



EXPERIENCE WORKS (2020 - 2023)

FINAL REPORT

Produced by Devon Communities Together
October 2023

EXPERIENCE
WORKS



PETROC



FOREWORD

As a further education college, Petroc is committed to achieving excellence through learning, transforming life chances and job prospects for all. We are proud to have managed the Experience Works partnership, working with 15–24-year-olds across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, offering employability support and bespoke mentoring to help them get into work, training or education, or supporting them to stay in school or college.

Although this project was awarded in a pre-Covid world, it was launched when the country was in lockdown. As such it faced a number of exceptional challenges associated with that most exceptional period in our lives. This report demonstrates that despite the challenges there were many positive outcomes in terms of the impact on the participants' personal lives and their wellbeing. Alongside this, the strength of the partnership which has worked together to share best practice, identify opportunities for all participants, and build relationships with employers, support networks and community groups throughout the project, is to be commended. It provides foundations for our future work to help learners needing this kind of support.

This report reflects on the impact of Covid on this specific project. The effect the pandemic had on the mental health of the young people was unprecedented and provided many challenges for the project workers. There was also a shift in the jobs market and opportunities available for the participants in terms of both employment and community engagement. The partnership to deliver also became more focused as some of the delivery organisations needed to divert their attentions to ensuring their core business survived in a post-Covid world.

Finally, probably the most significant impact is the length of time it is taking for the world to return to some sort of normality. While many people in our communities have returned to their normal patterns of life pre-Covid, for a sizeable proportion of our young people Covid continues to have a significant effect on their lives. As a college we are continuing to see learners struggling with the academic, social and emotional 'lost learning' that occurred during the 'Covid years' and there remains a need for programmes like Experience Works to ensure no-one in our communities are left behind.

Despite all of these challenges, it is inspiring to read the personal stories that participants have shared with us and permitted us to include within this report. Even in the face of adversity, with appropriate opportunity and support, young people have shown how they can develop, learn and succeed.

As European Funding ends, we move forward with new income streams and the hope that there will be opportunities to continue providing the types of support that projects like Experience Works allowed.

Dr Sean Mackney
Principal and CEO
Petroc



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Experience Works had a significant impact on the lives of many young people in Devon.

151

151 participants entered employment, education and training on completing. The many others who did not nevertheless gained employment skills and valuable experiences. The feedback from those who completed was overwhelmingly positive, with many praising the support and guidance they received.



This was achieved against the difficult backdrop of Covid-19, which delayed the start of the programme and initially stalled the enrolment of young people. The eventual success of the programme owes much to the management team and delivery partners' seeking creative solutions to the circumstances.



During the project it was recognised that social and recreational development – the so called 'soft' skills – are crucial factors contributing to individuals' capacity for employment. The lessons learned from the challenges presented by the Covid pandemic have underscored the importance of a wider set of attributes in preparing young people for the demands of the workplace.



The initial challenges faced by the programme highlighted the need for inclusive employment practices and dedicated mentors to support participants, especially those who are neurodiverse, face anxiety, or have disabilities.



The collaborative nature of the project revealed the strength and diversity of skills brought by the various partners involved. Larger organizations provided valuable resources, while smaller, agile groups responded swiftly to the changing demands brought about by the Covid crisis. Some partners faced limitations in supporting participants with complex needs, and responded by sourcing additional training. As the programme progressed, and all became more comfortable with face-to-face working, collaboration between partners grew, with ideas and resources being shared.



The strict criteria for defining success does not acknowledge the substantial benefits gained by many individuals who did not complete the programme and the input by mentors to supporting them. It is hoped that we have celebrated them here. The project's ambitious aim to promote awareness among employers about the challenges faced by NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) proved challenging due to the scale of the labour market and the preconceptions among some employers regarding the readiness of young people for work.



A need for a balance between administrative tasks and organisational capacities was identified, with smaller partners struggling to manage the administrative burden. Complex performance indicators contributed to this burden, and a streamlined approach to measuring the program's impact is proposed.



The challenges faced and lessons learned throughout the project have provided valuable insights for future projects in addressing the complex needs of young individuals entering the workforce.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Experience Works was a programme of employability support and bespoke mentoring designed to help 15-24-year olds to get into work, training or education or supporting them to stick with school or college if they were having difficulties.

It was part-funded directly by the European Social Fund (ESF) and managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In addition, Plymouth City Council contributed match funding to support the project management & evaluation elements of the project.

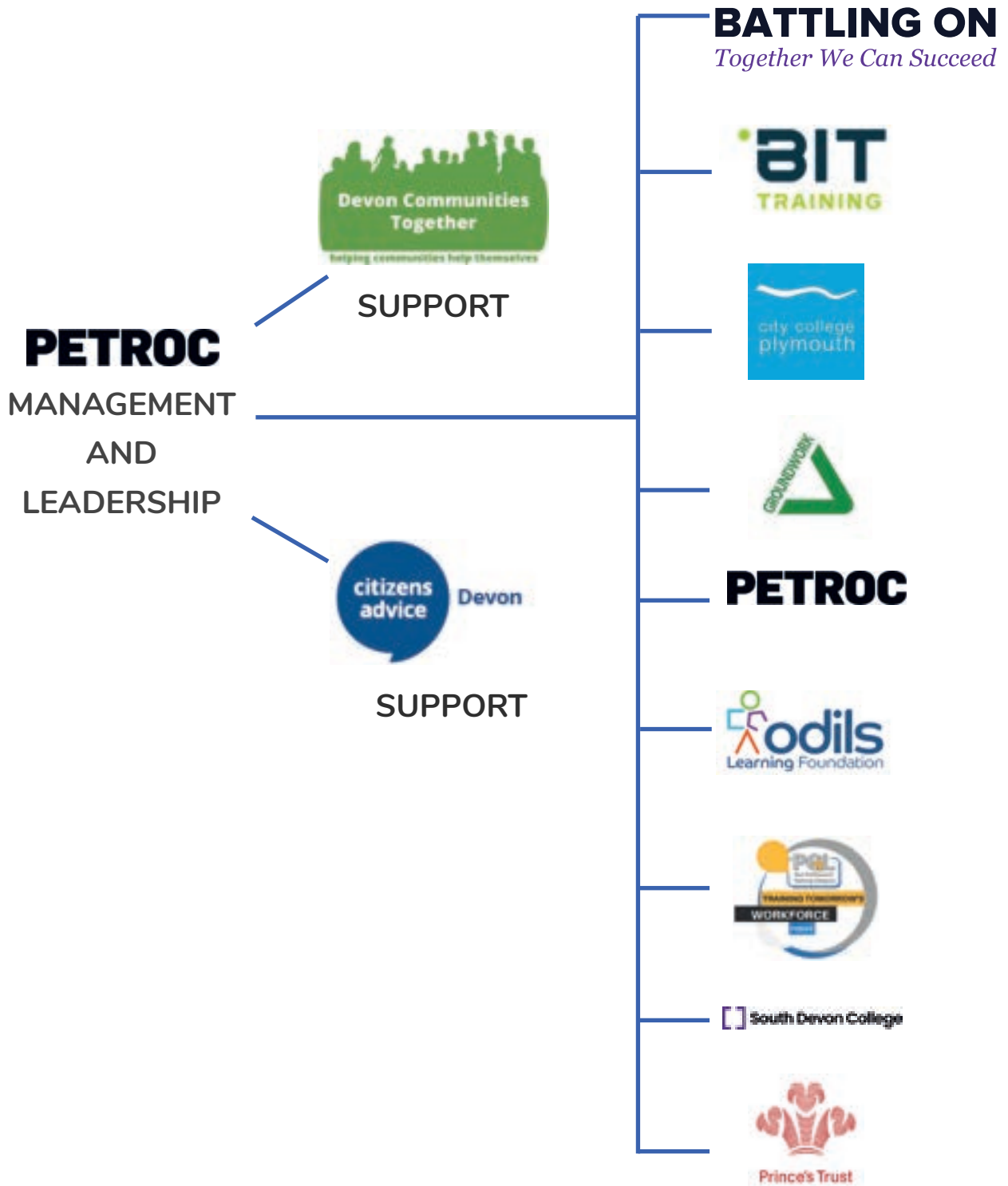
The partnership identified gaps in existing provision in The Heart of the South West Local Economic Partnership and a need to provide support at a pre-traineeship-level to enable young people to develop the skills to access traineeships, apprenticeships, National Citizen Service and similar provision and employment opportunities effectively.

Experience Works was designed to create real world opportunities through: one-to-one sessions with their mentor; developing employability skills; workplace learning; volunteering and social action; short tasters and training programmes; and in-work support from their mentor.

Participants worked with their mentor throughout the project. The mentor's role was to help the participant to pinpoint their talents, ambitions and barriers and identify gaps in skills or experience. Using a toolkit called the Employment Key, the participant then focused on building a portfolio to show employers and training organisations that they were ready to work and learn.

The project focused on those who were furthest from the labour market and those who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) but who were not registered as NEET. They included young people who were most at risk of social exclusion for a variety of reasons, including those who were completely outside the benefits, work and training system.

Experience Works was a partnership project, led by Petroc, who began developing the strategy in 2018 when the call for applications was published. Petroc managed the strategy, budget and administration. They also delivered the project along with eight other partners, whilst Devon Communities Together and Citizen's Advice worked as support partners.



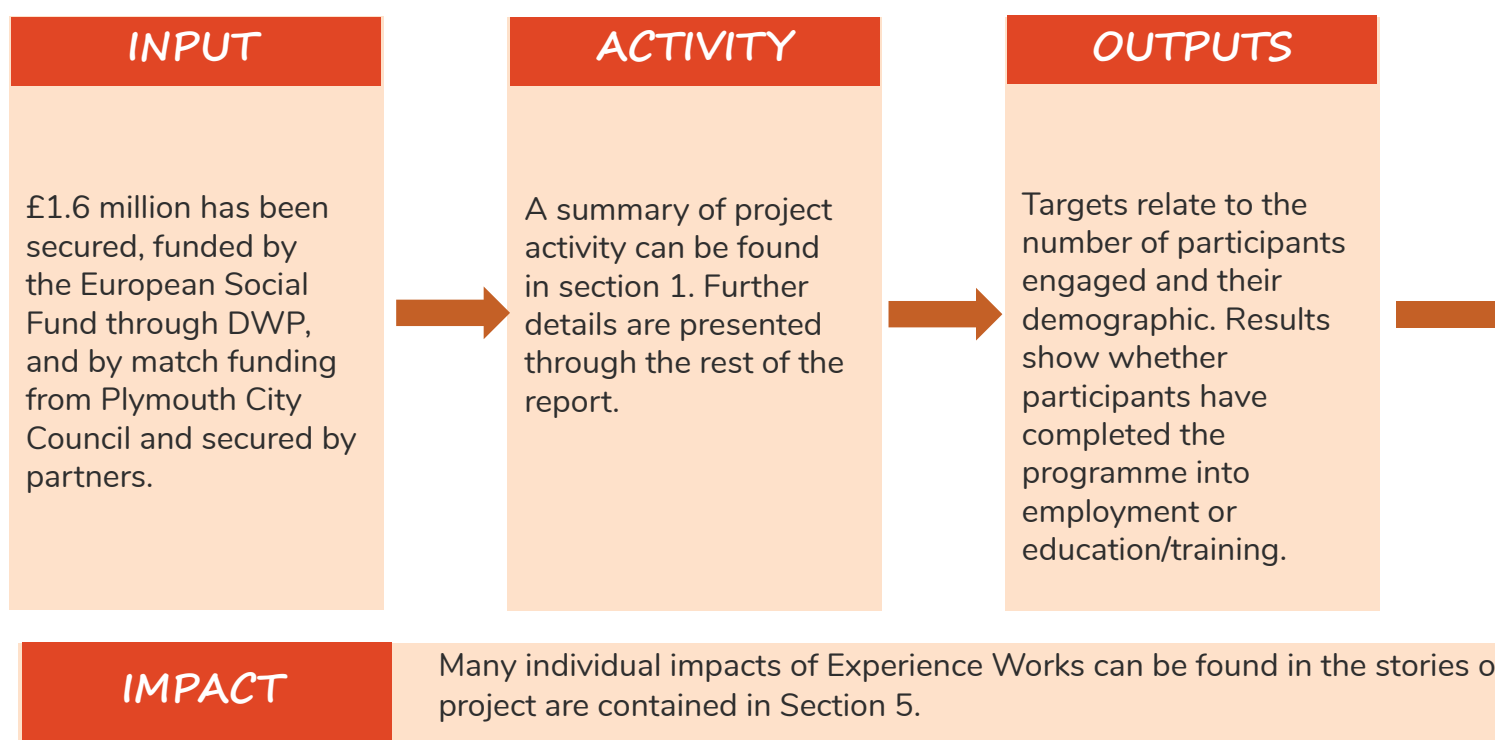
Originally planned to run from January 2021 to May 2023, delivery was extended to the end of September 2023.

See page **Appendix 1** for more information on the delivery partners.

1.2 THEORY OF CHANGE

As the project's evaluation partner, Devon Communities Together developed a Theory of Change through which Experience Works was evaluated and its impact measured. A Theory of Change indicates the links between actions, outputs and outcomes enabling us to understand how, and the extent to which, impact (or 'change') has taken place. The theory can also be used as a valuable planning and strategy development tool, to ensure that resource is effectively directed towards the desired change taking place.

The following impact measurement framework was designed at the start of the project to establish indicators of change for each of the five identified outcomes.




Reporting

The data in this report were gathered by the partners and collected into a series of spreadsheets covering: signposting, personal development plans, experiences, sessions (ie participants' contact with the project), progress star, in addition to demographic and attainment information. These were stored on a shared database, the Participant Data Reporting System (PDRS) and accessible to the partners.

Other sources included quarterly narrative reports on progress against the Outcomes and other measures, submitted by the partners, minutes of quarterly partner meetings, case studies and discussions and interviews by DCT staff of mentors and participants.

Though the numerical targets and desired results of this project were an important part of this, Devon Communities Together also set out to capture the very real stories and lived experiences of change that are anticipated to occur in participants' and communities' lives through the work of the project.

OUTCOMES

- 
1. Young people participating in the project have improved their employability and life skills.
 2. Young people have increased their knowledge of their local communities and have made positive contributions to them.
 3. Employers have increased their understanding of young people who are NEET, and are better equipped to provide them with valuable opportunities.
 4. Local support services have benefitted from improved referral processes
 5. Organisations inside and outside the partnership have access to best practice and lessons learned from Experience Works.

f some of the participants threaded through this report. Learnings and recommendations from the

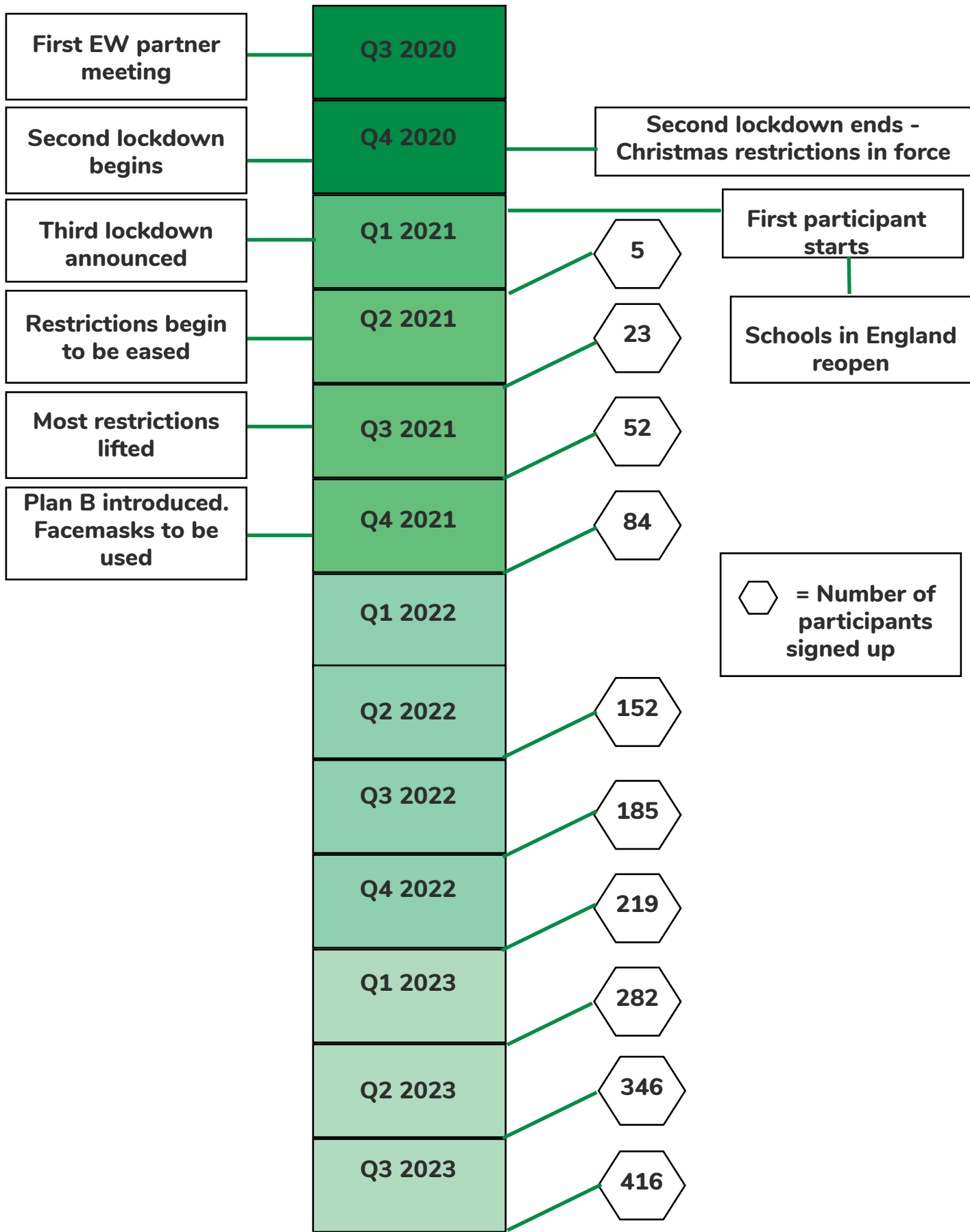
Devon Communities Together have produced bi-annual reports charting the progress of the project, summarising the activities, outputs and contributions to outcomes at that point in the project.

This final report draws on those earlier publications in order to present and analyse the work across the three years of Experience Works. It presents the results achieved for each of the key targets, illustrated by examples of specific participants. Each of the five outcomes are presented in more detail.

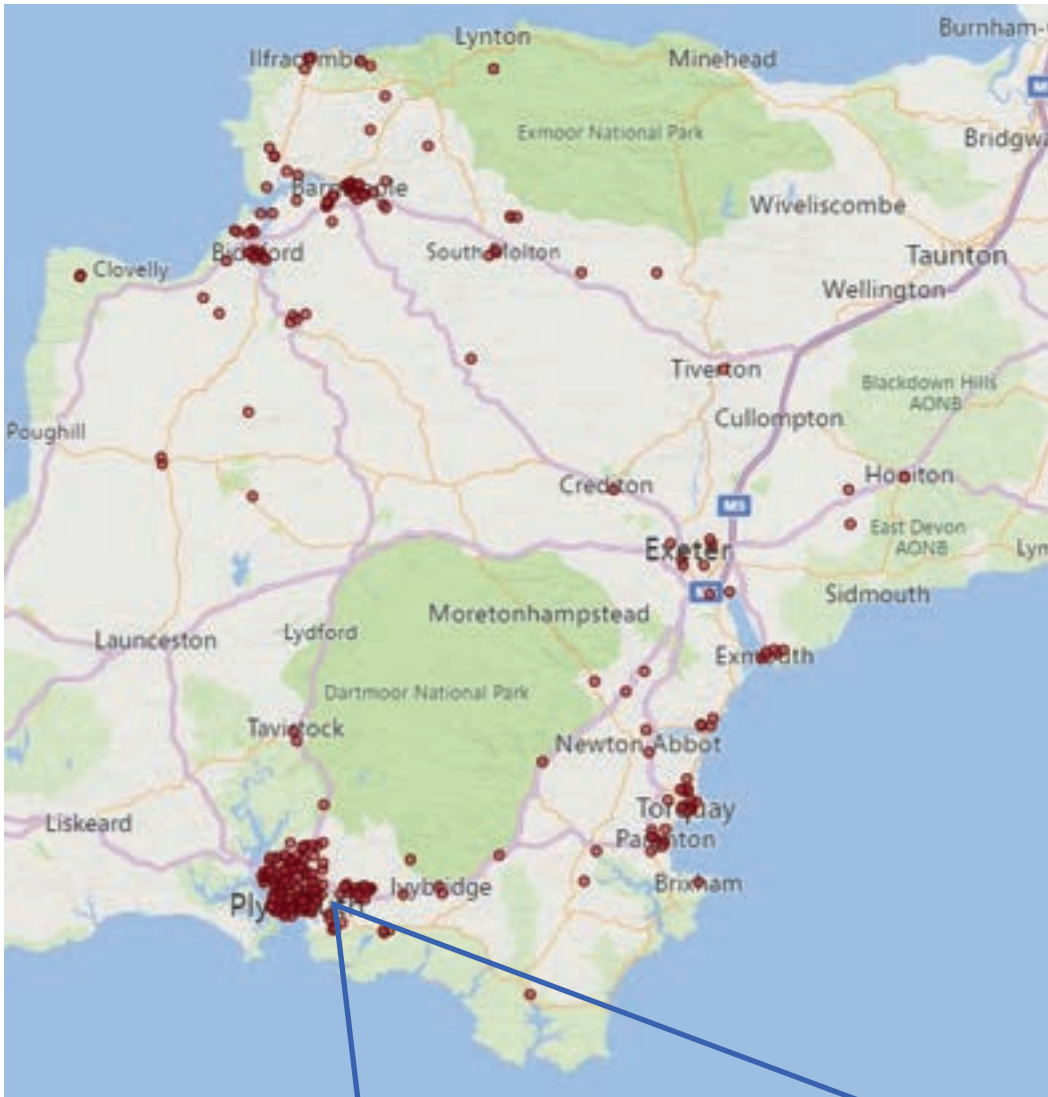
The profiles and activities of each delivery partner are then described, followed by the cross-cutting themes: Equal Opportunities, Sustainability and Publicity. Challenges to delivery are also acknowledged and examined.

The report concludes with a summary of the overall impact along with key learnings and recommendations.

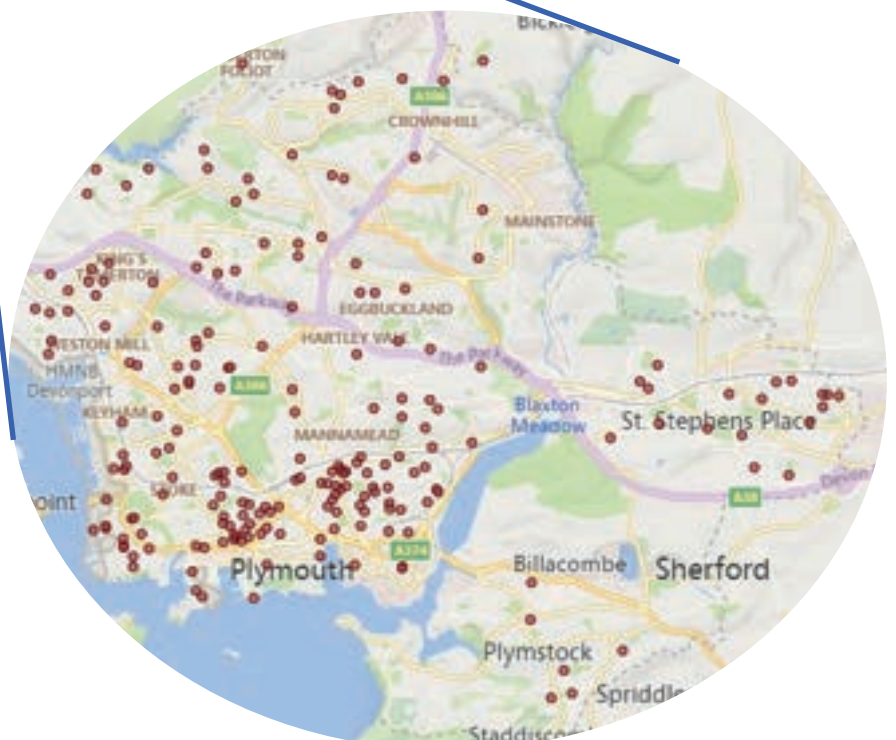
1.3 OVERVIEW OF EVENTS AND TIMELINE



1.4 LOCATION OF EXPERIENCE WORKS PARTICIPANTS



The concentration of participants around Plymouth and to a lesser extent Barnstaple, Torbay and Exeter, reflects the location of partners and the challenges of working in a large, rural county.



1.5 PETROC AND THE PARTNERSHIP

Experience Works was conceived as a partnership project, using the combined expertise of a wide range of delivery partners experienced in working with the target groups described in the introduction.

The project was led by Petroc who managed delivery and financial strategy and communications with funders and the delivery partners.

As the grant holder and managing body for Experience Works, Petroc had a number of responsibilities:

- *Tracking project progress and developing and implementing strategy to ensure targets, results and outcomes were achieved.*
- *Liaison with ESF, covering quarterly reporting, managing targets, expenditure and risk within the partnership and disseminating guidance to the partnership.*
- *Developing and maintaining a bespoke reporting system to record all participant data and deliver changes in administrative processes where necessary, such as the development of participant paperwork.*
- *Coordinating partnership support events including partner and local meetings and accompanying support sessions on relevant topics.*
- *Managing the project's budget and supporting partners with the financial claim process.*
- *Leading on the incorporation of the cross cutting themes across project design and activity leading to comprehensive action plans for each strand.*

Petroc were also responsible for the overall management of the project's delivery partners, through providing regular monitoring, supervision and support. This was carried out by means of regular partnership meetings for project managers and 'local' meetings for project mentors. Training sessions on completion of paperwork and financial claims were provided at the start of the project, and as required by staff who joined the project later.

Nine delivery partners started the project: Battling On; Bluescreen IT; City College Plymouth; Groundwork South; ODILS; Petroc; PGL Training; South Devon College; and The Prince's Trust. Devon Communities Together led on evaluation and strategic employer engagement. Each of the partners is profiled with information about their unique approach to the project, geographical reach, the participants they engaged and referral paths in **Appendix 1**.

The delivery partnership included extensive expertise in engaging employers, and in specific industries, including IT and construction, as well as working with vulnerable and young people. Partners were located in Plymouth, North Devon, Exeter and Paignton, giving a broad reach across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

Through the delivery partners, the project aimed to ensure that a network of mentors would spend time getting to know each participant and develop tailored packages of support, including a combination of facilitated, supported referrals to existing services/provision and activities delivered through the project.

The partnership agreements and funding model was designed to promote cross-partnership and external referrals with the aim of ensuring participants benefited from the most appropriate support available.

During the life of the project, BluescreenIT, City College Plymouth, ODILS and South Devon College withdrew from the project for internal organisational reasons.

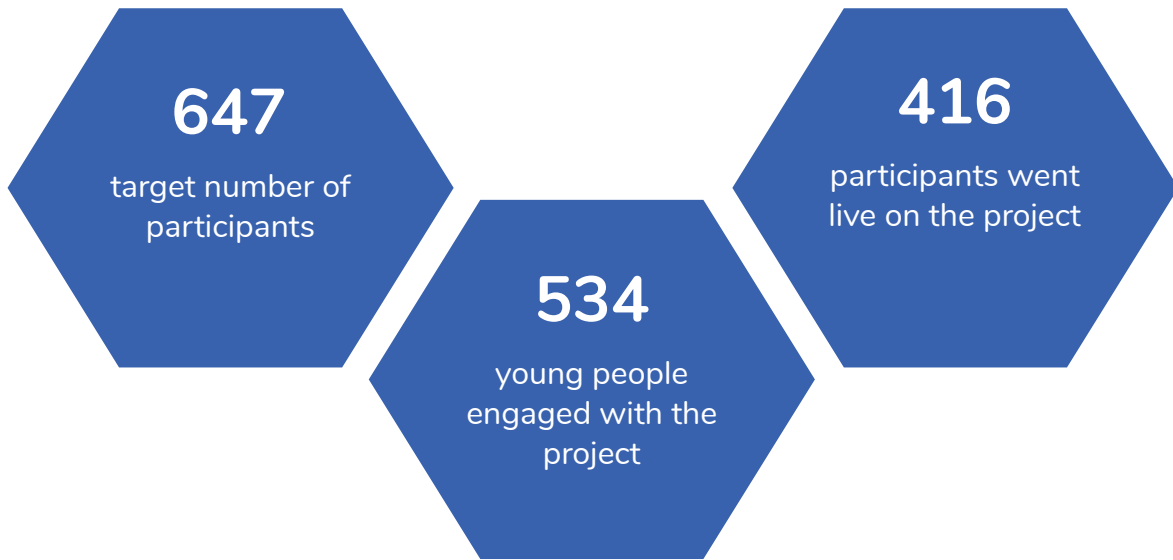
Petroc also developed and steered project strategies during times of adjustment and change, such as during the recovery plan and extension application process, by helping each individual partner develop action plans and manage their caseloads.



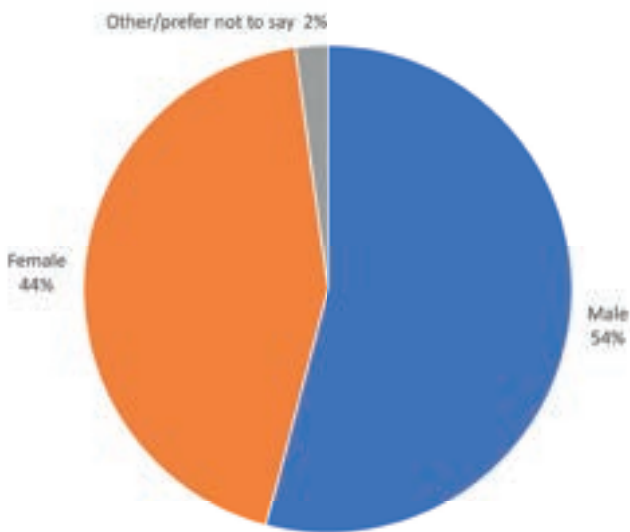
PETROC

As one of the South West's leading colleges, Petroc drives forward educational success in further and higher education and strives to raise the aspirations, knowledge and skills of individuals, communities and businesses in Devon and beyond.

2. TARGETS AND RESULTS



2.1 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS



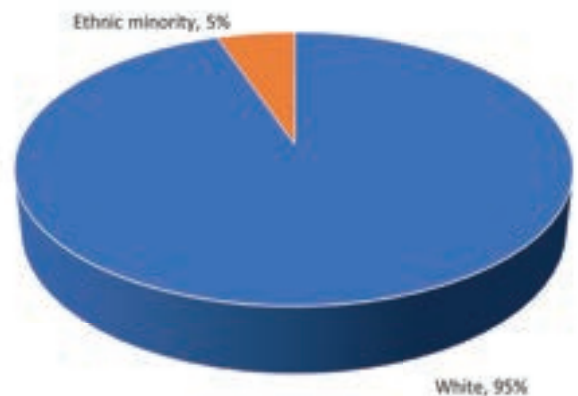
GENDER

The project exceeded the target of 39% female participation.

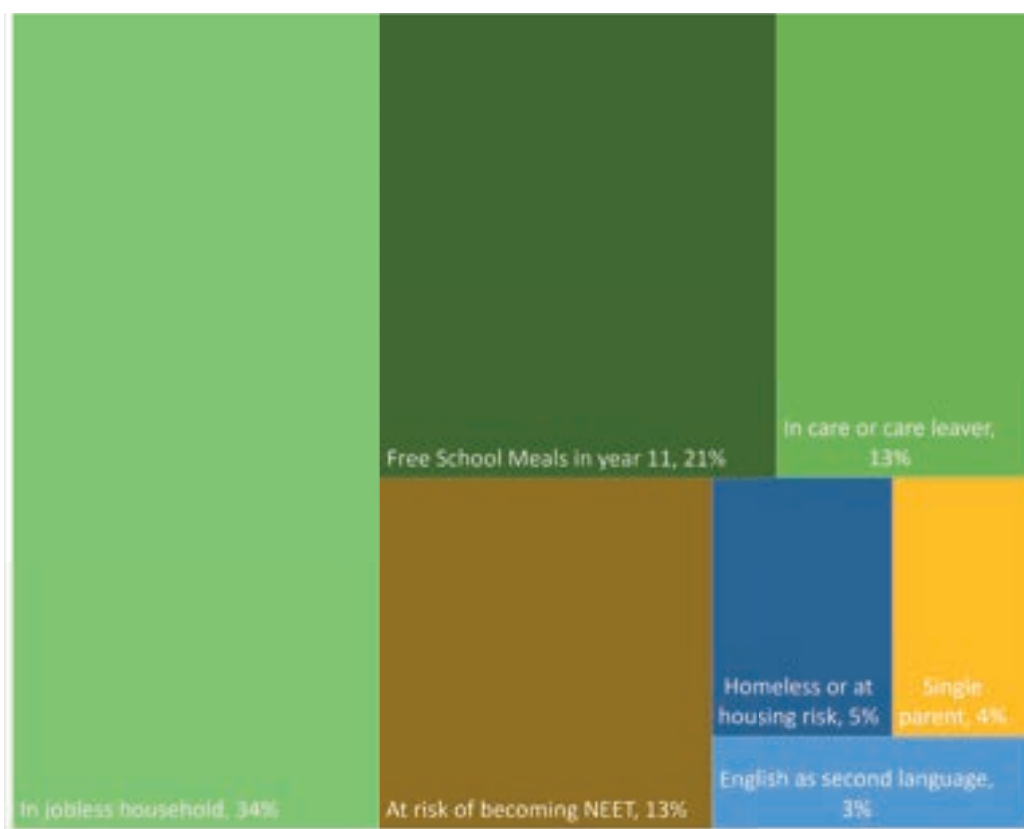
ETHNICITY

Ethnic minority participation was slightly higher than the Devon population average of 3.6%.¹

¹: [https://www.devon.gov.uk/equality/guidance/diversity/guide/race#:~:text=Devon%20remains%20a%20predominantly%20White,%25%20\(2017\)%20and%20growing](https://www.devon.gov.uk/equality/guidance/diversity/guide/race#:~:text=Devon%20remains%20a%20predominantly%20White,%25%20(2017)%20and%20growing)



OTHER CHARACTERISTICS



NB – Figures do not add to 100% as some participants fall into two or more categories.

This chart illustrates some of the circumstances of participants on Experience Works. In some cases these are higher than average for the population as a whole and may be contributors to young people being NEET. Exactly comparable figures are not available for all of these characteristics due to the way that national statistics are presented, but they give some indication of scale.

The number of participants in or leaving care (13%) is considerably higher than national average: the number of 17 – 21 year olds in care at any one time is around 3%.¹ In 2021/22, there were 45,940 care leavers in England who are now aged 17 to 21. This represents about 1% of that age group.²

Similarly, the number in jobless households (34%) is higher than the national average of 14% (ONS)

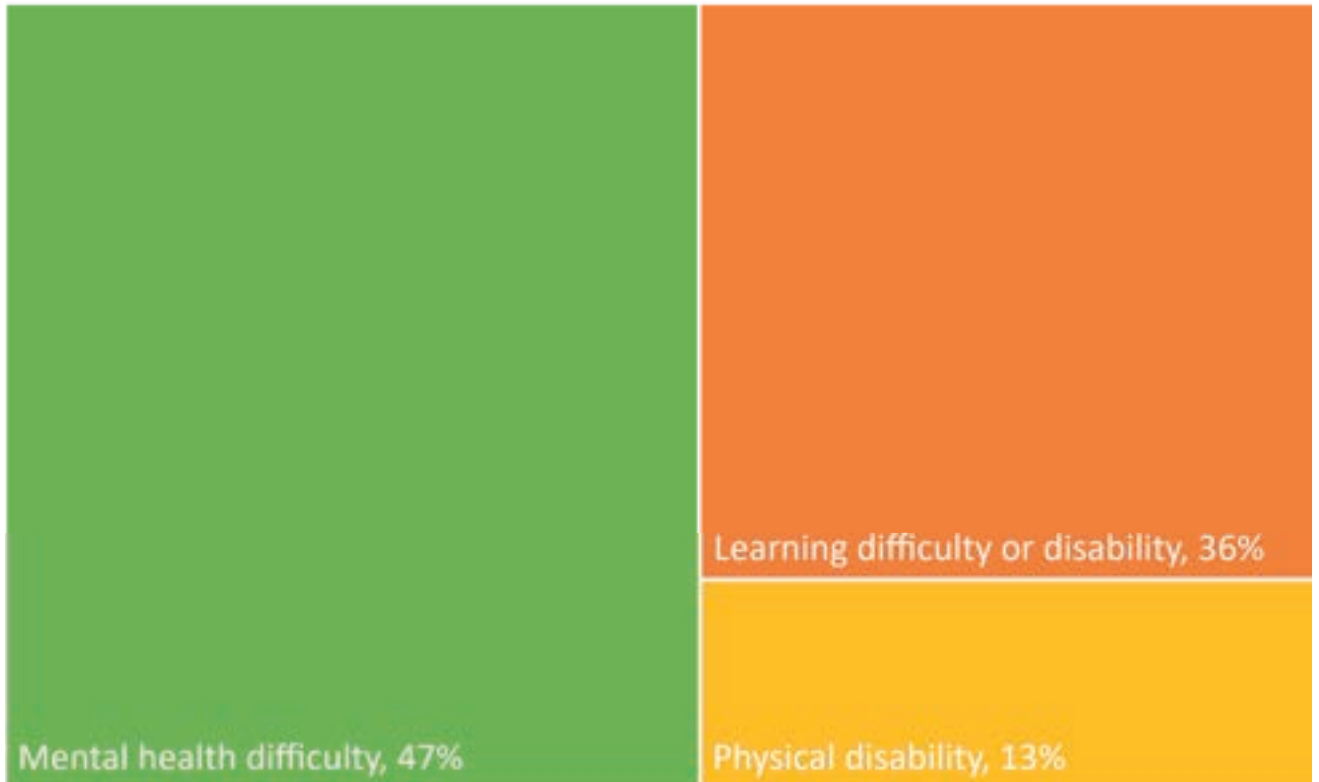
The number of participants eligible for free school meals (FSM) in year 11 was close to the 2021-22 national average of 21%.³

1: <https://becomecharity.org.uk/about-the-care-system/#:~:text=There%20are%20more%20children%20in,to%2070%20in%20every%2010%2C000.>

2: This figure was derived from 2019 population figures, the most recent available. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2019estimates>

3: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2022-23#dataBlock-c3f854ee-256e-4842-b89d-e1cb53110af5-tables>

REPORTED DISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

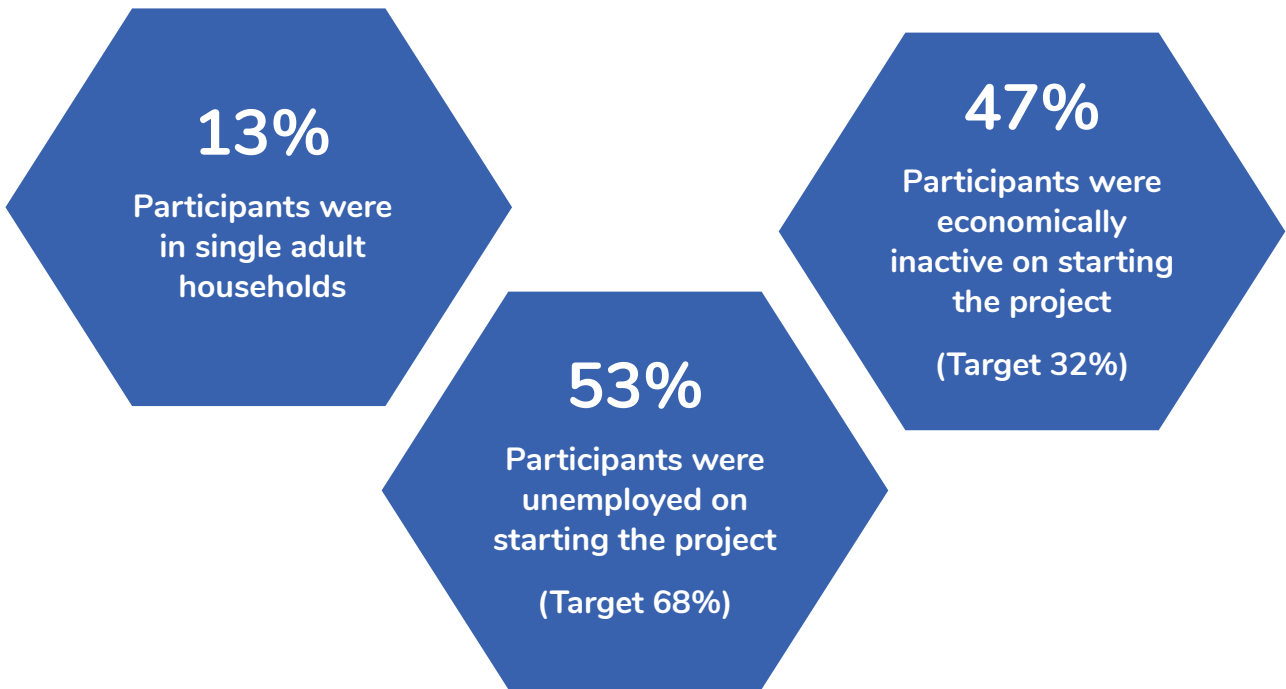


On joining the programme participants were asked whether they had a physical or learning disability or had a mental health difficulty. In 2020/21 13% of males and 16% of females aged 15-24 reported having a disability of any sort. ¹ Whilst not exactly comparable, the number of participants with physical disabilities seems in keeping with this statistic.

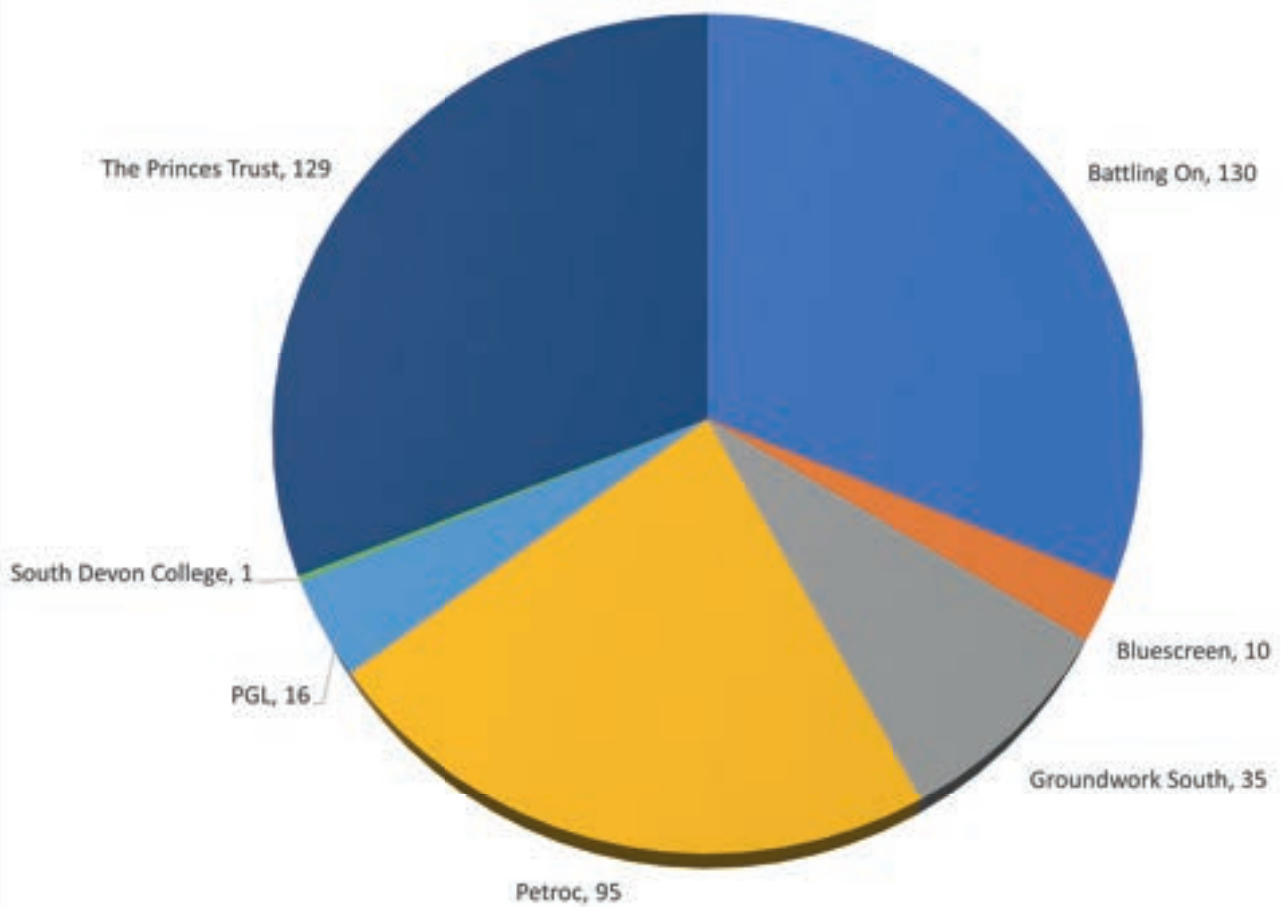
More striking is the large number of participants reporting having a mental health difficulty. This compares with NHS figures for 2023 of 20% of 8 – 25 year olds having a 'probable mental disorder'.

It should be stressed that these figures were self-reported and do not necessarily reflect likely diagnoses. However they are an indication of young people's sense of their own wellness.

1: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9602/CBP-9602.pdf>



PARTICIPANTS BY PARTNER



2.2 RESULTS



144 (35%) into employment, education or training



2 gained basic skills in Maths or English

The goal for Experience Works was to achieve one of three results: in employment, in education or training, or having gained a basic skills qualification in Maths or English.

As well as young people who were NEET, the project was also able to engage with those at risk of becoming NEET. A total of 30 (7%) participants started and ended in education or training. However if partners worked with those at risk, and they stayed on course and completed the project, it was not a claimable result on the project, even if the participant moved into a higher level of education.

It is worth celebrating these participants, many of whom will have benefited from their experience on the project, not least those who might otherwise have dropped out of education and therefore become NEET themselves.



NON-COMPLETERS

Of the 534 young people who engaged with the project, 121 (22%) did not complete induction. Of the 416 that completed induction (also referred to as 'went live' or 'started'), 132 (32%) withdrew without completing the programme. The latter group benefited from 253 group, advocacy and regular (one-to-one) sessions with mentors, totalling 857 hours, before withdrawing. Many of those who did not 'start' also took part in one-to-one and group sessions in the expectation that they would continue on the project.

We know from case studies (pages 24 and 25) that some withdrawn participants gained significant benefits from their time on the programme, including acquiring valuable work experience and entry into work. It is likely that many others also benefited. Had they not withdrawn, some of these would undoubtedly have become completers with result, having transitioned from NEET into a job or training.

Because a claimable result required a shift from NEET to employment or education much that would be regarded as a successful outcome for a participant could not be recorded as such.

No analysis of participants' explanations for withdrawal is possible, because in almost all cases they simply stopped engaging and couldn't be contacted, as the number of contact attempts suggests. (A pragmatic decision was taken by Petroc management to withdraw a participant if they failed to respond to contact attempts. It was felt that partners' time would be better spent attracting new participants and working with those who were engaged, whilst those who had dropped out might be referred again.) There are no demographic trends apparent in the data.

It is interesting to note that 2019/20 figures showed 53.4% drop out rate from apprenticeships and 47% in 2020/21.²

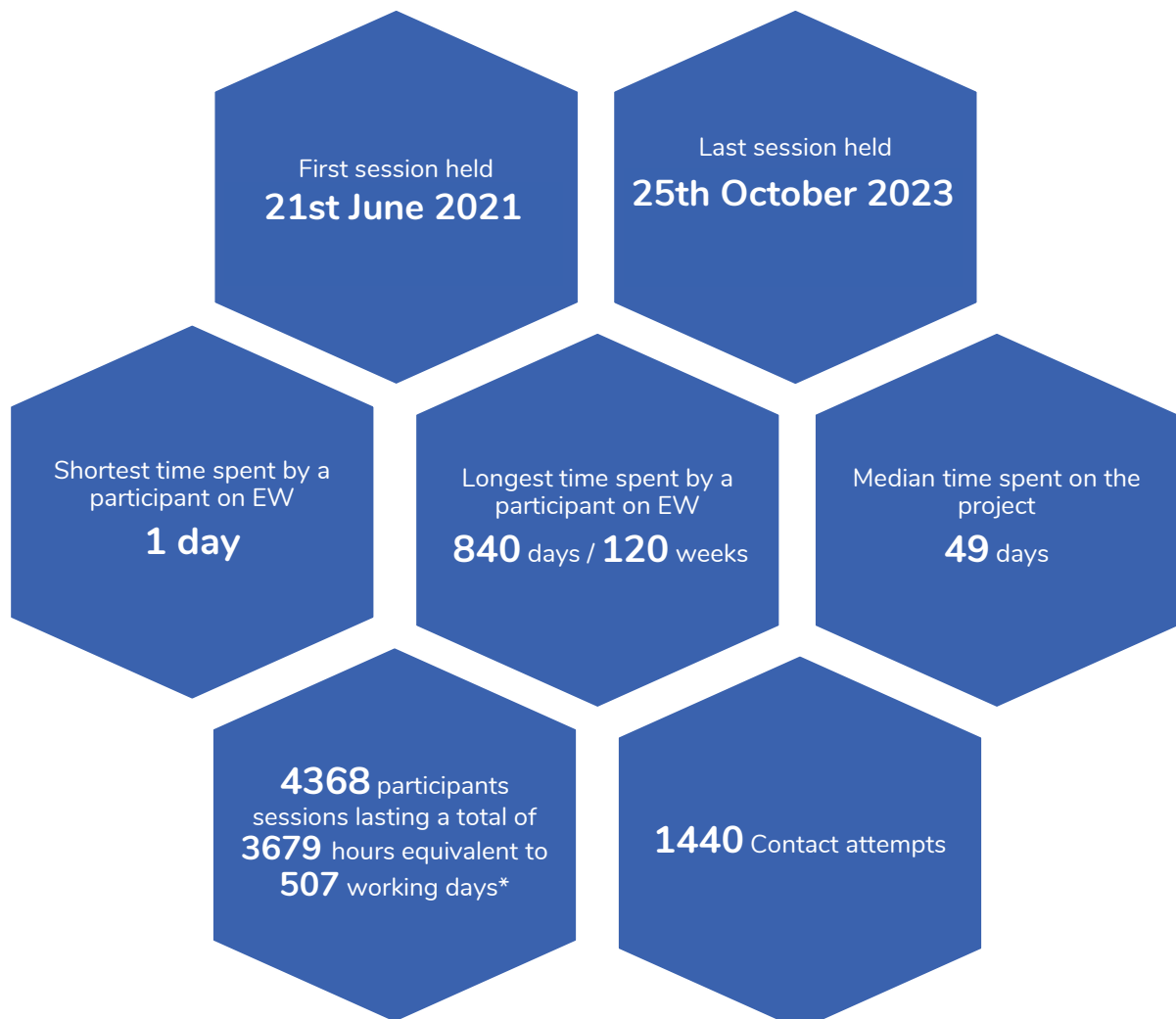
It would be useful in future programmes to capture reasons for withdrawing, either the participant's own words where possible or the mentor's view. Inevitably this would involve some speculation on the mentor's part, but nevertheless could be valuable.

²: Reported in FE Week, 13th October 2023

2.3 SESSIONS

Once on the project, participants engaged with mentors via the following types of sessions:

- **Induction:** advice and guidance session to establish if the project was right for the participant, to establish they met the eligibility criteria and to complete paperwork.
- **Regular (59%):** one-to-one sessions with the mentor covering job-seeking skills, support with issues such as housing or any other guidance, working on goals from an agreed Participants Development Plan.
- **Group (13%):** these may be with the mentor or other staff or with external partners. They could include the development of social or work skills, health and fitness, and volunteering or social activity.
- **Advocacy (4%):** working on research on for, or representing participants, sometimes in their absence. Examples include the Careers Service, employers, The Samaritans and online training courses.



*Where a working day is 7.25 hours

FOLLOW UPS

Petroc management made follow up calls to participants to monitor progress following the programme and satisfaction levels.

Those contacted represent 25% of all those who completed the project, which is a significant sample. However, it is not necessarily truly representative, with those in work or training being over-represented (over 80% of those contacted were in work or training compared with 36% of the total cohort on completing).

Those contacted were asked what they liked and disliked about Experience Works. There were four times more likes than dislikes and several of the latter were regret that the programme was ending.

A few themes emerged from participants' comments:

WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT EXPERIENCE WORKS?

'Support' was the word which appeared most often in responses:

“ I like that the support was shaped around me and that Sarah really cared, I have done more with the help than I thought I could.”

“ Helped look for courses, gave support and motivation to look into it.”

“ It was nice to have support, S was great at helping me organize assignments and helping me to be able to independently get to college.”

Related to that were several references to being listened to, that participants felt understood and cared for:

“ Genuinely felt like they cared and they were willing to help and talk about anything.”

“ They work with you at your own pace and offer good support. They fit time around you.”

“ Someone to talk to and help me see through hardships.”

Guidance in job seeking skills and finding employment or training:

“ Helped me to get employment in Kitchens, still currently employed there.”

“ Great help with CV writing, now in a job, very happy.”

“ Good support at helping me to look at apprenticeships/work.”

Courses, volunteering and other experiences during the project:

“ Likes the different volunteering, and different experiences.”

“ There was a range of things to do and give experience, helped me find a course on Sound Engineering.”

“ The skills and experience opportunity, it has helped and I now have an idea of where I'm going.”

WHAT DID YOU NOT LIKE ABOUT EXPERIENCE WORKS?

Meeting participants' specific needs:

“EHCP needs need to be more taken into account and understood by the mentor, instead of loading onto a course that doesn't fit with them. Parent feels that was done to just tick a box.”

“Staff didn't have a full understanding on disability.”

Limited opportunities:

“Some of the stuff he wasn't very interested in.”

“She got everything she needed, would have been nice if there was a wider range other subjects other than just Maths and English as she found it a better learning environment than 'schools in the past.’”

“The experiences that were available were quite limited, would be great if there was more variety.”

“The services that were pointed out to him for looking for available jobs were quite limited, rarely had jobs that were not in retail.”

“It felt like with the local opportunities he was shown there wasn't much variety, would be nicer if there was more.”

Lack of support:

“Saw mentor, resulted in her signing up for a part-time course. Was unsure on Course due to EHCP needs conflicting with ability to work on the course, family going through financial difficulty getting uniform for the course, didn't feel looked after on the course or by tutor.”

“Had no meeting during the course to discuss issues was instead just kicked off the course.”

“There were moments when due to low staff if I were unsure on something, there wasn't much help.”



2.4 CASE STUDIES

BROOKE – BATTLING ON

Brooke, 17, was referred to Battling on from Careers South West. She had a learning disability, dyslexia and dyscalculia and a condition which could present as having a fit.

She had accessed various courses before joining Experience Works without completing any of them. This limited the options available to her. Her experience in educational settings was that she was 'not listened to but talked at' and made to feel that she did not have anything to contribute.

Brooke was interested in either a trade apprenticeship or working with young people who were, like her, neurodiverse. Brooke's mentor approached Skills Group independent trainers, describing Brooke's need to feel she was 'not in a school environment'. The mentor brokered a discussion between Brooke, her mother and the Skills Group tutors after which Brooke took a place on a Barbering programme.

After the taster session she said she 'had experienced a fun day and was literally buzzing'. But Brooke found the training tiring, which increased her anxiety. At times she felt overwhelmed and that she was not progressing as quickly as she wanted. Through all of these challenges the mentor was able to provide reassurance and practical advice. She reminded Brooke how much she had already achieved and reminded her to talk to her tutor if she had problems. After three months on the course Brooke won a hairdressing contest in college.

While she was on the course Brooke said she wanted to get a job so she could earn her own money. With support from her mentor she was successful in her first ever interview and took a Christmas retail job. As it progressed she reported feeling sensory overload, struggling at times to deal with giving customers the correct change, perhaps

due to her dyscalculia. Again her mentor was supportive and reminded her to talk to her manager if she was struggling.

Skills Group then suggested that Brooke try a different course, and after discussion she decided to do Childcare. During the course she created a story for children featuring colour-changing elephants to explore themes of difference and discrimination and was praised for the speed at which she learned the Makaton language tool.

At the start of her time on Experience Works, Brooke scored 32 on her progress star (see p.29). At the end she her score was 55, a 71% increase. She exited Experience Works into employment.

ADAM – CITY COLLEGE PLYMOUTH



Adam, 20, was referred to City College Plymouth from The Zone, Plymouth. He had been attending Duchy College for 4 years, however he struggled with the people there due to his mental health and anxiety issues. The travel distance was also a factor and after a break of over a year Adam did not want to go back.

The mentor first met Adam at The Zone – a place where he would feel safe meeting someone new. He then started coming to the college each week, to work on job applications.

Adam's mentor reported that he was starting to see skills and interests that he could bring to a role, such as an ability to lay things out visually on an Excel spreadsheet. He also started to see how he needed to 'big himself up' and sell himself and was thinking about what achievements outside of college or work he was proudest of.

Adam said that his main aim was to find stable work, and he says his mentor helped him to find out about websites for applying which he didn't know about before and helped him know how to answer the questions on the form and what language to use.

Adam first engaged with Experience Works in September 2021, but left in July 2022 without having completing the paperwork to become 'live'. Despite that he clearly felt that he had benefited from his time at CCP, and gained valuable experience in job searching and developing confidence.

H - BLUESCREEN IT



When he joined Experience Works, H suffered from high levels of anxiety and depression. 'I get physically sick when I have to go to new environments, In the past when my mentor took me to a place for work experience, I couldn't go into the building because I would

get physically sick!'

He had a chaotic life, moving twice during his time on the project to live with different relatives who could support him. He suffered from insomnia, staying up until 3-5am. Over a period of weeks he shifted this to 10-11pm with his mentor encouraging him to go to bed a minute earlier each night.

At first he would not come to the Bluescreen building and all interaction was virtual, which gave H a chance to get to know his mentor. At times his condition meant he was unable to do any work, but still met to chat online. Talking about his streaming and interests gave him the opportunity to open up and develop trust in his mentor.

At one point when H went through a low period the mentor went on a workshop with Pete's Dragon, a charity helping those affected by suicide. This enabled her to support H through a night when he was feeling suicidal, corresponding by text.

One technique the mentor used was to talk about H's 'superpowers', which he described as open-mindedness and determination, and how to use his inner strengths to overcome negative thought patterns and look at different ways of coping with his circumstances.

Eventually H began attending Bluescreen and after a few weeks was wanting to stay on after course hours so he could do more work on computers. He said,

'I never used to leave the house, but now I am getting out and do a lot more and I am actually enjoying it. Yesterday I managed to get on a bus and didn't have any anxiety. I feel like a different person and I am so proud and happy at this moment in time.'

Unfortunately H did not complete Experience Works, but it is clear that he gained a great deal from his time and experiences at Bluescreen.

MEGAN – PETROC

Megan was 18 on joining Experience Works, referred from Careers South West. She reported having mental health difficulties and at the beginning of the programme, was lacking in confidence and self-belief, despite being bright, in the mentor's view.

Megan wanted to study History at university but did not feel ready due to anxiety around leaving home. With her mentor she discussed how taking a gap year can be a beneficial experience and can provide opportunities to improve work and life skills, such as self-reliance and confidence.

With her mentor Megan discussed her skills, interests and aspirations, and using the Explore website looked at how to improve her CV. She also looked at job searching websites, such as Indeed and Petroc Job Shop, for local employment opportunities.

Megan secured full-time employment as a Teaching Assistant in a local primary school. Through this she developed transferable skills such as organisation, flexibility, teamwork and creativity.

Although she found the position challenging at times, in terms of classroom management and pupils' behaviour, Megan found it very rewarding and enjoyed the challenge of overcoming barriers.

She said that found it useful having, 'someone to talk to about anxieties and [who] helped to get enjoyable employment during gap year'.

RONNIE – PGL TRAINING

Ronnie joined Experience Works, referred from Careers South West, having not been able to secure an apprenticeship during the pandemic. He struggled in a classroom environment, but responded to small group sizes and one to one support. Working towards his Level 2 Maths Functional Skills he made good progress.

Alongside his Maths and English study, Ronnie undertook internal work experience at PGL Training, learning skills in bricklaying and general construction. He worked methodically and gained a high level of bricklaying skill. At the same time, his social skills improved and he became more able to cope with being in a classroom with other learners.

He also completed Health and Safety Training relating to the construction industry and worked on his employability skills to help him apply for external job vacancies.

As a result of his hard work, he gained external work experience with a local holiday park, which increased his confidence and enabled him to extend his practical skills.

Ronnie withdrew from Experience Works, but had clearly benefitted from his time on the programme, learning relevant work and social skills.

Below: The Prince's Trust awards ceremony



CALLUM – THE PRINCE’S TRUST

Callum took part in The Prince’s Trust’s Get into Sport programme at Plymouth Argyle.

He had moved around a lot before settling in Plymouth, which he found difficult as it was hard to make friends in new places.

I spent a good year and a half just sat in my room because there was just nothing I could find, like I was just trying to find work and just anything, really. And, and I wasn’t having any luck with it.

With few qualifications the only work he found was in a bar. When they stopped giving him shifts ‘for literally no reason’ it impacted his mental health. He had also spent some time with Skills Group learning bricklaying, but back problems meant he wasn’t able to carry on.

He joined Experience Works with The Prince’s Trust and started a teamwork and communication course. Asked how things had changed for him since starting on EW,

he said,

‘My mental health definitely. I was very reclusive and not very talkative, but since being around people my age and like not just my age but like my personality and people who get me, it’s, it’s very like opened my eyes and it’s made me want to like start doing stuff’.

He wanted to be a mixed martial arts (MMA) coach, but his injury prevents him. He expressed interested in working in hospitality, but was concerned whether he would get an interview with his low grades.

‘I definitely want to, like redo my GCSEs. Maybe not all of them, but my Maths and English. Yeah, I would love to re-do them.’

He felt that Experience Works had helped with his confidence.

For more examples of Experience Works Case Studies, please visit

<https://www.youtube.com/@experienceworks4864>



“ My confidence has gone up like when I first started the Prince’s Trust course, like there would have been no chance I could have come in like I did and I just talked to Dan. Not even Dan. But like everyone else, just that’s in the class. But like we, we we’re like understanding each other and it’s definitely like good.”

3. OUTCOMES

3.1 OUTCOME 1

YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT HAVE IMPROVED THEIR EMPLOYABILITY AND LIFE SKILLS.



“ I have gained more experience for my CV and definitely feel more confident applying for jobs now. Before the programme, I was putting it off for ages because I wasn't happy with my CV. Now I know what sites to look on e.g. Petroc JobShop.”
Ruby, EW participant

“ Yes, so in the actual week and a day that I've done work experience here, I've been into different areas from going into the kitchen and also the Bistro helping out with the bar staff and with the kitchen staff as well. And it's I think it's been a great experience.”
EW participant

“ Ronnie's maths skills have really improved...working towards the Level 2 Maths Functional Skill. When he first attended he completed a mock maths paper and scored 25%. Last week he scored 65% which...underlines the how small group sizes have benefited [him].”
PGL Mentor

The project was designed to be person-centred, supporting young people to benefit from improved life chances through:

- Increased hard and soft skill levels,
- Better knowledge and understanding of the world of work,
- A wider network of positive role models and contacts,
- Raised aspirations and knowledge of the wider world,
- Increased resilience.



Tommy attended a Prince's Trust 'Get into Hospitality' course that was running in conjunction with TLH Leisure Resort in May 2023. During his work experience, the hotel was impressed by his reliability, dedication and work ethic, which impressed all of the departments that he worked with. As a result, he received two job offers at the end of the course, and ultimately decided to accept a role as a Hotel Porter in the TLH Toorak Hotel. He initially worked exclusively in the TLH Toorak Hotel, but now covers the whole of the TLH Leisure Resort.

Left: Tommy being presented with his TLH 'Summer of STARS' award by the General Manager at the TLH Toorak Hotel.

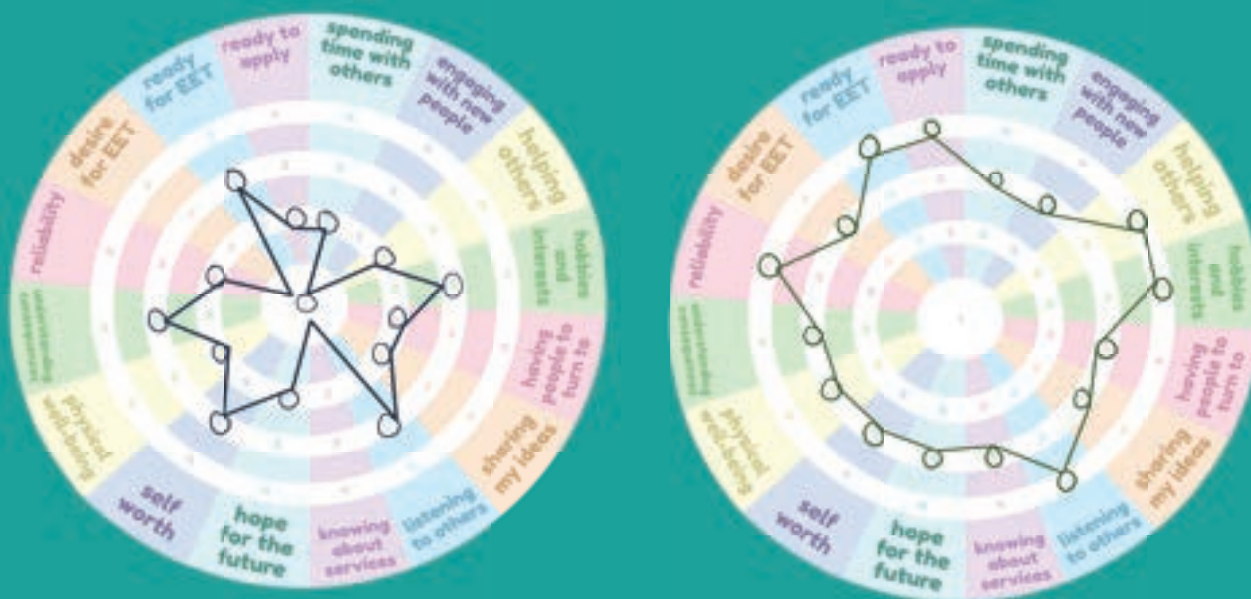
Regular one-to-one sessions with a mentor guided the participant through their Experience Works journey. Specific tools used by mentors were:

TAB, which helped the participants to identify their Talents, Ambitions and Barriers and any gaps in skills or experience.

Personal Development Plans (PDP) to guide them in addressing these gaps. Mentors helped participants to build confidence and track their progress. They also helped to tackle any areas of their personal life where they needed help, such as housing, health or finances.

Progress Star, designed by DCT, with which participants assessed themselves against a list of 16 categories creating a picture of their employability skills, life skills, community engagement and wellbeing. This was done at the start and end of the project and the progress measured. Several of the categories are grouped to give overall scores for 'Increased employability skills', another subset for 'basic life skills', 'community engagement' and 'health & wellbeing.'

Sample of completed Progress Stars showing scores at the start and the end of the project:



241 completers filled in progress stars at the beginning and end of the project. Of these 82% increased their score between the first and final versions. The top 20% showed an increase of 35% or more. The median percentage improvement was 14%.

As well as one-to-one mentoring, participants had opportunities to take part in:

- Workplace learning – such as short placements, mock interviews, virtual work experience, training sessions.
- Taster sessions and training on a range of topics for example digital skills, food hygiene, first aid and customer service.
- In-work support to help the young person transition into work or training when they progress.
- Group work, including social, recreational and sporting activities.

Examples of these activities can be found throughout the report.

'A' was NEET when they started EW and had no clear idea of what they wanted to achieve or the type of work they wanted to do. Over a four month period they developed this step-by-step PDP, which illustrates how the participant and mentor work together to develop the plan in response to progress.

ACTION	STEPS NEEDED	UPDATES
'A' to decide what they would like to be doing.	Mentor to look at online courses with 'A'.	Mentor and 'A' researched a list of online courses for 'A' to choose a course from.
'A' to choose 1 or 2 courses to do online.	'A' and mentor to choose together during mentoring session.	'A' has chosen an online coding course with an industry recognised exam.
'A' to attend volunteering sessions.	'A' to be at college 6.3.23.	'A' has been attending volunteering activity, they missed the last session but is ready for the next one.
'A' to come to PETROC to update mentor on their online course progress.	Fortnightly sessions to be arranged for 'A' to come to PETROC and teach mentor what they have learned. 'A' to do the online course at home in their own time.	'A' is 80% of their way through a coding course, which they have been working on, online.
'A' to go on Wix [website design tool] and build a free website advertising python java script services.	'A' to work on this in next few mentoring sessions.	'A' has started working on the Wix site and will continue this in their own time. 'A' has completed this.
'A' to look for work experience in coding and website building.	'A' to talk with brother who works in coding and website building. Mentor to contact IT companies and departments in PETROC and see if they can secure any relevant work experience for 'A'.	None
'A' to gain coding work experience.	'A' to contact coding college and companies.	None

'A' completed Experience Works successfully, taking a up a place at college.

EMPLOYMENT KEY

The Employment Key was developed by Devon Communities Together. The brief was for a tool which mentors could use with participants to 'support them to identify and evidence existing skills, experience and attributes, and to identify and address gaps, resulting in each participant having a tangible pack of 'certified' evidence'.

DCT undertook desk research to source suitable tools and approaches. They led co-design sessions with Petroc management, mentors and employers to determine the content and

format of the site. They then designed it using an off-the-peg web design site (Wix). Monitoring of site use was undertaken monthly and reported at partner meetings. Throughout the project mentors fed back how they were using the site and modifications were made as appropriate.

One of the tools used to help participants identify their TAB was the Employment Key. This took the form of a website, Explore, for ease of accessibility and updating. It consisted of three main areas – Create Your Portfolio, Give It A Go and Explore More.

Create Your Portfolio used quizzes and light-hearted questions as a way of supporting participants to self-reflect and identify strengths that they may not have previously recognised. They were encouraged to create a portfolio detailing ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills and experiences.

Give It A Go provided a format for participants to use the evidence in their portfolio, to begin to translate content from their portfolio into CVs and application forms. It included templates, examples and guidance documents.

Explore More aimed to signpost participants to a wide range of existing external resources under the headings: Finding Work, Education and Training, Volunteering, and Wellbeing.

The Explore website was well received by all partners when it was first launched in May 2021. After an initial high number of visits, usage settled to an average of 23 site sessions and 15 unique users per month for the next six months. Whilst these are low numbers for most websites, Explore was only intended for nine partners to access, so high visitor numbers was not expected. (The site was available for anyone to access, but not promoted outside the partnership.)

“We have been using Explore and the quiz as an ice breaker, this has worked really well.”
Battling On

“In our mentoring sessions, we used the Explore portfolio and discussed MT’s skills, interests and aspirations.”
Petroc

During the course of the project the number of visits dropped and DCT undertook a review. This found that:

- Several partners had downloaded the resources that they needed so no longer needed to visit the site.
- Others felt that the resources no longer served their needs and had found others that they found more useful.
- Some mentors who had joined the project after it had started did not know how to use the site.

DCT provided training on the site during partner meetings and delivered one-to-one sessions for new mentors. They also consulted about the future direction of the site with the partners, who said that it would be helpful to have more resources signposting participants to employment, volunteering training and advice sites. DCT researched and developed the Explore More section of the site creating bespoke pages for Finding Work, Education and Training, Wellbeing, and Volunteering.

Subsequent monitoring of the site showed that use had not increased. In a further consultation, partners reported that they needed more targeted support in linking participants with employment, training and community engagement opportunities. As a result of this feedback an occasional bulletin was produced by DCT and circulated to the partners, listing such opportunities. Explore was not developed any further but remained available to mentors to use.

3.2 OUTCOME 2

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE INCREASED THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND HAVE MADE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEM.

The aim of community engagement was for young people to become more connected to the world around them, improve their social skills and confidence in interacting with others and make a contribution to their communities through voluntary work.

Two types of Community Engagement sessions were reported: **volunteering and social action**. However feedback from the partners suggests that they were, understandably, focused mainly on the immediate benefits to the participants, such as increased confidence, social awareness and gaining transferrable work-readiness skills.



Through our volunteer programme with the National Trust, some of our participants had a chance to experience a full working day in an outdoor based career. They also learned to stick to scheduled lunch breaks and to work within a team towards an end goal.”

Petroc Mentor

In all, 16 Volunteering or Social Action sessions took place.

It became clear during the project that some participants struggled with any kind of social interaction and needed to take ‘baby steps’ to become more confident. This manifested as extreme shyness and an unwillingness to engage at all, through to inappropriate behaviour and language. For example Battling On supported a participant who does not like being in group environments to access local art provision “..so that they can engage with others and gain social interactions. We are trying to build their confidence and self-esteem.”

Some partners organised volunteering opportunities for groups of participants or helped an individual participant find a suitable volunteering position. In other instances, community engagement took place in more informal ways. The types of intervention used by partners to support participants included accompanied public transport journeys; meeting their mentor in a library or other community space; or simply joining group sessions with their peers.

Partners made various moves to reach community groups, attending business and volunteering forums and approaching local charities.

Partners adopted **three** approaches to community engagement:

- Seeking experiences tailored to individual participants’ needs
- Establishing volunteering opportunities with other organisations which several participants attended
- Using community spaces, such as a library, for one-to-one meetings

BATTLING ON

Battling On largely responded to individual participant's needs when planning community engagement. They supported several young people in finding and benefitting from voluntary activity, including at a pet shop, kennels and the National Aquarium.

N has autism and is a designated carer for her mum. She had been in and out of education since the age of 13 and had not completed any course previously. During her time on Experience Works she experienced a decline in her depression/increase in anxieties and periods of deterioration in her physical health. However, with the support of her mentor she was successful in gaining a volunteer role at the National Aquarium.

N said that she feels she has ownership over their work and that is a really good experience. It has helped to build her confidence and improve her mental health.

They also supported a participant who was experiencing poor mental health to engage in their local community and access Arts/Crafts sessions and well-being sessions to help understand emotions and their reactions to emotions.

The participant has experienced difficulty previously engaging with other females, yet they have flourished since working with the project.

Battling On also forged links with other organisations to create community opportunities. Several homeless young people attended workshops with Cardboard Citizens, a charity who use theatre to engage with homeless people. They worked together to create and perform a piece about their own experiences, and reported feeling proud of their achievements. It also created new relationships as the participants did not know each other despite all living at Plymouth Foyer.

Battling On share a building with the Plymouth Scrap Store – a recycling project

where the young people were able to buy and donate unwanted goods.

GROUNDWORK SOUTH

Groundwork took the approach of using community spaces to deliver one-to-one sessions. These included the local library, where participants were introduced to the resources and services on offer, and a nearby community resource, the Market Hall in Devonport.

Travel was a barrier to some young people, so this also encouraged participants to travel independently to somewhere new, so developing other skills. The mentor also provided guided public transport journeys to enable participants to overcome anxieties and learn to plan and manage their own trips. As well as the library, this included travel to Skills Launchpad and supporting one young person to travel into Plymouth and visit a café. In the longer term, this skill would also enable young people to access work.

Groundwork also partnered with Devon Communities Together's Connecting You travel training project. A DCT travel trainer worked over several sessions with one participant, Helena, to support her in becoming more confident using the bus with her mobility scooter so that she could travel to college. Her case illustrates that sometimes very basic, practical factors are what prevents young people from engaging with their communities:

"I feel I 'should' be able to get a bus, but I haven't for a long time, and with a mobility aid it is scary to manage by myself."

What she needed was, *"having someone to help me break things down into smaller steps. Once done it does get easier each time."*

She said that travel training, *"has made world of difference. [It] has given me confidence to expand my world. My world was smaller as I was using a stick for walking."*

As a result of this work, the Groundwork South mentor attended a travel training workshop then worked with a participant who is neurodiverse to support them to leave the house, go to a café and catch a bus into Plymouth.

PETROC

Petroc designed and ran a volunteering programme with the National Trust involving taster sessions of their work at Arlington Court. Through this they gained practical skills, an experience of and interest in outdoor work, confidence, through seeing the effects of their efforts and feeling that they had made a contribution, and knowledge about the history of their area. They had a chance to experience a full working day and learned to stick to scheduled lunch breaks and to work within a team towards an end goal. Arlington Court also had a team catering for young people with additional needs, so were well equipped to support participants with disabilities or suffering anxiety. One outcome of this work was that one young person got a job with the National Trust ranger team.

Other projects saw participants cooking for residents at Medard House supported accommodation, planting bulbs for residents in a retirement complex and conservation work with a Forest School in Barnstaple. One, Marisha, regularly volunteered at Bideford Youth Centre. This eventually led to employment there as a Peer Educator.

Some young people took part in the Wave Project, which provides mental health support through surfing. This kind of recreational activity was invaluable for many young people in learning to be with other people again after having been in lockdown.



CASE STUDY: Ruby

Creative and arty, she was studying BTEC Art, but dropped out due to social anxiety and poor sleep. Her lack of confidence was such that she couldn't order a drink in a café.

She was referred to Petroc for Experience Works after being withdrawn from her course due to lack of attendance. At the beginning she said, *"I felt a bit demotivated, I had no idea where to start"*.

Her mentor discovered that Ruby also liked the outdoors and had a dog, so held sessions on dog walks, with another participant and a job coach. This format was less intimidating than face to face meetings and enabled Ruby to open up and become more talkative.

Ruby joined a gardening project at a supported housing scheme, planting herbs and vegetables. She was also encouraged to volunteer at a primary school art club, where she already had a friend volunteering, and where she helped to run the sessions.

As a result of her time on Experience Works Ruby said *"Attending the group walks, gardening and mentoring sessions has helped to improve my confidence. I've had to make it on time to Experience Works sessions and activities, travel to different places, and be more independent"*.

She subsequently got a job working at a holiday park.

THE PRINCE'S TRUST

The Prince's Trust referred many participants to a series of programmes with the collective title 'Get Started in...'. Additional mentoring enabled them to achieve successful outcomes. Though these were ostensibly introductions to career paths, they had a strong community element. In particular Get Started in Film, in partnership with Fotonow, commissioned by The Institute for Community Studies in London, allowed participants to explore what the 'civic journey' of a young person might look like in contemporary society.

The participants made a documentary in which they interviewed 16 – 30-year-olds in various locations around Plymouth, learning about civic engagement and also their home city. The project culminated in a screening of their film at Totnes Cinema, at which some of the participants spoke about the experience.

Another project, Get into Theatre involved participants in devising and performing drama around the subject of the local community and their identity within it. The impact on participants' confidence and ability to connect with others is clear from their responses:

“

I'm so proud of myself, I never thought I would do something like that.”

Moth

“
What I enjoyed most was getting a story about young people's identity out there. It's really important to know yourself and to know people around you. I think it made me enjoy it a lot more. I personally struggle with my own identity anyway, so having something where all of us can come together and spread a message that more people should know about, was really important .”

Tiegan

“
It's great to know that you can do something like this and find friends for life.”

Beth

During the Get Started with Sport programme young people (in partnership with Plymouth

Argyle) volunteered to collect money from the general public to go towards purchase food for the local foodbank.

DEVON COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

DCT set out to source community engagement opportunities and create links between VCSEs and the partners. They made direct contacts with a number of charitable organisations and community projects to explore what opportunities were available. These included the National Trust, Hospiscare and two tree-planting programmes, one run by the Woodland Trust and another by Plymouth City Council.

There were also links with employer engagement (Outcome 3), as the organisations who undertook inclusive employment training included charities.

It proved difficult to act as the intermediary between charities and the partners. When opportunities were identified, the charities generally needed someone straight away, but partners did not always have the resources or participants ready to take them up.

DCT responded by taking a different approach, updating the signposting section of the Explore website to include forthcoming community activities and volunteering opportunities. After consulting with the partners, this was modified to producing and circulating a community events bulletin on a regular basis. These were welcomed by the mentors at partner meetings, with some reporting that they used them to promote discussion with participants.

Discussions were also held with Groundwork South and a community facility in Plymouth, the Market Hall in Devonport, with the intention of attending an immersive experience about local heritage. Though this did not take place, it did lead to Groundwork South using Market Hall as a location for one-to-one meetings and as a destination for travel training.

3.3 OUTCOME 3

EMPLOYERS HAVE INCREASED THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NEET AND ARE BETTER EQUIPPED TO PROVIDE THEM WITH VALUABLE OPPORTUNITIES.



Young people who are not in work face stereotyping by the media, policy makers and employers, often seen as lacking ‘the right attitudes and personal qualities, and work experience’. The aim of Outcome 3 was to support employers in recognising the numerous factors which prevented young people from being in work.

From the outset, employers were included in the design of the project. Five employers were engaged in the co-design of Explore. Devon Communities Together facilitated discussions around employer expectations and the barriers that young people who are NEET may face when seeking employment. They explored their role in ensuring that workplaces are accessible and inclusive for this demographic. Employers made valuable contributions to the development of the Employment Key/Explore website.

When the project started, it continued to support employers to become more aware of the issues facing young people who are NEET through a workshop run by DCT (p.38). It also encouraged employers to provide valuable opportunities for participants, for example by offering work experiences and tasters, mock interviews, thereby getting to know the needs and strengths of individuals.

101 young people took part in employment experiences, with **16** participants having multiple experiences. Examples of employers that provided opportunities for participants include Marks

and Spencer, National Trust, local care homes, Age UK, local farm shops, cafes and the NHS.

DELIVERY PARTNERS AND MENTOR SUPPORT

Delivery partners reached employers through their own networks and local connections which included local job centres, employer/volunteer forums, Skills Launchpad and the DWP. Partners reported that local employers were becoming more aware of participants' needs throughout the project. For example, Groundwork South and PGL Training mentors worked with local employers and made them more aware of their participants needs, which led to them offering participants paid opportunities.

“ [employer] is aware of the value of supporting young people with no work experience and provides this in small steps so the young person can achieve. This started with one day, then two and hours were increasing at the young person's pace.”
GWS Mentor

“ [Ronnie's] hard work has led to him gaining work experience with a local holiday park, which in turn has increased his confidence. This interaction has also led the employer to better understand the factors affecting young people who are NEET.”
PGL Mentor

This work highlights how important the mentor's support was for both participant and employer, with mentors providing a link between both parties. Mentors have helped employers to understand the needs of individual participants better and supported participants to overcome barriers to employment.

For participants with complex mental health needs, mentoring has helped participants prepare for an employment opportunity, to build confidence and provide support alongside the employer. For example, Marks & Spencer and a Prince's Trust mentor supported a young person in Plymouth who

had some additional support needs. Working together, the young person was able to complete the full four-week programme, after potentially having to drop out on a number of occasions. This has helped the employer to understand some of the needs of young people and those that have been expelled from mainstream education. Mentors have also provided practical support like working with employers to provide uniforms or supporting with their travel to employment experiences.

EW partners have also worked together and in a multi-partnership way, with some partners like Battling On inviting The Prince's Trust with Plymouth Argyle Community Trust to speak with participants about the types of programmes available to them. Battling On also worked closely with Skills Launch Pad and DWP coaches, strengthening awareness of young people who are NEET, and creating strong pathways for employment opportunities.

CASE STUDY

The Prince's Trust and Torbay Leisure Hotels have worked in partnership for many years, with The Trust running their 'Get into Hospitality' programme for young NEETs at the group's hotels. The Prince's Trust made this available to Experience Works participants, supported by their mentors.

At two 'celebration events' for different cohorts of EW participants the HR and management team reported how engaging with the programme has benefitted the hotel. They spoke about how vital young people are for the success of the business and how working with mentors at the Prince's Trust has enabled them to recruit valuable staff members, with a previous participant now in a management role. TLH described how working with young participants has challenged common perceptions of young staff.

“ Perhaps there’s a bit of a perception that they’re going to be lazy or they’re not going to turn up and for so many of the people we have come here it’s just not what we see from them. They’re enthusiastic and buzzing with ideas.”
Sophia, HR Manager

Working with this cohort has taught existing staff how to work with a diverse group of people, and how life experiences outside of formal qualifications or work history can provide important transferrable skills, such as young people that have been informal carers.

“ They’ve been carers for their parents for many years and not been able to get a job and that I think is a hidden talent in itself.. Hospitality has taken them out of that into another caring environment which is hospitality. So transferrable skills obviously come into check there from what they’ve done before.”
Mary-Ann, TLH Manager



Feedback from sessions included:

“ I found it most helpful to know that so many young people are in need of help due to Covid and that we should look more to the person as an individual and not what’s on paper.”

“ It helped to open my eyes to... others who may have mental health problems but can have different strengths to others.”

DEVON COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

In order to promote better understanding of young people who are NEET, DCT developed an ‘inclusive employment’ training for employers in Devon, to raise awareness of young people who are NEET and to provide solutions and ideas for employers to become more inclusive when hiring staff. Training consisted of two hour workshops, held between April-June 2022, both online and face-to-face, with 12 attendees in total.

Areas covered in the session were:

- Young people who are NEET – their strengths and challenges
- The Social Model of Disability
- Young people’s perceptions of work
- Potential benefits to your business
- Different ways to recruit young people
- Access to Work scheme

DCT approached two local employers in Exeter and made them aware of Experience Works and the issues facing young people who are NEET and job-searching. These employers shared their ‘top-tips’ for young people applying for employment and volunteering opportunities, which were made into videos and uploaded to the [Experience Works YouTube channel](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/@experienceworks4864>

DCT also promoted the work of EW in their own publication, Love Devon, raising awareness of the project, the needs of young people who are NEET and how employers can support them, Devon-wide.

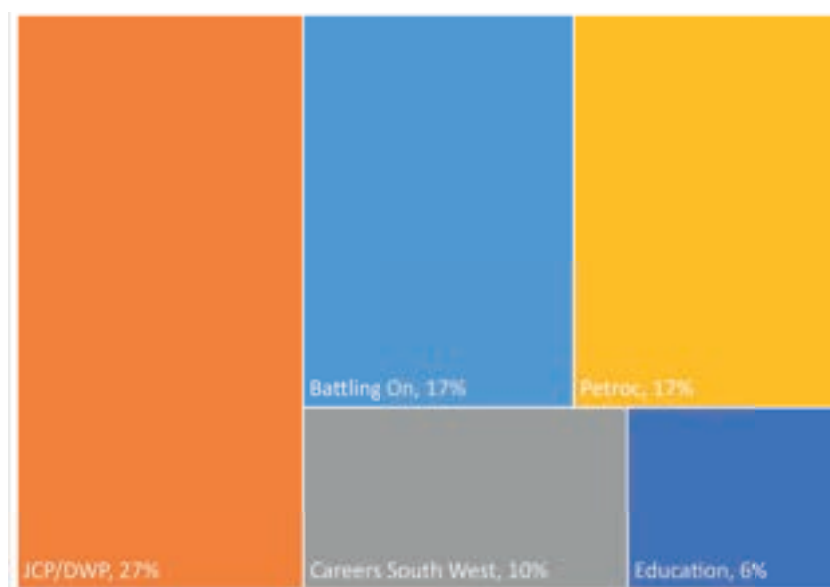
3.4 OUTCOME 4

LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICES HAVE BENEFITTED FROM IMPROVED REFERRAL PROCESSES.

Support services benefitted both from Experience Works providing referral routes both into and out from the project. The project offered a path young people who may not have been ready for work or where available provision was not able to support them. It also resulted in targeted referrals to specialist services such as mental health, legal or financial advice.

The biggest source of referrals onto the programme was from job centres (27%)³. Two partners reported a significant level of self-sourced participants: Battling On and Petroc (both 17%). Other sources included other educational establishments (8%) and Careers South West (9%). The remainder came via other agencies, self or parental referral.

SOURCES OF REFERRALS



The breadth of contacts available through the multi-partner approach was a key factor in successful recruitment, an endorsement of the partnership approach. Each partner was able to access local as well as county-wide or national services, building on existing contacts and forging new ones.

As we have shown earlier, Covid was responsible for a slow start to recruitment. This was in no small measure due to the inability of agencies to meet face to face and share information and resources.

Contacts with agencies such as JCP started gradually, seeking referrals or referring individuals to them. As restrictions eased and subsequently staff became more comfortable travelling to an office and mixing with colleagues, working relationships blossomed. In the second half of 2022 partners began not only to liaise with colleagues from other organisations, but to share space and meet potential participants together, as the following quotations show.

³: These were variously listed as job centre, JCP/Job Centre Plus and DWP. As job centres are part of the Department for Work and Pensions, it is likely that they all refer to job centres.

“ [We have] visited every job centre in the area meeting referral partners and young people. As a result, we have seen an increase in the number of referrals.’
The Prince’s Trust

“ Joining forces with other organisations has improved our referral process and Plymouth City College is testimony to this. We have almost weekly contact with them and Plymouth City Council Care Leavers Team.’
Battling On

“ We have secured a weekly slot at Skills Launchpad in Plymouth city centre where we have a drop-in session running for the day. The Prince’s Trust and Barnardo’s are often around [which] enhances the experience for the participants.’
Battling On

Partners also reported that other agencies faced challenges which led to difficulties dealing with caseloads:

“ Local support services appear to be overwhelmed with referrals and numbers of young people needing support.’
Battling On

“ Many local support services have lost funding or had theirs reduced drastically and so have been left with young people that now have no support. As a result, they’ve started sending them to work with us and continue the support they were receiving.’
Petroc Delivery

In a few cases where participants were unable to engage effectively with EW provision, partners were able to refer them on to other agencies:

“ 3 of our students have come off the Experience Works Programme and have been transferred to Focus 5 as they needed one-to-one mentoring in figuring out what they wanted to do with their lives. They originally thought that they wanted a job in IT, but realised that this was not the case when they were on the programme.’
Bluescreen



Whilst mentors could support the participants for many of their needs, sometimes specialist support was required. Because mentors could target appropriate services based on detailed knowledge and understanding of the young people, the service providers received relevant referrals, whilst the participants gained from being directed according to their needs.

“K has discovered through this process that he does not want to work in retail. Along with this K has been referred to a local theatre group supporting young people with mental health and confidence struggles.’
The Prince’s Trust

“We have continued to refer young people to the wellbeing team and help arrange CAMHS and EHCP meetings.’
Petroc Delivery

SIGNPOSTING

There were 265 recorded instances of signposting ⁴. Of these the majority – 71% – were to local services and organisations (or local branches of national organisations). Most of the remainder were to general careers or job search websites.

Unsurprisingly most signposting was work-search related or to education and training opportunities.

SIGNPOSTING TO OTHER AGENCIES

Most frequent types of signposting:

- Employment opportunities (33%)
- Education or training (20%)
- Volunteering opportunities (12%)
- Careers advice (9%)

Other signposting included:

- Physical health & wellbeing (5%)
- Mental health services (5%)
- Soft skills development
- Additional Needs Support
- Leisure and social opportunities
- Housing services
- Money advice
- Legal advice

⁴: It is thought that this is an underestimate as, in discussions with mentors, it was clear that referral and signposting to other services was such a core element of their work that they did not always regard it as requiring special note.

3.5 OUTCOME 5

ORGANISATIONS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE PARTNERSHIP HAVE ACCESS TO BEST PRACTICE AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCE WORKS.



INSIDE THE PARTNERSHIP

The structured process for sharing information and best practice between partners has been a great strength of Experience Works. Regular quarterly partner meetings for project managers enabled the management team to check progress, give project updates and schedule training, and the partners to report on progress and share successes.

Specifically the meetings checked progress against priority group targets (demographic targets) and, in the event of any variations from targets, suggest strategies to meet them.

They were also used to check that claim and reporting processes were understood and being followed correctly, and provide advice on effective and efficient ways of reporting. Given the quantity of data required, this was a vital opportunity for partners to get clarification on procedures.

“All of the Petroc sessions have been helpful in getting us to understand the process and the overall aim and outcome for the candidates going through the programme.”

Mentor

“Sessions have provided excellent support, updates and information for the Experience Works project.”

Mentor

“The partner meeting added value to our team as we were able to connect with other delivery partners. It gave us insight into what was working well and what we may need to think about moving forward.”

Mentor

The meetings were also used for more formal training delivery, including: finance; participant paperwork; and adding data to the PDRS.

“ We have attended the participant paperwork session with Petroc. This session was very useful, it guided us on how to fill out the necessary paperwork. I feel that staff have a better understanding of what is expected.”
Project Manager

Petroc also provided one-to-one training sessions when new staff partner were appointed.

DCT provided training in planning and writing case studies and the Employment Key/Explore website within the quarterly meetings.

“ The Explore workshop was particularly helpful with regards to using the tool.”
Mentor

The meeting also enabled partners to share best practice, and ask for advice. Topics covered included sources of support for young people, potential sources of referrals, the increasing prevalence of drug use, ways in which they engaged with young people.

“ AH asks partners for “Top tips” on getting people out of the house or onto transport, as she has found that since COVID people have felt less encouraged to want to leave the house or use public transport. TS recommends also contacting the parents, as she has found that the parent will bring them to meetings, eventually the participant will want to not be seen around their parents when attending the meeting and will attend without their support.”
From partner meeting minutes

One topic which arose frequently was relationships with other agencies. Some partners found it difficult to engage with Job Centre Plus at first. This was partly due to circumstances around Covid and the lack of face to face contact and partly a perception that JCP were focused on Kickstart to the exclusion of other programmes. Seeing other partners provided encouragement that improved relationships were possible and examples of how that might be achieved. In some cases partners teamed up to work together with their local JCP.

In some cases partners were also able to offer places on training or other activities to participants registered with other partners.

In addition to the Partner Meetings, Petroc management hosted Local Partner Meetings for mentors. These provided a less formal opportunity to share successes and challenges and were not minuted, to encourage partners to share freely.

At one local partner meeting two participants, from Battling On and The Prince’s Trust, gave presentations about their time on the programme. One of the participants, C, was new to the area and had found it hard to make friends. The two, who had not previously met, exchanged contact details, planning to keep in touch. They left the meeting to go and have lunch together.

At another there was a presentation by Dave Monks of the Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) to advise mentors about the scale and nature of risk that participants might face, how to identify if a participant might be a victim, how to provide support and signposting routes.

OUTSIDE THE PARTNERSHIP

The Petroc EW Project Manager held regular meetings with three Building Better Opportunities project managers: Empowering Enterprise, Focus5 and Positive People, to share best practice.

As part of its impact reporting Devon Communities Together produced four bi-annual reports detailing progress and findings from the project. These were shared within the partnership, to all managers and mentors, providing them with an overview of project activity. They were also circulated to external stakeholders, including funders and referring organisations.

The first report, [Introducing Experience Works](#) dealt with the period October 2020 to March 2021, covering the project set-up and first three months of the delivery period. The project reported that, 'work was limited in the first three months of 2021, as partners attempted to engage young people against the backdrop of a third national lockdown.'

This report set the framework for future evaluation, introducing the structure and aims of the project, outlining the Theory of Change model used and the processes and tools which would be used. It also set out the format for reporting quantitative results against the targets.

Although all results for participants were zero, the report was able to show progress made on Outcome 5, listing meetings and training undertaken by partners. It was also able to report on the initial progress by DCT in engaging employers under Outcome 3. It also described the work undertaken to recruit young people onto the programme and the initial steps taken by those who had begun enrolment.

The subsequent three biannual reports each reported on the previous six month's progress against targets and placed them in the context of overall progress. They detailed activities under each of the project outcomes and included participant case studies and mentor's observations. Findings were noted, and trends began to be identified. For example in the second report, covering April – September 2021, the high percentage of people with disabilities entering the project was becoming apparent.

Building Better Opportunities was a National Lottery Community Fund and European Social Fund project across England which supported programmes in 38 locations. Empowering Enterprise supported 18–24 year old NEETS, Focus5 worked with 15–18 year olds and Positive People the 25+ age group.



As well as written case studies, a series of video case studies have been made available on a public YouTube channel. These include participants talking about how Experience Works has benefitted them and employers describing their involvement in the project. The cases studies can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/@experienceworks4864>

The YouTube channel also has videos of ‘TopTips’ for young people about gaining employment.

Devon Communities Together delivered a series of Inclusive Employment workshops to employers, covering factors that lead to young people becoming NEET, the social model of disability and ways in which employers can support young people.



Finally, the partners worked with many external agencies and employers, sharing best practice through discussion and in their working methods. Some examples include:

The Petroc delivery team met with forums made up of local businesses and charities, that work with similar young people, to share ideas and tactics.

- Petroc delivery also met the National Trust’s engagement team, resulting in a volunteering project.
- The Petroc Project Manager ran a presentation with all CSW mentors to explain the objectives and how the project could be accessed
- The Petroc unemployment projects team issued a newsletter to partners and stakeholders, asking that they share it with their own networks.
- Bluescreen and Groundwork South both gave presentations to Careers South West and DWP work coaches.
- The Prince’s Trust showcased their work to the local MP.
- Battling On met with a local GP to discuss mental health and Work Capability Assessments.
- Skills Launchpad to discuss ways of working together.
- Battling On and The Prince’s Trust held drop-in sessions at Skill Launchpad, also attended by Barnardo’s.
- Petroc hosted an Experience Works website. Partner websites included Experience Works, with links to the Petroc site.

“Through attending local community & business meetings, we’ve been able to explain the work we’re doing in Experience Works and helping break down some of the stigma surrounding NEETs.’ Petroc

4. CROSS CUTTING THEMES

The contract included two 'cross-cutting themes' that were to be 'fully integrated into the delivery of Experience Works': Sustainable Development and Gender Equality & Equal Opportunities. These were developed in accordance with the requirements of the Cross-Cutting Themes Guidance for European Social Fund (August 2018). The partners were required to 'contribute best practice, and resolve to be open, communicating feedback, good news and ideas on a partnership-wide level.

The commitment and approach to promoting equality and sustainable development was expressed in the Sustainable Development and Gender Equality & Equal Opportunities Policy & Action Plan documents created by the Petroc Projects team.

The Petroc Project Lead and Project Manager were nominated as Champion for both themes, responsible for reviewing action plans and reporting to the partnership. It had been planned to create a subgroup to oversee the action plans, however as the group was small it was decided that the whole partnership would be involved.

At the start of the project internal training was provided and partners informed about the requirements of the action plans. Both themes formed part of quarterly reporting and were standing items on partner meetings.

4.1 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

AWARENESS

Partners targeted organisations working with disadvantaged groups to publicise Experience Works among their clients. These groups included drug and alcohol support organisations, Care Leavers, Stem Women, PLUSS, Wings Southwest and Space Youth Centre, Plymouth Foyer and refugee support groups. When working with work agencies such as JCP and Skills Launchpad, partners prioritised support for disadvantaged groups.

“

We have approached organisations such as Skills Launchpad to work with them to support young people who are care experienced, have an EHCP, are Young Carers, have a disability or are ex offenders.”

Groundwork South

“

Contact made with drug and alcohol support organisations and meeting planned with local mental health support group to look at ways to ease access and support users.”

City College Plymouth

“

We are targeting tailored social media adverts to audiences of young women on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to help drive enquiries and get them signing up to programmes.”

The Prince's Trust

Experience Works has exceeded targets in two areas: people with disabilities and women. The number of participants reporting a disability was 63%, compared with a national average of 21% of the working-age population. Women made up 44% of completers, compared with a target of 39%. Ethnic minority participants made up 5%, slightly ahead of the Devon population of 3.6%.

SUPPORT

Once engaged with the programme, partners offered a wide range of support to young people, ranging from general provision and opportunities through to bespoke interventions to address specific barriers. The strength of the mentoring system was that it enabled an individual response according to participants' needs.

In several cases mentors met participants at first in their own home or an agreed location when physical barriers or anxiety prevented travel. Where travel anxiety was a factor a taxi was provided and in one instance the mentor travelled with the participant to help them become independent using public transport.

Others adapted programmes and workspaces to meet the needs of their young people and increase accessibility.

“All of our students have learning disabilities at the moment, so we are changing activities and the learning environment to adapt to their needs.”
BluescreenIT

“We have been promoting areas of practical training that might attract more female participants – eg hairdressing – as we currently only have male participants on programme.”
PGL

Other approaches included mindfulness training, facilitating discussions around identity and a theatre programme exploring gender, sexuality and disability. Signposting and advocacy played a part in supporting those with protected characteristics.

“Group sessions have taken place to support participants with learning disabilities to access various organisations.”
Battling On

Partners also provided equal opportunities training to participants to promote equal opportunities.

“All participants will be provided with a full induction that includes Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding and Prevent.”
South Devon College

“We deliver a session exclusively on E&D highlighting the key learning points regarding the principles of equality, legislation and how promoting equality should remove discrimination in all areas covered.”
PGL

TRAINING

During Experience Works, The Prince's Trust was working towards Disability Confident accreditation for its staff and launched an Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy, whilst Devon Communities Together held an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training day for all staff. BluescreenIT attended a mental health course with Pete's Dragon. City College Plymouth made contact with a local LGBTQ+ group to ensure that their programmes were accessible to all clients. The Prince's Trust undertook training on the needs of a trans young person from the Devon-based Proud2Be.

“ We have a participant, that makes different textile products, and has contacted a local who cares for a young person with down syndrome. They needed bibs created for them, as official ones cost too much.”
Petroc

4.2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

All the partners had existing sustainability goals and actions when they entered the programme. All worked to develop these in relation to their Experience Works activities, settling their own targets.

Internally there were three main aims: reduction of printing and paper use, increased recycling and reduction in travel. All partners reported cutting printing, keeping it to the minimum required by ESF evidentiary requirements. Several also reduced colour print use, saving on ink. The Prince's Trust was able to introduce Docusign, enabling electronic rather than 'wet' signatures to be used, and were able to quantify this, producing quarterly figures.

Battling On, City College Plymouth and South Devon College had food waste composting in place and encouraged its use among staff and participants. Several organisations worked towards a 'zero to landfill' goal, with PGL changing its waste management contractor to improve this. DCT introduced differentiated waste management.

As a construction industry trainer, PGL worked to make specific improvements, including replacing workshop lighting with energy-efficient bulbs and reusing and recycling construction materials in their training. They also ensured that materials such as copper were sent to scrap merchants for recycling and that waste wood was made available as fuel.

Several partners reported reductions in car travel by: meeting online; planning meetings in such a way as to minimise travel, by grouping them in one place or holding them nearby; encouraging staff and participants to cycle or use public transport. DCT ran an audit of vehicle mileage and calculated CO2 savings compared with previous years.

Education and action with the participants was also an important element of sustainability for all partners. PGL held specific training on green building, energy efficiency, sustainable transport and recycling. Battling On encouraged use of the scrap store with whom they shared a site, whilst City College Plymouth ran monthly trips to the Salvation Army to make donations.

Petroc were very active in outdoor activity including gardening and volunteering with the National Trust. Groundwork partnered with the National Citizenship programme to engage in green space work.

All the partners were committed to sustainability before joining Experience Works and already

had some policies and practices in place to promote this. The focus on sustainability as part of the project encouraged them to find new ways to be sustainable or improve in areas they were already pursuing. However, it was clear that making improvements in this area can be challenging and that once low cost solutions have been implemented, it requires a significant extra commitment to make further change.

4.3 PUBLICITY

The European Commission set out publicity guidelines for ESF funded projects which all partners were required to follow. Petroc produced a guidance document to complement the ERDF and ESF Branding and Publicity Requirements document published by HM Government. As well as detailing the specific requirements and types of marketing, this explained the value of publicity: celebrating the work of the partnership and raising the profile of Experience Works. The guidance covered print, electronic and media and public relations.

Petroc monitored partners' publicity materials to ensure appropriate branding was followed. Training was provided to all partners with follow-up support to ensure that guidelines were followed correctly. Partners were required to display an Experience Works poster in a prominent place on their premises, include the ESF logo and funder credit on email signatures and websites. Petroc Management also designed and produced a banner available for partners to use at events.

Partners then used the marketing tools they felt most appropriate to promote the project including PowerPoint presentations, social media, virtual and printed posters and flyers. These were mainly used as part of online or face-to-face presentations with potential referrers such as JCP and CSW. In some cases the project was presented at larger forums such as a virtual careers fair and Digital Futures Summit. DCT gave presentations at Chamber of Commerce meetings.

The three colleges and PGL held open days at which Experience Works was promoted.



5. LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Social and recreational skills play a significant part in people's capacity for work.

The experience of Covid demonstrated the importance of so called 'soft' skills in preparing young people for the world of work. Many of those on Experience Works missed out on the chance to explore the world with their peers at a formative time in their lives. Everyday actions like going shopping, attending the cinema, taking part in sports and games or catching a bus – even simply being in a public space – build the social skills and attitudes which enable us to interact with others. It was clear from many of those on the programme that they had not acquired these skills and as result were either unable to engage due to anxiety or did so in inappropriate ways. The nature of barriers faced by the young people was a challenge for mentors and trainers. Communication was sometimes an issue. As one mentor put it: 'when they first came, it just really was eye opening. They really couldn't speak to people right. And no eye contact – looking down. If they did [speak] it was highly inappropriate things that came out.'

These skills will continue to need to be addressed as the next cohorts of school leavers move into adulthood. If businesses are to be encouraged to take on young people, especially those who are neurodiverse, have disabilities or face anxiety, support needs to be provided in the form of inclusive employment practices and mentors available to support the relationship between the young person and employers.



As the partnership became more collaborative, it became more successful.

Covid and its aftermath restricted collaboration by keeping people physically apart and changing the ways in which we worked and interacted. This made cooperation between partners more difficult at the start of the project.

The various partners brought a great diversity of skills and experience – collectively a huge resource. Larger partners brought significant resources, such as work and LGBTQ+ advisers. Smaller, agile organisations were more able to respond flexibly with the demands created by Covid.

Equally, each had areas where it was less strong and perhaps some blind spots. Industry-specific partners were less well equipped to deal with participants who had multiple needs. They responded by seeking training and support – but had to build those mechanisms. The mindset of some educational establishments tended to centre on classroom teaching, not necessarily appropriate for a young person who had struggled in school. Some of the socially issue-based organisations had few contacts in industry and therefore a longer road to finding work placements.

As Covid-related barriers fell and we all became more confident about meeting in person, and as the imperative to reach for completion targets grew, new ways were found to share the load. The Prince's Trust was able to offer places on its courses for other partners' participants. Partners worked together with the job centres to host support sessions, offering advice and interview experience.

As a result the tone of partners' reports became more positive. Young people had more chance to be placed with the most appropriate mentor. Recruitment onto the programme increased.

The project was designed to promote collaboration between partners, with meetings encouraging the sharing of ideas and routes to success.



Success comes in many forms and those who do not count as a 'result' should be recognised and celebrated.

The limited and inflexible criteria for 'success' meant that many young people who benefited from Experience Works were not recognised as reported progressions. Importantly, as we have seen, participants who withdrew – and even some who did not go 'live' – benefitted from mentor input and in some cases moved into employment, education or training.

The project was designed to include people – those in education but at risk of becoming NEET – who by definition could not meet the success criteria. We have aimed to celebrate their achievements, and those of the mentors who supported them, in this report.



In retrospect, increasing understanding of issues facing NEETS among employers, to any significant degree, was an ambitious target.

The labour market is large and diverse, so at the scale of Experience Works it was only possible to engage with a small proportion of employers. It became clear also, that employers had an expectation that new hires would be ready to work and that, beyond specific training for the job, they would not have to provide other support. According to one mentor the perception among business was that 'the amount of time and resources and staffing [to train and mentor young people] was waste, The amount of effort didn't produce enough results'.

This is changing. Covid and Brexit altered the playing field: older employees reviewed their lives and many made the decision to leave employment or reduce their hours. Covid made many people more anxious. The once ready supply of labour for lower-paid jobs from Europe dried up. Employers found themselves struggling to find workers. Some realised that they would need to recruit from a larger pool and do more to support the needs of new hires, but did not always have the staff in place to do so. However this was a gradual process, which is still ongoing. DCT developed a well-received training package to support employers. It is recommended that future projects consider building on the progress that Experience Works started.

The Petroc Project Team followed up with those who withdrew to find out why they did not complete, however some could not be contacted.



Administrative and evaluation tasks should be proportional to the organisations involved.

Whilst accountability is vital, the burden of paperwork was a factor in the early departure of at least one partner.

The smaller organisations working on the project had a relatively large administrative burden to deal with relative to their staff size. Petroc management was very supportive, providing training, setting up structures and reminders, and assisting with resolving any issues.

Mentors were required to capture a large amount of data, ranging from straightforwardly numerical – eg the number who went live – to the more complex, subjective or hard to capture/record – eg ‘how easy was it to find out about Experience Works’. Mentors were also required to capture one case study per quarter.

In reality mentors did not have the capacity to ask and record all of these questions rigorously when dealing with participants who did not have the correct paperwork or were dealing with challenging personal circumstances.

The number of KPIs should be considered carefully and a strategy put in place to gather data samples for some Outcome measures, rather than collecting all data from all participants.

The mentors and partner managers should be commended for working hard to capture as much data as possible.



Performance indicators should be as simple as possible to measure the impact

Following the principle of Occam’s Razor, which states that solutions to problems should be sought using the smallest number of elements, performance indicators should be kept as simple as possible.

Failure to do so creates two potential problems: firstly, the administrative burden of collecting and analysing a lot of data points; secondly that having many data sets can have a smoothing effect on the outcomes.

In addition to the demographic data and participants’ characteristics required by ESF, Devon Communities Together introduced a significant number of additional performance indicators, some of which were hard to capture or subjective.

A case in point here is the 16 elements of data contained in the Progress Star (see p.29). These were combined in several ways to report on four different measures of progress: ‘Increased employability skills’, ‘basic life skills’, ‘community engagement’ and ‘health & wellbeing’.

For example, Employability Skills were measured by combining ten scores: Helping Others, Engaging with new people, Sharing my ideas, Listening to others, Physical wellbeing, Reliability, Understanding consequences, Desire for EET, Readiness for EET, Ready to apply.

Several issues arise.

- It may be difficult for participants to separate out some of the categories, for example desire for and readiness for EET.
- Some of the categories may cancel each other out. What of a participant who really wants to work but has physical health issues? Or who feels they have gained the skills (readiness) but who does not want to work.
- There was overlap between all four measures of progress: there were six elements in common to both the Employability and Basic Life Skills. This made the results for these two measures very similar.

All of this leads to a smoothing of the results, which means that they do not add to our understanding.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Partner focus

Each of the partners is profiled with information about their unique approach to the project, geographical reach, the participants they engaged and referral paths.

BATTLING ON *Together We Can Succeed*

Established in 2012, Battling On is a multi-award winning

Community Interest Company predominantly staffed by ex-forces members. It provides care and support for veterans and also trains them to become mentors and instructors, employing them to deliver educational programmes to some of the West Country's most vulnerable young people. They deliver many programmes on their 124-acre farm and in the community including working with Petroc on Building Better Opportunities. These programmes develop confidence and emotional resilience including the development of social skills, careers advice, and the facilitation of industry recognized qualifications.

Battling On made early progress in getting new participants to complete the registration paperwork, despite staff recruitment being affected by Covid: it was July 2021 before a full time member of staff started on the project. An additional part-time mentor was recruited in the third quarter of 2021. They received referrals from a wide range of sources including: 'own engagement' (61%) – young people with whom they had direct engagement; CSW (14%) and Care Leavers (8%).

A feature of Battling On's work was creating social contacts for young people who had been isolated and were struggling to reconnect. These sessions, which included beach and water safety and dry-slope skiing, were instrumental in helping to develop 'soft' skills and increase their confidence in group situations.

Several of Battling On's participants faced

financial, housing, health or homelessness issues which affected their confidence and capacity to access work or training. Battling On mentors were able to act as mediators or advocates for the young person, meeting with parents, educators, employers and other agencies.

'A 15 year old we are supporting hasn't accessed school for over a year. A meeting with his social worker, Head of year, the participant and parent has been held. The participant said that he's receptive to accessing education again, maybe even to re-doing Year 10 as he's missed so much. He is only feeling like this because of the help he has received from the project.' Mentor

Battling On worked with a high proportion of participants with disabilities, with 73% reporting mental health issues. This sometimes led to participants remaining on the project for long periods, the average time from start to leaving date being over 12 months.

Battling On built successful working relationships with Plymouth Foyer, Plymouth City Council, The Zone, Barnardo's, Plymouth Scrap Store and Skills Launchpad.

Delivery Area: Plymouth



BluescreenIT (now trading as BIT Training) is a specialist IT & Cyber Security training provider for UK and

international businesses.

As a specialist trainer Bluescreen prioritised IT skills and qualifications alongside more general 'soft skills' support. This was delivered in a structured format, with timetabled sessions presented for small groups and one-to-one sessions to accommodate the different skills, abilities and learning paths of individuals.

BIT worked closely with schools: three of the young people were referred by ACE schools, having been excluded from mainstream education. The other main source of referrals

was Careers South West (4). A high proportion of their participants had self-declared learning difficulties (80%). Whilst some already had well-developed IT skills, around half needed support with life skills and went to Focus 5 for this whilst continuing their employment-based training with Bluescreen.

In order to support one participant, for whom there were considerable safeguarding concerns, two of Bluescreen's staff attended training run by Pete's Dragons, a charity which provides support after suicide loss. This helped the mentor to 'know what to say and what questions to ask when H was feeling really low'. It also came into its own when they were able to give the participant through-the-night support via text on one occasion.

As a result of Covid, BIT had reduced its staff team and moved to smaller offices, reducing its teaching resources and capacity. Where it had once had a large, flexible teaching space, sessions were now held in Bluescreen's open-plan office alongside its commercial staff, and with reduced access to equipment. This, in the mentor's view, may have affected the outcomes for the participants who did not complete: 'things might have changed if it was practical. We might have got them through the course'.

Bluescreen set up a schools programme for which they sought funding from external sources. This would have match funded their Experience Works work. Unfortunately they were unable to secure the funding and they stopped delivering the project at the end of quarter 1, 2022.

Delivery Area: - Plymouth



City College Plymouth is a higher and further education college in South West England offering a range of technical, professional and vocational qualifications, apprenticeships, Access to Higher Education and Foundation Degree courses.

The College made presentations to Jobcentre Plus, Careers South West, Plymouth Zone and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services to invite referrals to Experience Works. They also met with employers in the motor, retail and care sectors to find possible placements. They

held interviews with prospective participants and three young people connected with the programme, but all stopped engaging before becoming 'live'.

Despite considerable previous experience of supporting young people into work and good relations with other services, CCP experienced considerable challenges in bringing young people on board, beyond those faced by all the partners in reaching potential participants. Firstly, they had staff recruitment issues due to Covid restrictions and an internal freeze on recruitment, delaying their start. Secondly, other programmes competed for the same pool of young people, particularly Launchpad, another ESF funded project, and Kickstart. In the view of CCP's project manager Plymouth City Council and Job Centre Plus prioritised those programmes over Experience Works. It was also suggested that the existence of other Experience Works providers in Plymouth further exacerbated this situation by creating competition.

CCP found that those referrals that came in were less able to engage, at least in part due to the effects of the pandemic.

They stopped delivery at the end of quarter 2, 2022.



Groundwork South is part of a federation of Groundwork charities working nationally and locally to transform lives in the UK's most disadvantaged communi-

ties. Their aim is to help people gain confidence and skills, get into training and work, protect and improve green spaces, lead more active lives and overcome significant challenges such as poverty, isolation, low skills and poor health.

Groundwork South effectively started on Experience Works in November 2021 due to earlier issues in recruiting staff. Further staff changes resulted in Groundwork South having three different mentors and two different managers over the life of the project. They had a contract to work with those at risk of NEET. As successful outcomes required participants to be unemployed or economically inactive on entering the project, they were not working to specific progression targets. Of 16 'at risk' participants, 14 completed into education or

training and two into employment.

Prior to the first mentor joining they were able to establish relationships with three local schools, University Technical College (UTC), All Saints Academy and Millbay Academy. The bulk of participants (57%) were referred by schools and delivery took place in the schools. Uniquely, two referrals came from parents, and they also received some from CSW and Skills Launchpad.

Initial recruitment began well, with five participants starting. Communications with schools have at times presented a challenge, with schools being slow to respond. This and the fact that delivery in schools is not possible during holiday periods affected the numbers joining the programme. The final mentor on the programme took the decision to recruit more widely, attracting participants from CSW, DWP and Skills Launchpad.

Delivery Area: – Plymouth and South Hams

ODILS offers English Language classes to people who are refugees, seeking asylum or part of ethnic minority groups. They provide skills development so that people can find employment and integrate successfully.

Many of their client group were not yet eligible to work in the UK, so were also ineligible for EW. Of those that were eligible, a number were at risk of becoming NEET, rather than already NEET. ODILS were also working on the Building Better Opportunities project as a Petroc partner and opted to continue with this provision rather than Experience Works when the former was granted an extension

ODILS raised the issue of how to correctly evidence the at risk-at-risk status in partner meetings which led to clarification being sought from ESF. (see Learnings and Recommendations)

ODILS remained a 'sleeping partner' for a period, before withdrawing at the end of 2021.

Petroc College of Further and Higher Education is made up of two campuses situated in

PETROC Mid and North Devon and offers a wide range of courses for students of all ages and abilities including A-Levels, vocational courses, T-Levels, degrees, apprenticeships and industry short courses. Petroc Delivery is based in the Progressive Studies Department, separate from the Project Management Department leading Experience Works.

Around two thirds of Petroc's participants are referred via the college, with a further 19% from Careers South West. Of the referrals through Petroc, only five were classed as being at risk of NEET. Others had withdrawn from training and were being supported to find other training or work opportunities, or in some cases addressing confidence issues.

'For some of them, just getting out of the home and meeting with us is an achievement for them, so with these participants, we're more interested in the social/ emotional development so arrange to meet for coffees and go on walks etc.' Petroc Mentor

Petroc has been effective in securing partnerships with a number of organisations to provide volunteering and work experience opportunities. These include Medard House, Orchard Vale Forest School, LiveWest Housing Association, The National Trust and The Wave Foundation.

Despite a number of staff changes and absence, resulting in disruption to bringing young people on board, Petroc maintained a steady recruitment rate throughout the project.

Delivery Area: – North Devon, Mid Devon and Torridge

PGL Training is a professional training company based in Exeter which offers courses for apprentices and adult learners in construction, hairdressing and business development.



Recruitment of participants was slow at the start of the project, despite a broad-based marketing campaign and developing relationships with referral agencies. The main sources of recruitment were PGL's website, social media and open days, and referrals from

Careers South West.

PGL had well-developed relationships with the construction industry and so were able to source work placements and apprenticeships:

‘D has gained an Apprenticeship with Taylor Wimpey and is working on site, together with attending PGL Training one day per week as part of the apprenticeship training. The original work experience and skills development at PGL allowed the learner to gain new skills which supported the participant in successfully progressing to the apprenticeship.’

Early in the programme PGL identified that participants found it hard to sustain concentration for long and adapted their training, holding shorter sessions. This applied to induction sessions, to complete participants’ paperwork, as well as both work-based and employability training.

After a period of unavoidable staff absence and personnel change, PGL Training stopped delivery at the end of Quarter 2, 2022.

Delivery Area: - Exeter and East Devon

South Devon College is a further education college with 9 different campuses within Torbay and the surrounding area. The college is part of The University of Plymouth Colleges network.

The college was also running other employability programmes aimed at 16 – 18 year olds, so decided to focus their Experience Works efforts at the 19 – 24 age group. They received referrals from Devon County Council’s Step Forward programme and recruited one participant who completed the programme and exited into employment.

‘We are pleased to report that we have supported one participant into her first job. The young person was very nervous when attending the programme but gained a lot of confidence and wraparound support from their mentor to help them realise their potential.’
South Devon College mentor

They planned to liaise with Job Centre Plus for referrals. However covid rules and uncertainties meant that they were unable to meet JCP staff face-to-face. Furthermore, they felt that JCP

was prioritising the Kickstart apprenticeship programme, so referring fewer young people to other projects. The College offered classroom-based support and there is anecdotal evidence that potential participants who had struggled in educational settings were put off by this.

As a result of the above, after an initial sign-up to the programme, who completed into employment very quickly, SDC found it difficult to recruit to Experience Works. They made the decision to stop delivery on the programme in Q3 2021 rather than seek alternative ways to meet targets.

The Prince’s Trust, founded in 1976 by His Majesty The King when he was HRH The Prince of Wales, is a national charity which helps young people who have faced disadvantage and adversity to build a better future for themselves,



through employment, education and enterprise.

The Prince’s Trust has an existing suite of taster sessions and short training courses to help young people into work, which mentors supported participants to access and complete. They included:

- Get Into Sport/Theatre/Retail/Hospitality, which gave participants work experience and training in various sectors. These were run in partnership with a network of major employers, including Marks and Spencer, TLH Hotels, Plymouth Theatre Royal and Plymouth Argyle Football Club
- Future Steps, a short intervention run by mentors for young people unsure what to do next and who are not yet ready for the ‘Get into’ programme.
- Get Hired, in partnership with DWP, offering preparation for and practice interviews, plus employers attending to offer real interviews.

These were made available to their own and other partner’s participants, with mentors supporting the young people to access and complete the courses.

Recognising that many young people they were working with were having mental health struggles the Trust ran Get Started with Mindfulness courses, comprising an initial week-long programme with follow-up mentoring and support and covering, amongst other things, growth mindset, meditation, yoga and other strategies for managing stress.

Delivery Area: – Plymouth and Torbay

Appendix 2: External organisations and projects engaged by Experience Works and its partners

Organisation	Description
ACE Schools	ACE Schools provide education to young people aged from 4-16 who are not currently accessing mainstream or special school provision.
Age UK	National charity supporting older people
All Saints Academy	Secondary school in Plymouth
Barnardo's	National children's charity
Bideford Youth Centre	Youth centre run by Space Youth Services
Building Better Opportunities	An umbrella programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, with matched funding from the European Social Fund, for projects across England that tackled poverty and promoted social inclusion. The funding was delivered in 38 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas according to local priorities, which were set by the LEPs themselves
Cardboard Citizens	A national charity which uses theatre to support homeless people
Connecting You	A pilot project funded by the Department for Transport and managed by Devon County Council which addresses loneliness with transport
Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce	Business network
Care Leavers	A support service for care leavers run by Devon County Council
Focus 5	Focus5 was a mentoring programme providing one-to-one support to young people across Devon, Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset. Funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund, it ran under auspices of CSW in Devon
Forest School Barnstaple	Forest Schools are nature-based communities where trained practitioners nurture learner-led exploration and discovery
Fotonow CIC	A diverse team of filmmakers, photographers, media practitioners and educators specialising in socially motivated creative projects in the South West
Hospiscare	A hospice charity providing specialist care to patients and their families living with life-limiting illnesses across Exeter, Mid and East Devon
Institute for Community Studies	A research Institute, part of The Young Foundation.

Organisation	Description
Livewest	A housing association with homes across the south west
Market Hall	A space for immersive technology and learning managed by the Real Ideas Organisation
Marks and Spencer	Major UK retailer
Medard House	A retirement home in Barnstaple
Millbay Academy	Secondary school in Plymouth
NHS	National Health Service
Pete's Dragon	A charity for people affected by suicide
PLUSS	PLUSS CIC provides services to jobseekers
Plymouth Argyle Football Club	Professional football club with community outreach department
Plymouth City Council	Unitary local authority
Plymouth Foyer	A charity supporting people facing homelessness
Plymouth Scrap Store	A voluntary organisation for recycling materials to the community
Plymouth Zone	Provides a free and confidential information and support for all young people aged 13-25
Positive People	The Positive People programme was funded by the European Social Fund and the Big Lottery Community Fund with the aim of helping individuals over 25 who are out of work to build their confidence and develop their skills. It ran from 2017 to March 2023
Proud 2Be	A grassroots queer-led social enterprise that exists to support and enable LGBTQIA+ people in Devon
Saddles and Paddles	Watersports hire company
Space Youth Services	National Youth Service provided with clubs in Devon
Stem Women	Organisation promoting careers for women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects
Step Forward	A Devon County Council programme supporting care leavers to think about working towards goals and a future career
The Salvation Army	A worldwide Christian church and registered charity, fighting against social inequality
Theatre Royal Plymouth	Theatre which puts on professional, youth and community performances and workshops.
Torbridge High	Secondary school in Plymouth
UTC Plymouth	Secondary school in Plymouth
Wave Project	A charity which supports young people's mental health through surfing.
Wings South West	A charity which works with young people in Bideford and Torridge.

Appendix 3: Abbreviations used in this report

ABBREVIATION	MEANING
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CSW	Careers South West
DCT	Devon Communities Together
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
IMLT	Illegal Money Lending Team
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer +
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
PCC	Plymouth City Council
PDP	Personal Development Plan
PDRS	Participant Database Recording System
PLUSS	PLUSS CIC provides services to jobseekers
TLH	Torquay Leisure Hotels
TRP	Theatre Royal Plymouth
VCSE	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise

EXPERIENCE WORKS FINAL REPORT
OCTOBER 2023

