwise produces a scenario where around 75% of impacts are due to the programme and would not have happened anyway (meaning deadweight of 25%). This value is similar to that gained from Amion Consulting’s evaluation of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund projects⁸ which produced a deadweight estimate of 20% for worklessness based projects.

Leakage – this is the proportion of the gross impacts of an intervention that benefit areas or individuals outside of the intervention’s target area, in this case Leeds City Region. For this programme there is no leakage as only beneficiaries within Leeds City Region were eligible for support.

Substitution – this occurs if a beneficiary substitutes one activity for another solely to take advantage of public sector support, for example recruitment activities that take advantage of financial support. This is not relevant for this programme because there was no financial support to businesses – many of whom may have felt they were helping beneficiaries rather than taking advantage of public sector support.

Displacement – this is the extent to which an intervention results in economic growth for a beneficiary being offset by reductions in the activities of non-beneficiaries.⁹ For this programme, this is chiefly about the extent to which other people have not gained skills and employment because those supported by the Hub have taken available training and vacancies. This is a consideration for this programme, and we discuss it in more depth below.

Multipliers – these are further economic activity (jobs, expenditure or income) associated with additional local income, local supplier purchases and longer term effects. The two main types of multipliers are supply linkage multipliers (based on linkages in area of analysis) and income multipliers (based on additional income spent within the area of analysis). For this project, based on the HCA Guidance Ready Reckoner,¹⁰ we apply a composite multiplier for the regional level of 1.3 based on there being limited local supply linkages and induced or income effects (reflecting relatively low wage levels for the majority of those moving into employment).

⁸ Cited in

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378177/additionality_guide_2014_full.pdf

⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378177/additionality_guide_2014_full.pdf

¹⁰https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378177/additionality_guide_2014_full.pdf

Assessing displacement

We have assessed displacement from a number of perspectives. This includes an economic context and logic driven observation that the number of people not getting jobs because Hub beneficiaries have accessed them will be relatively low because:

- At the start and end of the programme, the economic context was of relatively high employment and vacancy levels, so others who were better placed to gain a job than Hub beneficiaries are unlikely to have missed out on employment because of a shortage of available roles; and
- During the periods of the programme most affected by COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions, few Hub beneficiaries were gaining employment.

Evaluations of previous programmes nationally back up this view that displacement is likely to be relatively low for this type of intervention. For example, the Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund¹¹ assessed displacement as 13% for worklessness based projects, while research undertaken by Amion Consulting¹² on behalf of BIS set out a mean displacement rate of 18% for people and skills interventions at sub-regional level. Taking a rounded average of these figures and the context that applies, we have adopted a displacement value of 15%.

Given these figures, our calculation of overall additionality are:

	Economic Benefit	Fiscal benefit
Gross impact	£48.1 million	£20.0 million
Less deadweight of 25%	£36.1 million	£15.0 million
Less displacement of 15%	-£5.4 million	-£2.3 million
Multiplier of 1.3	+£10.8 million	+ £4.5 million
Net impact	£41.5 million	£17.2 million

This shows the net economic impact of the project to be in the region of £41.5 million over two years, and the fiscal benefit to be in the region of £17.2 million.

6.4.3 Spend and value for money

Overall, the programme spent £8,628,538 including ESF fixed rate indirect costs – 96% of the target of £9,000,000; with the 4% underspend due to periods of project delivery where posts were vacant. This appears to be a relatively low level of underspend given the level of flux the programme has had to work through. A total of £4,314,269.00 of the spend was match funding from WYCA and delivery partners, the evidenced match funding was from staff salaries. Business Rates Funding enabled this programme to run and was used as a source of cash match to enable delivery.

Table 15 shows the unit cost for each output/result measure that is not a subdivision of a more global field, based on simple division of total spend by the number of outputs/results. This is a crude measure as not all spend will have been relevant to achieving each output measure, but is standard practice given where proportions of spend are not dedicated to specific activities or outputs, and where (as in this programme) creating such splits would have been artificial and impractical.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Table 15: Unit cost for main output and results measures

Measure	Achieved	Unit cost
O2 – Participants (below 25 years of age) who are unemployed or inactive	5,919	£1,458
R3 – Participants gaining basic skills	54	£159,788
R5 – Participants (below 25) in employment including self-employment, or education/training upon leaving	2,156	£4,002
CR06 – Participants in employment, including self-employment, six months after leaving	555	£15,547
Businesses Engaged	4,217	£2,046
Apprenticeship places created	941	£9,170

Key figures to draw out from the table include the cost per participant entering employment or education/training, which is approx. £4,000 per participant, and the cost of each apprenticeship created at £9,170 per apprenticeship advertised. The high basic skills figure is less relevant (and somewhat misleading) as that was not the main focus of the activity and only applied to a subgroup of participants.

Value for money can also be looked at through the lens of the return on investment gained in economic impact terms per pound invested in the programme. Based on the overall programme cost and its core estimated new economic impact benefit of £41.5 million, that translates into **Return on Investment of £4.80 per £1 invested in the programme.**

This level of Return on Investment (RoI) shows that the programme has delivered economic benefits well in excess of its cost, and this compares well to major and current employability focused programmes such as Kickstart. For example, a recent National Audit Office evaluation of the Kickstart scheme¹³ concluded that the approximate average cost of each Kickstart job placement was approx. £7,000, and that the RoI from the programme was £1.65 of returns for society for every £1 of public money invested (subject to certain assumptions being made about the impact of the programme on additional days in employment and fewer days on benefits).

¹³ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Employment-support-the-Kickstart-Scheme.pdf>

7. Overall Conclusions, Lessons and Good Practice

7.1 Overall Conclusions

The main overall conclusions we draw from this final evaluation are that:

- i) **The Employment Hub programme responded to identified needs** – especially those of unemployed or inactive young people facing disadvantage and challenges and who often have sizeable barriers that require ongoing and intensive support. It did this whilst navigating two very different climates in terms of how attractive these young people are to potential employers – starting in a period of high employment (where employers can struggle to recruit so may be more open to recruiting young people with challenges) and then in the face of unprecedented economic and social overhaul forced by the pandemic, which drove up unemployment and created an intensely competitive jobs market for the low number of roles being recruited to. Everyone involved should be commended for their part in maintaining delivery under those circumstances.
- ii) **The model of central coordination combined with local Hubs leading delivery worked well overall but was not without challenges in some areas.** Strong coordination and programme management from the centre offered economies of scale, consistency and utilisation of expertise, while local delivery allowed alignment with local structures, partnership and provision (often already in place) tuned to local circumstances. However, there are grey areas where demarcation between the local and central is more challenging (notably marketing), and the model is reliant on good local delivery – where Hubs perform well, so does the model. But it can be let down if delivery is weak in individual Hubs. The lack of a payment by results element has a mixed impact which links to this. It can mean less pressure to drive performance, but equally allows provision to focus on those who need more intensive support – even if this involves more time and delivers fewer outputs. The latter was certainly the case in the second phase of the programme, as the level of ‘hand holding’ for individuals and businesses grew significantly.
- iii) **Local Hubs, and the programme as a whole, responded creatively and effectively to the challenges of the pandemic. However, the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions on Hub operation was pronounced and will have significantly reduced outputs and results.** Changes included a shift to online delivery (with associated practical and digital exclusion challenges), fewer job opportunities (especially in sectors such as hospitality and retail which offer routes into first jobs), and new DWP programmes such as Kickstart which impacted on the volume and type of clients accessing Hubs, and to more time-intensive support and fewer outputs. Local Hub delivery had wider benefits for clients during this time, including around mental health and wellbeing.
- iv) **Performance against targets was strong in many respects given the challenging context but varied significantly across geographies and output and result measures,** with both success stories and areas of underperformance. Key points are:
 - **The programme hit or was very close to hitting most of its output measures, including supporting 5,919 participants** (below 25 years of age) who are unemployed or inactive – 94% of the target. Performance was excellent on engaging participants with disabilities (201% of

target) and those from ethnic minorities (258%) and also strong for unemployed people (111%), males (108%) and those without basic skills (132%). Outputs were below target for engaging females and (to a greater extent) inactive young people.

- **The programme was below target on its three ESF results measures**, although helping 2,156 people into employment or education/training (80% of target) could be viewed as an achievement given the challenging context. Performance was poorer for those sustaining employment for six months (56% of target) and especially those gaining basic skills (27%).
 - **A significant but below target volume of BRP business engagement results** were achieved, with the 4,217 businesses engaged being 84% of the targeted number.
 - **Performance varied greatly by Hub**, with one Hub (Kirklees) exceeding nearly all of its outputs, most of the others hitting five or six out of nine, but with one (York) only achieving one target. Calderdale stood out on reaching single parents and the economically inactive, while Leeds had most success in reaching those without basic skills. There was similar variation in results targets, where Hubs hit between 26% and 121% of their targets for participants entering employment or education/training, while only one Hub (Kirklees) hit its target for those sustaining employment for six months. Wakefield excelled in hitting its target on apprenticeships. One of the two Hubs struggling at the mid-term review (Bradford) turned around its performance impressively, the other (York) did not improve significantly.
 - **Key reasons for reduced outputs and results initially included late starts, limited capacity and difficulties getting referrals.** These were largely under local control and reflect local issues rather than being an innate fault of the model itself. However, during COVID-19, the tough economic, operational and labour market context for much of that period will have suppressed delivery of employment and skills based results. There would have been a strong case for DWP to accept a reduction in output/result targets without reducing programme finances given these exceptional circumstances, and that other areas of national policy (e.g. more generous Universal Credit provision) were predicated on it being harder to gain employment. There was also scope for local target setting on participants from ethnic minorities to have better reflected varying local demographics, while the way in which 'paired' targets for male and female participants, and for those who were unemployed/inactive, were set (summing exactly to all participants) made it unlikely that both elements of a pair would be hit.
- v) **The programme's goals for creating apprenticeship opportunities for participants and which help to meet business needs reflected an admirable ambition, but was difficult in practice (even in the pre-pandemic phase of delivery) and not a good fit for the target group.** At the outset, Hubs found that apprenticeships often are not the best solution either for the young people targeted (who can find them 'too big a step' or not available at the right level for them) or for the businesses who would recruit them. Other employment or work experience models may be better initially, with less focus on apprenticeships. The tough business environment brought about by COVID-19 saw a dramatic drop off in apprenticeship starts that has yet to recover, meaning that there simply were not the opportunities available, and where they were, they were being secured by the candidates far closer to the labour market than the target cohorts for this programme.

vi) **The programme is estimated to have achieved a gross economic impact of approximately £48.1 million, and net economic impact of approximately £41.5 million** over two years. Given spend of £8,628,538 (96% of that forecast), the cost per person entering employment or education/training was £4,002; while that for participants sustaining employment for six months was £15,547 and the cost per apprenticeship place created was £9,170. Based on the programme's cost and its net economic impact, it achieved a healthy **Return on Investment of £4.80 per £1 invested**.

4.2 Specific lessons and insights

In addition to and building on the overall conclusions, specific lessons learned around main themes covered in the evaluation are summarised below.

Programme management and central functions

- **There is clear benefit from having a central element built into the model and this is valued by localities.** It provided a key role in local Hub contract management and helped to facilitate networking and sharing of ideas across the network, albeit the latter could be amplified. The central team provided useful and proactive support to individual Hubs as they moved through a complex set-up process and into very challenging times with the onset of the pandemic and ensuing difficulties with delivery. It also enabled brokering of overall programme management with DWP to prevent multiple and/or conflicting discussions - although being in the middle position is not without its pressure points.
- **There are mixed views on central marketing and communication.** Hubs used their own local brands at the forefront because this maintained consistency with messaging regarding their wider skills and employment package. An approach that leads with the local but that recognises Combined Authority programme investment and that spots opportunities to join up and promote complementary products/services being delivered by the Combined Authority/LEP seems sensible, with the central team proactively supporting local Hubs where helpful and ensuring the required EU recognition. Central marketing may add most value when it is directed at paid social media and generation of case studies that reflect the experiences of target cohorts.
- **Recruitment of businesses from a central perspective is best channelled through existing LEP business support mechanisms and advisers** who can have direct one to one dialogue with businesses and offer clear and appropriate advice and signposting. This is far more impactful than a blanket marketing approach or outsourced cold calling. However, as noted below, the greatest impact on business recruitment comes from local dialogue, where emphasis can be tuned to local need and corporate social responsibility messaging, and greater ongoing levels of support can be provided, especially in more challenging economic circumstances.

Local Hub model, positioning and capacity

- **Capacity is vital** – having enough (and suitably experienced and able) people working in local Hubs from the start was central to ability to deliver. Where this was not the case, or was achieved late or lacked consistency, then the scale of delivery suffered. Recruitment and retention was a particular challenge in some of the local Hubs.

- **Staff in local Hubs should be commended for their efforts to adapt to home-working and pivoting all delivery online.** This was an unprecedented challenge and one that everyone involved did very well to respond to under exceptional circumstances, and with new pressures such as effectively supporting clients on wellbeing issues as much as employability support at times.
- Operating **all activity under the umbrella of local employment and skills ‘front doors’** is very helpful in joining up local services, supporting local targeting of cohorts and moving people seamlessly to and between programmes that best suit their needs. It also allows for consistent messaging and for ‘hiding the wiring’ which makes it far easier for clients to engage.
- **Building on and fit with existing provision and partnership structures** is key, bringing alignment, consistency and coordination across Council departments and local partners, and enabling better reach, a good stream of referrals and building on multi-agency expertise. Ultimately this results in a clearer and more impactful offer to clients.
- **A clear focus on young people as opposed to being business facing** helped Hubs to position and direct efforts, build effective partnerships, and focus on identifying individuals’ aspirations around which they can be supported and from which business talent matching can take place.
- For some Hubs there were **significant issues in securing the evidence** required to claim outputs, especially for progression based results. This effectively reduced the final totals counted as outputs and results, and should be considered in the design of future programmes.

Referrals and routes to young people

- **Establishing strong relationships with Jobcentres** early in the programme, including co-location, was crucial in driving referrals. The closure of Jobcentres and refocusing of DWP work coaches towards Universal Credit during the pandemic had a big impact on this and illuminated the extent to which Employment Hub referrals depended on this relationship.
- **Partnerships with other players in the local employment and skills and children and young people services landscapes** – ideally established early in the programme – proved valuable. This included schools, colleges, careers organisations, local NEET groups, pupil referral units and SEND provision. These were all good ways of reaching young people and ensuring a joined-up approach. This heightened in importance during the pandemic to ensure that vulnerable young people did not ‘fall off the radar’ of support services.
- A **proactive, outreach centred approach based on going out to communities** rather than expecting them to come to you - or to the city centre – enhanced Hub reach and effectiveness. Initially this focused on co-locating with local Jobcentres, but during the pandemic extended to presence at foodbanks and doorstep visits.

Providing support to young people and making it effective

- **Engaging with the inactive is a challenge and requires persistence**, because by their nature they are hard to identify and reach. At times there can be ingrained anti-work attitudes to overcome and complex, sizeable barriers to address. The pandemic and associated context changes (including new JCP programmes like Kickstart) increased the proportion of those who are further from the labour market within the Hub's clientele, as other programmes took on those who are more readily employable. This led to more time needed per client, and a likely lower chance of sustained employment results. The fact that this programme was not funded on a payment by results basis was helpful given this development.
- **Flexible, individualised provision** that responds to needs and challenges is important. Hubs were largely able to focus on what is right for individual young people and to tailor support around that, rather than offer pre-set provision or to shape activity primarily around 'chasing numbers' of outputs/results (which can lead to provision that is not right for a young person or a business).
- **One to one, face to face support has generally worked best** and is most in demand from young people. This approach is more time and cost intensive but appears to deliver good outcomes, and has benefits in terms of richer communication, interaction and insights. The onset of COVID-19 stopped this in its tracks, with provision being 100% online at times. Online worked well for some young people (for example it may have helped to increase access for single parents) but not others, and did not work well for group work. A hybrid approach would appear sensible.

Participant perspectives on provision

- The main reasons young people engaged with Hubs were to access careers advice and guidance and/or to get a job. However, the benefits they cited were wider than this and included confidence building, health and wellbeing and overcoming barriers to work.
- Most participants identified a range of things that was good about the support received, with friendly, non-judgemental support delivered by people who understood client needs and could help them with solutions, prominent amongst these. Most (over 80%) rated their experience of engaging with a Hub as good or excellent and would recommend it to others.
- The main elements that (a minority of) young people said could be improved were outcome oriented and focused on more access to local employers, and support that better led into employment, self-employment, training or an apprenticeship.

Business engagement and perspectives on provision

- Helping young people to secure and sustain employment is more challenging than gaining initial participation. **Relationships and dialogue with employers, drawing on local knowledge, and effective talent-matching and brokerage** are important in encouraging them to take on young people, which can also require an element of persuasion, e.g. linking to Corporate Social Responsibility. Ongoing in-work support is also key, both in reassuring employers and in underpinning successful sustained employment for individuals.

- **Two reasons as to why businesses engaged with local Hubs stood out – firstly to give young people a chance, and secondly to position themselves for future growth.** Case making and communication to businesses in similar future activity should learn from this and combine the emotional resonance of helping young people with more direct business-benefits messages.
- **A half of businesses surveyed employed someone following Hub engagement.** The main benefits emerging were seen as to improve capacity to deliver for customers; to enable growth, to be seen positively by existing employees, and to add energy and enthusiasm. Additionally, nearly a half said they would benefit financially (virtually always up to £10,000) with another 30% unsure of whether they would do. 77% of these businesses rated engagement with the Hub as excellent or good. Potential improvements included communications with business, putting forward more and better quality young people, and providing more support once the young person was in post.
- **Close to 90% of businesses said** they were happy on balance with their decision to take someone on via the Hub. Where problems were reported, these concerned unreliability, poor performance / productivity, or attitude. But positively over 60% had no issues or problems with those they recruited and 92% would definitely or probably engage with a Hub or similar service again.
- **For the half of businesses that had not employed anyone following Hub engagement, the main** reasons included no suitable opportunities arising; no applications received; or Hub applicants being unsuitable. Half of these businesses said their recruitment intentions had been influenced by COVID-19 to some extent. 43% of this group said their experience of the Hub had been good or excellent; with criticisms made (by a minority) including perceived slow service, a lack of communication and confusion over the offer. Encouragingly, over 80% said they would use a Hub style mechanism to recruit in the future.

