



Building Better Opportunities Evaluation:

Focused support for groups furthest from the labour market

Annual Report Spring 2022



A low-angle photograph of a high rope course. Two people are visible on a horizontal wooden beam, suspended by ropes. They are wearing safety harnesses and helmets. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The structure of the course, including vertical wooden posts and horizontal beams, is visible on the right side of the frame.

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Summary

This summarises the sixth annual report of the evaluation of the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme, which launched in 2016 using funds provided by The National Lottery Community Fund to match funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 programme.

BBO aims to provide investment in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty by supporting participants to move towards the labour market.

When the programme launched, 132 BBO projects received funding. To September 2021, those projects have supported **144,846** participants.

We found that:

The impact of the pandemic has not been felt equally by everyone. Older people, young people, women, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities have become less likely to be in employment. The increase in economic inactivity¹ for older people, young people and people with ill-health or disabilities is particularly concerning.

BBO projects have been successful at engaging people with complex barriers to work. For example, 48% of participants were economically inactive when they joined the programme. 63% lived in a jobless household, 48% had a disability, and 41% were experiencing multiple disadvantage. Covid-19 saw barriers to work increase amongst BBO participants; the number of those economically inactive increased, as did those from jobless households and those experiencing homelessness.

Ecorys has been evaluating BBO since 2016. This year, the evaluation built on our existing research by conducting case study “visits” with grant-holders (conducted virtually due to covid-19 restrictions), continuing our survey with BBO participants, analysing programme monitoring data, and reviewing project outputs such as their own evaluations and case studies. Our focus was to explore successful approaches to supporting target groups who are most disadvantaged in a changed, post-pandemic labour market.

Projects have worked hard to maintain referrals to the project during the pandemic. Building relationships with new referral partners, adapting referral mechanisms to include online referral forms, and developing dedicated engagement roles or teams have all been important to reach people during lockdown restrictions. As restrictions ease, outreach work and close working with partners such as Jobcentre Plus have proved successful.

New approaches to delivering support during the pandemic have remained as restrictions ease. Our 2021 report highlighted how remote working and enhancing digital inclusion had been vital. These aspects of delivery continue, with hybrid models of support proving popular. Enhancing digital skills for participants remains a priority, as well as supporting other basic skills which will enhance that.

¹ Economic inactivity means a person is not looking for, and / or is not available for, work.

Although specialist approaches have been developed to support different target groups across BBO, there were common themes that are important regardless of the types of barriers faced by participants. BBO projects have:

- Provided flexible and responsive support, adapting to address emerging needs during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Put people first, tailoring support to address individual circumstances
- Focused on building confidence, particularly as lockdown restrictions eased
- Supported wellbeing by developing support mechanisms specifically to address increasing mental health needs
- Encouraged and facilitated digital inclusion
- Worked with employers to address stigma and find appropriate opportunities for BBO participants.

Achieving results

The analysis of programme MI data tells us that to September 2021, 117,960 participants had left the programme, of which 73,287 left to a known and verified destination. Projects

funded through BBO are required, as a condition of their of ESF funding, to record progress against three key results indicators.

We found that:

A high proportion of participants leaving the programme moved to a positive destination. Our review of the programme data showed that after leaving BBO, 84% of those with a known destination achieved a key result.

- **36%** of participants entered employment;
- **32%** moved to education or training; and
- **15%** moved from economic inactivity to job search.

There were indications that participants were moving into sustainable and good quality work. Our survey with BBO participants showed that 4-5 months after leaving BBO into employment, 69% were still in the same job. More than two-thirds of those who were employed were holding permanent contracts, and some respondents showed progression at work; 13% had taken on higher skilled work and 11% had received a pay rise.

People with complex barriers to work achieved success with help from BBO.

For example, of those with a disability who left to a verified destination, 27% moved into employment and 33% moved into education or training. Similar figures were attained for those who were economically inactive on joining the programme – 28% of this group entered employment, 33% moved into education or training, and 30% were actively looking for work.

A focus on soft skills was reflected in benefits to participants.

68% of participants we surveyed told us that they had improved their confidence as a direct result of taking part in BBO, and more than half (55%) reported that they had improved wellbeing. One-third told us they were more involved in their communities, which has proved particularly important following pandemic-related restrictions. 71% of respondents were very confident or fairly confident that changes would continue in the future.

Looking forward

For the final year of the BBO programme, funded projects could usefully focus on support for those groups who are at risk of withdrawing from, or being overlooked in, the labour market following the pandemic. Learning from the evaluation so far suggests that this would include:

- Continue to utilise mechanisms to encourage self-referrals such as social media and outreach work, supporting the engagement of those who are economically inactive
- Work with employers to break down perceptions of different demographics
- Work with employers to understand local needs, forging links with participant's individual skills and experience
- Continue to offer holistic and individualised support for participants to break down barriers to the labour market.



Introduction

This is the sixth annual report for the evaluation of the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme, which aims to support people to move towards work.

The report explores how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the labour market, and how projects funded by BBO have responded to support different groups of

people who might face additional barriers to work. It explores lessons around engagement and the delivery of support, and what results have been achieved by project participants.

About the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme

The National Lottery Community Fund (the Fund) is matching funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 programme to provide joint investment in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth, particularly for the hardest to reach groups. Through this funding, the BBO programme was developed using a decentralised approach, with 37 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) involved in producing project outlines to inform the development and delivery of the programme at local levels. These outlines were used to guide the allocation of funds to 132 BBO projects that deliver interventions to address local priorities. The programme, which launched in 2016, is supporting a variety of projects to improve the employability of the most disadvantaged, including helping

those with multiple and complex needs with a range of support including confidence building, skills development and help with financial literacy. BBO was designed to engage the expertise and knowledge of a wide range of stakeholders through encouraging partnership delivery, thus creating positive impacts for harder to reach groups.

In 2019, the Fund undertook an exercise to secure and confirm extensions for many of the BBO projects, either in the form of additional funding or extended delivery timescales for projects to achieve their original targets. In total, 121 projects received an extension to 2022. The Fund is also in the process of confirming further extensions to allow delivery to continue into 2023 for the majority of projects.

About the evaluation

In 2016, the Fund commissioned Ecorys to deliver an evaluation and learning contract for the BBO Programme. Since then, BBO has been extended twice and as a result, the initial four-year evaluation was also extended to continue until the end of BBO in 2023. In this latter period, the evaluation will continue to examine the approach to programme implementation on the ground

using the formative perspective it has taken in previous years to generate insights and timely lessons during the life of the programme.

The broad areas for investigation and analysis through the national evaluation can be categorised as access, impact and learning, and cut across all strands of the methodology. However, more specifically, the evaluation

is exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the way projects deliver services and what the pandemic has meant for the attainment of results, the impact the programme has on participants in terms of progression and skills development, and how funded

projects impact on existing services locally. Throughout the evaluation, various outputs draw out learning for projects, practitioners and future funding programmes. These outputs can be viewed on the evaluation website: buildingbetteropportunities.org.uk.

About this report

Our [previous annual report](#)², the fifth published for this evaluation, was written as the lockdown restrictions for the pandemic were just beginning to ease. At that point, projects had developed new approaches to supporting participants in an uncertain and heavily changed environment and had established mechanisms for working with participants remotely. However, at the time of writing there was little data available to fully explore what the pandemic had meant for project performance and the attainment of results and

outcomes, particularly as the labour market was still in a state of flux. This report looks at the programme's overarching performance since it launched in 2016, as well as examining whether results have differed post-pandemic. In 2021, emerging evidence suggested that there were a number of groups who were becoming more distanced from the labour market; this report also explores whether that remains the case, as well as exploring how BBO projects have supported those groups facing particular labour market challenges.

The report draws on a number of research strands undertaken throughout 2021-22, including:

Project case studies: VSix BBO projects have participated in case study research in the first half 2022. Each of these has included up to eight interviews with a range of stakeholders including project leads, delivery staff, delivery partners, participants and where relevant, other stakeholders such as employers. The case studies were purposively selected to explore practice and lessons learned in delivering support for specific target groups. Six more project case studies will be completed in the second half of 2022, along with eight place-based, locality case studies. The findings from these interviews will be included in our final evaluation report in 2023.

Participant survey: Our participant "exit" survey was launched in February 2021. The survey targets a random sample of participants who have recently left the programme, with the aim of collecting information on destinations and outcomes. In order to explore sustainability of outcomes, the survey engages participants at two intervals; four to six months after leaving the programme, and up to six months after the first interview. Since it launched, 333 people have participated in the first interval survey, with 60 having also completed the follow up interview. We aim to engage 450 people in the first wave interviews by the end of 2022, and 150 in the follow up interviews.

² https://buildingbetteropportunities.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/BBO_Annual%20Evaluation%20Report_2021.pdf

Analysis of programme monitoring data:

Monitoring data is compiled by the Fund from project returns, namely the participant entry and exit forms, and the data is validated by the Managing Agency for ESF in England. This data provides an important source of information on participant characteristics and activities, and analysis of the data has allowed us to understand more about the barriers faced by BBO participants. The data also supports our understanding of where participants go after they leave BBO projects. The data analysed for this report contains information on participants who engaged with the programme up to 30th September 2021.

Review of other sources of evidence:

In addition to evidence gathered directly by the evaluation team, this report draws on a range of other evidence including local evaluation reports, case studies collated by grant holders, and other outputs developed by individual projects including social media posts.





Our 2021 annual report focussed on how BBO projects were continuing to support participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, as we emerge, BBO is operating in an environment of compounding political and economic post-pandemic pressures; for example, the Government announced the withdrawal of several temporary support measures in Autumn 2021; both the £20 universal credit uplift³ and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme⁴ came to an end in September 2021. Rental eviction protection has now also expired⁵. The phasing out of these measures, along with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, have gone hand in hand with a renewed government emphasis on “getting people into work and getting people into jobs”⁶. However, many suggest that weakening social security now risks pushing many into unemployment or redundancy.

At the same time, reports of record job vacancies, serious labour shortages, and rising costs of living⁷ dominate the headlines. These issues raise important questions for this evaluation and wider policymaking. To what extent have COVID-19 and subsequent economic challenges impacted programme performance? In what ways has BBO responded, continued to support the most vulnerable and achieve results? How are the groups identified in our last report – those who research indicated were facing the biggest challenges such as young people, older people and women, amongst others – faring in the economic recovery?

The tightest labour market in modern times⁸

The post-pandemic picture of work has been one of labour supply not keeping up with demand. This means that, as job openings have risen to record levels- standing at 1.32 million in the most recent data- unemployment has continued to fall and employment growth has been weak. The UK now has just 1.03 unemployed people per vacancy, the lowest figure in over half a century⁹.

As highlighted by the Institute for Employment Studies, the conundrum between both low employment and unemployment is explained by an unprecedented increase in economic inactivity (that is, the number of people not looking for, and / or not available for, work). Recent analysis of today's labour market¹⁰ shows that, whilst unemployment has dropped below 4% for the first time since the onset

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- 3 Winchester, N. 2021. Universal Credit: An end to the uplift. House of Lords Library. Available at: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/universal-credit-an-end-to-the-uplift/#:~:text=In%20response%20to%20the%20COVID,in%20the%20March%202021%20budget>
 - 4 Clark, H. 2021. Examining the end of the furlough scheme. House of Lords Library. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/examining-the-end-of-the-furlough-scheme/>
 - 5 GOV.UK. 2022. Guidance for landlords and tenants. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/COVID-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities/coronavirus-COV-ID-19-guidance-for-landlords-and-tenants>
 - 6 House of Commons, 2021. Oral evidence from the Prime Minister. Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/2308/default/>
 - 7 Francis-Devine, B. Harari, D. Keep, M. Bolton, P. and Harker, R. 2022. Rising costs of living in the UK. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9428/>
 - 8 Institute for Employment Studies, 2021. Labour Market Statistics: October 2021. Available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20paper.1%20-%20Labour%20Market%20Statistics%20October%202021.pdf>
 - 9 Institute for Employment Studies, 2022. Labour Market Statistics: March 2022. Available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20-%20Labour%20Market%20Statistics%20March%202022%20.pdf>
 - 10 Institute for Employment Studies, 2022. Labour Market Statistics: January 2022.
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of the pandemic, the number of people now economically inactive is at 420,000 above pre-pandemic levels. The continuous fall in labour force participation is mostly attributable to increasing economic inactivity amongst older people¹¹ and a rise in worklessness due to ill health or disabilities. These figures

are compounded by lower net migration and demographic changes during the pandemic, resulting in an overall weak economic recovery and around 1.1 million fewer people in the workforce than we could have expected to see based on pre-crisis trends¹².

A closer look at the vacancies

When looking at the recent surge in job openings, it is important to examine job quality as well as quantity. Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) states that, in September 2021, vacancies in the lowest paid third of occupations stood 20% above pre-pandemic levels¹³. This affects the quality of opportunities that some BBO participants are likely to have. The same research also found that higher paying sectors were slower to recover, with new job opportunities being around 10% below pre-pandemic levels for a quarter of the UK workforce in September 2021. However, more recent data from ONS¹⁴ reflects a slight change in this trend, with increasing openings for professional jobs (for example, law and accountancy).

ONS data states that, as of March 2022, vacancies had surpassed record levels in most industries. Although rates have slowed slightly since Summer 2021, they remain at

record highs for half of the industry sectors. The wholesale, retail and motor vehicle repairs trade has recently seen the largest increase in vacancies. Amongst other sectors experiencing severe labour shortages in the aftermath of the pandemic are health and social work, accommodation and food services, and manufacturing. Accommodation and food services has seen the biggest increase based on pre-pandemic trends, with vacancy numbers now 110% above the figure for March 2020. We have also seen increases in job openings for traditionally male dominated roles, such as in construction, transport and storage, and mining and quarrying, albeit at fluctuating levels since Autumn 2021¹⁵.

There are several factors driving the rise in vacancies, including the recent increase in economic inactivity and a reduction of workers from the EU, as well as certain areas of work becoming less attractive during

Available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20-%20Labour%20Market%20Statistics%20January%202022.pdf>

11 There is no formal definition of older workers, though generally the term is used to refer to those over the age of 50. However, some BBO projects supporting older workers target those aged 45 and over.

12 Institute for Employment Studies, 2022. Labour Market Statistics: March 2022. Available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20-%20Labour%20Market%20Statistics%20March%202022%20.pdf>

13 Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021. Job Opportunities During the Pandemic. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN355-Job-opportunities-during-the-pandemic.pdf>

14 ONS, 2022. Vacancies and jobs in the UK: March 2022. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/jobsandvacanciesintheuk/march2022>

15 ONS, 2022. Vacancies and jobs in the UK: March 2022. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/jobsandvacanciesintheuk/march2022>

the pandemic. COVID-19 has massively impacted the ability of businesses to trade and fill posts, however, as IFS¹⁶ highlight, competition for good quality jobs remains high

amongst unemployed workers. This indicates that recent labour market trends have not necessarily led to a rise in worker power.

The impact on the hardest to reach groups

BBO is focussed upon tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion, and driving local jobs and growth particularly for the hardest to reach groups. As our 2021 evaluation report indicated, the impacts of the pandemic have not been felt equally by everyone; pre-existing inequalities have been exacerbated, resulting in a disproportionate impact on various groups, including but not limited to BAME people, women, refugees, and disabled people. Younger and older people, the digitally excluded and rural communities, and those experiencing or at risk of homelessness have also felt differential impacts. It should be noted that these groups are not mutually exclusive, and that those identifying with several of these disadvantaged groups have experienced intersecting inequalities during the pandemic.

Emerging trends are particularly concerning for **older people**, indicating that this group are more likely to drop out of the labour force after furlough or redundancy and that those looking for work face more difficulty than younger jobseekers. Research by IFS states that 58% of the older people made redundant throughout the pandemic were not in or searching for work

six months later¹⁷. As the furlough scheme ended in September 2021, employees aged 65+ were twice as likely to be furloughed than those under 30¹⁸. Older people now account for much of the large increase in economic inactivity, with the majority of the increase falling in the 50-64 age group.

Whilst **young people** have been hit hard by the pandemic, disproportionately represented in the worst effected industries, recent statistics suggest improvements. There have been huge increases in the proportion of young people in full-time education, and a recovery in employment for young people. However, employment growth has been led predominantly by students; whilst the proportion of young people in both education and work has recently increased, the figures for those just in work has remained unchanged in the past year. As it stands, 1 in 8 young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET), two thirds of which are economically inactive rather than unemployed. Labour force non-participation rates for young men have, for the first time since records began, surpassed those for young women (although the latter remains high at 12%)¹⁹.

16 Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021. Job Opportunities During the Pandemic. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN355-Job-opportunities-during-the-pandemic.pdf>

17 Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021. Employment and the end of the furlough scheme. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/9-Employment-and-the-end-of-the-furlough-scheme-.pdf>

18 GOV UK, 2021. Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics: 4 November 2021, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-4-november-2021/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-4-november-2021>

19 Institute for Employment Studies, 2022. Labour Market Statistics: March 2022. Available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20-%20Labour%20Market%20Statistics%20March%202022%20.pdf>

The pandemic has also had particularly adverse effect on **women**. Pre-existing gendered inequalities have meant that women have long been disproportionately burdened with unpaid caring responsibilities and under-represented in the labour market. Women were over-represented in the hardest hit sectors during the pandemic- a trend underpinned by pre-existing inequalities- meaning they have been more likely to suffer job losses and falling wages. Today, there are twice as many women as men in the bottom 10% of earners in the UK. As we emerge from the pandemic into a cost-of-living crisis, women's employment is increasingly low paid and precarious, and the lowest earners- disproportionately women, BAME people and people with disabilities- are likely to be worst affected²⁰.

Concerning racial inequalities in the labour market, the already high unemployment rate amongst ethnic minority groups has risen at more than twice the rate of white workers at certain points during the pandemic, with particularly concerning figures for young ethnic minority workers²¹. Research by TUC highlights that, although varying by region, the unemployment rate for those from ethnic minorities is higher than that for white people across the country.²² Women from ethnic minority backgrounds have suffered job losses at much higher rates than white women during the pandemic, with statistics demonstrating the intersecting impacts of racial and gendered inequalities during and beyond the pandemic.

As highlighted by IES²³, **refugees** also face multiple challenges when looking for work. This includes policies preventing them from working in the UK whilst seeking asylum, limited social support, and a lack of knowledge on job seeking in the UK and English language skills. Support for these people has been affected by COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the barriers created by **digital exclusion**. As our reliance on technology for work, education and almost every aspect of our daily lives continues in the wake of the pandemic, those lacking the skills to navigate digital services, or unable to afford access to the internet and technology, continue to struggle. Digital exclusion is of particular concern for jobseekers in rural areas, due to a lack of technological infrastructure, further compounded by regionally different impacts on employment and the economy.

The pandemic initially saw a fall in the disability employment rate and a widening of the disability employment gap, with improvements occurring recently. However, according to a 2021 analysis by Women's Budget Group, people **with disabilities** are around 2.5x more likely to be out of work than non-disabled people²⁴. Disabilities and ill health are now a major driver of economic inactivity; the Learning and Work institute highlight that this accounts for around 2.3 million people out of the labour force²⁵. It should also be noted that, according to government

20 Women's Budget Group, 2022. The Gendered Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-gendered-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf>

21 TUC, 2021. Unemployment rate has risen by 50% for BME workers aged 16-24 during COVID.

Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/unemployment-rate-has-risen-50-bme-workers-aged-16-24-during-COVID>

22 TUC, 2021. Jobs and recovery monitor, Issue #3: BAME workers.

Available at: [https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/Recession%20report%20-%20BME%20workers%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/Recession%20report%20-%20BME%20workers%20(1).pdf)

23 Institute for Employment Studies, 2022. Supporting refugees into work: what can we do better?

Available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Refugees%20and%20employment.pdf>

24 Women's Budget Group, 2022. The Gendered Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-gendered-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf>

25 Learning and work institute, 2022. Labour Market Analysis: March 2022.

Available at: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/what-we-do/employment-and-social-security/labour-market-analysis/march-2022/>

statistics, workless disabled people move into work at around just one-third of the rate of workless non-disabled people²⁶.

The relationship between housing and the labour market has been impacted by the pandemic. The Learning and Work Institute highlight that “people who rent their home from the council or a housing association are twice as likely to be unemployed and three times as likely to be economically inactive than private renters or homeowners”²⁷.

Homelessness during the second wave of the pandemic and beyond has been driven by wider economic trends, primarily newly unemployed people, furloughed people, and those experiencing homelessness for the first time. The structural barriers that existed before the pandemic, including a lack of affordable housing and a welfare safety net through which homeless people often fall, is currently being compounded by the end of COVID-19 support policies and the cost-of-living crisis²⁸.

26 GOV UK, 2022. The employment of disabled people 2021.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021>

27 Learning and work institute, date unavailable, Housing and employment.

Available at: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/what-we-do/employment-and-social-security/employment-support/housing-and-employment/>

28 Crisis, 2020. The Impact of COVID-19 on people facing homelessness and service provision across Great Britain.

Available at: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/244285/the_impact_of_COVID19_on_people_facing_homelessness_and_service_provision_across_gb_2020.pdf



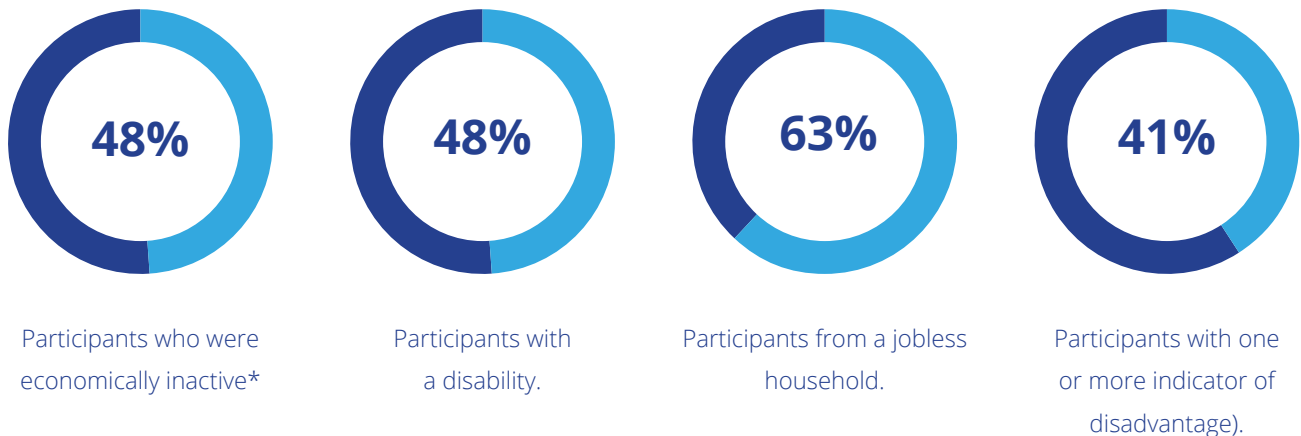


Engagement with the BBO programme

This section of the report explores how BBO projects have performed in relation to targets for engaging participants, as well as assessing who participants in the programme are; what barriers to work do they face? And what mechanisms have supported engagement?

Engagement with the programme to September 2021

144,846 Total number of engagements



* Economically inactive means not looking for work / not available for work

Programme targets were revised following the first extension, and the programme now aims to engage 173,153 people by the end of 2022. This target appears to be on track to be reached; monitoring data provided by the Fund shows that 144,846 participants had engaged with BBO up to September 2021. Reviewing the demographics of those who engaged with the programme, there was a relatively even split between male and female participants (with 51% male and 49% female). While most participants (44%) were in the 25-44 age bracket, the programme has successfully engaged with young people; 21% of participants were aged between 15-24. Similar success was seen with engagement with older people; 35% of participants were aged over 45, and 16% over 55; this is particularly important given the recent decrease in labour force

participation amongst this group, as highlighted in our previous chapter. In terms of race and ethnicity, 77% of participants reported that they were White / White British, with 22% falling into other ethnicities. ONS data published in 2019 records the overall English population as 84.8% White²⁹, suggesting that BBO has been successful in supporting the engagement of participants from ethnic minority groups.

Our previous reports for this evaluation have shown that BBO has long been successful in engaging with those who face barriers to work. The data to September 2021 continues to bear this out; almost half of participants (48%) reported that they had a disability for example, and 63% joined the programme from a jobless household. In terms of education and skills, 37% were recorded as having no basic

²⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/populationestimatesbyethnicgroupandreli-gionenglandandwales/2019>

skills when joining the programme. Just over a quarter (29%) had attained post-secondary education - 71% had an education level of upper secondary (ISCED level 3³⁰) or lower. As many as 12% of those had not progressed beyond primary education (ISCED level 1).

At the point of engaging with the programme, 48% of participants were economically inactive, meaning that they were not looking for work or not available for work. The other 52% of people were unemployed on engagement, meaning they were looking for and were available for work.

Impact of COVID on engagement

Our 2021 annual report found that engagement had dropped significantly at the start of the pandemic, with few participants joining the programme in the first quarter of lockdown. Interviews with BBO projects highlighted the difficulties during this period which disrupted the level of referrals and ability of projects to engage with participants. Project staff themselves were transitioning to virtual ways of working and personal relationships with other organisations were lost or reduced as a result of organisations being closed or staff on furlough.

However, after this initial period, projects found new ways of working and at the time of writing our last report, there were signs that engagement levels were improving. Indeed, this has been borne out in analysis of the updated monitoring data, which shows that nearly 30,000 of those who have engaged with the programme from launch to September 2021 joined after the pandemic started.³¹ However, there is indication that this cohort might face greater disadvantage than those who engaged with the programme pre-pandemic. For example, there was a slight increase in those joining from jobless

households (62% pre-pandemic to 64% post-pandemic), and while 8% of participants were homeless when joining the programme before March 2020, this increased to 9% of those joining between April 2020 and September 2021. There was also a higher number in the “pandemic cohort” who were economically inactive on joining BBO (50%, compared to 47% of those who joined before March 2020).

To facilitate engagements since the pandemic began, project staff identified a number of mechanisms which have been important:

- On a practical level, projects made changes to support referral processes. One project, working with homeless participants, quickly introduced an online form to receive referrals. Previously these were received by telephone but with staff working at home, there was no one in the office to receive the calls. This proved very successful with 28 referrals within three weeks of launching the form.
- As seen since the beginning of the programme, **relationships with specialist partners** continue to be an

³⁰ International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels are internationally recognised approaches to categorising educational attainment. More information about ISCED can be found here: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_\(ISCED\)#Implementation_of_ISCED_2011_.28levels_of_education.29](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED)#Implementation_of_ISCED_2011_.28levels_of_education.29)

³¹ For the purposes of this report, analysis presented as pre-pandemic has been defined by activity which took place before 31st March 2020 (such as engagement with the programme, or leaving the programme), and post-pandemic is defined as activity which took place after 1st April 2020.

important referral and engagement route. However, during the pandemic some projects have had to expand or change these partners when some have closed as a result of pandemic restrictions. For example, referrals from Jobcentre Plus were important for projects, but these facilities closed during period of lockdown. Projects instead looked to different organisations that continued to offer support throughout the pandemic. Working West London, for example, a project supporting BAME and refugee participants have more recently built referral relationships with the local YMCA Hostel. The West London Working project through its lead grant holder ELATT has also benefited from a voluntary forum for refugee advisers working across London which has been sustained through the pandemic. This has proven to be a valuable forum to share ideas, intelligence on what works for supporting refugees but also has been helpful in raising awareness of the BBO project to generate referrals. The Lots More to Offer project, which focuses on providing support to those aged 45+, has done targeted work with the Nepalese community, working and speaking with a number of organisations and community leaders to promote that older people in the community still have lots to offer and that employers will consider them for roles.

- Across the BBO programme, building on early learning, a number of projects created **dedicated engagement roles or teams** separate from those who deliver the support to participants once engaged. This has proved helpful during and as the projects emerged from the pandemic

allowing a dedicated focus on engagement. The Motiv8 project, for example, has a separate attachment team who handle the initial referral, engagement and eligibility requirements freeing up key workers.

Now Jobcentre Plus services are open again, projects report they are once again receiving referrals of **unemployed participants** from this route. In an isolated example, one project reports that they have seen an increase of referrals perceived to be as a result of the Government's 'Ways to Work'³² initiative as part of the COVID-19 recovery.

It has been more challenging throughout the programme to reach the **economically inactive**. With the evident increase of people with this status, projects have continued to work flexibly and creatively in order to engage economically inactive participants. **Social media** use was increased by many projects over the pandemic, though initially this was to maintain contact and offer universal support around wellbeing. With its increased use, several projects have retained it and even ramped up its use as a mechanism for engagement, particularly for economically inactive participants.

When able to, project staff have returned to **outreach approaches** visiting community venues, Children's Centres and other locations to promote the project and engage participants. For example, when restrictions lifted in the summer of 2021, the Lots More to Offer project held a series of roadshows visiting venues such as shopping centres and local community venues to engage people over 45 who were their main target group.

32 More information on Ways to Work available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-jobs-mission-to-get-500-000-into-work>



How have BBO projects responded to the pandemic and the changing labour market?

This chapter of the report explores how BBO projects have adapted to delivery in a post-pandemic landscape, and address some of the challenges posed by supporting participants who are experiencing increasing levels of need. It explores what BBO projects are doing to support some of the most vulnerable target groups engaging with the programme.

The research we have conducted over the past year indicates that employment-focused activities remain a key part of BBO delivery. Our participant survey showed that more than two-thirds of participants (69%) had received help to build their confidence, while 50% had received work-focused support, including CV writing and interview techniques. 40% had received help with getting qualifications or training. However, many projects have widened their offer to help participants to address additional challenges they face, some of which have been exacerbated post-pandemic. It was

clear from participant survey responses that interventions to address other barriers to work were important aspects of BBO delivery; almost one-third of participants we surveyed (32%) had received support to address money matters such as debt, budgeting or planning, and 38% had received help to address issues related to illness or disability. A number of participants told us they had received help to reduce social isolation and to re-integrate into society following lockdown; these issues are explored throughout this chapter.

Retaining a hybrid approach

Projects worked flexibly to ensure support has been delivered to participants throughout the pandemic period. Now moving out of the pandemic there is strong evidence from interviews with BBO project staff that some of the virtual support is being retained in a more

hybrid model of support. Projects report that the pandemic required the introduction of virtual support but this provided an opportunity to test ways of working which in fact have removed some barriers.

“Changing to telephone calls and online was a complete new way of working, perhaps we needed a blended approach from the start. It not only worked for us as delivery staff but also participants, a lot prefer the way we operate now.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

Initial face to face meetings have been reintroduced by many projects given the importance of relationship building and the need for evidence to be collected and verified. Outdoor sessions were introduced by projects once restrictions allowed. For

example, a delivery partner on the Invest in Youth project, who specialised in delivering therapeutic support to young people, organised outdoor activities in conjunction with a friends group of a local park which provided opportunities for discussion with

a practical exercise of gardening. This was reported as important where participants were struggling with motivation and that being outdoors allowed for some deeper and more personal conversations.

Projects reported ongoing use of text messaging as a way to keep in touch with participants and online delivery using platforms such as Zoom or Teams. Projects

are retaining flexibility and typically offering participants the choice of what and the balance of different modes of support. Interviewees for this research noted that some participants with anxiety feel more able to be open about challenges they face on telephone or video calls, and this group, along with those who would face challenges travelling, are particularly benefiting from the hybrid offer.

“Everything has been online because of COVID-19 – for me it was better. I found it quite good because I didn’t want to go out of the house, so I find that more relaxed; better for me personally.”

[BBO Participant]

“People have been more willing to pick up the phone. Sometimes, although you can’t read body language, a participant will tell you more because they almost feel like there’s a divide.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

There is some evidence that current hybrid working practices are allowing quicker access to support rather than having to join a waiting list. The Reaching Out Across Durham (ROAD) project, for example was initially set up to operate with geographical caseloads. Now

virtual and online mechanisms for support and communication are being used, Navigators and Specialist Support staff are working with participants not necessarily within their original geographical area thus avoiding having to add participants to a waiting list.

Enhancing digital skills

Across all projects, enhancing **digital skills** has been a key focus to enable all participants to engage in the initial virtual support and more latterly the hybrid offer. While some projects already had digital support elements in their project, others had to respond quickly and creatively to be able to offer this, and projects perceive these to be additional outcomes from the project they did not necessarily plan to achieve. Often this included support with the basics of getting online such as setting up an email address and hand

holding while participants get familiar with the different platforms being used. For many participants, these newly-developed digital skills were perceived as significant progress and particularly important given employer recruitment activity is often virtual. One participant involved in the survey described the support to develop IT literacy as the most important aspect of the support they had received; developing these skills gave them much more confidence and supported them to feel more positive about going to job interviews.

“From not even having an email address- getting somebody from that stage- not even knowing how to turn the tablet on, to being able to accept a zoom call. For me, that was massive. Even though I haven’t met that person face to face over the course of the programme, that was really, really good.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

“We’re supporting them with the digital skills. So that obviously feeds into our outcomes, but it also feeds into their employability as well, as a lot of interviews and things are now on online platforms. Doing our meetings over video, zoom or anything like that, it’s sort of helping them to get used to using these.”

[Project Lead]

As one BBO project lead highlighted, the pandemic has forced people into accepting that the “digital world exists” and that participants will need to accept it and become part of it if they want to move forward. At this project, delivery teams have found that moving

someone with no digital experience into an IT course is not a successful approach – first they address things like literacy and numeracy, and introduce IT at a basic level before moving people on to formalised digital training.

Additional support to address mental health needs

Our previous evaluation reports have flagged an increasing level of mental health needs amongst participants. Projects have responded by creating additional packages of support to address issues such as anxiety and depression. While some of this work has formed part of a project’s longer term, core offer, some has been designed to specifically address issues participants may face as a result of the pandemic experience. As restrictions were lifted some older people experienced ongoing fear and anxiety leaving their home and mixing with other people within physical distancing guidelines. The Lots More to Offer project which works with people over 45 specifically introduced ‘Re-entering Anxiety’ training to tackle participant’s anxieties (see case study example below). At Motiv8, a review of the delivery model flagged the high number of people entering the project with low-level mental health issues. In response, the project introduced wellbeing navigators

in 2021, offering interventions focused on health and wellbeing including topics such as improving daily routines, self-confidence and self-development. The package of interventions runs for 8 to 12 weeks and is delivered by a specialist partner, alongside other employment-focused activities delivered by the keyworker. Although project staff point out that the offer is relatively new, they are already seeing successes arising from it.

Staff from other projects credit the flexibility of the BBO programme in responding to participant needs. The ability for participants to be supported for the length of time that suits their needs is recognised by project staff particularly where participants may have experienced trauma.

This approach was also reflected by how delivery staff support those participants with complex needs.

“It’s been great for us to be able to genuinely meet [participant’s] needs. If we’re working with anyone who’s been through trauma, it’s going to be a long-term thing and short-term funding is actually sometimes it just makes it worse... This project has allowed us to look at the individual and trusted us to do a good needs assessment. We need more projects like this.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

“We will keep going with somebody for however long they need. Even if they are progressing very slowly, if they’re engaging and have a desire to move forward we’ll keep working. Not pushing them to places they’re not ready for.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

Respondents to our participant survey commonly expressed how their mental health had acted as a barrier to work. Although our survey did not explicitly ask whether mental health was a challenge for participants, almost a quarter (23%, or 59 respondents) told us about their mental health needs unprompted, indicating the scale of the challenge faced for those engaging with BBO. For many of this group of survey respondents, their needs

had been significant – for example, several participants referred to having been suicidal when they entered the programme. For others, anxiety and other mental illnesses had prevented them from wanting to leave the house, and one participant told us that they had taken part in other employment programmes but found that the interventions did not take their individual challenges into account. As a result, they had struggled to

move towards work until joining BBO – the participant described how it felt that the BBO key worker cared about them, and that had made a real difference. Indeed, participants experiencing mental health barriers to work

commonly flagged the importance of the keyworker role; having someone to talk to was often cited as the most helpful thing about the support they had received.

“I suffer from bipolar, and this makes it hard for me to leave my house, but my mentor was someone to talk to about this issue that I have, and she was very supportive in this matter.”

[Participant Survey Respondent]

“For a long time I’ve felt that people haven’t listened to my problems. To have somebody who does listen to you makes a big difference to me.”

[BBO participant]

Other participants flagged that they had been able to receive specialist mental health support through the BBO project, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). We know that many BBO projects have developed specialist mental

health interventions since the pandemic, but other support, such as encouragement to socialise through joining groups and attending courses, has also been beneficial, particularly to those experiencing isolation.

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

[Participant Survey Respondent]

Case study: Invest in Youth - supporting young people to improve their mental health

The Invest in Youth project supports young people aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), including young people at risk of becoming NEET. To September 2021, the project has supported 1254 participants.

On joining the project each young person is assigned a key worker who works through an induction and needs assessment process using the Life Circle tool. If mental health or emotional wellbeing are identified as needs a referral is made to Child Network North-West (CANW) a core partner in the BBO project who

delivers mental health support and therapy. These needs may relate to anxiety, chaotic or lack of routine; low mood; need to build coping skills; or a need to develop a vision for their future and motivation. It's important to note that CANW can only accept participants with low to moderate need; even a specialist partner such as CANW is not equipped to deal with high level needs or mental health crisis. In these circumstances, CANW will work with the key worker to identify a more appropriate service. A participant from Invest in Youth explained how their anxiety manifests and has acted as a barrier to them finding work.

“When I’m by myself and I’m talking and thinking to myself, I can think perfectly. But when I’m externally vocalising myself, like using my own words like using my own voice and making actual sound, it makes me nervous. So I start to like not an actual speech impediment, but my brain stopped me from making noise.”

[BBO participant]

Typically, young people will start working with CANW around 2-3 months after engaging with Invest in Youth. The participant needs to be working well with the key worker and have built a relationship with them to be in a position to engage well with CANW. Participants also need to be aware of their own needs and be comfortable enough to want to address

these needs through the CANW support; the process needs commitment from the young person that might not be built early in their engagement with Invest in Youth.

Young people are supported by CANW over a period of 8 weeks, typically through individual therapy sessions.

Project staff reflect key things that have worked well in delivering this project:

- Maintaining good communication between the key worker and therapy practitioner, so the key worker can support and encourage continued attendance and completion of the 8 weeks of support.
- Holding sessions in the afternoons and using text messaging to remind young people to attend.
- Dedicating the first session to getting to know the young person and building trusted relationships.
- Identifying activities that interest young people and working to identify practical activities and actions on this theme.
- Practical exercises for young people to do outside of sessions such as CBT mood journals or using sleep apps to encourage better sleep patterns.

With the pandemic restrictions in place, the project has adapted its delivery and introduced a number of outdoor sessions or activities. These proved successful and motivating for young people so have been retained as part of a hybrid model of delivery. For example, some initial sessions were held outside and it was found meeting young people in a neutral place and walking while talking allowed some young people to open up and have deeper or more personal discussions. Project staff

have also worked with local organisations such as a friends groups for the local park to introduce some volunteering activities for young people. Young people are invited to attend the therapy session but then complete volunteering such as gardening. This is often done in a group, allowing young people to build skills and interact with new people.

The project has also developed 'motivation workbooks' with participants which plots their activities and how they are making progress using SMART targets. Delivery staff have found that having a series of small targets has been better for participants; they are more achievable, buildable and support the long-term journey. At the end of the 8 weeks, young people are signposted to other sources of support as required or continue to work with their key worker. Generally, CANW aims to achieve three outcomes for their Invest in Youth participants and are usually able to achieve this. Some have developed their speaking skills or have developed confidence to look for employment and knowing what they want for their future. Project workers also use standardised tools – in this case, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale³³ - to assess progress and support their measurement of soft outcomes. More broadly, Invest in Youth has achieved good progress against BBO's three key results; 52% of those who have left the project with a verified result have gone into jobs, and 48% of verified leavers have moved to education and training. Importantly, young people have widely given positive feedback on the support:

33 More information about WEMWEBS is available here: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

“Having people there that are trying to get me to talk about myself is the best thing. I mean, it helps me because then in the future I’m able to articulate myself properly in reference to talking about myself, which is hard for me to do, because I usually suppress everything and it’s difficult.”

[BBO Participant]

Supporting ethnic minorities and refugees

Of the 144,846 people who have engaged with BBO since the programme launched, 22% were from ethnic minority groups. We have already seen that the pandemic has negatively impacted on employment rates for people from ethnic minority backgrounds, increasing the need for support in this post-pandemic period. Project staff have had to work flexibly to continue to deliver this support in an appropriate and accessible way. For projects **working with refugees** project staff highlighted it was really important to build a personal relationship and trust

with participants to get an understanding of what their individual needs are to ensure participants feel comfortable. This included being aware of any cultural differences, achieved through advisors having varied backgrounds and able to speak the same languages as refugees. Any barriers and challenges are then addressed directly. This may include the provision of childcare or creche facilities to allow participants to join language classes and work to help participants evidence and convert overseas qualifications not recognised within the UK.

“To be able to sit besides someone who could point you in the right direction was very helpful, they also gave me so much confidence in myself as English is not my first language, they encouraged me to do things I might not have had the confidence to do on my own.”

[Participant survey respondent]

Case study: Working West London - supporting refugees with work and integration to the UK

The West London Working project is led by ELATT, working alongside five delivery partners. The project is delivering tailored support for people of refugee and migrant status to support them with their journey of integration into UK society. The project staff work with a cohort considered as being 'furthest from the labour market', who are unemployed or economically inactive. Indeed, analysis of demographic data for Working West London participants showed that 22% had indicators of multiple disadvantage when joining the project.

Their approach is to empower and support them as they navigate the barriers and challenges they face: Typically, these include - low levels of English, navigating UK integration and systems including benefits and secure housing; having low levels of skills/ education, or qualifications invalid in the UK. Most significantly they are impacted with their lived experiences of trauma. High project participant enrolment and engagement levels, even during the pandemic, are a testament to the ability of the project and its staff to successfully navigate individuals through their own journey of wellness and towards work.

"Cumulatively this project has engaged with 594 participants to date (97% of target achievement), and has been recognised by ERSA (Employment Related Services Association)³⁴ as the project was shortlisted for 'Team of the Year' in 2020."

[Project Monitoring Report, 2021]

This project's success is attributed to several key factors: its commitment to working in partnerships to ensure the range of participant's needs are met and using a

personalised, trauma-informed approach. All of these values are apparent in the project's agile and innovative delivery mechanisms.

34 ERSA, Awards 2020 shortlist. <https://ersa.org.uk/media/news/applauding-employability-sector>

Some examples of these include:

A strong partnership presence across seven London boroughs and well-established refugee networks. The project is delivered by a well-established organisation and its partnership which brings together complementary organisations to deliver English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), employment support, housing, and wellbeing work. Where required the project partnership also signposts to other support services such as for therapeutic

and counselling or specific housing support with the relevant Local Authority.

Linking in with a number of other refugee organisations and networks ensures strong referral routes and being linked into current knowledge and best practice-sharing through regular network engagement and events. This has included creating strong working relationships with other BBO projects working with similar target groups.

“We were very active in getting all the BBO refugee projects together across London to talk about issues that each partner was having with regards to the refugee demographic group. That really helped us to be able to target people better and provide better support.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

Trauma-informed ways of working.

Central to the delivery approach is working sensitively on a one-to-one basis, being considerate of any potential triggers, having awareness of participant's lived trauma-experiences and any current mental health issues and working at a pace that is fully considerate of a participant's current needs. Interviewees reported many ways this is

embedded within their approach, underpinned by the Advisors all having a prior background of working with refugees and the project recognising that timeframes are not fixed but iterative and flexible ways of working are needed for meeting this cohorts varying needs.

Some specific aspects of the support delivered include:

- **Trauma-informed workshops** for ESOL teachers who aren't working on the project to better understand how to work with refugee groups.
- **Participants work with just one Advisor.** Building trusting relationships are particularly important due to past traumas. Slowly establishing a relationship that is built with one committed Advisor is key for managing participant trauma, ensuring their wellbeing and maintaining commitment to the project.

"I feel that in the future if I need help, I will have someone to help me, I am happy to know (Advisor) and the programme. If I have any issues I know I will be supported."

[BBO Participant]

- **Signposting referrals to counselling services** Where further socio-emotional support is needed, Advisors can make referrals and request- same sex and native language speakers for added cultural/ trauma sensitivity.
- **ESOL teachers are selected on more than just their ability to teach English:** In addition to their teaching qualifications, teachers are also selected on their experience of working with refugees and commitment to the holistic and person-centred approaches of the project which include involvement in wider support and integration engagement activities with students

“Our Advisors have a really good understanding of their [refugees] backgrounds and they are first and foremost ESOL teachers which means part of their training also supports them to really think about experiences that people [refugees] bring.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

- **Working with employers for more open and trauma-informed recruitment processes.** The project is currently engaging with employers so they better understand refugee employment immigration rules, being more open to accepting non-UK education qualifications and see their workforce

value. Interviews revealed how the project advises on ways to rethink their recruitment methods that are more trauma-informed, for example by making them aware that the interview process can be traumatic for some refugees who may relive the trauma of being disbelieved.

“[We’ve had] events where we’ve had to really try and get employers to rethink their recruitment processes and how diverse and inclusive their recruitment processes are for people who don’t have, a standard secondary school level or university UK experience, and people who have been through trauma. I think that’s where one of the areas that we’ve been trying to convey to employers is that putting someone in the interview process can be quite traumatic.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

To September 2021, 304 participants had left the project with a verified destination. Of these, 42% moved into employment, 13% moved

from economic inactivity to job search, and 59% were engaged in education and training.

Supporting women

Historically, our research has shown that some projects find it difficult to engage women, but across the programme, 48% of participants joining BBO were women. With women disproportionately affected by the pandemic and the current labour market developments, activity across BBO projects that have specifically targeted support

at women continue to be important. A number of participant survey respondents highlighted that their participation in training or job search activities had to be halted during the early part of the pandemic due to childcare issues, and several flagged that they had approached BBO projects looking for help with childcare specifically.

Case study: Action Towards Inclusion - supporting women through the pandemic

Action Towards Inclusion is a large BBO project partnership operating in North Yorkshire. To September 2021, the project has supported 2750 participants, of whom 46% are women. The partnership consists of 30 organisations, one of which is Kyra Women's Project, a by women for women project in York. The inclusion of a specialist women's organisation in the BBO partnership was driven by the multiple and complex barriers that women face, that are not necessarily harnessed or addressed by mainstream employability organisations or programmes.

The BBO activity delivered by the Kyra Women's Project receives referrals from other ATI partners where it is felt by partners that the Kyra Project is better placed to support female participants as well as referrals from other areas of the Kyra Women's Project and self-referrals.

During the lockdown periods of the pandemic, Kyra made sure that ATI participants had access to a laptop and the internet. They hoped that this had disrupted feelings of isolation and made it possible for participants to continue with courses. However, this was more difficult for the few women living in rural areas, where connections were poor.

A manager and a key worker at Kyra believed that effectively supporting women with vulnerabilities or in vulnerable circumstances took a few simple factors:

- Becoming a champion for the women and someone who believes in them
- Sitting alongside women, to identify their barriers and how to overcome them
- Setting small, achievable goals that can be recorded and celebrated

An added benefit for women participants was that they could attend **Kyra activities in tandem with ATI interventions**. This was especially beneficial because of the specialised services available to them at Kyra, such as domestic abuse support, self-esteem and assertiveness, poetry (which supported building self-esteem through creativity), and counselling. Delivery staff felt that this acted as a **wraparound support** to people involved with ATI. Further support for participants after ATI finished included referrals to MIND (for more therapeutic interventions), or into other Kyra activities. Delivery staff felt this helped to wind down support in a way that let them still feel supported.

A review of the project's monitoring data showed that to September 2021, 684 women had left the project with a verified destination. Of these:

- 42% moved into employment
- 21% moved into education and training
- 21% moved from economic inactivity to job search.



Supporting people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness

Programme monitoring data tells us that 8% of BBO participants reported that they were homeless on joining the project. This is a higher level than in the wider English population; official rough sleeping statistics suggest that there were 2,440 people sleeping rough in England in Autumn 2021, but Crisis estimate that there are 227,000 (or 4% of the English population) experiencing the worst forms of homelessness (such as rough sleeping or being placed in a B&B)³⁵. Analysis of the

programme monitoring information showed that homelessness has increased amongst BBO participants since March 2020. This group faces very specific barriers to work, as well as barriers to participating in the programme. One participant survey respondent described how they wanted to work but were experiencing health issues which meant they couldn't work outside the home, but weren't able to work from home either because they were staying in someone else's house.

Case study: Motiv8 – specialist support towards the labour market for homeless people

The Motiv8 project is based in Greater Manchester and aims to provide employability support for those most detached from the labour market with multiple complex needs. To September 2021, Motiv8 has engaged 4738 participants, of whom 83% had indicators of multiple disadvantage. A large proportion (30%) of their participants experience homelessness, and as a result Motiv8 includes a specialist housing partner, Shelter. The partnership recognises through their approach that housing is a major barrier to employment, and that securing a safe place to live, accessing appropriate benefits, and dealing with debts are the “building blocks” towards employment.

During the pandemic and its aftermath, Motiv8 has seen a **huge increase in participants experiencing homelessness and housing issues and poverty**. Interviewees also noted a large increase in referrals coming in from probation, with ex-offenders now making up a large proportion of the client group. Housing issues, including sofa surfing, living in temporary accommodation or on the streets, or having rent arrears and being at risk of homelessness, were said to have soared during the pandemic.

³⁵ <https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-many-people-are-homeless-in-the-uk-and-what-can-you-do-about-it/>

Team structure and delivery model

Project support begins with the **Attachment Team**. Project staff identified that evidencing eligibility for people with complex lives (including those without a fixed address, with mental health issues or substance misuse) often proved difficult. This was said to be frustrating when their need for support was clear. The introduction of an Attachment Team, who deal solely with referrals, eligibility and documentation requirements, has made providing support to those hardest to reach more efficient and effective. The **focussed workload** of the Attachment Team and Key Worker ensures that those who need help are referred successfully, whilst key workers can focus on sustaining engagement.

The project emphasises the importance of being **creative and persistent** with transient groups. For those without a fixed address, sofa surfing, living in temporary accommodation or on the streets, proving eligibility to be on programme is difficult. This challenge is dealt with by the Attachment Team, and through working closely with professionals and agencies (housing associations, probation officers, etc,) who know the participant. Regular contact with anyone who has a link with that person is found to work well in maintaining engagement. Shelter also operates a free envelope system, whereby participants can send documentation free of charge and without the need to access technology. The project emphasises that what is delivered is tailored to the participant, including mode of delivery, outcomes and interventions, and taking into account any complex needs they may have.

The **Key Worker** role was understood to be successful in supporting vulnerable participants, described as the “glue” holding the whole project together. Key Workers deal with ongoing support and follow a tailored support plan with participants, looking closely at their personal goals and barriers. Participants are also referred onto wellbeing, employability and self-confidence support teams, and navigated around whichever service (mental health, substance misuse, or domestic abuse support) they may need. The Key Worker relationship was said to be particularly effective for participants with “chaotic lives”- those that may find it difficult to engage and stick to appointments, don’t have phones or a fixed address. They exist as a dedicated resource with which vulnerable participants can establish a sustainable relationship and who can help keep track of appointments and progress.

Striking a balance and avoiding creating a dependent relationship was also emphasised. Onward referrals onto other teams was highlighted as particularly effective in being more true to “real life”, enabling participants to engage with people other than their key worker, gain independence and access holistic support.

Shelter’s work around **specialist housing advice** has also been particularly effective. The participants are often in crisis and have multiple complex barriers to employment. Shelter tackles basic barriers around housing, debt and benefits advice. This is particularly useful for participants who want **practical support** to get back on track, for example, through budgeting tools. This is complemented by Motiv8’s work around wellbeing and self-confidence.

“It’s really good wrap around support with wellbeing and employability alongside the key workers. It just all compliments everything that we do. And it works really well for quite a lot of our participants. We have had some good outcomes without some great results.”

[Project Lead]

Dealing with exacerbated risk during the pandemic

A consistent theme was that **risk and complexity** amongst participants has heightened as a result of the pandemic, particularly in regard to mental health. This leads to challenges, including a need to safeguard participants before they formally enter the program. Staff noted the increase in demand for mental health support as “distressing”, and that the number of participants taking their own lives has increased during the pandemic. If participants are identified as high risk, they are allocated a Key Worker urgently. The

project emphasises a **wellbeing-first, person-centred approach** and navigates participants to appropriate specialist support.

The programme worked pragmatically and sensibly to balance the risk of COVID-19 with the risk of not seeing people with safeguarding issues. They now operate through a blended approach (virtual and face-to-face) but encourage face-to-face visits where possible, which are understood to be essential in supporting complex participant groups.

“We all know that it’s getting tougher out there in the big world, and that’s having an impact on people.”

[Project Lead]

After identifying a lack of provision for low-level mental health issues and an increase in participants experiencing these issues, Motiv8 introduced **Wellbeing Navigators**. This support includes 8-12-week interventions around self-confidence, daily routines, and

self-development alongside Key Worker activities. This was noted as particularly successful for people newly out of prison and was thought to have filled a gap in mainstream provision in low-level mental-health support.

A person-centred approach to outcomes

The ethical values of the project and doing what is best for the participant was a strong theme in interviews. Whilst many participants are understood to be very far off employment, due to complex multiple issues and barriers, the program focusses first on securing safe accommodation, the correct benefits, payment plans and helping participants get

to a better, more stable place in their lives. These **softer outcomes** are understood to be crucial first steps on a journey towards employment. Stakeholders were proud that they work with participants for as long as they need, and do not push them towards outcomes which they are not ready for:

“We’re not an employability programme, we’re more than that. Only a proportion of our participants will move into a result, so to speak, but there’s huge value in the work that goes on.”

[Project Lead]

The value of this work was noted by one survey respondent who was supported by the project.

“I was homeless at the time and they helped me get in touch with people that could help me. They helped me to find accommodation, and a doctor to help me with my mental issues. I am no longer homeless and am able to support myself through my universal credit benefits; in time I would like to get back into the workplace. – Participant survey respondent.”

[Participant Survey Respondent]

Amongst project staff, there was an emphasis on gaining and celebrating the softer outcomes achieved by participants. Consensus was that focussing solely on results takes away

from the person-centred approach of the program and the progress that participants make from a particularly difficult start point.

“It’s something that we celebrate - that significant progress around their resilience, their confidence, their personal development. It’s as much an achievement for those people as it would be if they got a job, or they went into training. Because that’s a massive step from where they’ve been and that [may be] where their journey with Motiv8 ends. They’re pre- pre- pre-employment, so, they may go on to something else in the future. But what we’ve given them is the building blocks to be able to take that next step and that for us is really, really crucial in their journey.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

“We measure softer outcomes, which, to us, are just as important as getting them into employment. A lot of them, without that support, wouldn’t even be here. It’s about day-to-day survival, keeping people safe and well.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

In terms of BBO’s results, the project has demonstrated particular strength in moving participants into education and training, with 59% of those leaving with a

verified destination taking up learning. 21% moved into employment, and 20% moved from economic inactivity to job search.

Employer engagement

While there are strong levels of vacancies, project staff do acknowledge that the **local labour market has changed** in some areas with some businesses ceasing to exist and organisations restructuring their organisations and changing locations. This has required

some work on the part of BBO staff to explore and relearn the local labour market post pandemic to be able to advise and support their participants. Additionally, participants are reported to be looking for different types of employment opportunities to those pre-

pandemic. Project staff reported that they are seeing some participants that experienced unemployment during the pandemic, and as such, have not been unemployed for long, but who are looking for something different - the recent unemployment and pandemic experience becoming motivation to look for a change in career. Project staff are working with them to identify their transferable skills and having to explore what options and employers can offer these opportunities. Project staff also report a perceived reluctance from some participants to work in the care sector, perhaps as a result of the challenging environment this became during the pandemic.

Work life balance or working from home has become an increased focus for participants according to project staff feedback; they note this was much less of a concern for participants pre-pandemic. In light of this there has been an increased focus on self-employment in some projects. Our participant survey showed that 6% of respondents moved into self-employment immediately after leaving BBO, with a number of participants stating that they had engaged with BBO specifically to find help on setting up a business. These respondents indicated that they had participated in activities to help with issues including tax, marketing and business planning.

“I have started up my own business now, with the support from the project. The project funded two courses for me to attend, to give me the qualifications I needed to start up my own business. Being self-employed helps me to balance my work, and my family responsibilities much better.”

[Participant Survey Respondent]

As noted in our previous evaluation reports, **employer engagement** has been a key activity which has supported the results achieved through BBO. In particular the wider work projects and lead grant holder have done to **raise awareness** of the abilities and skills participants from particular target groups can bring to employers has continued and is more important now in a more competitive labour market. ELATT, the grant-holding organisation which leads the West London Working project, reported this advocacy for refugees is something they are doing more widely at

a strategic level, organising conferences and inviting employers. For example, pre-pandemic a specific employer event was organised during Refugee Week which brought together employers, refugees, students and partners to meet and discuss routes into work. The project hopes to do similar again now face to face events are returning. This more flexible approach to employer engagement was echoed at other projects such as Reaching Out Across Durham, where rather than working with employers to secure, for example, 20 warehouse vacancies for their participants,

they will seek to match participant skill sets and interests with the jobs that they want.

Projects have picked up on employer engagement activities post pandemic that had proved successful previously. For example, **sector-based training** where an employer was opening a new base or store and a larger number of staff were needed.

Motiv8 for example have recently worked with McDonalds and Smyths Toys who have opened locally, delivering a bespoke training course in return for guaranteed interviews for participants. Somewhat in contrast, another project perceived that small businesses were more open to employment opportunities for older people.

“They are really positive, saying that ‘older workers are good for their business because they are reliable, they’ve got knowledge, they’ve got life experience. They’ve often worked in jobs before where they’ve held quite responsible positions.’”

[Project Delivery Staff]

Case study: Lots More to Offer - supporting over-45s to return to work through employer engagement

In the rural and coastal regions of Kent and East Sussex, the Lots More to Offer project has been working to enable ‘economically inactive’ people aged 45 years+ move closer to the workforce by overcoming barriers at the individual and employer level. Interviewees attributed the success of the project to its blended approach of tailored support and engagement with individuals, its proactive interaction and relationship building with both the community, and prospective employers to break down perceived and actual barriers for the project participants. To September 2021, the project had supported 338 participants.

A lack of confidence and hesitancy around how their age might limit them from being considered for employment roles has held project participants back from re-entry to work. In addition, access to transport, physical ill-health or injury, low digital literacy, skills and experiences not portrayed as relevant or transferable to another market are examples of the wide range of barriers and challenges the project addresses through alternative approaches and flexible delivery mechanisms.

Some of these mechanisms include:

Addressing employment readiness through one-to-one informal skills training. Project workers supported participants to address and improve cover letters, CVs, self-esteem/confidence, interview preparation and mock interviews. Previously delivered on a group basis, project staff

shifted delivery to one-to-one sessions after participants said they would prefer this approach. This change became doubly successful, as project staff found that in a one-to-one setting, participants were more comfortable talking about some of their other barriers to work. Staff told us that:

“Working with people on a one-to-one basis [made] them feel comfortable and more willing to open up about their personal issues and barriers, their feelings and circumstances. Identifying non-work issues had far greater success than enforcing a group environment with low levels of turnout and engagement.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

Following attendance at workshops and training, participants can present themselves more confidently with an updated CV which is tailored to the role and includes recent skills training. As a result, they appear more ‘market ready.’

Taking new approaches to identify and engage project participants. During the pandemic, project staff found more mainstream locations like the Jobcentre proved to be less successful for engaging this harder to reach ‘economically inactive’ cohort, especially when it was closed for extended periods. Instead, the project has taken an outreach approach to engagement, ensuring a visible

presence in places such as community groups and other local events. The presence of the pandemic was a further deterrent to people seeking work, but the project has continued to diversify its targeting approach including door knocking, attending recruitment fairs and employer open days and having a regular presence at the Jobcentre since its re-opening.

Individual-needs assessment. Project staff work with project participants holistically and at their own pace to address barriers to the workplace that are individual to them, acknowledging that progress in a person’s life is captured in wider metrics beyond employment status.

“What we try and do, is have a holistic approach. We have a form which is called ‘my journey’, which is how people feel about themselves, how ready they feel for work, how confident they feel and any other barriers.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

Focusing on a person’s strengths and existing capabilities – such as transferable skills and life experience also builds confidence and

has helped to present participants more positively to prospective employers.

“She was so delighted she found something she was good at that she could do and that her health didn’t hinder her at all.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

A wide offer of suitable employment positions through an age-friendly recruitment agency. The project has focused on actively linking participants with appropriate employment opportunities. Originally designed as an online recruitment “App” this facilitation mechanism provided a link with employers receptive to recruiting through the project, with “appropriate, meaningful volunteering, training and recruitment opportunities with those people looking for them” (Source - Project website). However, in

response to technical and social interaction limitations from the app, the project made the move to bring onboard a member of staff to work in a “job broker” post to replace the app.

The postholder has grown and personalised existing employer relationships. Interviews revealed that the success of this stemmed from proactive engagement through telephone and face-to-face meetings with a diverse range of local and national organisations based in the locality.

“The love of my job is going out there, face to face and meeting someone for a coffee from a community interest company.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

Those most receptive to the project and its aims tended to be the organisations who have already shown commitment to employment diversity through their company's social values which aligned to the project - i.e. 'Investors in People' and 'Transforming Local Communities.' Being introduced to the right

person at an organisation- such as the Social Value Manager - proved to be the best way of working to ensure dedicated commitment to work with the project, working together to identify and address potential barriers to work where possible for the project participants.

“Since the App was taken over by the Broker, 70 companies have since engaged with the project, of which 15 organisations, or 20% have committed to offer an interview to any project participants who meet the job criteria.”

[Project Lead]

Flexibility around recruitment processes has helped remove barriers to the job market for participants.

Examples of these developed by employees with the project having an open day for prospective candidates who can benefit from a site visit and engage in a 'meet and greet' session in a more

informal setting to alleviate anxieties of formal interviewing processes. Through this approach project participants could attend with their Employment Advisor for support, and their CV could be presented through a discussion of their work history to date, transferable skills and reasons for their interest and fit for the job.

“CVs are a big deal, it is a barrier because they are intimidated by it, so we just sat down really casually and talked to people, and [the Employer organisation] we worked with really pushed this out for us.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

The projects ethos and values are evident in its approach that puts its people first above performance stats. For example, to only offer ‘quality’ job opportunities, that is, roles which are permanent and appropriately matched with participants skills and interests. This works to ensure positive and sustained outcomes and maintains participants’ confidence in themselves and in the job market. Furthermore, the project experiences far fewer participant dropouts since they have become more selective with who should join the project, ensuring that people who are signing up are wanting to work, and who show commitment to the project and openness to addressing barriers they face.

Responding flexibly to COVID to address new and emerging needs. During the pandemic, the project moved its training and participant support online, and following the relaxation of restrictions is delivering a hybrid model of in-person and remote engagement.

Meetings have taken place in coffee shops and libraries to encourage people who have been socially isolated during the pandemic to re-integrate into society. A ‘Re-Entry Anxiety’ workbook and training has been specifically created on how to manage social anxieties through practical health and safety tips and CBT. The training material was developed in response to participants expressing varying degrees of concern through to anxieties around fear of leaving the house and getting on public transport with strangers. The tools and information covered in the training has helped people re-gain confidence and has eased the overall transition back to the ‘new normal’. Although the tool was developed specifically for BBO, the partner has also been able to roll it out more widely. As a result, BBO participants are starting to travel independently again for work and training, enabling them to continue with their progress in the project and enter the workforce when they are ready to do so.

“He [participant] was very pleased that he was able to go [to the Re-Entry Anxiety Training]. He’s now looking for jobs everywhere, he’s been to several interviews, so he’s really come out of his shell. I think that was thanks to the ‘Re-entry anxiety’ book.”

[Project Delivery Staff]

“I think the success was the Re-entry Anxiety training we do with people. I think that has been a key thing to helping people through the pandemic, especially for those who have anxiety issues no matter how small or large, there’s always something people can take from that.”

[Project Lead]

Of those participants leaving Lots
More to Offer to a verified destination
(up to September 2021),

- 32% moved into employment
 - 33% moved into education and training
 - 21% moved from economic inactivity to job search.
-

Summary

Our research with BBO participants and projects in this last year has highlighted that participants are facing greater complexities in the post-pandemic period; anxiety, mental health issues, health issues and financial barriers such as debt, housing and budgeting problems have come to the forefront of

participant concerns. Although BBO projects have tailored their approaches to engage and support particular target groups, our research has once again highlighted that there are a number of common themes that are important regardless of the types of barriers faced by participants.

BBO projects have:

- Provided flexible and responsive support, adapting to address emerging needs during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Put people first, tailoring support to address individual circumstances
 - Focused on building confidence, particularly as lockdown restrictions eased
 - Supported wellbeing by developing support mechanisms specifically to address increasing mental health needs
 - Encouraged and facilitated digital inclusion
 - Worked with employers to address stigma and find appropriate opportunities for BBO participants.
-



Achieving results

BBO projects are required, as a condition of their of ESF funding, to record progress against three key “results”.

These results relate to participant progress into or towards employment - specifically whether they are:

1. in employment,
2. In education or training,
3. moving from being economically inactive when joining the programme (meaning that they are not looking for work or are unavailable for work due to ill-health or caring responsibilities) to actively job searching when leaving the programme.

Although these results are important indicators of the success of the programme,

it is also expected that participants will benefit more widely from the support they receive, with participants achieving “softer” outcomes such as increased confidence, the development of new skills, and improved physical and mental wellbeing.

The following sections explore the achievements of the programme to date in relation to results and outcomes, drawing on the programme monitoring information (MI) data but also results of our participant survey. We also explore whether there are key differences in results pre- and post-COVID-19, and to what extent key results differ amongst target groups.

Leaving the programme

Participants leaving the programme to end September 2021

Total number of participants leaving the programme

117,960

Total number of leavers with a known, verified destination

73,287 (62%)

Total number of leavers with an unknown destination

44,673 (38%)

Our review of the programme MI up to the end of September 2021 showed that 117,960 people - 81% of those who had engaged with the programme - had finished their support and had left or exited BBO. Of those, 73,287 participants (or 62%) had “signed off” the programme by informing the project of their destination - that is, they had provided evidence that they were employed, engaged in education or training, or confirmed that they were now available for work or actively looking for work, or economically inactive (and thus, not available for work or actively looking for work). This process allows projects to claim a result or outcome for participants. It is the outcomes for these 73,287 participants we will explore in this section of the report.

However, our analysis found that there were 44,673 participants who left the programme without registering a result with their BBO project (38% of all programme leavers). This gap in information means that project efforts in supporting and progressing participants are not fully represented in the programme data – for example, it’s possible that more participants had moved to employment, but had not informed the project. We highlighted this issue in our previous evaluation report, and with an additional 18 months of data now available, we have been able to begin to assess factors that have influenced project ability to collect outcome data.

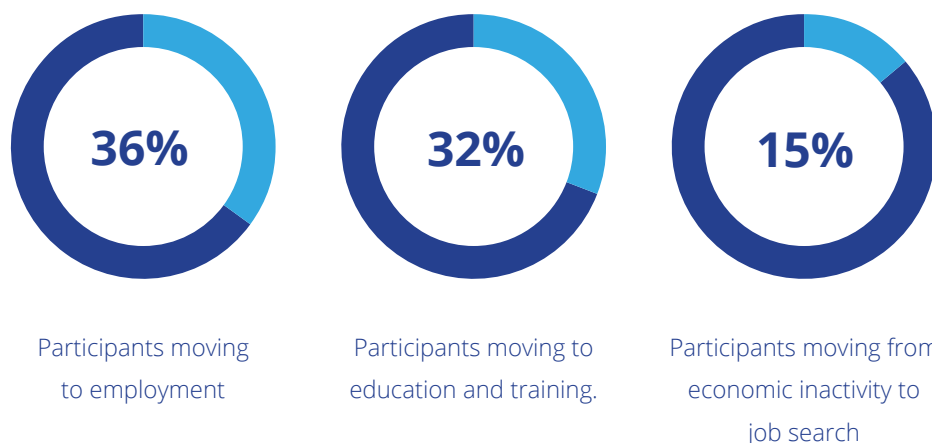
Projects told us that pre-pandemic, ESF rules required participants to provide evidence of their exit destination and sign a form in person. These requirements had been

challenging – often participants would not return to the project to sign forms after leaving, particularly if they had moved to employment or education, resulting in an evidence gap. Since the pandemic began, processes have been implemented for collecting signatures electronically, and evidence of destination is no longer required, making it easier to collect data from participants on exit. Analysis of the programme MI data supports this assessment; we found that 61% of those who engaged with and left the programme before 31st March 2020 had a verified exit destination, compared to 67% of those who engaged and left the programme after 1st April 2020, showing an improved rate of projects collecting evidence.

Of course, not all gaps in destination data can be attributed to evidence collection procedures, and some participants do disengage, often for personal reasons such as precarious housing situations, caring responsibilities or health challenges. Interviewees from BBO projects told us that they have processes in place to support those who might need a break, allowing them to stay with the project at arms-length until they’re ready to actively participate again. Where participants are exiting without achieving a formal result, projects told us that they will support the participant to reflect on their outcome journey using tools such as the outcome star to show progress on soft outcomes, and where further support is required, they will signpost the participant to other relevant organisations. On average, participants spend 8.1 months with the programme.

Achievement of BBO's key results

Results achieved by participants with a known, verified destination (to September 2021)



Analysis of the programme MI data showed that **84% of leavers with verified destination data had achieved one of the three key programme results** after their participation in BBO. More than one-third of these participants (36%) had moved into employment, and a similar number (32%) had moved into education or training. 15% of participants who were economically inactive on joining the programme had moved into job search activity on leaving the programme. The attainment levels for each of these results has increased slightly since our last review of the programme data, which included data up to June 2020.

Our participant survey, conducted through telephone interviews, aims to explore the sustainability of results. It asks participants what they were doing immediately when they left the BBO programme, what they were doing

at the time of their first interview, around 4-5 months after leaving, and then what they were doing at the time of their second interview, six months later – so around 10-12 months after leaving the programme³⁶. At the time of this report, 279 respondents had taken part in an initial interview, and 60 had taken part in a follow up interview.

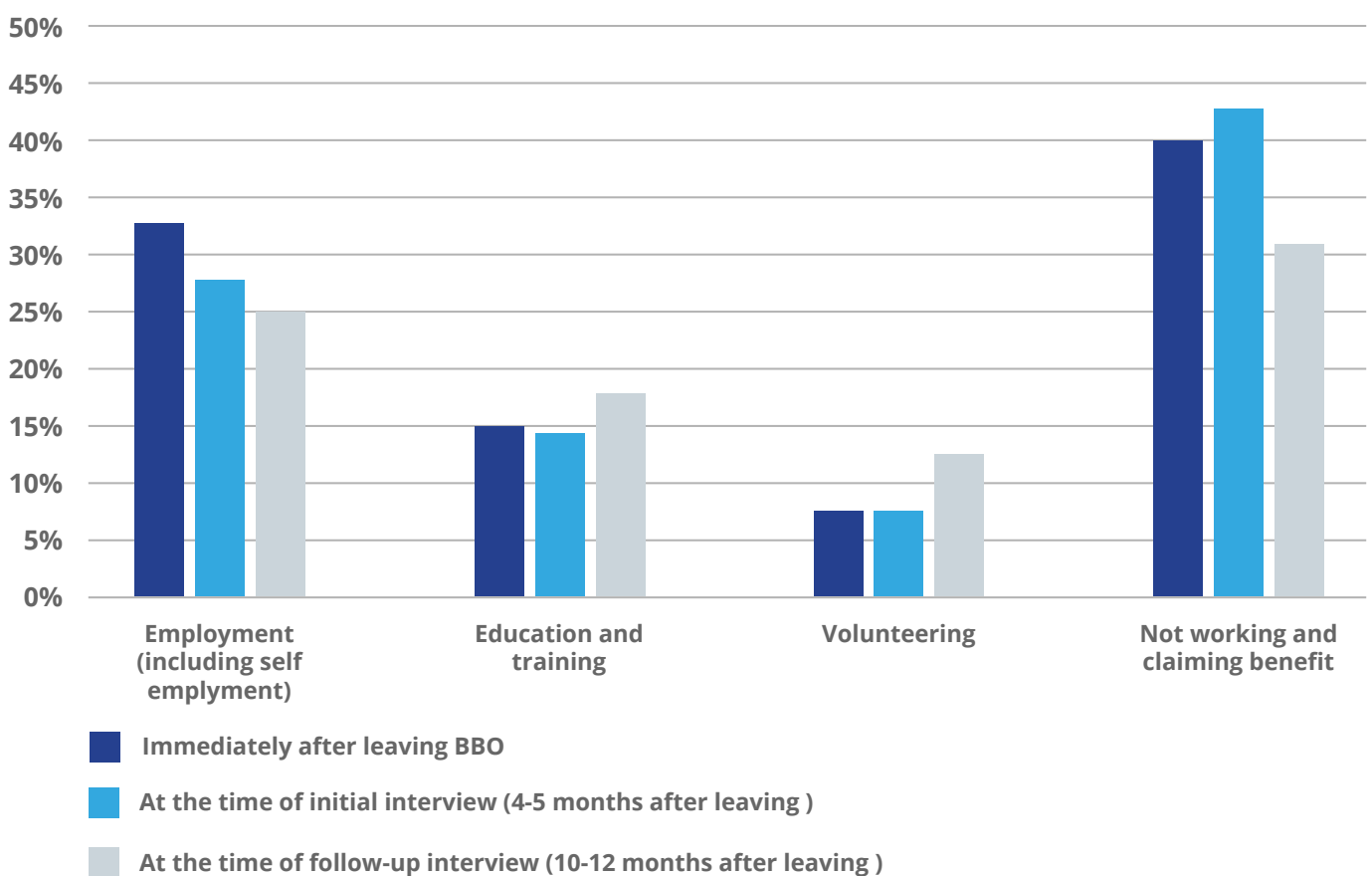
As Figure 1 shows, immediately after leaving BBO, 33% of our survey respondents went into employment (either full or part time). This also includes 6% of participants who moved into self-employment. This broadly aligns with the 36% who moved into employment across the wider programme. However, of our survey respondents, only 15% moved into education and training immediately after leaving, compared to 32% of the wider programme cohort. Interestingly, after an initial drop off at the 4-5 month point, this figure

³⁶ It should be noted that at the time of writing, we are only presenting two waves of follow up interview data; around 60 respondents. Interviews will continue over the course of 2022, giving more robust data for our final evaluation report in 2023.

had increased to 18% at the time of the follow up interview. Indeed, in initial interviews we found that of those who had left a job between leaving BBO and taking part in the survey, 10% had left the job to move on to education and training. It should be noted that the cohort of survey respondents is much smaller than

those included in the wider programme monitoring data; outcomes data drawn from the survey is used to identify trends in destinations and journeys, rather than to formulate conclusions about the success of the programme in achieving outcomes.

Figure 1: Destinations after BBO over time – survey respondents



NB: Base number of respondents at initial interview = 279, and at follow up = 60.

There were indications from our first interviews that participants were largely moving into sustainable work. For example, at the time of initial interview, 69% of those who were employed immediately after leaving were still in the same job (4-5 months after

leaving BBO). Of those who had left their job in that time, 48% resigned or left but this was generally because they had been recruited on a short-term contract. 14% left to start another job, and as noted, 10% had moved into education or training.

In terms of the quality of jobs, of those working at the time of their first interview 69% had been employed on a permanent basis, with 30% holding a temporary post. 9% were employed on a zero-hours contract. There was some

evidence of participants progressing in their jobs in the short time since being recruited; 8% had moved from a temporary contract to a permanent one, while 13% had taken on higher skilled work and 11% had received a pay rise.

“My job is permanent, so I feel a lot more secure that the job will prove to be ongoing.”

[Participant Survey Respondent]

At the stage of the follow up survey, the rate of employment had decreased. However, at this point there was also reduction in the number of participants who were not working and claiming benefit. Although the data is for a small cohort at this stage, the follow up survey gives us some interesting early indications about longer-term routes into work for BBO participants who do not leave to an immediate positive destination. For example, nine of the 15 respondents who were in employment in the follow up survey were not working at the time of their first interview with us, six months previously. Of these nine,

- two had been volunteering
- one was in education and training; and
- six were not working and claiming benefits.

Interestingly, two-thirds of this group told us that BBO projects had been instrumental in helping them obtain a job, even though the result was achieved some time after leaving the programme. One respondent was now working as an IT consultant, and explained that BBO had supported him on his path to establishing a stable career.

“I have had a lot of problems with anxiety, and in the past I probably would not even have answered the phone, but now I am more proactive and confident in myself. [without BBO] I would probably have just got a job in a shop or something, not looked for a career.”

[Participant Survey Respondent]

Only one respondent indicated that they had left a job since we last spoke to them; this person had resigned to move into education and training and was still engaged in their course at the point of our interview. Another respondent had gone on to work as an advisor

at the BBO project which had supported them; at the time of their first interview with us, they were volunteering with the organisation. We will explore these different employment patterns further in our final evaluation report, with a larger cohort of survey respondents.

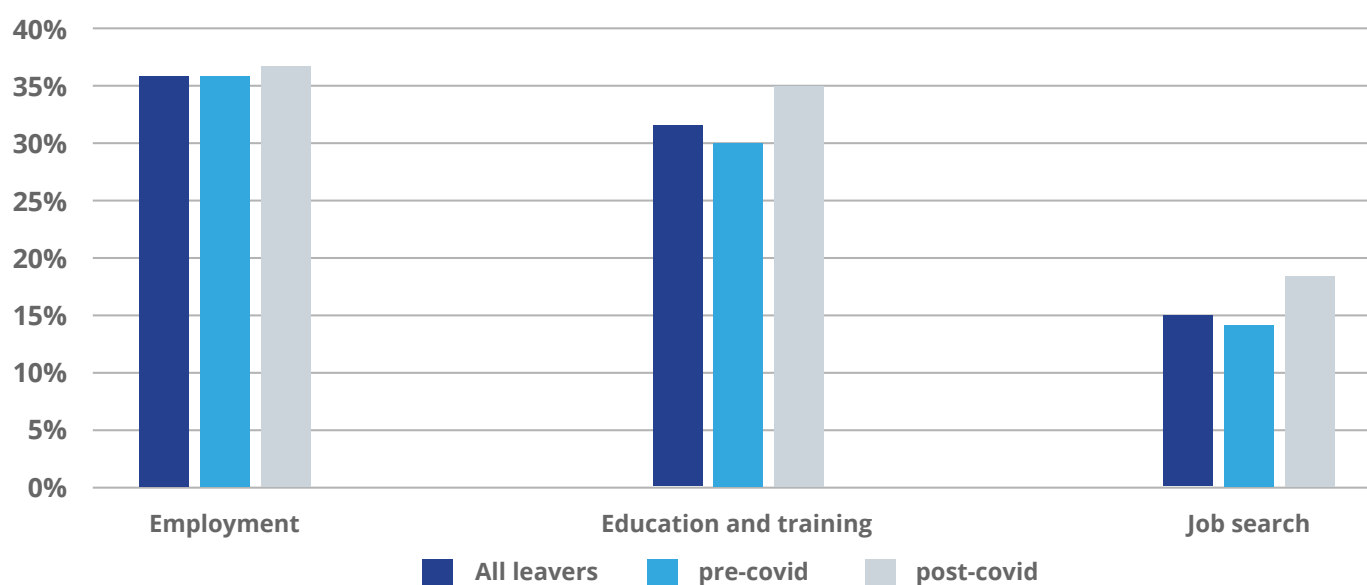
Has the pandemic impacted on results?

Our last annual report began to explore to what extent results might have been impacted by the pandemic. However, at that point, programme data only covered the first three months of the lockdown restrictions, and most activity had halted at this point while new ways of working were established. For this report we now have eighteen months of programme monitoring data covering the pandemic period, as well as an increased

number of survey respondents who all left the programme during the pandemic.

Figure 2 sets out the rates of attainment for BBO's three key results for all leavers with a verified destination since the start of the programme, and then for participants who left the programme before 31st March 2020 ("pre-COVID") and those who left the programme after 1st April 2020 ("post-COVID").

Figure 2: Attainment of BBO's key results, pre- and post-pandemic



Source: BBO's programme monitoring data

The table shows that attainment of results was higher for those who left the programme in the “post-COVID” period across all three of the key indicators, but particularly **education and training** and **job search**. There are a number of factors which may have contributed to this, including better recording of results in the post-COVID cohort and those who have left in the post-COVID period have been with the project for a shorter period of time, and so may have been closer to the labour market – perhaps engaging after a redundancy or similar.

The results achieved for participants in terms of training or education could be explained by the emphasis project staff placed on identifying online courses and activities for participants to engage with during the pandemic. Project staff highlighted examples of participants, typically those with anxiety who benefited in particular from these opportunities, gaining confidence. For those who had the required digital skills to engage, there were new opportunities with many courses which traditionally would have been face to face being offered online during the pandemic.

One project however suggests their high achievement in education and training results is

“testament to the fact that we’re getting to those more complex people.”

[Partnership lead]

Some project staff highlighted that one of the unexpected outcomes from the pandemic is the quality of the results being

achieved by participants who are more ‘market ready’, having participated in online learning, courses or engaged in support.

“It will make employers look at them more carefully and think they’ve updated their skills and they’re keen to do more things.”

[Delivery partner]

Furthermore, the **job search result** has become increasingly recognised as valuable by project staff. For some participants it is not possible to move them

into employment but a job search result is beneficial and participants themselves can see it is a step towards employment.

“She’s now happy to apply for jobs just to have the opportunity to have a job interview and she says ‘even if [I] don’t get it, at least I’ve learnt something about what I need to get this job later.’ Because she gets feedback.”

[Project lead]

How do results differ amongst target groups?

We have seen that in the wider labour market, different demographic groups have different rates of success in employment. This section of the report explores whether the trends we have explored earlier in this report are reflected in the BBO participant cohort.

Importantly, the programme MI showed that BBO projects had successfully supported those who were some distance from the labour market back into or towards work. For example, the analysis showed that of the 73,287 people who have left BBO with a verified destination, 35,997 (49%) were **economically inactive** on joining the programme. Of this group:

- 28% moved into employment;
- 33% moved into education and training; and
- 30% were searching for a job.

Encouragingly, the figures for those moving from economic inactivity to education and training and job search activity have increased (by 3 percentage points and 2 percentage points respectively) since our last review of the data (to June 2020), while the figure for those entering employment has stayed the same.

There were also successes for those facing other barriers to work, such as for those who had been part of a **jobless household** – that is, a household where no working-age adults are in employment - when they joined the programme. For this group (totalling 44,100, or 60%, of the 73,287 leavers with a verified destination):

- 33% had moved into employment;
- 33% into education and training; and
- 14% into job-search.

Again, these categories have all seen an improvement of 2-3 percentage points since our last review.

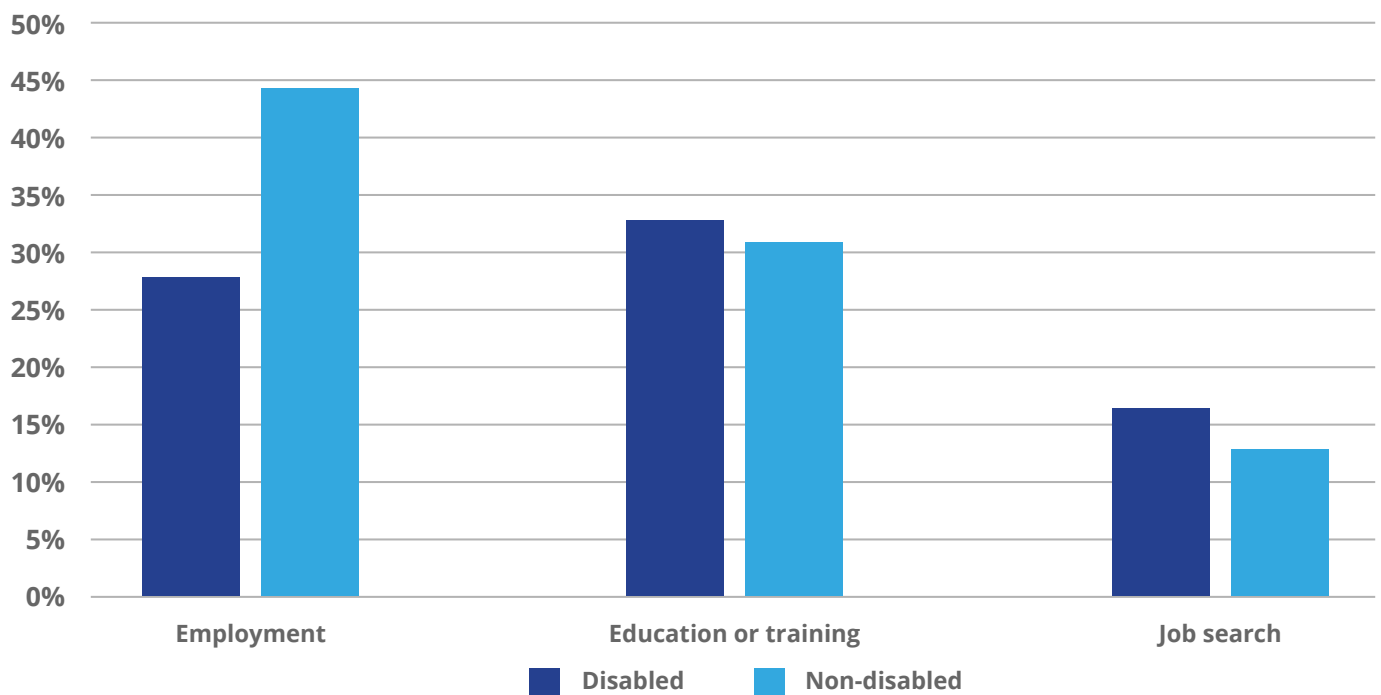
Of those who have left BBO with a verified destination, almost half reported that they had a **disability** on joining the programme (34,295, or 47%). Of this group:

- 27% had moved into employment;
- 33% moved into education and training; and
- 17% were searching for a job.

For this group, both education and training and job search results had seen increases of 1-2 percentage points.

Of those verified leavers with a disability, 25% were inactive on entry to the programme. Encouragingly, this had dropped to 14% leaving the programme to economic activity, suggesting that for 8,276 leavers, their health was no longer a barrier to work.

Figure 3: Attainment of BBO's key results, by disability status



Source: BBO's programme monitoring data

Almost half of participants in the programme have a disability, and our analysis shows that this group achieved good results from participating in BBO. However, Figure 3 shows that the employment outcomes for BBO participants with a disability are far worse

than for those participants who do not have a disability. Participants with a disability are more likely than non-disabled participants to enter education or training or job search activity, reflecting a starting point which is often further from the labour market.

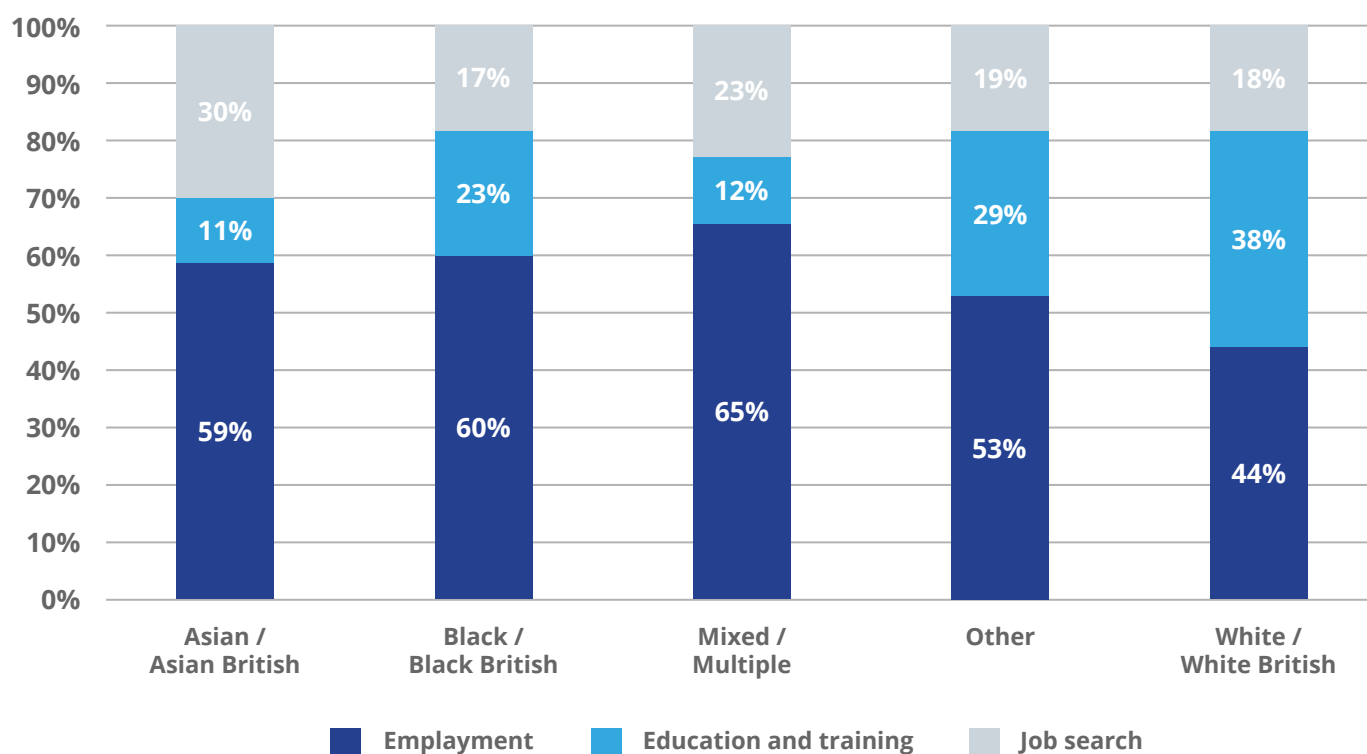
“[My keyworker] talked me through things and helped me to see that my health was not up to work at that point, but that that was OK , and to just take small steps.”

[Participant Survey Respondent]

In order to further explore how outcomes vary for other demographics of BBO participants, we have conducted analysis to compare the attainment of results by different ethnic groups, gender and age. We have conducted this analysis by calculating the number of results attained as a proportion of results attained by all people within a particular cohort (e.g. the number of people entering employment within the 54-65 age group as a percentage of all those achieving a verified result in the 54-65 age group).

The programme data showed significant differences between the attainment of results by ethnicity, as shown in Figure 4. For example, White / White British people were least likely to enter employment following BBO but had the highest rates of entry to education and training. The data also shows that those with mixed or multiple ethnicities were most likely to enter employment but had one of the lowest rates of entry to education and training, along with those from Asian / Asian British backgrounds. Meanwhile, Asian / Asian British participants had the highest rate of movement from economic activity into job search.

Figure 4: Attainment of BBO's key results, by ethnicity



Base sizes: Asian / Asian British = 4,199, Black / Black British = 3,962, Mixed / Multiple = 1,060, Other = 1,732, White / White British = 45,193

Source: BBO's programme monitoring data

However, it is interesting to consider what participants were doing when they joined the programme. Analysis of labour market status on entry shows us that Asian / Asian British participants were most likely to be economically inactive when joining BBO - 58%, compared to 47% for White / White British participants, for example. Black / Black British participants were least likely to be inactive on entry (41%). This variation in start point goes some way to explaining the different rates of **attainment for the job search outcome**, which was much more prevalent amongst Asian / Asian British participants.

However, there is very little difference in the **attainment of employment outcomes** for Asian / Asian British and Black / Black British participants, with those with Mixed / Multiple ethnicity also having success in this respect. For context, Table 1 shows national rates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity by ethnicity from 2019. The table shows that patterns of employment largely follow the attainment of employment rate for BBO participants of all ethnicities except the White / White British group.

Table 1: Rates of employment, unemployment and economic activity by ethnicity

Ethnicity	% people employed	% people unemployed	% people economically inactive
All	76	4	21
Asian / Asian British	65	6	31
Black / Black British	69	8	25
Mixed / Multiple	69	6	26
Other	63	7	32
White / White British	78	4	20

Source: ONS. Data for England, Wales and Scotland from 2019.

From the research conducted so far, we are unclear as to why different groups experience such differences in outcomes; this may be as a result of the specialist support offered, but we will continue to explore this in the final phase of the evaluation.

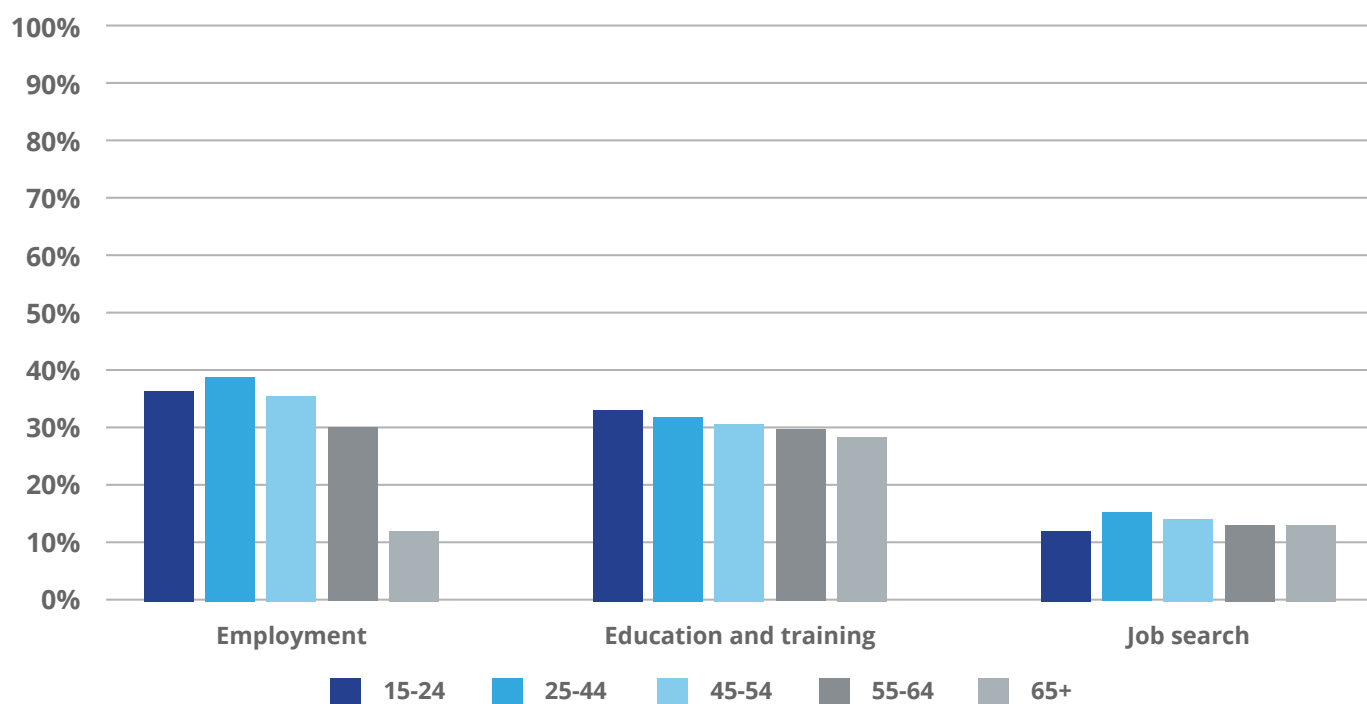
We can see from Figure 5 that the attainment of employment results also differs between age groups, with 25–44-year-olds having the greatest success in moving into the labour market. The rate of employment decreases by age, aligning with wider findings that older people are more likely to leave the labour

market after a redundancy for example, rather than moving into work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, young people are most likely to move into education and training, while there is little differentiation in rates of entry to job search over the age of 45, while rates of job search activity are highest for 25–44-year-olds. As noted elsewhere in this report, perceptions towards age are influential in moving people forwards, both in terms of employer perceptions and the perceptions of older people themselves.

“I would have liked to get a job, but really I think I am the wrong person for this project, I am almost 65 and waiting to get my State Pension when I am 66. ...My health is poor and it is unlikely I will get a job now.”

[Participant survey respondent]

Figure 5: Attainment of BBO's key results, by age



Source: BBO's programme monitoring data

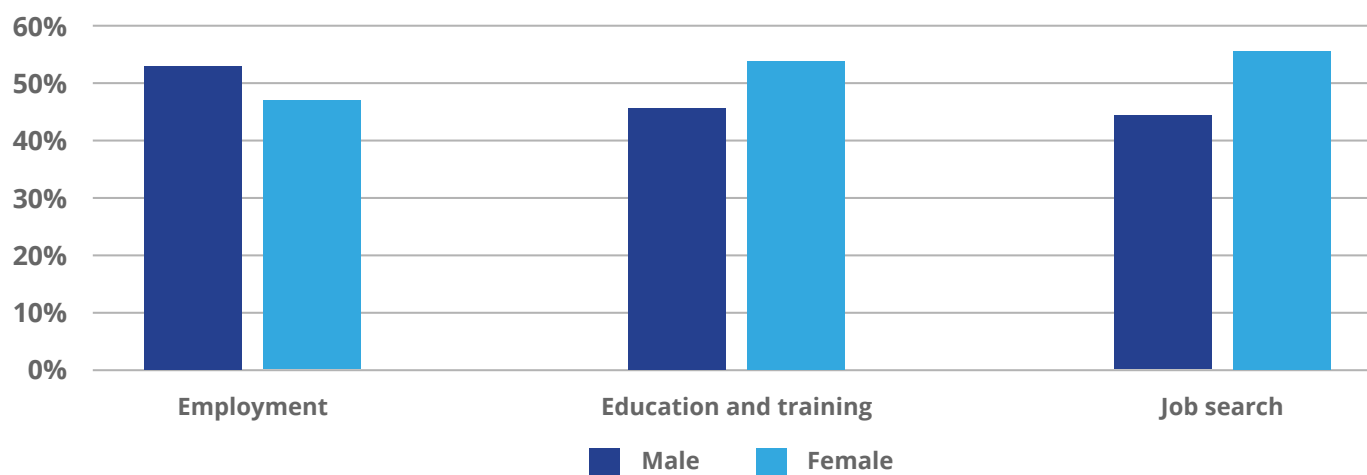
When gender is factored in, age takes on even greater significance; for example, the programme data shows that women participants aged between 25-44 have poorer employment outcomes than men (35% entering employment, compared to 42% of men). This is likely a result of the

inequality of caring responsibilities between women and men, which are more commonly borne by women in that age group. There is little difference in employment outcomes between young men and women aged below 25, or for those aged over 45.

This means that on the whole, women leaving BBO have worse employment outcomes than men, although more women move into education or training or job search

activity on leaving the programme. However, more women join the programme from an economically inactive start point – of those who are inactive on joining BBO, 55% are women.

Figure 6: Attainment of BBO's key results, by gender



Source: BBO's programme monitoring data

Making progress towards work

As highlighted, although BBO is an employment programme, progress towards the labour market is recognised to have as much validity as employment outcomes. This is acknowledged through the key results of movement into education and training and job search activity, but other outcomes such as the development of soft skills are not formally counted by the programme.

However, the participant survey and qualitative research conducted through the evaluation have highlighted the value of the work BBO projects do to improve participant soft skills. Figure 7 shows participant responses to the

survey question "Which of the following things have changed for you as a direct result of support from BBO?". As the figure shows, two-thirds of respondents (68%) felt the programme had improved their confidence, and more than half (55%) reported improved wellbeing as a direct result of being involved in the programme. We have seen that projects developed a range of strategies to address social isolation for participants during the pandemic, and that is reflected in the 32% of participants who reported that they had got more involved in their community as a result of the support.

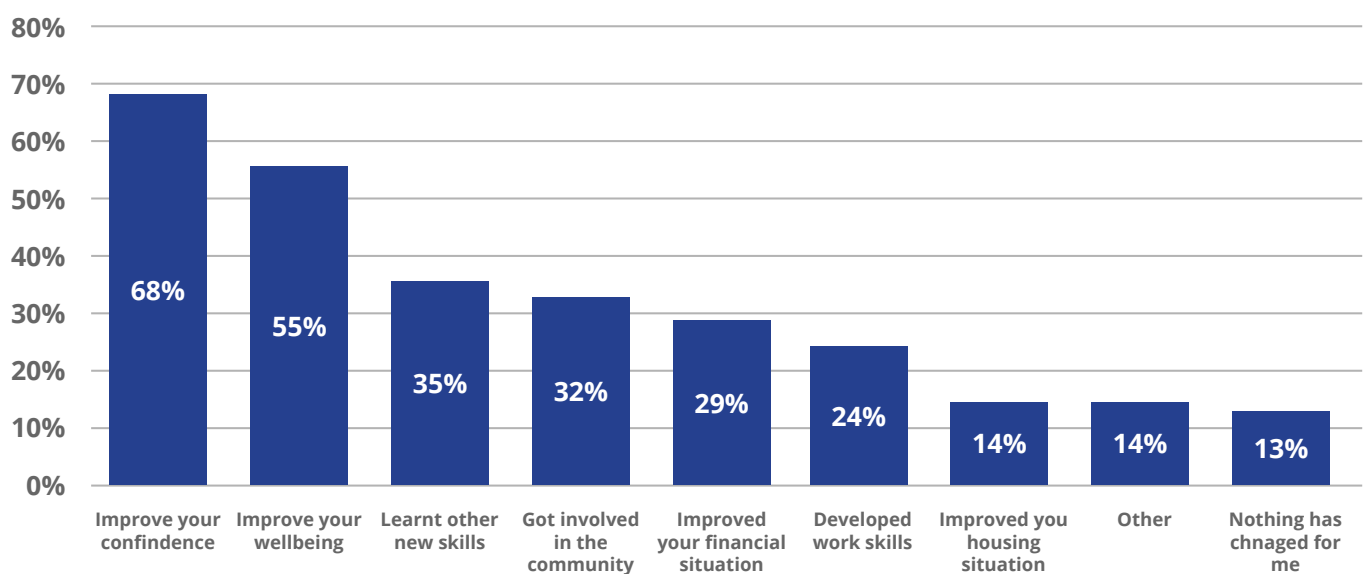
“I was not going out as much, getting to the group meeting made me interact with other people.”

[Participant Survey Respondent]

“I was part of a group with people who had similar issues as myself, basically the people in my group helped me to build my confidence.”

[Participant survey respondent]

Figure 7: Attaining other outcomes – findings from the BBO participant survey



Source: Participant survey initial interviews. n = 262

We asked all survey participants whether they felt the changes they had experienced from BBO's support would continue into

the future. Importantly, 71% of respondents were fairly confident or very confident that the changes would continue.

Table 2 provides a comparison of the attainment of the main soft outcomes between those who were employed at the time of leaving BBO support, and those who were not working (and either claiming benefits or not claiming

benefits) at the time of leaving. This shows that those who moved into work were slightly more likely to report improved soft outcomes, but particularly in relation to improved wellbeing.

Table 2: Comparison of soft outcomes between those who were employed and those who were not working on exit from BBO support

	% Survey respondents who were employed immediately after leaving BBO (n = 81)	% Survey respondents who were not working immediately after leaving BBO (n = 106)
Improved your confidence	68	66
Improved your wellbeing	63	58
Learnt other new skills	26	25

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, those respondents who were already holding permanent roles and those who were in education or training were more

consistently confident that they would sustain changes. For others, the future looked less certain, often as a result of the pandemic changing local circumstances.

“I think that it will be difficult times, so I think that volunteering is the best option, but I will continue to look for work.”

[Participant survey respondent]

The participant survey also helps us to understand how BBO contributed to moving people towards work. Just over one third of survey respondents (36%) expressed in their first interview with us that the support they had received from BBO had

been a key factor in them finding their job. One respondent highlighted how they had come to the project to find a way to get off benefits and had gone on to start their own voluntary organisation. With the help of the BBO project, the participant

found a volunteering opportunity and also received support to set up the organisation which they are currently in the process of launching. Another had received support to

obtain the qualifications they needed to start their own translation business. For another participant, self-employment was a way to circumnavigate their health barriers to work.

“The project gave me the motivation and the tools to move on to the next step of setting up my voluntary organisation.”

[Participant survey respondent]

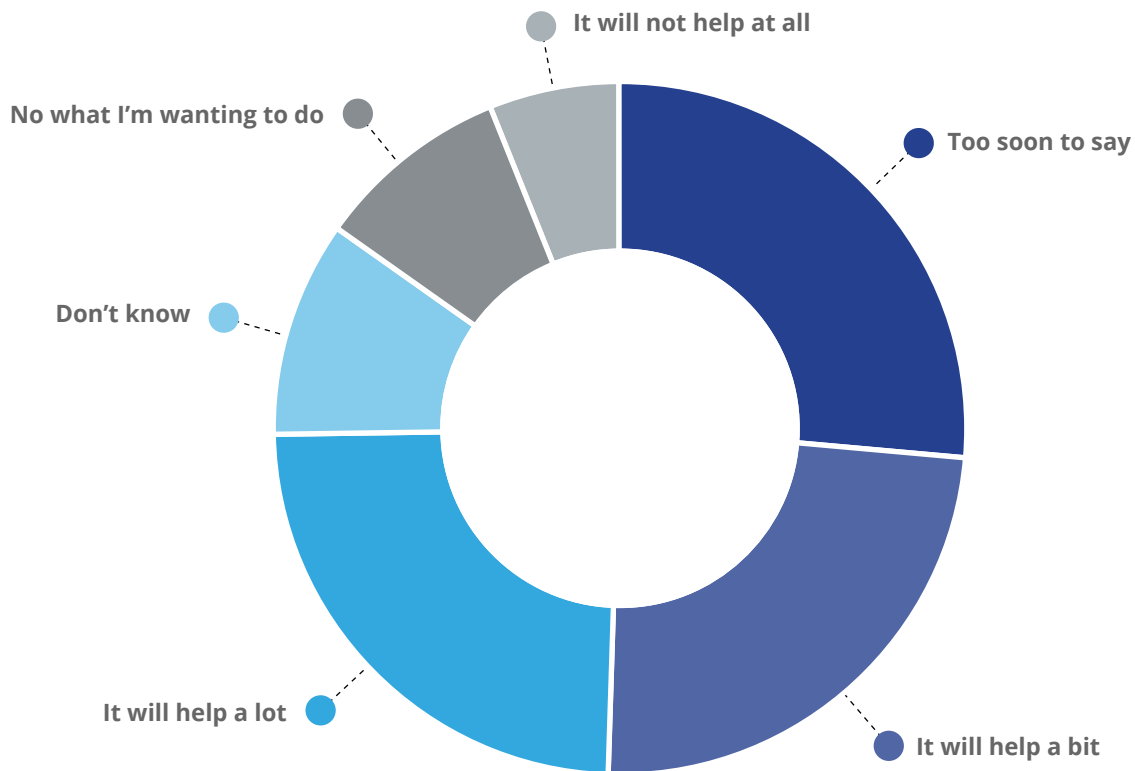
“I am currently unable to work due to my health issues. However I am looking to work self-employed after finishing my course, so I can work when I feel up to it. I am currently slowly building up all the things I need to be able to this, but I am unsure as to when exactly I will be able to start.”

[Participant survey respondent]

For those participants who had moved on to education and training and volunteering, employment was still a key consideration for the future; 80% of those in education and training indicated that their course would help them to get a job, while 65% of those who were volunteering believed it would help them to find work. However, of those who were not employed when

leaving BBO, 70% had not applied for any jobs since leaving. Despite this, respondents who were not currently working remained optimistic about the value of the BBO support in helping them find work in the future. 48% felt the BBO support would help them to find work – either a bit (24%), or a lot (24%). Only 6% felt it would not help them at all, as illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Will the support you received from BBO help you get a job?



The reasons provided by respondents aligned with the factors participants had highlighted as improved as a result of support – for example, improved confidence and motivation were both felt to be important to help them find work, as well as a better understanding of career options. Work experience and new work skills were also cited.

Regardless of destination, respondents to our survey were overwhelmingly positive about their experience with BBO; very few had found that the project was unable to help them in any way. Respondents talked about enjoying working again, feeling a sense of fulfilment and achievement, feeling more confident and having improved mental health. In the final phase of the evaluation, and with a larger cohort of survey respondents at follow up stage, we will have a clearer picture of what this means for longer term outcomes for participants.



Conclusions

On the face of it, the post-pandemic labour market should form an ideal opportunity for BBO participants – we have a landscape of unprecedented vacancy levels which are not being met by the existing workforce.

BBO participants are being equipped, with the support of project activities, to take full advantage of the vacancies available. However, we also know that even with BBO support, the labour market is still far from a level playing field for women, older people, people with disabilities and different ethnic groups. We have seen projects put in a range of approaches to address specific barriers faced by each of these groups, but we must also acknowledge that for many, their start point is much further from the labour market than others. In this respect, progress in terms of entering training, education and job search activity is strong. Each of these demographics face wider societal challenges – childcare and other caring responsibilities; legislation around reasonable adjustments and accessibility; employer and self-perceptions amongst others – that BBO can only address to an extent. Work being done on employer engagement helps this, alongside a post-pandemic shift to flexible and home-working that may be beneficial for these groups.

Our participant survey confirms that this is the case, and that the support provided by BBO projects is helping to move people further towards the labour market. Importantly, for many this progress would not have been made without BBO's help. Participants have told us that having someone to work through their challenges with them, on a one to one and flexible basis, has been vital to them.

They also told us that help to break down other barriers such as debt, housing and even family conflict had helped them to move forwards, showing that a holistic approach is vital for those facing complex challenges.

It is heartening to see that post-pandemic, BBO projects have continued to achieve good levels of both engagement and results. Although the pandemic presented numerous challenges for projects, the flexibility of hybrid delivery and the ability to gather evidence electronically have ultimately been positive for both projects and participants and will remain a key part of the delivery model for BBO projects in their final year of funding. Digital exclusion was a significant challenge for projects at the outset of the pandemic, but projects developed approaches to upskill participants to face these new challenges; survey respondents told us that this work had been beneficial to them.

Mental health and social isolation remain significant challenges for BBO participants and we have seen projects work hard to address these issues through the provision of specialist support for mental health, group activities and specific “re-integration” work. Participants have valued this highly, and survey respondents commonly expressed how their mental health and wellbeing had improved following their engagement with the programme.

For the remaining period of the BBO programme, funded projects could usefully focus their efforts on those groups who are at risk of withdrawing from, or being overlooked in, the labour market in the post-pandemic period. Learning from the evaluation so far suggests that this would include:

- Continue to utilise mechanisms to encourage self-referrals such as social media and outreach work, supporting the engagement of those who are economically inactive
- Work with employers to break down perceptions of different demographics
- Work with employers to understand local needs, forging links with participant's individual skills and experience
- Continue to offer holistic and individualised support for participants to break down barriers to the labour market.

What next for employment support?

In April 2022, the UK Government made public their plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)³⁷, which will replace the European Social Fund (and other European Structural Funds such as the European Regional Development Fund). The investment to support people and skills strand of the UKSPF is most closely aligned to ESF, although it will not launch until 2024-25 in England, leaving a significant funding gap when ESF ends. However, there is some flexibility within this - meaning funding can be drawn sooner - if local authorities are able to demonstrate that there will be a significant gap in provision delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations following the end of ESF.

The people and skills strand of UKSPF is developed to complement mainstream employment support provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, by focusing on the provision of employment

support to those who are economically inactive. It also makes provision for the development of skills for both unemployed and economically inactive people.

Importantly, the prospectus for UKSPF recognises the need to provide focused support to people aged over 50, people with a disability or health condition, women, people from an ethnic minority, young people not in education, employment or training and people with multiple complex needs (homeless, care leavers, ex/ offenders, people with substance abuse problems and victims of domestic violence). The target interventions mirror those being widely offered throughout BBO, such as intensive, tailored, one-to-one support supplemented by additional and / or specialist skills support. BBO has equipped partners with a strong track record in the provision of such support, and as such, evidencing this work is increasingly important.

³⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

Next steps for the evaluation

The final evaluation period will see the evaluation team continuing to work closely with grant holders, conducting more project-focused case study visits, as well as a series of place-based case studies, exploring how BBO activity links with other local-level provision to support participants. We will also conduct a final grant-holder survey. Our research with participants will continue; further waves of both the “baseline” participant survey and the follow up

survey will be conducted to further explore the sustainability of participant outcomes and the role the BBO programme plays in this. Finally, we will continue to review the programme MI data and local evaluation reports to support our final report which will be produced in 2023.

Throughout this period of the evaluation, we have identified a number of important themes to explore throughout the final phase.

These include:

- How BBO delivery partnerships have evolved over the lifetime of the programme and what factors have contributed to successful partnership working.
 - What role local context plays in the successful delivery of BBO.
 - Whether the pandemic has meant a shift in the needs and characteristics of BBO participants and how BBO projects have responded.
 - Exploring the extent to which grant holders and projects are able to track participants after they exit the programme, and how this impacts on understanding participant results and destinations.
 - Continuing to explore links between participant demographics or characteristics and participant destinations. We will also continue to assess the impact of the pandemic on results.
 - Trends relating to working hours, quality of jobs and under-employment as the labour market evolves and we obtain more data from participants.
 - Where possible, comparing outcomes for BBO participants to those of other employment programmes.
 - Identifying key success factors from BBO provision to support the development of future employment support programmes.
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