

Experience Works Biannual Impact Report

1. INTRODUCING EXPERIENCE WORKS
OCTOBER 2020 – MARCH 2021



EXPERIENCE
WORKS



PETROC™



This report was produced by Devon Communities Together, who are the evaluation and impact measurement partner for Experience Works. Visit www.devoncommunities.org.uk for further information.

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Experience Works is part-funded by the European Social Fund through the Department for Work and Pensions, and is managed by Petroc.



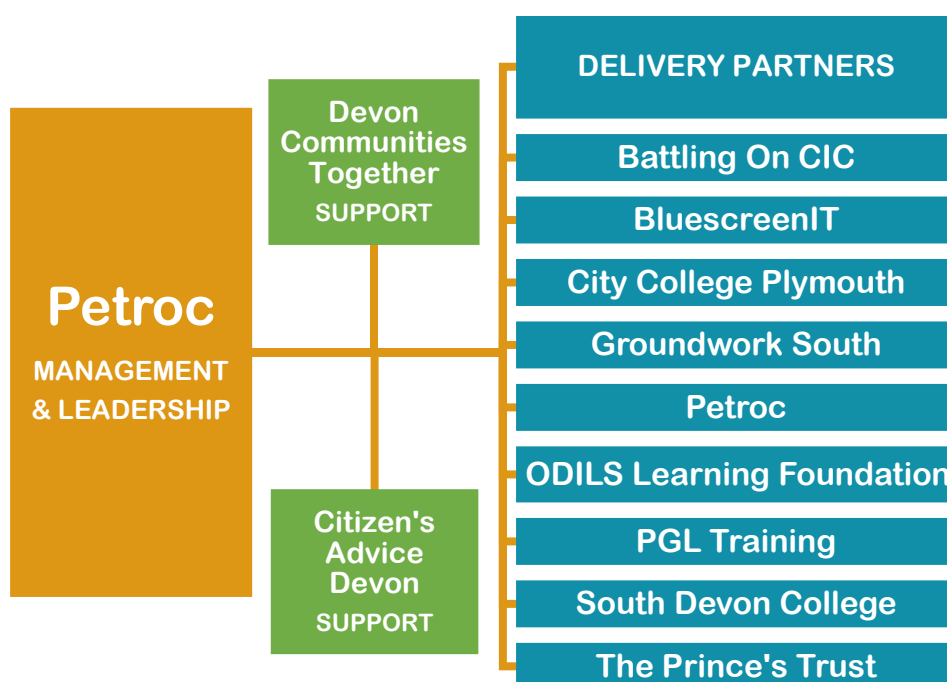
Introducing: Experience Works

Experience Works is a project that seeks to support 15–24-year-olds in Devon who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), or at risk of becoming so, from January 2021 to May 2023. This partnership project is **managed by Petroc**, who have been developing the strategy for Experience Works since 2018, when the original call for applications was published. In January 2021, they reflected:

In 2018 when the original call for applications was published, the intention was to support young people to advance and avoid NEET status, or to re-engage after becoming NEET, particularly those with a recognised barrier to learning or employment.

In Autumn 2020, as the contract finally gets underway, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic further highlights the need for support for young people, who are expected to be among the hardest hit by the economic downturn. There is now even clearer demand for provision that not only helps young people develop skills and experience to improve their chances in an increasingly competitive job market but also gives them the personal support they need to tackle other problems they may face like housing or mental health difficulties.

As Experience Works has commenced, Petroc have continued to manage the project's **strategy, budget and administration**, and are responsible for **leading the partnership and ensuring that the intended targets, results and outcomes are achieved**. Petroc have also committed to delivering Experience Works, with the **eight other delivery partners** who have come on board. Along with Devon Communities Together and Citizen's Advice Devon who participate in the partnership as **support partners**, the partnership is as follows:



In the project's first Operational Guide, Petroc present a summary of the **intended activity of the partnership** and, by extension, the **anticipated archetype of a 'participant's journey'** on the project.

The young person is introduced to a mentor, who will be their key support whilst on Experience Works, and they will also go on to join group sessions run by others. Using high quality Information, Advice and Guidance they will help the participant to pinpoint their talents, ambitions and barriers (TAB) and then identify any gaps in skills or experience that can be tackled through a personal development plan (PDP). Using a toolkit called the Employment Key (that we will develop with the input of employers, young people and mentors), the participant will focus on building a portfolio that shows an employer or training organisation that they are ready to work and learn. Practically speaking, this will be in a number of ways:

- **Regular one to ones with their mentor** who will help them to build their confidence and understand the progress they are making and work towards the goal of employment, education or training. They will also help them to tackle any areas of their personal life where they need help and signpost on to specialist support where appropriate e.g. housing, NHS services.
- **Workplace learning** - this could be short placements, mock interviews, virtual work experience, the opportunity to connect with employers to understand their workplace, business or industry.
- **Volunteering and social action** - to build deeper links with the community around them and to gain and demonstrate skills and attributes like timekeeping, teamwork, problem solving; resilience; stamina; self-worth.
- Opportunities for **short tasters and training** on a range of topics for example digital skills, manual handling; food hygiene; first aid; customer service.
- **Employability sessions using the Employment Key Toolkit** that focus on developing demonstrating transferable skills, job search, interview techniques and pull together a tangible pack of evidence including a CV and references.
- **The option of in work support** to help the young person transition into work or training when they progress.

Support is flexible, with mentors and participants creating a package of activities that meet their needs. The time commitment each week could be anywhere between 2 and 16 hours a week, depending on the type of sessions booked. It is ensured that the time the young person spends on the project doesn't interfere with their ability to claim relevant job seeking benefits.

Theory of Change & Impact Updates

As the evaluation partner for Experience Works, Devon Communities Together will support the partnership by:

- measuring the impact that is being achieved by the partnership,
- highlighting the **successes of this work in order that they might be** shared as best practice
- highlighting **key areas for further development and growth**, as the project unfolds over the coming three years.

This report is the first of **six biannual impact updates** and seeks to introduce the framework through which Experience Works will be evaluated going forward.

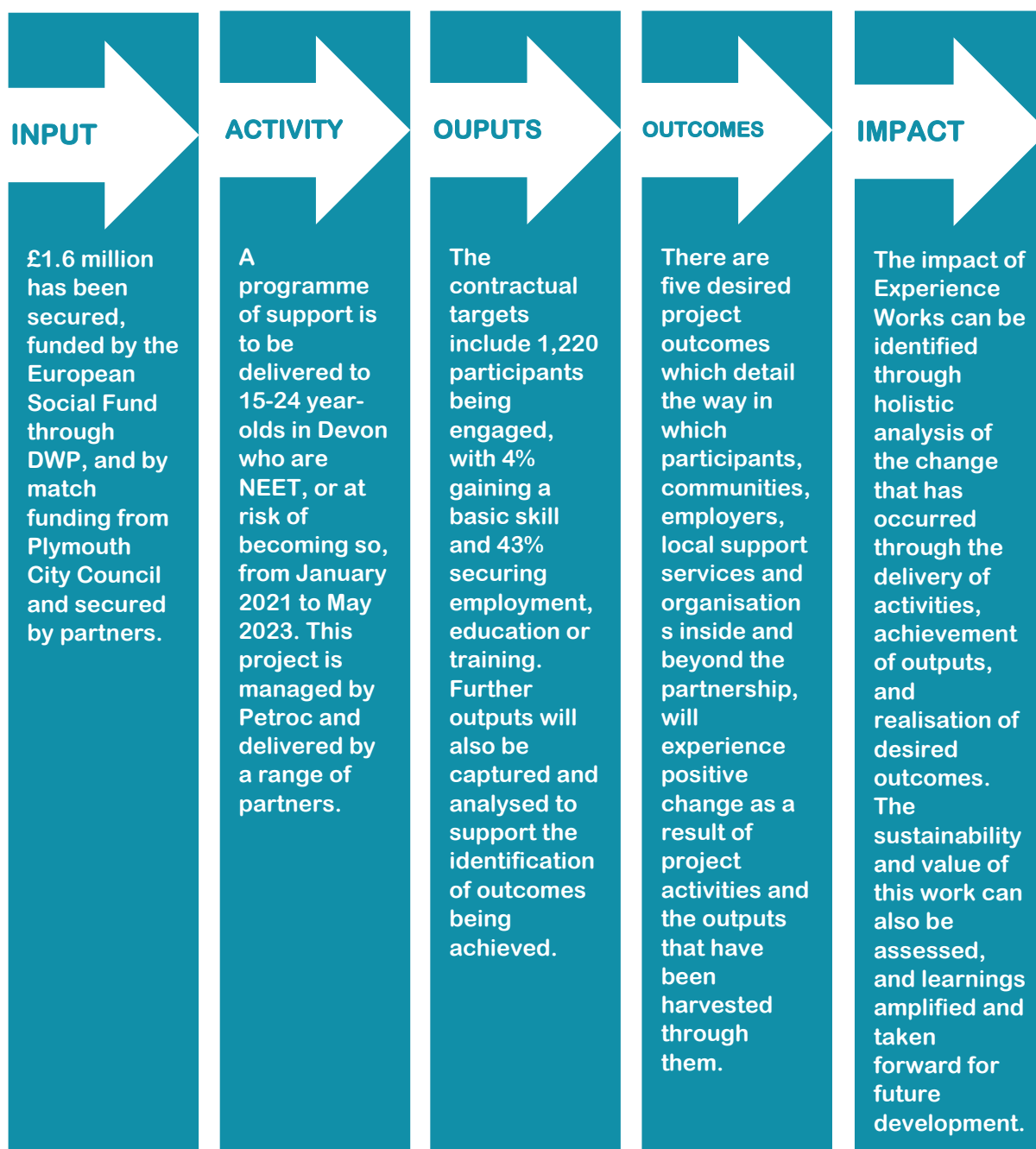
It is through a Theory of Change that Experience Works will be evaluated and its impact measured. Using a Theory of Change, one can trace the resource or **input** that has facilitated a programme of **activities** to take place. The results or **outputs** of these activities can then be identified and, when contextualised and analysed holistically, these outputs can indicate whether desired **outcomes** have become realities. By carefully tracking and analysing each stage of this process, one can 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.

Though the numerical targets and desired results of this project (p.10) are an important part of this, Devon Communities Together also sets out to capture and take seriously the very **real stories and lived experiences of change** that are anticipated to occur in participants' and communities' lives through the work of this project.

Whilst Petroc will continue to report regularly to European Social Fund (ESF) through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to update them on expenditure and progress made towards quantitative targets, **Devon Communities Together will produce biannual reports to capture and present the change that is being achieved by the Experience Works partnership, by tracing its own Theory of Change and updating the partnership, stakeholders and interested parties on the activities that are taking place, the outputs that are being achieved, and the outcomes and impact that is being realised.**

The planned programme for reporting is as follows:

Impact Update	Covering from	Until	Report To Be Shared
1	1 st October 2020	31 st March 2021	August 2021
2	1 st April 2021	30 th September 2021	November 2021
3	1 st October 2021	31 st March 2022	May 2022
4	1 st April 2022	30 th September 2022	November 2022
5	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2023	May 2023
6	1 st October 2020	31 st May 2023	August 2023



A summary of Experience Work’s Theory of Change can be seen above. It is anticipated that the project’s impact updates in the future will largely focus on the activities and progress of the previous six month period. However, as this report only covers the set-up phase and the first three months of delivery, there is a limited amount of activity and progress to report on at this stage. Consequently, **whilst this report does reflect on those initial activities, it largely serves to lay out the intended framework for impact measurement and demonstration moving forward.**

Input

There is a **financial budget of £1.6 million** for Experience Works. This funding partially comes from the European Social Fund (ESF) and is managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As well as money from ESF, all project partners are using match funding from other sources. Plymouth City Council have also contributed match funding to support the project management & evaluation elements of Experience Works, which maximises the amount of ESF funding that all partners are able to access.

The parties inputting funding into Experience Works, therefore, are:

- **European Social Fund**
providing central funding, via the **Department for Work and Pensions in the Heart of the South West**

and, through secured match-funding,

- **Plymouth City Council**
- Battling On
- Blue Screen IT
- City College Plymouth
- Devon Communities Together
- Groundwork South
- ODILS
- Petroc
- PGL Training
- South Devon College
- The Prince's Trust

By 31st March 2021, £258,093.50 of the overall budget was profiled to be spent, according to the contractual expenditure profile. Petroc would be in a position to submit the first financial claim upon completion of the Project Inception process. At the end of the first quarter, this process was still ongoing pending queries around project results for young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. It was, however, clear that actual expenditure would be much lower than the profiled sum. The profile was drawn up pre-pandemic, at application stage in 2019, and it is anticipated that there will continue to be a difference between real expenditure and the contracted profile for some quarters to come.

Activity

In **January 2021**, the partnership commenced the delivery of Experience Works. Partners began seeking and engaging eligible prospective participants onto the project and beginning those mentoring journeys with participants, whilst working to identify and collate all the necessary paperwork to get participants 'live' on the project – meaning that their entry paperwork has been completed and NEET status has been evidenced.

This 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**, which commenced on the 4th of January, and the Covid-19 threat level being moved to Level 5 by the government. From this date, people were permitted to leave their homes to go to work, or provide voluntary or charitable services, only if they could not reasonably do so from home; exercise alone or within their bubble once per day in their local area; shop for basic necessities; meet with support bubbles (if legally permitted to form one); and seek medical assistance. Furthermore, it was mandated that all schools and colleges would move to remote learning, and all non-essential retail, hospitality and personal care centres would close. Most of these mandates remained in place past the end of this reporting period (31st March 2021). This context affected the launch of Experience Works considerably, and much of the project's **activity was forced to take place remotely**.

Though a handful of young people were engaged and supported (see Outputs), this time was also spent by **mobilising the partnership**. Throughout October 2020 to March 2021, Petroc have **inducted partners** who have been recruiting and training project managers and mentors within each delivery organisation, conducting publicity and outreach, and building referral routes with support services outside of the partnership. Alongside delivering training and support to the partnership, Petroc also worked to develop the project's PDRS (Participant Data Reporting System) which would enable mentors to record delivery activity and participant data, as well as 3P – the Experience Works online portal, designed to share resources and paperwork within the partnership.

Devon Communities Together also worked in this time to develop this Theory of Change, and begin to **build an Impact Measurement Framework**. This framework identifies a wide range of 'outcome indicators' to be used as tools to analyse to what extent outcomes are being achieved. These indicators include the contractual outputs and results, but largely constitute additional statistical and qualitative data that can be drawn out from project activity. This framework is presented across the Outcomes section of this report (pp.11-18). In doing this, Devon Communities Together also developed the Participant Progress Star with accompanying guidance paperwork which, alongside the TAB and PDP (see p.5) supports participants and their mentors to better understand their strengths and weaknesses, as well as identify the progress being made by them.

Activity was also undertaken by Devon Communities Together to develop the Employment Key Toolkit. Further information on progress made towards this, and other partnership deliverables, is detailed under the Outcomes section

Outputs (Targets)

The following outputs and results are the project’s targets agreed with the funding bodies. It is these that Petroc are responsible for overseeing and reporting on, on a quarterly basis.

Outputs	Target		01/01/21 - 31/03/21	
Total participants engaged		1220	N/A	0
Male	61%	748	N/A	0
Female	39%	472	N/A	0
Unemployed	68%	828	N/A	0
Economically inactive	32%	392	N/A	0
Participants from ethnic minority groups	5%	60	N/A	0
Participants with disabilities	10%	116	N/A	0
Participants without basic skills	17%	202	N/A	0
Participants from a single adult household with dependent children	4%	49	N/A	0
Results				
Participants gaining basic skills on leaving, where basic skill is RQF accredited	4%	49	N/A	0
Participants in employment, including self-employment or education/training on leaving	43%	525	N/A	0
Participants in employment, including self-employment or education/training 6 months after leaving	34%	415	N/A	0

As indicated in the table above, in this period there were no participants who went ‘live’ on the project – meaning that they completed the entry paperwork with their mentor and sought, collated and submitted the necessary paperwork to evidence their eligibility. However, **13 young people were engaged on the project** and worked with an Experience Works mentor and began their participant journeys, whilst their mentor supported them to complete entry paperwork and evidence their eligibility, in order that they might later become ‘live’ participants.

The next section of this report details the project’s desired outcomes, and a **diverse range of additional outputs** have been identified by Devon Communities Together to support the identification and measurement of progress towards outcomes being achieved. Though these are not contractual targets, when considered cumulatively, they are valuable indicators of change.

Experience Works 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.

Outcome 1

Young people participating in the project have improved their employability and life skills.

Young people will 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, together with increased resilience, giving them the skills to address more effectively the challenges they will inevitably face throughout life.

As explained in earlier stages of this report, the delivery of Experience Works to participants in this time period has been limited. 13 young people have been engaged on the project, but have not yet become 'live' participants. Despite this, those young people have met with mentors and have begun to complete entry paperwork and, in doing so, started to identify their talents, aspirations and barriers (TAB), designed a Personal Development Plan (PDP) and created their initial Progress Star. As a partnership, we are yet to produce any case studies on these journeys, but look forward to doing so in the coming months as both partners and participants move further along in the programme of support.

Outcome 1 Indicator (Output)	01/01/2021 - 31/03/2021
# of young people receiving support from EW	0
# of 1-2-1 sessions (and hours)	34 sessions / 39.25 hours
# of group sessions (and hours)	0
# of young people are in employment on leaving	0
# of young people are in employment after 6 months	0
# of young people are in education/training on leaving	0
# of young people are in education/training after 6 months	0
# of young people have gained a qualification	0
# of young people have gained a basic skill	0
# of young people have gained an RQF accredited qualification	0
# of young people accessed workplace opportunity	0
Participants feel that their employability and life skills have improved	0
Participants express higher levels of desire for EET	0
Participants feel more prepared for EET	0
Participants feel more prepared to apply for opportunities	0
# of Outcome 1 stories	0

Explore

One significant area of progress that has been worked towards under this outcome is the development of Explore – the employment key toolkit which was laid out in the bid as being a co-designed resource that will support participants to **demonstrate transferable skills**, job search, and interview techniques, and pull together a **tangible pack of evidence** including a CV and references.

As the project's Employer Engagement lead, Devon Communities Together have taken responsibility for developing this resource, in consultation with participants and the partnership. In October 2020, it was decided that the Employment Key would take the form of a **website**. This was decided so that content could be **updated regularly** and kept up to date without having to issue new versions of documents. Furthermore, a website was understood to be more **engaging and dynamic** for users, than a static document would be. Research from a previous project, Empowering Enterprise, has shown that participants can often feel overwhelmed by the volume of paperwork that they have to digest and complete in a project like this.

In December 2020, Devon Communities Together drafted a skeleton prototype of the Explore website, using the outline given in the project's bid as a brief. This initial prototype was finalised and shared with Petroc in January 2021, who provided feedback, before Devon Communities Together took the draft to the partnership, young people and employers in February and March 2021. **Co-design** activities were conducted through focus groups and one-to-one discussions, to gather input and feedback from five young people, four Experience Works delivery staff members and five employers. **Valuable and actionable input** included issues around accessibility, design, content, user experience and the name 'Explore' which was agreed.

Whilst it is planned for feedback to be implemented in the coming months before Explore is launched, this initial activity has contributed towards the progress of Outcome 1, by providing participating young people with an **opportunity to develop and exercise focus group, feedback and design skills**, as well as **advocate for their own and peers' needs and preferences**. Furthermore, the development of Explore will ultimately support young people in their journeys towards a positive future.

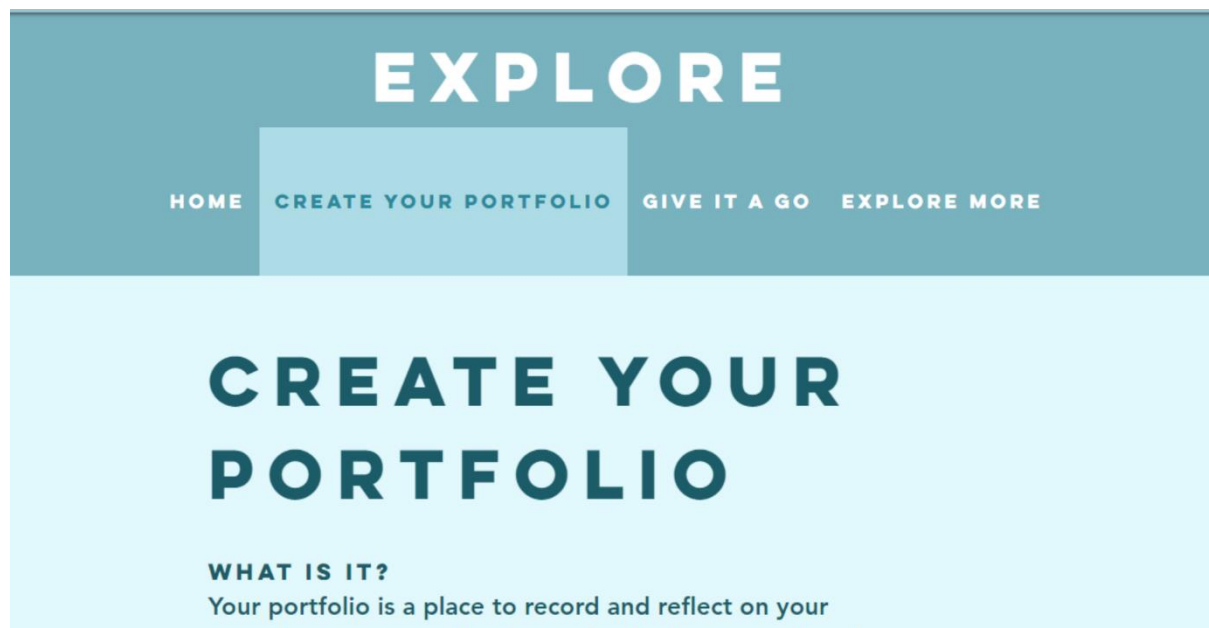
Explore is due to be launched in May 2021. The draft at March 2021 currently takes the form of three main areas – Create Your Portfolio, Give It A Go and Explore More.

Create Your Portfolio will equip participants with a portfolio template and accompanying guide that will walk them through the curation of their own Explore portfolio. These are designed to enable participants to build up their own toolbox of evidence and information that they can later use when applying for opportunities. The template and guide are designed to take into account, and respond to, the likelihood that many participants may not have the mainstream evidence packs that other young people do, such as past employment records and/or qualifications, and consequently encourages a holistic reflection on transferable life experiences, skills and character traits.

Give It A Go will support participants to use the information and evidence they've collated in their portfolio, to begin to approach some of the common activities that are necessary when

seeking and securing employment, education and training opportunities. It will support them to translate content from their portfolio into CVs, application forms, LinkedIn profiles, application forms, and more. Templates, examples and guidance documents will be provided for these activities.

[Explore More](#) is a hub that will signpost participants to a wide range of existing external resources that provide information, advice and guidance on job seeking, ideas for next steps, thriving work sectors, financial support, further employment support, and much more. These will be researched and recommended by partnership staff members who have used and valued them, in order to provide participants with high quality materials.



Considerations are also being made regarding the possibility of adding an [Employers' Space](#), which could act as an information hub for employers who are involved with Experience Works. The content would align with Devon Community Together's evolving employer engagement and inclusive employment strategy for Experience Works. Further information on this can be found under Outcome 3.

Outcome 2

Young people have increased their knowledge of their local communities and have made positive contributions to them.

Communities will benefit from young people making an increased positive contribution through social action and work experience; their young people being better skilled and prepared to make positive contributions; a lower risk of young people participating in negative behaviours; and places being more socially cohesive and safer due to reduced antisocial behaviour.

At the end of March 2021, the small number of young people who have engaged with the project have not yet undertaken activities in their communities through Experience Works. This activity is planned to commence as delivery partners engage more young people and establish Personal Development Plans with them that include community engagement and social action activities.

Outcome 2 Indicator (Output)	01/01/2021 - 31/03/2021
# of participants attended a Social Action session	0
# of instances of a participant attending a Social Action session	0
# of participants attended a Volunteering session	0
# of instances of a participant attending a Volunteering session	0
# of participants volunteering on exit	0
At least once a week	0
Less often than once a week but at least once a month	0
Less often than once a month but at least 3 or 4 times a year	0
Twice in the last 12 months	0
Once in the last 12 months	0
Participants feel that they are increasingly helping others	0
Participants feel that they are better able to engage with new people	0
# of Outcome 2 stories	0

Outcome 3

Employers have increased their understanding of young people who are NEET, and are better equipped to provide them with valuable opportunities.

Local employers will benefit from eligible young people being better prepared for the world of work in terms of employability skills (e.g. reliability, timekeeping, team working, resilience etc), having access to potential employees with improved vocational skill levels; having a greater understanding of the needs of young people; and better partnership working with education and training providers to improve the relevance of the support young people receive.

In this reporting period, five employers were engaged in the co-design of Explore. They were introduced to Experience Works and supported to **better understand the demographic of young people that the project serves**. These employers made valuable contributions to the development of Explore and Devon Communities Together facilitated discussions around **employer expectations**, as well as the barriers that young people who are NEET often face when seeking employment and the **role that employers can play to ensure their workplaces are accessible and inclusive** for this demographic.

Moving forward, delivery partners will build on their existing relationships with local employers to **secure workplace opportunities** for participants, which will be valuable **learning experiences for both young people and employers**. Furthermore, as the employer engagement lead, Devon Communities Together will go on to support local employers at a strategic level to better understand this demographic and the **role that employers can play in ensuring that we make the most of young people's potential, talents and aspirations**. This strategic work is unfortunately due to be paused until late summer 2021.

Outcome 3 Indicator (Output)	01/01/2021 - 31/03/2021
# of learning opportunities offered to a participant by an employer	0
# of learning opportunities hosted for a participant by an employer	0
# of employers made aware of Experience Works	5
Employers reports	0
# of Outcome 3 stories	0

Outcome 4

Local support services have benefitted from improved referral processes.

Local public service providers will benefit from improved referral processes and a reduction in demand for services supporting people with multiple challenges at a time when financial pressures are making it difficult to meet the needs of local communities. This will be achieved by working with young people to address their issues before they become entrenched in adulthood and ensuring mentors and public service workers have easier access to information about the range of services available in their areas.

So far, CSSW Group, Plymouth City Council and Garland Support are external support services who have been made aware of Experience Works and have referred young people into the project. Petroc have also made referrals into Experience Works. There have not yet been any recorded instances of mentors signposting young people to external support services, but this is expected to change imminently as more participants engage and require this signposting support.

Outcome 4 Indicator (Output)	01/01/2021 - 31/03/2021
# of advocacy sessions (and hours)	0
# of instances of signposting to external support services	0
Careers Advice	0
Employment opportunities	0
Education or training	0
Soft skills development	0
Legal advice	0
Housing services	0
Additional needs support	0
Mental health services	0
Physical health & wellbeing	0
Money advice	0
# of instances of signposting to external support services when the participant wasn't previously aware	0
Categories as above x10	0
# of referrals into the project from external service (where that participant went live)	0
Participants feel that they are better informed about support services	0
# of Outcome 4 stories	0

Outcome 5

Organisations inside and outside the partnership have access to best practice and lessons learned from Experience Works.

Finally, other providers of support to young people across the country will benefit from us sharing best practice and lessons learnt through delivery of our project. We are passionate about sharing both the positive and negative experiences and lessons we learn through our project delivery to benefit the sector, as it ultimately benefits the young people we are seeking to support.

Progress made towards Outcome 5 has been an early strength of the Experience Works partnership. Petroc have offered extensive support to all partners, in enabling them to set up their organisations for both practical delivery and administration and management of contracts.

20 partnership staff members from across 10 organisations have attended finance support sessions, and 24 have attended participant paperwork support sessions, from across 10 organisations. These support sessions were delivered in January 2021 by Petroc, who have also extended the offer of providing one-to-one support for partnership staff members who may require further support.

Furthermore, Petroc hosted the first official **Experience Works Partner Meeting** in March 2021, which was attended by **20** partnership staff members. Valuable insights were shared in this meeting concerning partners' experiences of project set-up and initial engagement with young people.

Finally, four staff members engaged with the Explore focus group and feedback activities, offering valuable contributions from their own experience and expertise which would inform the development of Explore.

Outcome 4 Indicator (Output)	01/01/2021 - 31/03/2021
# of instances of a partnership staff member attending an inter-partner meeting	68
Partnership meeting	20
Local meeting	0
Support/training from Petroc (e.g. admin/finance/delivery)	44
Other (e.g. steering group; focus group; etc)	4
# of instances of a partnership staff member receiving a project newsletter/newsflash	0
# of instances of project insights being shared outside of the partnership	0
# of Outcome 5 stories	0

Looking Forward to the Impact of Experience Works

This introduction to Experience Works has accounted for the activity that's been carried out across the set-up phase in the latter end of 2020, as well as during the first three months of delivery throughout January – March 2021. With only a small handful of young people engaged on the programme, and none yet 'live', the recognised outputs of this activity have been limited in these early stages. This is partially due to the nature of this work, which requires the establishment of robust strategic and operational foundations, in addition to the challenging context of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis – the effects of which were exacerbated in early 2021 by the national lockdown.

Despite this, varying degrees of progress can be identified as having been made towards Outcomes 1, 3, 4 and 5. In the case of Outcome 1, young people have begun to be supported by Experience Works mentors and have engaged in a co-design activity concerning the project's key employability tool, Explore, which has undergone substantial development during this time – paving the way for future progress being made under Outcome 1. This activity has also contributed to progress being made towards Outcome 3, as a small handful of employers have started to engage with Experience Works and its mission to get the most out of the young people in Devon's communities. Three organisations outside of the partnership have demonstrated an awareness and appreciation of this provision, by referring young people into Experience Works – indicating the beginnings of Outcome 4 being worked towards. Finally, the partnership has got off to a flying start in demonstrating their commitment to Outcome 5, with over 40 instances of partnership members receiving support and/or training, and having been mobilised to commence delivery.

The partnership looks forward to driving this provision forward in the coming months and years and, as well as working towards the attainment of some of those key targets around the engagement of young people, the partnership is keen to capture, reflect on, and celebrate the stories of change and progress that are anticipated to arise as the project gets underway.

The next Experience Works Biannual Impact Report will be available in November 2021, and will provide an impact update covering April – September 2021.