

SMART SKILLS Interim Report

May 2023

Prepared by Devon
Communities Together



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WELCOME

I am delighted to share the SMART SKILLS Impact Report with you.

It has been another incredibly busy year where our project has continued to navigate ways to make fully funded training accessible to individuals and businesses across Devon. I can only applaud the way in which our delivery partners have operated in a flexible way to ensure that our participants can complete qualifications and training which may be delivered online as well as offering face to face training for those who prefer this option.

As you read the report it will become evident that we have reached all corners of Devon, which is just one of the project's priorities. Helping those in rural and coastal communities is important to ensure that our funded training solutions reach those who may not have had an opportunity to upskill for free in the past.

The Skills Hub continues to be an essential service for businesses allowing them to access the required funding for their future staff development requirements. The Skills Hub does not only offer advice on SMART SKILLS courses but has become adept at signposting enquiries to other initiatives where it is more appropriate. Offering a more consultative service to businesses in the future may be a direction that we could take.

I hope that you enjoy the read and that you, like I, are impressed with the number of people that we have supported so far.

Sean Gibson
Partnership and Engagement Manager

INTRODUCTION TO SMART SKILLS

SMART SKILLS offers fully funded training to businesses in Devon to help them upskill their workforce. The training offered has no-strings attached and is completely free of charge to those taking part, thanks to £3.5million of funding from the European Social Fund (ESF). ESF funding will be available until the Autumn of 2023.



The project started during the Covid-19 pandemic and for this reason it was important to create an online offer which allowed people to upskill at a time when social distancing and travel was being restricted. The project focused on individuals and businesses in Devon and having an extensive range of online courses enabled the project to reach a wider audience while time providing environmental benefits as individuals did not have to travel to receive training.

Geographical Reach

Devon is one of the largest counties in the country by area. With many rural and coastal communities the project was determined to ensure that all areas were covered. SMART SKILLS have been really focussed on supporting SME's and helping businesses where the greatest skills gaps are and who may not have accessed EU funding in the past. To ensure that the SMART SKILLS project were visible to as many people and businesses as possible CSW Group attended business shows and networking events, promoting the offer on social media and via newsletters as well as via advertisement in different publications across the whole county.

Participant Postcodes



DELIVERY PARTNERS

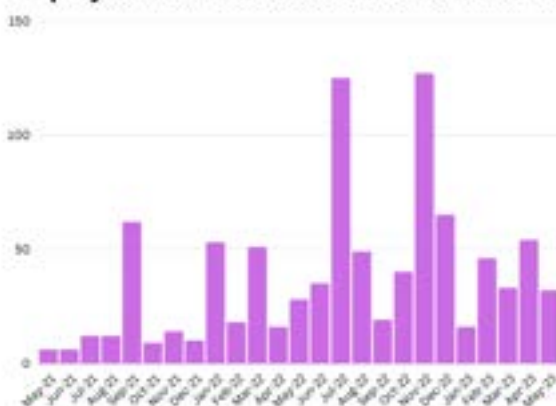


THE SKILLS HUB

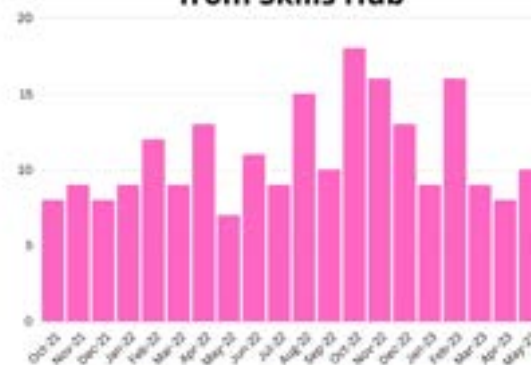
The Skills Hub operated within the realms of the SMART SKILLS project and businesses were able to reach out to the Hub to find out more about the range of fully funded courses available. To date a total number of 914 employed individuals and 219 businesses have been referred by the Skills Hub. There have been occasions where the Skills Advisers working in the Skills Hub assessed the needs of the business and decided that there may have been a better training solution to meet the identified need. In such circumstances referrals were often made outside of our project to initiatives like:

- Apprenticeships
- Regional bootcamps
- Heart of the South West Growth Hub
- Other European funded initiatives
- Devon & Cornwall Training Provider Network

Employed Individuals Referred from Skills Hub



Number of businesses referred from Skills Hub



With SMART SKILLS being a new initiative in the county it was important to establish relationships with businesses through existing membership networks. Over the term of the project we have shared information and attended events with:

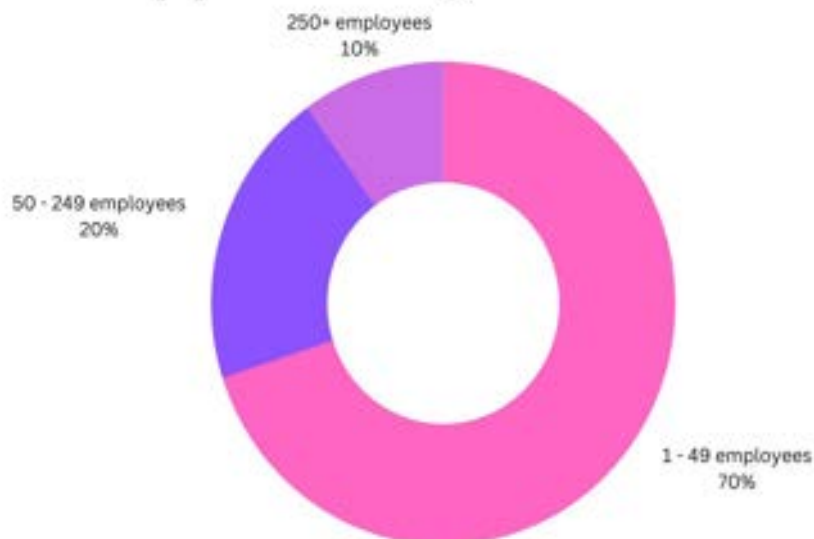
- o Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
- o Paignton Chamber of Commerce
- o Exeter Chamber of Commerce
- o Torbay Business Forum
- o Federation of Small Businesses
- o North Devon Networking Group
- o Tavistock Chamber of Commerce
- o Recruitment and Retention events in North Devon
- o G12 Business Networking
- o Plympton Chamber of Commerce

BUSINESSES SUPPORTED BY SMART SKILLS

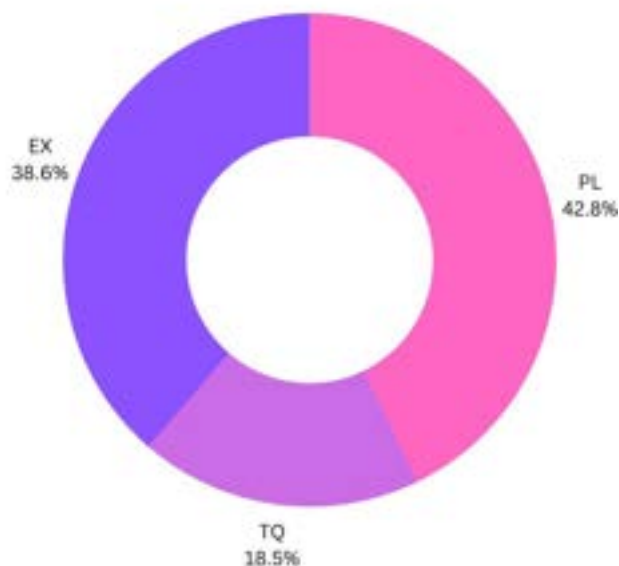
The Skills Hub team are responsible for identifying business skills and training needs.

By completing an organisational diagnostic it has been possible to identify additional business training requirements. All of the fully funded courses offered through SMART SKILLS have a clearly defined progression route onto full and higher qualifications and courses. All efforts have been made to offer individuals a clear progression on to more substantial education pathways in the future. It is hoped that individuals use SMART SKILLS as a platform to engage with adult education and choose to progress with their educational journey in the future.

Size of businesses supported by Skills Hub



Where businesses are located



MARKETING

In November 2021, the new SMART SKILLS dedicated microsite (see snapshot and link below) went live and has since received over 260 enquiries from businesses and individuals across Devon.

The CSW Group's social media channels, with an audience of over 6,000, have been utilised to regularly promote SMART SKILLS.

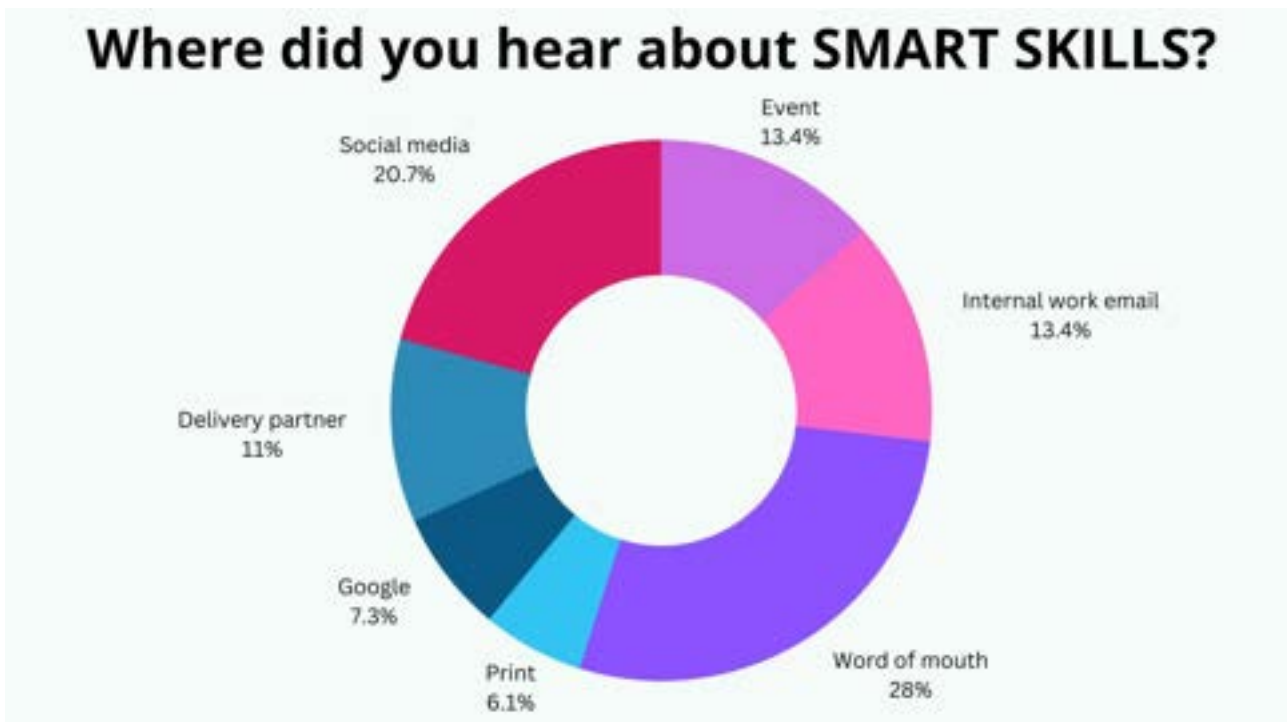
We also send out a monthly update to 500+ businesses which we have had engagement with.

Recently we have introduced a quarterly Stakeholder Newsletter to help us keep people across Devon informed on the positive impact that SMART SKILLS is having throughout our county.

SMART SKILLS has been featured in stakeholder e-newsletters, including the Heart of the South West Growth Hub, local Chambers of Commerce, and Local Authorities, which has helped extend the reach and reputation of the project.

SMART SKILLS has targeted rural communities through advertising in Links Magazine, reaching 25,500 homes across Tavistock, Okehampton, and Dartmoor.

Furthermore, SMART SKILLS has had ad placements in the Devon County Show Programme for two years running, with a print run of 12,000 each year, and has featured in six issues of GROW Magazine, a publication for businesses in Exeter with a print run of 5,000. Lastly, SMART SKILLS has been featured in the Plymouth Chronicle, reaching 92,000 homes across Plymouth.



For more information visit <https://cswgroup.co.uk/smart-skills-home/> or use the following QR code:



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



SUSTAINABILITY

Making a Green Impact

The SMART SKILLS team are proud and thrilled to be Green Impact double award winners! Green Impact is a United Nations award-winning programme designed to support environmentally and socially sustainable practices in organisations. Over 12 months, the team enjoyed introducing new ways to live and work more sustainably.

The team were awarded Silver for Green Impact and received a Special Award for Community Action. The team won the Community Action award for initiating and nurturing a partnership between Anglo Krempel and the Composites Centre at South Devon College. The new partnership makes use of expired composite materials destined for landfill to enhance the educational experience of students.

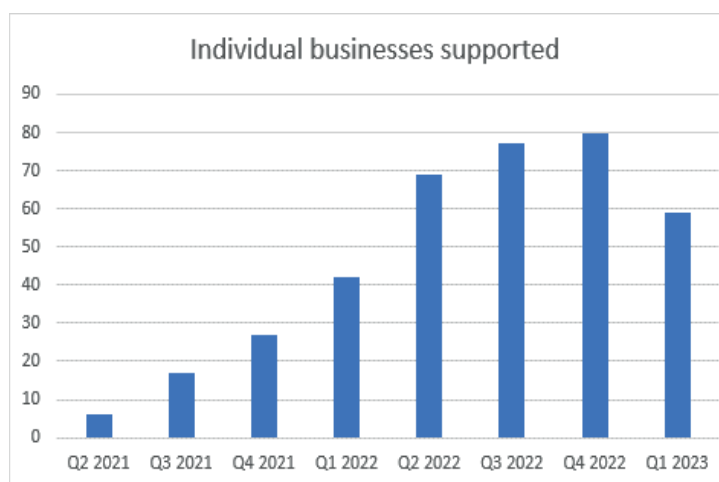
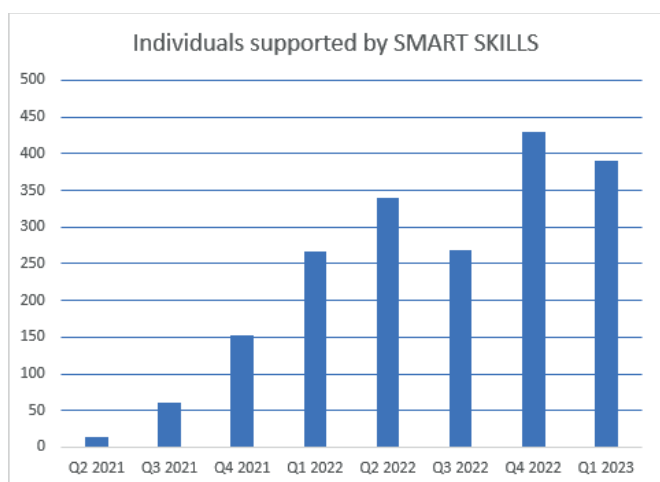
“... Our work is predominately in the aerospace and defence sector and high spec materials that would normally go to landfill due to expiry dates can instead be utilised at South Devon College for our future engineers to gain valuable hands-on know-how of composite materials and processes.”

Darren Tompkins, Anglo Krempel



KEY LEARNINGS

- The course in highest demand among businesses has been Mental Health First Aid at Work, which was not initially included in the original SMART SKILLS offering. However, through proactive engagement with local businesses and understanding their training needs, it became apparent that there was a significant demand for mental health training. In response to this need, we extended an opportunity to our delivery partners to add accredited mental health courses to their portfolio and provide training to businesses across Devon. This approach allows us to meet the specific requirements of businesses and ensure that they have access to essential mental health training.
- The initial project plan involved the delivery partners taking responsibility for completing all paperwork, while the Skills Hub focused on generating interest in the courses and forwarding inquiries to each partner. However, as the project progressed, there was a request for the Skills Adviser in the Hub to handle the employer paperwork. This shift in responsibility has had a significant impact on the project. It has not only increased the number of referrals generated but also improved the quality of those referrals, leading to a higher likelihood of participants starting the courses.
- Building relationships with our stakeholders has been a focal point to ensuring that the SMART SKILLS project is recognised across all sectors which has helped us to make sure that no business or individual misses out on the fully funded opportunities the project has to offer.
- By raising the profile of this project a large number of businesses have established relationships with our delivery partners. In most cases this has resulted in businesses working with local Colleges and Independent Training Providers for the first time. It is envisaged that a legacy will be that our delivery partners harness these new relationships and continue to support their new found clients for years to come.



40%

of the participants helped by SMART SKILLS have been referred by the advisers working in the Skills Hub.

DELIVERY PARTNER FEEDBACK

The support and guidance from CSW throughout our partnership on the SMART SKILLS project has been exemplary. All paperwork has been well explained and when complications or queries have arisen the guidance and advice has been readily available and clear. We have requested training multiple times due to new staff joining our team and this has always been delivered with clarity and patience. It has always been a supportive open channel of communication.

“All steering and monitoring meetings have been full of encouragement, support and advice on how to hit targets and the hard working skills advisors have promoted our courses and brought business our way, assisting with paperwork at all times. It truly has been a partnership.”

On Course South West

We have worked with CSW since 2020, during this time we have received exceptional help and support from all staff on the project. We have regular meetings with all of the delivery partners to update us on the full contract progress and also monthly partner meetings to discuss individual progress. Through the support given this has enabled us to almost double our original start profile giving us the funding and support to help a substantial amount of local employers to upskill their current workforce. We look forward to working with CSW on any future projects.”

The Focus Training Group



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“

Throughout the project, I have been impressed with the support we have received from CSW. They have provided timely and thorough responses to our queries, ensuring that we have the necessary information and assistance when we need it. Mike, our contract manager, has shown a strong commitment to the overall success of the project. His proactive approach to contract management effectively addresses risks and ensures the project performs well. In addition, the regular progress updates have been very helpful in keeping us informed, motivated, and on track.

“Furthermore, the Skills Hub established by CSW has played a significant role in attracting referrals and providing support with paperwork. The team members, especially Sean, demonstrate genuine passion for the Hub’s success - completing employer paperwork from the companies they refer to us, despite this not being a requirement in the original contract.

“Moreover, the admin team’s meticulousness in checking paperwork has instilled confidence that we will successfully pass any future audits. The regular communication and updates from CSW effectively keep us informed and enable us to continue working towards achieving the project goals.

“Overall, CSW’s consistent support, timely responses, dedication, and attention to detail have made a significant contribution to the success of the project.”

Petroc

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

“Completing the CMI L3 Award in Project Management has been of real benefit to me and my organisation. My new skills have allowed me to work more effectively; the theory based and best practice models will support me when managing projects in the future and have given me the confidence to manage larger scale projects.”

Devon & Somerset Fire Service Employee

“Thanks for giving me the tools and confidence to take my business further in terms of digital marketing. The course tutor, Rich, gave examples and his experience of real-life businesses which made it much more relatable. I’ve come away with a wealth of knowledge to put into practice and build my mindfulness coaching business.”

Laura, Simpliful

“Thanks to SMART SKILLS, I feel more positive about work and how I can increase the brand awareness of my business and the services available. I feel empowered and have lots of exciting new ideas to implement to help my business continue to grow.”

Julia, Julia Woollacott Photography



CASE STUDY - INDIVIDUAL

Jeremy started his learning journey by enrolling in a Digital Skills First Steps course through SMART SKILLS.

With minimal digital knowledge, he was eager to gain skills. Despite having a smartphone, he had never used it for anything other than calls and texts. Jeremy had undergone hip surgery, which made him unable to work as a bricklayer and he wanted to use his extensive building experience as a project manager in the construction industry. For this, he needed to be confident in using Microsoft 365 and other relevant office applications.

Jeremy was determined to improve, and he even looked into getting broadband at home to help him with his digital skills. After completing Digital First Steps he enrolled onto Digital Improvers, Essential Digital Skills course and had already signed up for the next Digital Skills for Work L2 course starting in late February/March. While he still had a way to go before being confident as a digital manager, he had come a long way.

Having been a bricklayer for over 20 years, Jeremy had never explored the digital world and conducted most of his business over the phone or with pen and paper. However, due to wear and tear from working on the tools, he realised he needed to acquire digital skills to remain employed in the construction industry and was able to achieve this.

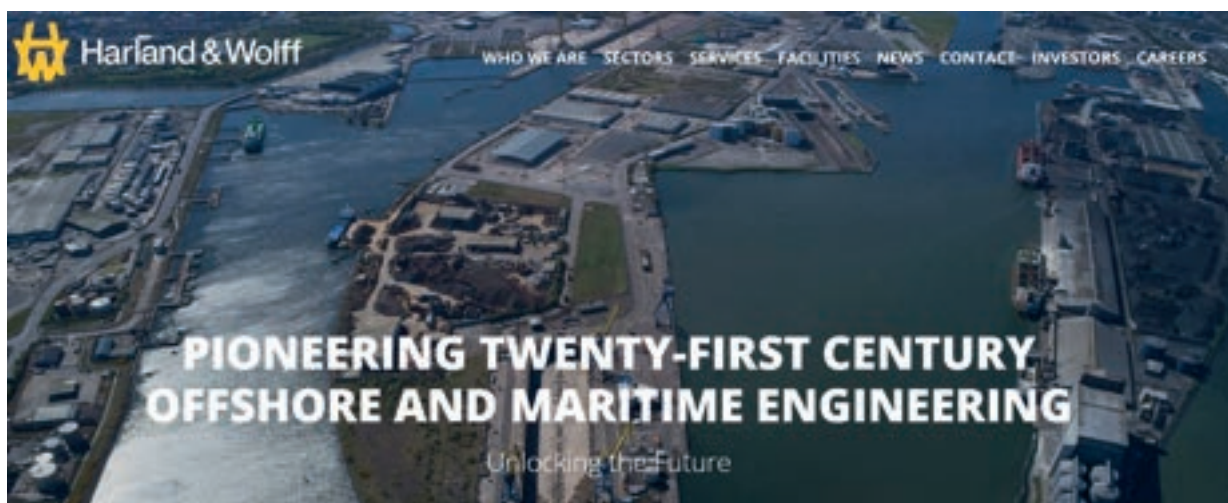


CASE STUDY - BUSINESS

One of the businesses who have taken part in SMART SKILLS is Harland & Wolff, a business based in Appledore, North Devon with 160 years' of maritime experience. They initially took up the offer of Chartered Management Institute Level 3 leadership and management units delivered by Petroc. The training was delivered on site and the uptake by their staff for this training was high.

All attendees thoroughly enjoyed the training and also benefitted greatly from it. Going forward we are now potentially looking at increasing the number of CMI units delivered to better the overall qualification. In addition to the CMI qualification units, the college expanded availability to include Basic Excel skills (Half day) and Advanced Excel (over 4 Days), again as before the demand was high for both. We still have staff awaiting the next Excel sessions planned for July and CMI unit in September. Overall, nearly 40 staff members have gained knowledge and experience through the SMART SKILLS project, and as a newly regrowing business here the availability of projects like this have really supported the development of our staff.”

Tony Cole, Apprentice and Training Manager



CASE STUDY - BUSINESS

Wolferstans is a major Plymouth law firm based in North Hill, with satellite offices in Plympton and Plymstock. The SMART SKILLS project has directly and indirectly benefited their business as stated below by Emma Evans.

I was introduced to SMART SKILLS via a colleague and spoke to both Sean Gibson and Michael Sharman who between them explained to me what training would be available to our employees at Wolferstans along with explaining how we can benefit from the funding available. They made the paperwork and introduction to the training seamless. I was then introduced to Charlotte Broadhead at Petroc who went into further details with regards to the three courses we had chosen; Managing a Team to Achieve Results, Managing Individuals to be Effective in their Role and Contributing to the Delivery of a Project. 44 employees from Wolferstans attended the training and feedback received has been positive. We have 196 employees at Wolferstans split into 8 Departments with some large teams so Heads of Departments and Team Leaders benefitted from attending the Managing a Team and Managing Individuals courses which has enabled them to support their teams along with the growth of the firm. The final team who attended the Project training are managers who from time to time manage projects or contribute to a project and so learning about the different skills around preparation for a project, from budgeting and risks to stakeholders was extremely helpful.”

Emma Evans, Associate, HR Manager
Wolferstans, Plymouth

