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Evaluation of the European Social Fund 2014-2020 Programme in England

Qualitative case study research

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Executive summary

Executive summary

The European Social Fund (ESF) is part of the European Structural and Investment Funds which are used by the European Union to fund programmes for supporting growth and jobs across member states. The ESF focuses on improving employment opportunities, promoting social inclusion and investing in skills. The DWP (Department for Work and Pensions), ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency), National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) and Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) are the main co-financing organisations (CFOs) for the ESF in England. A limited amount of funding is also available for smaller delivery organisations through direct bids.

As part of the impact evaluation of the ESF 2014 to 2020, the DWP commissioned IFF Research to carry out qualitative case study research with projects funded by the ESF in England. The research aimed to understand 'what works' in the delivery of employability and skills interventions via the ESF and to provide insight into 'how' and 'why' outcomes are achieved. The research also aimed to allow some exploration of softer outcomes that can be harder to identify through quantitative analysis.

The research consisted of 20 case studies with projects funded by the ESF 2014-2020 programme. The research also included an augmented case study with ESF provision delivered through HMPPS to people in custody or on probation, across six sites. HMPPS provision was managed and delivered through a different model than mainstream ESF provision, and HMPPS provision is therefore discussed separately in this report.

The fieldwork was carried out between September 2019 and February 2020 and was therefore unaffected by COVID-19.

The research among mainstream ESF projects found that:

- The most important enabler of effective delivery was positive working relationships with CFOs, LEPs and with delivery partners. Previous experience of delivering ESF contracts also influenced project efficiency. Where staff had this experience, it enabled projects to be up and running and delivering outcomes far sooner than those with little or no previous experience delivering such contracts.
- Challenges to effective delivery centred on complex and time-consuming ESF eligibility checks and registration processes; and the challenges of working with vulnerable individuals who needed support for multiple issues.
- Across most of the investment priorities, the key worker model, which allows participants to have a consistent point of contact over a long period of time, was crucial to achieving positive outcomes. This support tended to be highly personalised and holistic.

- A flexible approach was important, both for projects working directly with individuals and those working with employers. Those working with individuals out of work recognised that participant lives were often chaotic and unpredictable and tried to accommodate this as far as possible.
- Some projects working with what they describe as ‘those hardest to help’ felt a varied supply chain was better suited to serve this group.
- Projects offering in-work support felt that this was important to ensure employment outcomes were sustained. Frequent contact and guidance during this period was helpful, although participants could be reluctant to take this up.
- Strategic and delivery staff also reported some common challenges to achieving outcomes. Some working with what were perceived as harder-to-help groups said their employment targets were not always realistic and did not take the complexity of individual situations into account.
- Strategic and delivery staff identified key areas of improvement for similar provision going forward: streamlining some of the ESF processes and administrative tasks; including measures for soft outcomes and allowing projects to draw some funding for these; better integration between local services so that participants receive more holistic support.

Among HMPPS projects, the research found that:

- Project activities were structured into a package which participants needed to move through sequentially for the delivery organisations to be able to draw down funding. Staff had access to the Discretionary Action Fund (DAF) which could be used to fund one-off expenses. This was a big draw for participants.
- To accommodate the fact that participants can be transferred between prisons often with very little notice, the programme was underpinned by careful documentation of progress so that staff and participants can pick up their provision at a new site. Similarly, efforts had been made to try to ensure ‘through the gate’ continuity between prisons and probation settings.
- Common challenges to delivery included the logistics of delivering support within the constraints of the prison schedule, and difficulties finding suitable spaces for group activities.
- The drivers of positive outcomes in HMPPS delivery were similar to those in mainstream delivery. This included the relationship with their case manager; a flexible approach to make the most of short windows of availability; and, among probation-based projects, an established relationship with local employers to build live pathways to employment for participants.
- Similarly to ESF provision delivered outside HMPPS, those delivering the support felt the evidence requirements were very challenging. They felt ex-offenders were even more likely to disengage from the support once they found a job, which made evidencing employment outcomes particularly difficult.

- The structure of HMPPS delivery was designed to allow delivery organisations to draw funding for moving a participant closer to work, therefore taking more account of incremental progress and distance travelled. This was praised as a positive development over former ESF programmes.

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Authors' credits

The team of researchers who worked on the study and contributed to the report are listed below.

Lorna Adams and Claire Johnson, Directors, co-directed the IFF team responsible for the research. Both have considerable experience in researching employment support and welfare issues, particularly in relation to vulnerable client groups.

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Tanya Basi, Research Manager, **Henry Allingham**, Senior Research Executive and **Joseph Charsley** and **Nicholas Mitchell**, Research Executives at IFF worked on the fieldwork, delivery, analysis and reporting.

Other IFF researchers that have contributed to the project include Sam Selner and Sarah Coburn.

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Co-financing Organisations (CFOs)	Public bodies which bring together ESF and domestic funding for employment and skills so that ESF complements national programmes. Provision for the 2014-2020 Operational Programme was delivered through 4 co-financing organisations, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), DWP, Big Lottery Fund; Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HPMMS, replacement of National Offender Management Service or 'NOMS'), as well as direct providers.
Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)	CSCS cards provide proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications for the job they do on site. While holding a CSCS card is not a legislative requirement, most principal contractors and major house builders require construction workers on their sites to hold a valid card.
Disability or long-term health condition	<p>A physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'substantial' is more than minor or trivial - e.g. it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed• 'long-term' means 12 months or more
Economically Inactive	<p>Those not working, and are either not looking for work, or not available for work. It includes the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• participants in full or part-time education;• those not in employment because of sickness or disability;• those looking after the family or home full time;• those caring for an adult family member, relative or friend who has any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity;• those in a voluntary, unpaid role or internship (not a family business); and <p>those in prison.</p>

Term	Definition
European Social Fund (ESF)	The European Social Fund (ESF) is the European Union's main fund for supporting employment in the member states of the European Union as well as promoting economic and social cohesion.
ESF provider	Refers to any or all organisations delivering ESF funded provision, including CFOs, opt-in organisations, direct bid providers, and intermediately bodies or organisation contracted by them to offer provision
Full-time work	Work for an employer in a paid role 30 hours or more per week
Jobcentre Plus	Jobcentre Plus is a brand under which the DWP offers working-age support services, such as employment advisory services. In the context of this report, 'Jobcentre Plus (JCP) office' refers to the physical premises in which Jobcentre Plus services are offered.
Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Allowance is an unemployment benefit for people who are actively looking for work.
Long-term unemployed	The definition of long-term unemployed varies with age: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth long-term unemployed (<25 years of age) = more than 6 months continuous spell of unemployment• Adult long-term unemployed (25 years of age or more) = more than 12 months continuous spell of unemployment
Part-time work	Work for an employer in a paid role less than 30 hours per week
Small and medium enterprises	Any business with fewer than 250 employees.
Underemployed	Where an individual is working part-time but wanting full-time work
Universal Credit	Universal Credit (UC) is an in and out of work benefit designed to support people with their living costs. Most new claims by people with a health condition or disability are now made to UC with the remaining claiming New Style ESA which has replaced ESA-Contributions based. The equivalent to the ESA Support Group within Universal Credit is UC-LCWRA (Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity).

Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CFO	Co-financing organisation
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESF	European Social Fund (unless specified this refers to 2014-2020 ESF programme)
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
EU	European Union
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, formerly National Offender Management Service
IP	Investment Priority
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
LEPs	Local Enterprise Partnerships
MI	Management Information – refers to participant level information collected by ESF providers
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NCLF	National Lottery Community Fund, formerly Big Lottery Fund
SME	Small and medium enterprises
UC	Universal Credit
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative

Summary

Background and objectives

This report discusses findings from 20 case studies with projects funded by the ESF 2014-2020 programme. This includes projects co-funded by DWP, ESFA and the National Lottery Community Fund, as well as Direct Bids. Case studies were typically carried out over two days and included interviews with strategic staff, delivery staff, participants, partners and, where relevant, employers. The report also includes findings from an augmented case study with ESF provision delivered through HMPPS. This involved visits to six delivery sites across custody and probation services. HMPPS provision was managed and delivered through a different model than mainstream ESF provision, and HMPPS provision is therefore discussed separately in this report.

The fieldwork was carried out between September 2019 and February 2020 and was therefore unaffected by COVID-19.

The aim of this study was to understand ‘what works’ in the delivery of employability and skills interventions and to provide insight into ‘how’ and ‘why’ outcomes are achieved. The research also aimed to allow some exploration of softer outcomes that can be harder to identify through quantitative analysis.

Main findings

Project design

It was common for delivery organisations involved in the research to have previous experience delivering ESF contracts and they were therefore familiar with ESF processes and requirements from the start. It was also common for provision funded by ESF to be a continuation of existing provision, which had previously been funded in other ways, for example through DWP initiatives such as the Growth Programme.

The projects involved in this study had been tailored to fit within the needs of the local economy. This was usually achieved through conversations with the LEP in the design phase or through consultations with local businesses or other stakeholders.

The cross cutting ESF themes of equality and diversity and sustainability had been built into most projects in some form, but the extent to which they were fully integrated varied. They were built into monitoring processes, but several strategic leads and contract managers said they did not use the information collected as much as they could. Larger organisations were more likely to have their own processes and policies related to equality and sustainability and could therefore more easily embed these into the ESF contract.

Project delivery

While some projects targeted one discrete audience (such as older workers, women, NEET young people, lone parents, BAME populations etc) most worked with a

broader participant group. Projects offering in-work skills support tended to work across a range of sectors, which meant the participant group varied.

There were however some barriers commonly identified across participant groups, such as lack of confidence and motivation to find work, mental health issues, housing, lack of digital skills and social isolation.

Projects co-funded by DWP tended to receive the majority of their referrals from local JCP offices, although all topped-up their recruitment through outreach activities, including engagement with community centres, places of worship, children's centres, libraries, GP surgeries and shelters.

Among direct bids and those co-funded through the National Lottery Community Fund, recruitment tended to come through a wider range of channels, and was often a mix of outreach work, through community centres, libraries, children's centres, probation services, local authority services and roadshows, and advertising, through social media as well as physical adverts in the local community. For smaller organisations, this could be very time consuming and some stated it was a challenge to balance outreach work with actual delivery.

Projects working directly with employers in the local area had dedicated marketing or business development staff who engaged with employers to educate them about the funding available and what the programme offered.

Several projects that received referrals from JCP reported facing challenges early on. Often, this was a case of awareness of the provision being low among JCP staff or of competing provision within the local area taking priority. Staff had responded to this by increasing their engagement with JCP, often through spending more time in local JCP offices to improve the project's visibility and to interact with work coaches one-to-one.

Projects receiving referrals from health services similarly stated quality and continuity of recruitment was dependent on ongoing engagement with these services to maintain awareness of the project and buy-in among health staff.

The activities delivered under each funded project varied significantly. Projects working on IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people) often focused on one-to-one, personalised support from a key worker, offering activities and guidance related to job search. Some of these projects also included employer engagement to create pathways for participants into employment.

Activities working on IP 1.4 (Active inclusion) also tended to involve one-to-one support, but as these participants were often further from the labour market delivery focused on addressing barriers to allow them to take steps closer to employment, through activities such as English language or basic skills qualifications, courses on topics such as confidence and motivation, anger management or life skills, as well as offering volunteering opportunities or work placements.

Activities working on IP 2.1 (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning) worked predominantly with an existing network of employers across different sectors to offer job related qualifications.

The analysis of the 20 case studies revealed some common enablers of effective delivery. The most important of these was positive working relationships with CFOs, LEPs and with delivery partners.

The relationship between the prime contractor and the CFO contract manager influenced delivery. Where this has worked well, the CFO contract manager had offered guidance on changes to eligibility criteria and evidence requirements and had been supportive in enabling organisations to access growth funding. Where the relationship had been less strong, strategic leads felt the CFO had not had capacity to engage as frequently as was needed or had an insufficient level of understanding of ESF processes.

A collaborative relationship with the LEP, where the delivery organisations were clear on local priorities and the LEP understood the nature of the programme and the participants, enabled delivery to be better suited to local needs. There were cases where organisations felt the LEP did not fully understand the nature of their delivery and that the priorities of the LEP were at odds with those of the individuals they worked with.

A supportive relationship with prime contractors enabled partners to deliver their provision more effectively. The delivery partners tended to be small organisations who often struggled with the administrative burden of an ESF contract, as well as with the payment by results model and were therefore dependent on the prime contractor for guidance and support. Some prime contractors describe a 'mentoring' relationship with delivery partners, where in addition to monitoring project performance they would support their partners with ongoing delivery and cash flow.

Previous experience of delivering ESF contracts also influenced project efficiency. Where staff had this experience, it appeared to have enabled projects to be up and running and delivering outcomes far sooner than those with little or no previous experience delivering such contracts. Those who did not have previous experience tended to say they underestimated how much time would be needed for setup and embedding the project locally and that this impacted their delivery and outcomes achieved in the early phases of the project.

There were also some commonly experienced challenges to effective delivery. Delivery staff felt the ESF eligibility checks and registration process were overly complicated and that these added barriers to building trust and rapport with new participants, which staff felt was crucial to ongoing delivery.

Staff stated that working with vulnerable individuals with complex needs was by its nature challenging, and that the unpredictability of this audience presented difficulties in terms of delivery. Staff worked to minimise drop-outs by handholding participants through every step of their journey towards employment, especially if they were signposted to external provision. Staff did this through ongoing, informal communication over phone, email or text. Despite this, they still experienced drop-outs which was challenging as, depending on when in the process the participant disengaged, significant staff time had been invested in a participant which they could no longer claim outcome funding for.

Staff also stated the roll-out of Universal Credit had added some complexities to their delivery, as some advisors ended up providing ongoing support to participants who struggled to navigate the system which detracted from the time which could be spent delivering employment support.

Project outcomes

At the time of fieldwork, most projects were either on track to achieve their outcome targets or already exceeding them.

Strategic and delivery staff emphasised however that there were additional outcomes for participants that were not captured by their ESF outcome data. Confidence and motivation were commonly mentioned areas of significant progress, as was an improvement in participants' understanding of the types of roles they should be applying for and how to go about this. Some participants also said they felt more resilient and positive about the process of job searching. Other areas of development included communication skills, overall wellbeing, presentation skills, social isolation and appropriate job behaviour (e.g. being on time).

An important element of this study was to understand what drives positive outcomes. Across most of the investment priorities, the key worker model, which allows participants to have a consistent point of contact over a long period of time was crucial to achieving positive outcomes. This model allowed for a relationship to build between key worker and participant which made participants feel at ease about opening up and in turn allowed advisors to challenge participants' perceptions, attitudes or behaviour when it came to job search.

This support tended to be highly personalised and holistic and participants and staff said an approach that acknowledged the individual's needs and barriers as well as their interests and goals was more likely to lead to sustainable employment outcomes.

A flexible approach was seen as important for both projects working directly with individuals and those working with employers. Those working with individuals out of work recognised that participant lives were often chaotic and unpredictable and tried to accommodate this as far as possible. Although most had scheduled appointments with participants, it was also common for advisors and participants to meet outside these appointments and to communicate regularly over telephone, email and text.

Those working with employers echoed the importance of making the provision fit within the employers' availability. This included offering training over several short, 'bitesize' units or in evenings and over weekends to avoid the employer having to release staff from their duties for too long. While some provided the training on the employers' premises, another delivered all its training online as this was seen to be more convenient to both employers, employees and tutors.

Some projects working with what they described as 'those hardest to help' felt a varied supply chain was needed to serve this group. Strategic leads in these projects had purposefully put together an offer consisting of a range of fairly niche provision, both in terms of the support offered and in terms of the client group specialised in,

and said the individuals they work with were not likely to engage with mainstream provision and therefore required a different approach.

Projects offering in-work support felt that this was important to ensure employment outcomes were sustained. Especially among those who had been out of work for longer periods of time, the transition back into employment was reported to be overwhelming and advisors felt frequent contact and guidance during this period was helpful. However, staff found that not all participants took up this element of the support.

Strategic and delivery staff also reported some common challenges related to achieving outcomes. Some working with what were perceived as harder-to-help groups, such as long term unemployed, ex-offenders, NEET young people and people with health conditions or disabilities said their employment targets were not always realistic and did not take the complexity of individual situations into account.

Targets for apprenticeships and traineeships tended to present challenges for delivery staff. They said awareness of apprenticeships among employers was limited and that appetite among learners for apprenticeships and traineeships was low.

Finally, the ESF evidence requirements were experienced as challenging and not always possible to fulfil within the eligibility window. This was especially the case for employment outcomes and for progression within work.

Strategic and delivery staff identified four key areas of improvement for similar provision going forward.

Delivery staff suggested streamlining some of the ESF processes and administrative tasks, especially the registration and eligibility checks, to ensure a smoother delivery for participants. They also suggested including measures for soft outcomes, such as increased confidence and motivation or improved understanding of employment requirements and allowing projects to draw some funding for these.

While both strategic and delivery staff acknowledged the need for rigorous evidence requirements, they said the ESF requirements placed a strain on their delivery, as evidencing took up significant resource. This was especially challenging for small delivery organisations with little experience of such processes and limited staff resource to carry them out.

Finally, staff say integration between local services is important as the majority of participants receiving ESF provision were either already engaged with other services or needed signposting onto other support. However, most projects said local services often operated in silos or that there was too little collaboration and communication between services.

ESF provision delivered through HMPPS

Project design

Working with those without access to mainstream provision, HMPPS CFO3 aimed to identify and remove barriers to employment experienced by offenders in custody and in the community.

Support was delivered by four delivery partners. While the provision was centrally managed by HMPPS, it was delivered through regional contracts, which were tailored to the local area depending on what subgroups regional stakeholders considered to be a priority.

Reflecting the project's focus on helping those furthest from the labour market and on recognising distance travelled, only half of the contract value was based on a payment by results model and there were payment stages for activities on the programme, rather than only for outcomes.

Project delivery

Generally, there were no major challenges around recruitment for any provider. Staff had found prisoners were keen to engage to fill their time and enhance their connection to the outside world as they got closer to their release.

HMPPS MI data and qualitative feedback from delivery staff showed that most participants faced multiple barriers to work. These included finances, life skills, mental health, literacy, substance abuse, housing and homelessness and a lack of work experience and qualifications. In a women's prison, staff said a history of domestic abuse was a common barrier among participants. Low self-esteem and a belief that returning to employment was impossible were additional barriers for many.

Activities were structured into a package which participants needed to move through sequentially for the delivery organisations to be able to draw funding for activities. After completing enrolment forms and eligibility checks, participants were offered a package of core activities, which consisted of one-to-one support from an advisor and often focussed on elements such as employment advice, disclosure guidance, supported job search, CV and application writing and goal setting.

Participants were also able to enrol onto training delivered through the programme, often through external delivery partners. While some of these were job specific qualifications, such as forklift truck driving, PTS courses for railway work and Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) courses for construction roles, others focused more on soft skills, such as confidence and motivation, anger management and suitable work behaviour.

Those who moved into employment were also offered ongoing in-work support from their case manager, to address any issues experienced by either participants or employers during the transition back into work.

Staff had access to the Discretionary Action Fund (DAF) which could be used to fund one-off expenses. This was often used to pay for DBS checks, photo identification and CSCS cards. Being able to pay for these items was described as a big draw for participants and often what persuaded them to engage with the provision early on.

The model had endeavoured to work with the prison and probation system as far as possible. To accommodate the fact that participants can be transferred between prisons often with very little notice, the programme was underpinned by careful documentation of progress so that staff and participants can pick up their provision at a new site. Similarly, efforts had been made to try to ensure 'though the gate'

continuity whereby warm handovers were made between staff working in prisons and those working in probation settings.

Staff reported some common challenges to delivery, particularly those operating in custody. Staff found the logistics of delivering support within the constraints of the prison schedule to be challenging. This included having a limited time window within the day to engage with participants, as well as difficulties finding suitable spaces for group activities.

Effective delivery was to a large extent dependent on a positive working relationship with other staff in the prison or probation service, as they required support to make sure participants were made available to attend appointments or training. In some cases, ESF delivery staff felt other staff members in the prison did not fully understand the service they were offering or did not appreciate the value of it to participants and that this impacted on collaboration between them.

Staff said there were also challenges related to working with what was, in their view, a highly unpredictable client group. Staff worked to minimise dropouts as far as possible, but these did still take place sometimes triggered by individuals being transferred to different sites (although it is possible for provision to be continued at a different site, the break in continuity could still prompt drop-out).

Project outcomes

The drivers of positive outcomes in HMPPS delivery were similar to those in mainstream delivery. This included the relationship with their case manager. Although participants tended to say they were initially interested in the programme for practical support, such as help getting photo identification or receiving job relevant qualifications, the relationship with the case manager became increasingly important. According to staff, building a trusting relationship early on allowed them to challenge participants on some of their behaviour and attitudes and to have honest conversations about difficult topics, such as drug and alcohol abuse or fears or re-offending.

Due to the unpredictability of the target audience and the constraints of operating in custody, staff said the delivery is dependent on a flexible approach; being prepared to work with individuals as and when they were able to engage and making the most of short windows of availability.

Those working on probation sites also stated that an established relationship with local employers was important. This meant they had live pathways to employment for participants, and that this was an important 'hook' to get them interested in the support in the first place.

Similarly to ESF provision delivered outside HMPPS, those delivering the support felt the evidence requirements were very challenging. They felt ex-offenders were even more likely to disengage from the support once they found a job, as this marks a new phase in their life, and that this can make evidencing challenging, especially if the individual had not disclosed their offence to their employer. Among those in probation services, established relationships with employers helped with this process.

While the structure of HMPPS delivery, and in particular the supportive measures, was designed to allow delivery organisations to draw funding for moving a participant closer to work (and this was praised as a positive development over former ESF programmes), staff still felt there was progress made among participants which was not captured by the current framework.

Conclusions

Drawing on the findings discussed in this report it is possible to make the following conclusions regarding ESF delivery and outcomes.

In terms of the structure of the programme:

- A complex but generally effective supply chain has been built over many rounds of ESF funding.
- Generally provision was entirely dependent on ESF funding and will not be sustained without it.
- The prime provider model seemed to have been effective for the delivery of ESF provision. There were several examples of prime providers being able to facilitate the participation of smaller organisations in ESF programmes that might not otherwise have been possible.
- Where effective, the CFO structure has been important to help providers navigate the complexities of the ESF programme effectively.
- Organising ESF provision through the LEP model helped to maintain a strong focus on local needs. ESF providers sometimes felt that the LEP could have done more to support the integration between local services which would have benefitted programme delivery.

In terms of delivery:

- ESF provision successfully engaged with very vulnerable individuals.
- Provision also reached those working for employers who might otherwise have had limited access to development opportunities.
- The resource-intensive case-workers or mentor model was integral to delivery across all strands.
- Flexibility of delivery was critical.
- Often a key element of the ESF support was to help connect individuals to other support – ‘to be the glue sticking services together’.
- Participants are not always the best judge of the extent of their needs and having a tangible ‘hook’ that matches an obvious need can secure engagement.
- For projects to be effective it is key that they have clear plans for generating referrals and that they have sufficient resource for this.
- Registration processes and eligibility checks were seen as a barrier to building rapport with participants early on.

In terms of outcomes:

- Payment-by-results models have kept delivery focussed on programme targets.
- However, providers felt that the programme should place greater emphasis on the soft outcomes that client groups are more likely to achieve within the timeframe of ESF delivery.
- Measurement of achievement of soft outcomes is obviously challenging but the HMPPS 'supportive measures' approach is a potential workable structure.
- Evidencing of outcomes is time-consuming. Delivery staff frequently voiced frustrations that the amount of time taken up in the administration of ESF processes detracted from the amount of time that frontline staff were able to spend with participants.

Background and methodology

This chapter gives an overview of the background to this research and its aims and objectives. It then provides an outline of the methodology of the study.

Background

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) are the European Union's main funding programmes for supporting growth and jobs across EU member states.

In England, for 2014 to 2020 the programmes comprised the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).¹ These were brought together into a single Growth programme with individual operational programmes aligned to maximise support for jobs and growth. Within this Growth Programme, the ESF is used to fund provision which focuses on improving employment opportunities, promoting social inclusion and investing in skills by providing help people need to fulfil their potential. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is the Managing Authority for ESF funds in England.

There are three 'priority axes' underpinning ESF, namely:

1. Inclusive Labour Markets
2. Skills for Growth
3. Technical Assistance

The Technical Assistance axis represents a small proportion of the overall Programme budget and is largely used to meet the costs of the managing authorities in running the programmes and meeting the needs of the European Programme Monitoring Committee. Hence the provision that directly benefits individuals is delivered through Priority Axes 1 and 2.

From a list of European-wide Investment Priorities (IPs) that the ESF can be used by member states to contribute towards, the DWP have chosen to focus on six IPs (Table 1.1).

¹ For more detail on the 2014-2020 operational planning see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750497/ESF_operational_programme_2014_2020.pdf

Table 1.1: Overview of ESF Investment Priorities

Priority Axis	Investment Priority
<p style="text-align: center;">1</p>	<p>1.1 Access to employment for job seekers and inactive people, including the long term unemployed and people far from the labour market, also through local employment initiatives and support for labour mobility. The investment priority gives extra support to specific target groups, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people with disabilities or health barriers (including mental health issues) • older workers • people with caring responsibilities • lone parents • ethnic minorities • ex-service personnel • care leavers • those with chaotic lives • third country nationals and migrants with the right to work in the UK • people who have difficulty accessing support because they live in isolated rural areas • those from jobless households.
	<p>1.2 Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people (ESF), in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. This includes offering additional traineeships and apprenticeships, work experience and pre-employment training opportunities, including basic skills qualifications.</p>
	<p>1.3 Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people, in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.</p>
	<p>1.4 Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving</p>

Priority Axis	Investment Priority
	<p>employability. This includes support for people with multiple and complex barriers to participation to address these underlying issues and support for prisoners in custody and on release, and those without work who are serving sentences in the community, to improve their employability. Finally, it aims to engage marginalised individuals and support them to re-engage with education, training, or in employment.</p> <p>1.5 Community-led Local Development strategies (CLLD). This investment priority aims to deliver additional, localised support to people in particularly deprived areas, so that they move towards or into employment. It focuses on sub-regional areas at a level below LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) area boundaries with a population of not less than 10,000 and not more than 150,000 and prioritises areas identified as being in the most deprived 20% areas. CLLD strategies are led by Local Action Groups representing public, private and local socio-economic interests.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>2.1 Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences. Specific objectives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to address the basic skills needs of employed people, particularly in SMEs (Small and Medium size Enterprises) and Micro businesses • to increase skills levels of employed people from the existing level to the next level up • to encourage progression in employment • to increase the number of people with technical and job specific skills, particularly at level 3 and above and into higher and advanced level apprenticeships • to support business growth, and • to increase the skills levels of employed women to encourage progression in employment help address the gender employment and wage gap. <p>2.2 Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitating the transition from education to work, and strengthening vocational education and training</p>

Priority Axis	Investment Priority
	<p>systems and their quality, including through mechanisms for skills anticipation, adaptation of curricula and the establishment and development of work based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes. The investment priority aims to promote improvements in the labour market relevance of skills provision through active engagement with relevant institutions and employers, particularly SMEs and Micro businesses.</p>

The activities funded under IP 2.2 address education infrastructure and will therefore not usually have direct beneficiaries.

ESF funding is dependent on match funding provided at the national level. The DWP, ESFA, National Lottery Community Fund and HMPPS are the main co-financing organisations (CFOs) in England. In addition to providing the required match funding CFOs use their expertise to procure and contract manage ESF provision. A limited amount of funding is also available for smaller delivery organisations through direct bids.

Individual delivery programmes are determined at the level of the 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in England, who have the autonomy to shape their own local ESF provision through:

- providing input into how the funds available should be used within their area.
- encouraging local organisations to make direct bids to run smaller-scale projects. This could be either through responding to DWP calls for grant-funding applications or through the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) funding.

The only element of ESF provision that sits outside this LEP-led model is that which is delivered by the HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The HMPPS CFO receives a national allocation of ESF funding to fund activities that support the reintegration of prisoners back into the workforce, through a structured package of one-to-one support and training, which it then allocates regionally.

As part of the impact evaluation of the ESF 2014 to 2020, the Department for Work and Pensions commissioned IFF Research to carry out qualitative case study research with projects funded by the ESF in England. The study will add to the body of evidence collected about the operation of the ESF Programme across a number of other strands. These other sources of evidence include the ESF and YEI (Youth Employment Initiative) Leavers Survey which provides quantitative metrics on a range of different outcome measures.

This qualitative research is being carried out alongside a counterfactual impact assessment, using secondary data to quantify the impacts that the programme has

achieved, both at Priority Axes level and where feasible for different investment priorities and sub-groups of participants.²

Aims of the research

The qualitative case study research aimed to understand ‘what works’ in the delivery of employability and skills interventions via the ESF and to provide insight into ‘how’ and ‘why’ outcomes are achieved. The research also aimed to allow some exploration of softer outcomes that can be harder to identify through quantitative analysis.

While the UK’s departure from the European Union will bring an end to its participation in the ESF, the government in 2019 announced that the funding available through ESF will be replaced by a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). Hence, the findings from this study will also be used to inform future programme design.

Methodology

As part of this research, IFF Research carried out 20 qualitative case studies with projects funded by ESF. The research also included one augmented case study with ESF-funded provision delivered through HMPPS, which consisted of visits to six delivery sites across custody and probation services.

The fieldwork was carried out between September 2019 and February 2020 and was therefore unaffected by COVID-19.

Selection of case studies

Case study recruitment targets based on Investment Priority and CFO were agreed with DWP and, based on this, IFF Research drew a sample of projects in a ratio of approximately 3:1, anticipating that not every project that was contacted would agree to take part. Data from the ESF leavers survey was matched in order to provide some guidance about the size of projects and the volume of beneficiaries. The sample was constructed to ensure a regional spread and to include providers operating in rural and urban areas, including at least one project located in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and at least two which focused on in-work beneficiaries. Contact details were appended to the selected sample by the DWP. Providers were sent a letter co-signed by DWP outlining the research and inviting them to participate, which was followed up by telephone contact from IFF’s specialist qualitative recruiters. Included in the initial letter was a reassurance that while the DWP would know which projects had taken part in research they would not be able to identify individual staff, participants or employers in the reporting.

Recruitment targets and case studies completed are shown in Table 1.2.

² Results from the counterfactual impact evaluation will be published separately. All ESF evaluation reports are published on GOV.UK.

Table 1.2: Overview of research quotas and achieved fieldwork

Axis	Investment Priority	ESFA	Big Lottery Fund	Direct Bids	DWP
1	1.1 Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people	-	-	3 Target: 1-2	4 Target: 4
	1.2 sustainable integration into the labour market of young people	1 Target: 1-2	-	1 Target: 1-2	-
	1.4 Active inclusion	2 Target: 1-2	4 Target: 4	-	-
	1.5 Community-led Local Development strategies	-	-	1 Target: 1-2	-
2	2.1 Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning	3 Target: 1-2	-	-	-
	2.2 Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems.	-	-	1 Target: 1	-
	TOTAL CASE STUDIES	Target: 6 Completed: 6	Target: 4 Completed: 4	Target: 6 Completed: 6	Target: 4 Completed: 4

For the HMPPS augmented case study, a selection of sites was put forward by HMPPS, based on a specification provided by IFF. This included a regional spread, a mix of probation and custody-based provision, a range of custody facilities in terms of security categories and all of the four sub-contractors delivering ESF provision through HMPPS. One women's prison was also included. An overview of the sites included is shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Overview of HMPPS case study fieldwork

	Custody / Probation	Region
1	Custody	East Midlands
2	Custody	South East
3	Custody	North West
4	Probation	North West
5	Custody	London
6	Probation	London

Fieldwork

The case studies were generally carried out over two days, and included interviews with strategic and delivery staff, participants and, where relevant, partners and employers. If possible, the case studies also included an observation of delivery, however, this was not always feasible within the timelines of the fieldwork.

An overview of the fieldwork conducted is shown in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4: Overview of fieldwork conducted

Case study	CFO	Investment priority	Strategic lead	Delivery staff	Partners	Participants	Employers	Observation	Total
1	BBO	1.4	2	6	2	7	0	0	17
2	DWP	1.1	2	2	1	2	1	0	8
3	Direct	2.2	6	1	2	1	N/A	3	13
4	Direct	1.1	2	4	1	4	3	1	15
5	DWP	1.1	1	5	2	3	N/A	0	11
6	Direct	1.2	7	8	1	6	0	0	22
7	BBO	1.4	2	3	2	5	N/A	1	13
8	BBO	1.4	5	5	0	12	1	0	23
9	BBO	1.4	2	8	6	4	1	1	22
10	ESFA	1.4	1	1	1	2	N/A	0	5
11	ESFA	1.4	3	0	4	8	0	1	16
12	ESFA	2.1	3	3	1	3	1	0	11

13	ESFA	2.1	1	1	2	1	1	1	7
14	ESFA	1.2	1	1	3	0	0	0	5
15	DWP	1.1	2	2	0	4	0	0	8
16	Direct	1.1	4	7	0	13	2	1	27
17	Direct	1.5	2	0	2	1	N/A	0	5
18	DWP	1.1	2	3	N/A	4	0	0	9
18	Direct	1.1	2	4	2	4	0	0	12
20	ESFA	2.1	4	2	0	3	2	0	11

HMPSS fieldwork

The six HMPSS case study visits were carried out over one day each and included interviews with team leaders, case managers and participants. We also conducted one interview with a strategic lead for all HMPSS provision. An overview of the fieldwork conducted is shown in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: Overview of HMPSS fieldwork conducted

Case study	Custody / probation	Delivery staff	Participants	Observations
1	Custody	1	3	YES
2	Custody	4	5	NO
3	Custody	4	1	YES
4	Probation	4	3	NO
5	Custody	4	3	NO
6	Probation	3	0	YES

Topic guide

For both strands of case study visits, topic guides were developed in collaboration with DWP colleagues. Topic guide coverage is shown in the table below.

Table 1.6: Overview of strategic lead, delivery staff and employer topic guides

	Topic Guide section						
Audience	Introduction	Project design and objectives	Inputs / funding	Management structure / governance	Project delivery	Project monitoring	Views on the project to date
Strategic lead							
Delivery staff							

Employer						
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Table 1.7: Overview of participant topic guides

	Topic Guide section				
Audience	Introduction / participant background	Experience of the project	Project outcomes / impacts	Reflections and areas for improvement	Views on the project to date
Non-HMPPS participant					
HMPPS participant					

The participant and delivery staff topic guides also included an assessment using the Northumbria University’s Distance Travelled framework. As part of interviews with participants, they were asked to assess their position pre-participation and on the day of the interview in relation to a list of job related competencies using a scale ranging from ‘Participant has no skills and do not feel is important to find work’ through to ‘Feel fully competent in this area’. The tool was also used in discussions with delivery staff, who were asked to think more generally about progress made across their participant population. Completing the assessment was voluntary and not all staff or participants chose to do so.

The 21 competencies measured were: Job seeking skills, Understanding employment requirements, delivering employment requirements, health and safety, reliability, equal opportunities, time management, adaptability, motivation, concentration, problem-solving, communication skills, appropriate behaviour, supervision, team-working, literacy and numeracy, self-esteem/ confidence, personal presentation, living skills, independent travel and health and wellbeing.

Ethics

For both strands, recruitment screeners, information and confirmation letters as well as topic guides reiterated that participation was entirely voluntary and would not impact dealings with DWP in any way. All topic guides included a privacy note regarding respondents’ rights under GDPR which was read out at the start of every interview. Information and consent sheets were given to participants at the start of the interview and for those with literacy issues these sheets were read out loud by the researcher.

Analysis approach

All interviews were recorded using encrypted digital recorders and subsequently transcribed or summarised in detail. Each case study was then entered into an Excel-based analysis framework, under headings reflecting the key research questions. This approach allowed researchers to analyse:

- within each case study across all audiences
- across case studies aimed at similar audiences or working on the same investment priorities.
- across case studies for particular themes (confounding contextual factors, 'key ingredients for successful outcomes' etc.)

Following initial analysis, two in-depth analysis sessions were held; one focussing specifically on the HMPPS fieldwork and another focussing on the remaining case studies. The HMPPS fieldwork was analysed separately due to HMPPS provision being relatively different to mainstream provision, both in terms of its delivery model and outcomes framework. The sessions explored key themes emerging from the initial analysis, which were subsequently followed up in more depth using the framework.

The information gathered using the distance travelled framework was combined with information collected in the interviews to inform the analysis of outcomes and distance travelled.

About this report

This report summarises a qualitative investigation of the ESF programme in England. Please note that HMPPS provision is discussed in a separate chapter. It is worth noting that the report does not make any assessments of the impact made by the projects included in the study, but instead takes a qualitative approach to understand what elements of delivery supports impact. The chapters that follow should be read in this context.

Project Design

This chapter provides an overview of how projects were designed and set up and the extent to which the design reflects local needs. It also describes the background and experience of organisations and staff of similar projects. Finally, this chapter discusses the extent to which the ESF cross-cutting themes of equality and diversity and sustainability were embedded into projects.

Project Delivery

This chapter explores project delivery, including details of those receiving support, approaches to recruitment, project management and governance and details of the activities delivered, any challenges faced.

Outcomes

This chapter describes providers' experiences of achieving positive outcomes for participants. It also discusses enablers and challenges to achieving such outcomes.

HMPPS delivery

This chapter discusses findings from the augmented case study with six HMPPS delivery sites. This includes the design of the project, the nature of the participant group involved, activities delivered and challenges faced. Finally, this chapter discusses enablers of and challenges to positive outcomes for participants on this project.

Conclusions

This chapter draws conclusions based on the findings discussed in the report. This includes recommendations for the design of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Project design

This chapter explores how projects were designed and set up, and the extent to which the design reflected local needs. It also describes the background and experience of organisations and staff of similar projects. Finally, this chapter discusses the extent to which the ESF cross-cutting themes of equality and diversity and sustainability have been embedded into projects.

Rationale for project design

Projects were designed, and bids written, by the project strategic team and contract managers. Often this would be led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the organisation bidding for the contract, with support from those leading the delivery team. For projects where contract holders were universities or local authorities, the strategic teams, and bid writers, typically sat within the skills and employability teams.

In some instances, sub-contractors and delivery partners were involved in the bid writing and project design process. In these cases, the delivery partners typically had ESF experience, a long-standing relationship with the contract holders or were providing the majority of the delivery. In one such example, a contract providing in-work training, was managed by a local further education college with a majority of delivery coming from a single partner, including all of their construction training, which was one of the largest sectors locally. These organisations had worked together for a number of years, including co-managing previous ESF projects, and the delivery partner was heavily involved in the bid writing phase.

Extent to which projects reflect local needs

Most projects were tailored to fit within the needs of the local economy and reflected issues specific to the areas they served.

Where participants were unemployed or inactive, projects were typically designed to specifically address local barriers. For example, some projects noted a high incidence of mental health as a barrier to work in the areas they served. These projects built mental health support, delivered either by third sector or local authority partnerships, into their design. One project covered a large region including several rural areas, so support travelling to and from employers and navigating local public transport was important for participants, particularly those with learning disabilities. This project built travel support into its offering which could guide participants through local bus routes and provide staff to make journeys with them in advance of visits to employers.

Projects, in particular those that worked with participants in work, were typically designed to reflect the prominence of particular sectors in the local economy. Some projects pursued this through promoting relationships with businesses in the largest sectors locally. In one example a business development lead was tasked with engaging businesses in this way, in particular the large manufacturers that were major local employers. Delivery partners on another in-work support project held regular business forums to give business the chance to feed into course design. Other projects brought businesses in through relationships with the LEP, typically maintained through regular meetings, or LEP presence on the project steering group.

The extent to which a project reflected local business needs depended largely on the relationship between strategic leads and the LEP. Where this relationship was good, there was ongoing discussion about project performance, local priorities and how delivery could be shifted to better suit local needs. Where a prime contractor was working with several subcontractors, it was common for them to redirect funds from those struggling with delivery towards others focusing on sectors or participant groups identified as a priority by the LEP. In some cases, tensions could arise between projects and the LEP regarding the extent to which a project could meet specific local priorities. In one example, the LEP wanted an out-of-work support project to focus on filling Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) roles locally. Strategic staff felt their role was to find their clients jobs rather than to address local skills gaps and felt the participants they worked with had very little work experience and therefore tended to go into entry level jobs. Staff said there was not enough time within the length of the programme to sufficiently upskill participants in order to fill typical STEM roles which required specific skills and qualifications.

Embedding local needs and priorities was ingrained into the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) model (IP 1.5). These projects focused on the specific needs and opportunities of a particular area, typically much smaller than that of the average LEP, and operated in communities with a population size of between 10,000 and 150,000. In this model, a Local Action Group (LAG) was set up which consisted of representatives from public, private and civil society sectors. The LAG was responsible for setting out local priorities and awarding funding to local organisations addressing these. An example of this is shown in the case study below.

CASE STUDY: Direct Bid, IP 1.5 (Community-led Local Development strategies)

Before the launch of the project, the Local Action Group led a number of public consultation events and carried out a local needs analysis to understand the issues facing the local community. The overall objective of the project was to boost the economy by moving unemployed individuals into local roles but also to build the capacity of local organisations to be able to deliver similar contracts on their own, going forward.

Public consultations and the needs analysis identified high levels of intergenerational unemployment, low educational attainment and a lack of well-paid jobs in the area as priority areas. Lack of transport links was also identified as an area of concern:

“A local development strategy was developed and the key aspects that were identified are heavily reliant on the particularities of the areas. It’s somehow disconnected, you may have seen there is only a bus, there is no easy travel and there are not a lot of opportunities in the area...[the strategy also focuses on] barriers to employment such as low aspiration, crisis, poor health, lack of basic skills and education.”

(Strategic Lead)

The strategy set out the target participant group, which at an overall level was those furthest from the labour market who are underserved by mainstream provision. Sub-groups included those who were homeless, lone parents and those with severe mental health conditions.

Experience of similar projects

Most of the delivery organisations and leadership teams delivering case study projects had previous experience delivering ESF contracts and were therefore familiar with ESF processes and requirements from the start.

It was also common for provision funded by ESF to be a continuation of existing provision previously funded in other ways, for example through DWP initiatives such as the Growth Programme. For these projects, existing partnerships were built into project design, allowing the strategic teams to work with experienced organisations and delivery staff, familiar with delivering employability provision. One such project had established relationships with local charities, most of which offered support for people with learning disabilities, and during the bidding phase worked with these to expand their offer to include employment support.

It was common for delivery staff to have extensive experience within welfare to work programmes. Typically, delivery staff had been working on similar programmes, in many cases for the contract holders, for several years and brought this experience to

projects. Sub-contractors and delivery partners often brought specialised experience, commonly having worked within the region and in some cases with a specific client base with specialised needs (including autistic spectrum conditions or immigrant communities with limited English), before their involvement in ESF delivery.

Five of the 20 case study projects were continuations of previous ESF or ERDF funded projects. A further five projects had been delivering similar projects, with broadly the same strategic team for a number of years, albeit not receiving ESF funding. For these projects much of the necessary infrastructure for monitoring, delivery and reporting was already in place.

CASE STUDY: Co-funded by ESFA, IP 2.1 (Enhancing equal access)

The organisation, which delivers Skills Support for the Workforce, has held two previous ESF contracts, although these were considerably smaller and there was a major 'scaling up' process associated with the current bidding round. Due to the scale of the organisation and their previous experience they already had standardised processes for management and governance of ESF at the point of bidding for the latest contract. They had also worked with sub-contractors in the area for many years and had longstanding relationships with employers. Strategic and delivery staff emphasised how their previous experience of ESF and of working together allowed them to quickly ramp up delivery from the project's inception. The prime contractor said it deliberately included delivery partners they had worked with previously, as they knew they had existing relationships with employers and could start delivering outcomes shortly after the contract started.

"We started the project really well because of the existing relationships these partners have with employers in the region. We had an existing employer base and partners are able to use these connections to go out and promote the project."

Performance Manager.

The few projects with limited experience of either ESF projects or of delivering programmes of a similar focus took longer to set up. The particular challenges for these projects were establishing and maintaining new partnerships with delivery partners and working within the monitoring and delivery requirements of ESF funding with no prior experience of doing so.

CASE STUDY: Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

The project was delivered by a small charity and it was the first time they delivered an ESF contract. They were commissioned by an alliance of local boroughs to deliver an employment intervention for jobseekers with mild to moderate mental health conditions. Although they had experience delivering welfare to work programmes generally, and working with people with mental health conditions specifically, they did not have any experience of ESF or of running similar contracts. Strategic staff acknowledged that this meant the setup phase and early phases of delivery were difficult. They did not have a strong enough understanding of the reporting and evidencing requirements and as a result had some claims rejected due to insufficient quality. They also had not anticipated the amount of staff time needed for reporting and evidencing and eventually had to recruit more staff to resource these tasks.

“It was challenging at first, we hit a lot of stumbling blocks, because the ESF guidelines are so stringent.”

Strategic Lead

Cross-cutting themes

The ‘ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020’ outlined the cross-cutting themes of equality and diversity and sustainability that it aimed to promote through its operations. All ESF projects were therefore expected to integrate these into their design.

Equality and diversity

Equality and diversity had been built into most case study projects in some form, but the extent to which they could be considered fully integrated varied.

All case study projects had built equality and diversity into their monitoring processes. Targets were typically set to ensure representation of individuals with protected characteristics and an even gender split. However, the extent to which this data was acted upon varied. For some projects, this information was collected and monitored but there were no clear policies to ensure action was taken if certain groups were under-represented. For other projects, this data was more integrated into recruitment strategies and ongoing monitoring. For example, some projects had found low uptake among lone parents through their monitoring processes and had as a result targeted their recruitment in GPs surgeries, baby clinics and children’s centres to reach more of this group.

Targets were usually set against national statistics, which some case study projects said they have had to revise to reflect local demographics. In one such project staff said they operated in an area that was overwhelmingly white making it near impossible to achieve BAME representation at national levels. These targets had since been revised to be in line with local demographics. In another project, targets for a sub-contractor had to be flexible as they only delivered to South Asian women. Similarly, one ESFA project delivering in-work support struggled to reach lone parents, which staff attributed to this group being under-represented in the labour market.

“There are those ESFA targets that we will strive to get but in [region redacted] we don’t have a very high ethnic minority base so therefore there has got to be some element of understanding. We will strive to meet those targets but our audience just isn’t consisting of that demographic. So it’s tough when they’re national targets and aren’t region specific.”

Strategic Lead, ESFA, 2.1 (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning)

Larger organisations were more likely to have their own processes and policies related to equality and could therefore more easily embed these into the ESF contract, as well as support smaller delivery partners in this area. Organisations with experience delivering ESF contracts found this easier, with an existing understanding of ESF requirements around equality and diversity, and how best to deliver them from the outset.

Sustainability

As with equality and diversity, case study projects had made efforts to build sustainability into their design, although the extent to which it was embedded varied.

Larger organisations, and those with ESF experience, also appeared to have been better placed to integrate sustainability into their operations through pre-existing policies and infrastructure. Smaller organisations, and the few with limited ESF experience, had made efforts to update and improve their existing processes around sustainability, but these were often less developed or more informal.

Those working with sub-contractors and delivery partners tended to work with them on sustainability in a similar way to equality and diversity. Prime contractors often used similar reporting methods and timelines for sustainability and set targets (typically around paper use, recycling, reducing travel and reducing electricity consumption). Some projects devoted time in regular project meetings to sharing best practice on sustainability between delivery partners. A few projects required that their supply chain complied to certain sustainability targets, while others had staff sign up to personal pledges to reduce their environmental impact.

Some strategic leads appeared to view the sustainability theme with a greater level of scepticism than equality and diversity. Most organisations felt they were already aware of the need to pursue sustainability and already had policies in place, and therefore felt reporting it via ESF felt to some like a ‘tick box’ exercise rather than a process to bring about meaningful change.

“We have set some measures, we do what we can, but it becomes a bit of chore really”

Strategic Lead, Direct Bid, IP 1.4 (Active inclusion)

Project delivery

This chapter will explore project delivery, including the characteristics of those receiving support, approaches to and experiences of recruitment into projects, as well as project management and governance. It then discusses details of the activities delivered and challenges faced.

Nature of participants

The participant group was varied. While some projects worked specifically with one discrete group (such as older workers, women, NEET young people, lone parents, BAME populations etc), others worked with a broader participant group. Projects offering in-work skills support tended to work across a range of sectors, which meant the participant group varied. There were however some common barriers identified across most participant groups, such as lack of confidence and motivation to find work, mental health issues, poor quality housing and homelessness, lack of digital skills and social isolation. Most projects working directly with individuals also stressed that their participants faced multiple barriers, and that most mainstream provision usually worked on one barrier in isolation, rather than taking a holistic approach. One strategic lead reported that the participants they worked with lived within pockets of deprivation within an otherwise affluent area, and that they had therefore "fallen through the funding cracks".

"Common themes we work with are lack of confidence and motivation. We get a lot of customers for whom English language is a barrier. Mental health, homelessness and criminal convictions are also common barriers."

Employer engagement advisor, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Long-term unemployed

The majority of projects working on IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people) and IP 1.4 (Active inclusion) worked with individuals who were long-term unemployed or economically inactive. Participants on both strands faced similar barriers, although those receiving support from Active Inclusion projects were typically further from the labour market, either due to the severity or complexity of their barriers.

Reasons for long-term unemployment included health conditions and disabilities, childcare or caring responsibilities and criminal offences. Other barriers often included literacy, English as a second language, alcohol and substance abuse and housing issues. There were also barriers that in many cases were a result of long-term unemployment, such as low confidence and social isolation.

CASE STUDY: BBO Co-funded, IP 1.4 (Active inclusion)

The prime contractor worked with a supply chain of eight delivery partners to provide support for those furthest away from the labour market. Most were long-term unemployed and a few had never worked before.

The supply chain was designed to target several specific barriers or sub-groups within the local population, including older workers, people with autistic spectrum disorders, South Asian women, stroke survivors and people with physical disabilities.

The project was designed to allow partner organisations to tailor their employment support according to the needs of the participants they worked with. For example, one partner supporting individuals with autistic spectrum disorders focussed heavily on interview preparation and practice. Another organisation worked exclusively with South Asian women, most of whom were in their 50s and did not have access to a computer, and the provision therefore focused heavily on job search and IT skills.

All partners had included group work in their delivery; believing that due to their vulnerability, building a support network and being able to draw on the experience of others would be beneficial to their participant group.

“We had one lady for whom the barrier she had was physically getting to her training course. So for her the support we offered was about sitting down and looking at bus routes, walking her through the journey, reassuring her and supporting her to actually get there on the day”

Delivery Staff, autism support charity.

Projects working with older workers reported that mindset was often a key barrier for them to address. It was common for these individuals to perceive their age to be a barrier to employment or to be resistant to a career change at their age, which might be advisable due to life changes such as health conditions or caring responsibilities.

One provider highlighted that one of the biggest barriers for those who were long-term unemployed was resistance among employers. Staff reported that participants often had the skills and abilities to work, but a key issue they had to address was scepticism among employers about the ability of someone who had been out of work for a long time and the resource required of the employer to support them. To address this, the provider offered employers who took on participants for placements, trials or paid work ongoing support, in the form of regular catch ups with the participant’s line manager. They also offered workshops for employers on how to support employees with physical disabilities, mental health issues and learning disabilities.

Young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Participants on projects aimed at young people who were NEET typically had low educational attainment, although there were exceptions to this, with some individuals having undergraduate degrees but facing other barriers to employment. These other barriers often included caring responsibilities as well as housing issues, including long-term homelessness. Those with low educational attainment had typically had negative experiences of school, requiring providers offering skills and qualifications to take a different approach to education in order to engage these individuals. Some did this through offering one-to-one learning or by combining Functional Skills qualifications with training focusing on soft skills, such as self-esteem, or with vocational courses, such as music, acting, fitness or entrepreneurial skills.

According to delivery staff, mental health problems were also a common barrier among this group. Related to this, staff reported that many among this group were highly socially isolated, often due to mental health problems, which presented a challenge to projects delivering group activities. Several providers offered learning on a one-to-one basis initially, with a view to transitioning the young person back into group environments when they felt confident doing so.

Businesses and organisations

There were also projects where the end recipients were businesses and organisations. This included projects working on IP 2.2 (Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems) which worked directly with local employers to upskill their employees. The sectors they worked with were usually determined by priorities within the local economy. For example, a few LEPs had identified construction as a key sector due to the amount of planned property development. Providers were therefore delivering significant amounts of training to upskill construction workers, but even more so to train new workers to ensure continuity of business amid high staff turnover.

Another project worked directly with local SMEs who struggled to access local graduate talent, as well as with local education providers, to ensure their delivery matched the needs of local businesses.

Finally, a project operating as a grants-making organisation awarded funding to local organisations working with those furthest away from the labour market. These were projects that were highly embedded within the local community and worked with niche audiences, such as individuals with mental health conditions, those with learning difficulties or those recognised as being highly socially isolated.

Recruitment

Recruitment channels

Projects co-funded by DWP tended to receive the majority of their referrals from local Jobcentre Plus (JCP) offices, although all topped-up their recruitment through engagement within the local community, for example through community centres, youth clubs, libraries, places of worship, GP surgeries, probation services, job fairs and shelters. Some also received referrals through other local authority services, such as housing and social care. Awareness of these programmes also came from word of mouth, with participants sharing their experience with friends and family.

Among direct bids and those co-funded through the Big Lottery Fund, recruitment tended to come through a wider range of channels, and was often a mix of outreach work, through community centres, libraries, children's centres, probation services, local authority services and roadshows, and advertising, through social media as well as physical ads in the local community. Where projects were advertised through social media, this was often aimed at directing individuals to outreach events, as these were seen as most effective in explaining their offer, through introducing individuals to advisors, giving examples of ways they can help and showcasing success stories.

Some of these projects had dedicated marketing or outreach staff carrying out these activities. In one case the prime contractor had organised for recruitment staff from all delivery partners to meet regularly to discuss approaches and examples of good practice, viewing recruitment as a "learning process". Now in the third contract cycle, the meeting between delivery partners had passed on new ways to reach difficult groups, such as outreach at children's centres to attract lone parents, which the prime contractor felt had been a factor in the increase in starters compared with the first contract.

Projects working directly with employers in the local area had dedicated marketing or business development staff who engaged with employers to educate them about the funding available and the qualifications on offer.

CASE STUDY: ESFA Co-funded, I.P 2.1 (Enhancing equal access)

Due to long-standing partnerships and a strong local reputation for working with employers, recruitment was described by staff as near seamless. As the project provided in-work training at no cost to employers, the contract holder (a further education college) found that demand exceeded supply. It was therefore typically a case of the contract holder selecting the most appropriate employers for them to provide training to. The LEP had outlined four key industries for the provider to focus on (pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, engineering, health and care) which guided the selection.

The college and its largest partner did not pro-actively recruit through adverts or other outreach. Their established reputation in the region, existing relationships and word of mouth among employers drove their recruitment. The college strategic team had a staff member in a new business role, however the focus of this role focused more on assessing businesses that applied to ensure the provision was relevant.

Individual participants were typically offered training to improve their skills by their HR teams or line managers, typically with a view to progressing within their organisations. In some cases, staff were required to undertake a training programme by their employer upon commencement of their employment, or due to regulatory changes, for examples changes to safety requirements.

“We’ve got a good breadth of coverage across our different departments in terms of identifying and reaching employers, but it works just as well with our sub-contractors with their wealth of employers. So, we’ve got a very good coverage across the North East and have a strong portfolio of employers.”

Strategic lead, prime contractor

Effectiveness of recruitment and challenges faced

Overall, recruitment strategies were found to be relatively effective although there were some commonly faced challenges related to referrals from JCP and to recruiting certain subgroups. For smaller organisations, securing the necessary referrals could be very time consuming and some found it a challenge to balance outreach work with actual delivery.

There were also cases where smaller sub-contractors early on in the contract felt the eligibility criteria were unclear or too narrow. The criteria were in these cases clarified and widened as the project progressed. One example of this was a contract aimed at

older workers where the eligibility criteria was adjusted from those over 50 years down to 40 years, as recruitment was proving too difficult.

Referrals from JCP and health services

Several projects that received referrals from local JCP offices reported facing challenges early on. Often, this was a case of awareness of the provision being low among JCP staff. In other cases, ESF staff felt there was other provision within the local area with a similar offer which took priority within JCP, and this was especially the case if the provision was offered as part of JCP delivery.

CASE STUDY: Co-funded by DWP, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

The majority of referrals came from JCP and staff therefore worked closely with several local offices to ensure a smooth transition onto their programme. They also received referrals from local community centres and a reasonable proportion of customers came to them via word of mouth.

In the early stages of the contract they struggled to get enough referrals. This was partially because JCP work coaches were signposting their customers onto their provision, but not actually filling out referrals forms and passing on contact details, which meant advisors were unable to make initial contact and book appointments. They also found that work coaches did not fully understand the project and therefore were either not making referrals or not making suitable referrals. Delivery staff also said there were other types of provision in the area competing for similar participant groups, and that JCP staff did not have a good enough understanding of their delivery to set this apart from other organisations.

The response to this was to engage more frequently with JCP staff to educate them on their offer and to share their success stories in order to build interest, but also to spend more time going out into the community to recruit directly. As a small organisation, they had limited resources to put towards this type of engagement, however.

“The relationship with the job centre was quite hard in the beginning because they have a lot of things they can refer onto so making them aware of the project and how to refer was a challenge.”

There were also local areas where there were several ESF funded projects operating and some staff said they felt they were competing for referrals. In these cases, strategic staff worked closely with these other organisations and/or the JCP to ensure that their eligibility criteria and their offer did not overlap. This ensured that JCP staff were better equipped to refer participants to the most appropriate service. There

were also examples where several ESF funded projects had entered a partnership and set up processes for referring participants between them, depending on what provision was more suitable.

In some cases, a lack of awareness or understanding among JCP staff also led to referrals that did not meet the specification of their delivery. An example of this is described in the case study below.

CASE STUDY: Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

A project delivering employment support to individuals with mild to moderate mental health conditions received the majority of their referrals from JCP. Early on in delivery they struggled with low numbers of referrals, due to a lack of awareness of the project among JCP staff. They also received a number of unsuitable referrals. ESF and JCP staff interviewed acknowledged that JCP work coaches did not have a sufficiently good understanding of mental health conditions to distinguish between mild to moderate and severe conditions and this led to referrals that were unsuitable due to the severity of their condition.

The delivery organisation decided to change the recruitment process in response to this. The organisation switched to running two separate ESF contracts, one aimed at those with mild to moderate conditions and one operating in secondary care aimed at severe conditions. Instead of JCP staff referring an individual straight onto one of these programmes, they instead referred them to a member of staff functioning as a 'gateway' who then directed the individual to the most suitable provision. This ensured delivery staff were not having to re-direct unsuitable referrals and removed the burden of identifying the correct contract from JCP staff.

Delivery staff also noted that in some cases, eligible individuals assumed they were being mandated by JCP to the programme and then disengaged when they found out participation was voluntary. Similarly, staff said some UC claimants turned up for the initial meeting out of fear of being sanctioned and that some of these individuals were not genuinely interested in the support on offer. ESF staff tried to minimise this by emphasising to JCP work coaches to refer those with a real interest in finding work or in moving closer to employment and giving feedback to work coaches when referrals were felt to be inappropriate.

In all these cases, building a positive relationship with JCP early on was therefore seen as key to continuity and quality of recruitment. Staff had typically achieved this by increasing their physical presence within JCP, often spending at least one working day in each local office. They had also increased the number of group presentations of their offer as well as the amount of one-to-one interaction with work coaches.

Projects that received referrals from health services said that sometimes those working in this sector did not recognise the potential of employment outcomes to lead to positive health outcomes and therefore did not prioritise referrals. As with referrals from JCP, securing referrals from health services depended on significant and ongoing engagement with these services to educate them on the value of the offer and the importance of making referrals.

Difficulties recruiting subgroups of participants

There were particular types of participants mentioned by some organisations as being more difficult to recruit. This was especially the case with individuals who were economically inactive. Unlike those who are unemployed, the economically inactive do not have regular interactions with JCP and are therefore difficult to identify and engage with. Once an individual had been identified, staff also faced challenges related to enrolment, due to difficulties proving economic inactivity and a lack of an income, which was necessary in order to make a financial claim for the enrolment.

Some projects with targets for lone parents or those with childcare responsibilities said that finding time for these individuals to attend introductory or enrolment sessions was difficult due to lack of childcare, especially if sessions fell during school holidays. Some therefore offered childcare alongside appointments or organised child-focused activities in their office during appointment hours.

Staff working with refugees as participants found recruitment and enrolment challenging as these individuals often lacked the ID and documentation needed for registration and enrolment, which could then take between six and twelve weeks to receive and staff were unable to support individuals in the meantime.

Projects covering rural areas with poor transport links stated that this added challenges to recruitment. It was difficult to convince participants to come to outreach activities due to transport limitations so recruitment staff instead spent time going out to the communities and knocking on doors to inform residents of their offer. Staff said this could take up significant amounts of staff resource however and needed to be balanced against actual delivery.

As was discussed in the section of the previous chapter on equality and diversity targets, some projects also reported struggling to recruit certain subgroups due to the demographic make-up of the area they were operating in. For example, some projects struggled to recruit BAME individuals due to the local area being predominantly White British. In some cases, this was addressed by adjusting the targets.

Drop-outs between enrolment and starting activities

Staff reported that occasionally participants lost motivation during the gap between completing enrolment forms and starting the programme. Projects reported an interval of around a week to a month between sending off participant enrolment forms and DWP approving them for payment. This period was sometimes extended if forms were rejected due to a mismatch between DWP data and provider files. Some delivery staff expressed frustration with this and stated that the delay can deter participants from engaging with the programme altogether.

Project management and governance

Management and governance structure

The Managing Authority in DWP sits at the top of the ESF delivery structure. Below this, the structure is broadly divided between the Co-financing organisations (DWP, ESFA, NLCF and HMPSS) and Direct bid organisations. With the exception of HMPSS who deliver through their regional delivery partners, the other CFOs work through LEPs, who in turn work with prime contract providers and sub-contractors and other delivery partners. Direct bid organisations work directly through prime contractors and sub-contractors and other delivery partners. Some provision is delivered through local co-financing arrangements with organisations acting as Intermediary Bodies, including the Greater London Authority and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. A small proportion of ESF funding is delivered through Community Led Local Development projects (Investment Priority 1.5) for which smaller community organisations apply for funding directly from the Managing Authority.

Working relationships with CFOs

Prime contractors had monthly meetings with CFO contract managers to discuss progress against targets, quality assurance and any updates on eligibility criteria. While in most cases the working relationship with the CFO was described as positive, there were instances where prime contractors felt they had received contradictory guidance on eligibility from their CFO contract manager. This was worrying for providers, who risked being unable to claim funding for activities or outcomes if they did not fulfil the eligibility criteria. In one example, this ended up influencing the supply chain of a project. The prime provider was told by their CFO contract manager that all sub-contractors must provide a full financial statement in order to be eligible. Not all of the partners they usually worked with were able to comply with the requirements, which were described as very time consuming. The prime was later told the information they were given initially was incorrect and that the level of information they had provided was not needed for procurement after all.

There were also examples where miscommunication had impacted delivery. In one, the strategic lead stated they were only notified of a funding extension with four days' notice, which led to a gap in recruitment and delivery. For two other projects, delays to the CFO signing off the project's inception meant delivery was on hold for several months, in one case for nine months.

Prime contractors also had quarterly face-to-face meetings with the CFO contract manager and the LEP. In addition to progress against targets, these meetings typically included a discussion of local priorities and how delivery could be adjusted to respond to this. Some projects also involved other stakeholders in these meetings, such as local authorities and representatives from health services or educational institutions. While one project felt this helped ensure the delivery was responding to local needs another said balancing the interests of several stakeholders within what was a relatively small project could be challenging. In this example, the involvement

of local authorities had led to the eligibility criteria for participants becoming narrower. In an effort to prioritise the most deprived areas, each local authority had identified wards that were in scope for the project. The delivery organisation said these additional layers of eligibility added more administrative tasks to advisors' workload and limited what in their view should be a widely available offer.

Working relationships between prime and subcontractors

The approach to project management among prime contractors varied somewhat, and was partially dependent on the size of the supply chain. While some prime contractors worked with as few as two or three delivery partners, others worked with as many as 30. In some cases, the prime contractor also delivered provision, while in others the prime solely focused on operational management and governance.

While some prime providers had standardised processes for sharing progress updates and subsequently meeting delivery partners to discuss these, others took a more informal approach.

“We think of it as mentoring our providers...It is very collaborative... We work with some very small and very niche providers and most of them [need a lot of support].”

Delivery staff, ESFA co-funded, IP 1.2 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people)

Typically, prime provider staff spoke to delivery partners every week to discuss enrolments, activities delivered and outcomes achieved.

In the early stages of projects, a key role for the prime contractor was to support delivery partners with documentation and evidence requirements. Smaller delivery organisations typically found these processes challenging and resource intensive, and therefore required significant support on an ongoing basis. This could include holding regular training workshops on documentation or evidence requirements or helping providers set up templates to make the process more efficient. Some prime contractors also worked with their providers to help them maximise the amount of funding they could draw down. In one example, the prime advised their subcontractor to partner with a local college so they could draw partial funding for regulated training courses:

“One of our providers is not approved with an awarding organisation because their numbers are too few. What [we advised them to do] is non-regulated support but also do regulated [courses] through a college so that they get the support to register and report it even though the delivery is not done at their premises.”

Strategic Lead, ESFA co-funded, IP 1.2 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people)

Internal data management systems

Delivery partners uploaded enrolment and outcome data to a management system designed and overseen by the prime contractor. While some delivery partners found the systems they worked with valuable, user-friendly and appreciated that they

allowed for oversight of progress against targets, others felt that the systems were cumbersome, difficult to navigate and time consuming to work with. In some cases, management systems were introduced mid-way through the contract which presented challenges to delivery partners who then had to get to grips with these.

Internal quality teams

Most prime contractors and sole contractors had their own internal quality teams who reviewed enrolment and outcome data before it was uploaded to the CFO's systems. These teams were in many cases also responsible for quality assuring delivery outside of ESF contracts. Some of the smaller organisations did not have quality assurance staff from the start of the project but, after having some of their claims rejected due to insufficient evidence, realised having such staff was essential to the success of the project and business continuity. Having dedicated quality assurance staff also meant some of these responsibilities could be taken off delivery and strategic staff.

Performance management and auditing processes

All projects were regularly audited by ESF quality assurance teams. They were also audited quarterly by the CFO. Beyond this, organisations took different approaches to audits.

Larger prime contractors more commonly had standardised approaches and schedules for internal audits. This included visits to carry out observations as well as document audits of delivery partners. Smaller prime contractors and delivery organisations had less dedicated resource for quality assurance and often took a more informal approach, where they carried out observations and audits when possible.

“We have monthly meetings with the big providers and quarterly meetings with the small ones. We have a discussion of our reach and their reach within the groups [we have targets against]. That discussion can feed up to remedial actions, which we look at in the management meetings where we consider whether we need to take a further look at the issues that have come up.”

Strategic lead, Direct Bid, 1.2 Sustainable integration of young people

Activities delivered

Key activities

The activities delivered under each funded project varied significantly. Projects working on IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people) often focused on one-to-one, personalised support from a key worker, offering activities and guidance related to job search.

Activities working on IP 1.4 (Active inclusion) also tended to involve one-to-one support, but as these participants were typically further from the labour market delivery focused more on addressing a wider set of barriers to employment, through activities such as English language or basic skills qualifications, courses on topics

such as confidence and motivation, anger management or life skills, as well as offering volunteering opportunities or work placements.

The projects included in this study working on IP 2.1 (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning) offered in-work training to employers in their area. The projects working on IP 1.2 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people) varied in their approach. While one co-funded by the ESFA delivered Functional Skills and other qualifications through a range of delivery partners, another Direct Bid working under this IP worked with partners to offer one-to-one employment support through a key worker.

The time participants spent on projects varied significantly, depending on the complexity of their situation. While some moved into employment within months, others remained on the programme for up to a year, sometimes longer, depending on the complexity of their barriers.

While some projects had divided their offer into distinct stages or steps, most were careful to stress that the participant journey looked different for each individual.

CASE STUDY: Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

This project operated a three-step programme where participants could move forward or backwards through the programme depending on progress. Participants worked with a support worker throughout the programme, whom they met face-to-face on a regular basis. The journey was bespoke to each participant, meaning not all went through every step of the programme.

The first of three phases involved a needs and barriers assessment. During the second phase participants met with a 'job connector' who worked with employers in the local area. The job connectors organised informal job interviews and work placements and supported both the participant and the employer through this.

In the final stage, participants were provided with in work support for six months from their support worker, while the job connector might separately be in contact with the employer to help smooth over any teething issues. During this stage participants were given support managing financial issues or applying for in-work benefits or tax credits.

The role of a key worker

The majority case study projects included an element of support from a key worker. This took the form of face-to-face meetings, usually every two weeks. Once a participant had been enrolled, advisors typically carried out a needs assessment and, based on this, created a personalised action plan. The action plan formed the basis of scheduled meetings. Activities undertaken during these meetings often included better off calculations, CV writing, practicing interview technique, looking at job postings and working together on applications or cover letters, as well as discussions

around what skills or qualifications might be needed for a participant to move closer to a particular role.

Meetings with key workers also addressed other barriers, such as mental health, housing, debt or childcare. They also often included somewhat challenging conversations around appropriate attitudes and behaviours related to job search, and advisors felt having time to build a relationship with an individual allowed them to have these conversations. Advisors felt a key part of their role was also to provide emotional support and help individuals build resilience. They acknowledged that job search, especially for those who have been long-term unemployed, can be challenging and isolating and that helping individuals remain positive and goal oriented was an important part of their role.

“We often get individuals that display something that might not be ideal for an employer- we have had people who have come to our workshops and not participated and we have had people who have been quite abrupt and rude. We then have to start tackling those barriers which will often be their advisor sitting down with that individual and going through the feedback, quite honestly, to highlight those barriers.”

Delivery Staff, DWP, 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

On projects working under IP 1.4 (Active inclusion), the meetings with the key worker often focused more on wider barriers than on traditional job search activities, reflecting the distance participants were at from employment.

CASE STUDY: ESFA co-funded IP 1.2 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people)

The prime contractor worked with 12 delivery partners offering training and qualifications. This usually included a mix of Functional Skills qualifications and courses focused on self-esteem or confidence and motivation.

Although the focus of the project was on delivering qualifications, strategic and delivery staff said an important element of the support was building relationships with young people. Staff said many of the young people they worked with were highly socially isolated and at first reluctant to engage. Building a trusting relationship was therefore crucial to ensure the learner engaged with the content and was able to progress into further education or employment. Most of these providers offered young people the option of taking courses individually with a tutor, rather than in a group setting so that this relationship could develop.

Signposting to additional support

While the key worker support tended to take a holistic approach and tried to take a wide set of barriers into account when trying to move someone closer to employment, it was still common for staff to have to signpost participants onto more specialist external provision in order to tackle some of these barriers. This was especially the case for issues such as mental health and housing issues or

homelessness. Although this signposting role was typically not part of their job description, staff felt overcoming these barriers was necessary for the participant to be able to fully engage with employment support. Key workers tended to offer participants a high degree of handholding through these movements between other services, to minimise dropouts. This included communicating with participants over telephone, email or text before and after scheduled appointments were due to take place or even accompanying participants to these. In order to minimise the amount of signposting needed, one project had built an internal health and wellbeing advisor team to address things like physical or mental health issues without making external referrals. According to staff, 80% of their participants had used this service.

Work-based training

Providers working on IP 2.1 (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning) worked predominantly with an existing network of employers across different sectors to offer job-related qualifications. These were often employers that required training on an on-going basis, either due to regulatory requirements or due to staff turnover. For example, one employer in the construction sector said they would struggle to bring enough new workers onto their sites to cope with demand without the ESF funding for Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)³ courses.

Training was often delivered on employers' premises and was typically delivered in small units, to reduce the amount of time an individual had to take away from their duties at any one time. One provider offered training in the evenings and weekends for organisations where taking staff away from their duties was too difficult. Another provider offered all of its training online, supported by booklets. This provider operated in a rural area and offering their training online reduced time and expense spent on travel, so that more of their funding could be spent on delivering qualifications.

Providers tended to offer a mix of regulated and unregulated learning⁴, although several strategic leaders said there was a clear preference among employers for regulated courses. One prime contractor stated that they had adjusted their targets for regulated and non-regulated courses from a 50/50 split to 75/25 as a result of this, and asked delivery partners to reflect this in their offer to employers.

Training courses

Most projects also offered training courses, which were either delivered internally or by external providers. Examples of courses typically delivered internally included confidence and motivation and employability skills. It was also common for projects to refer participants onto courses such as Functional skills or ESOL courses, as well as vocational courses, such as food hygiene, customer service or administrative qualifications such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

³ The Construction Skills Certification Scheme ensured individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications for the job they do on site. Most contractors and major house builders require individuals working on construction sites to hold a valid CSCS card.

⁴ Regulated learning refers to courses which use regulated qualifications and learning units. While non-regulated courses lead to qualifications these are not regulated by the ESFA.

Employer engagement

Some of the projects working under IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people) also had employer engagement teams that worked to create pathways for participants into employment. These teams usually focused on building lasting relationships with employers that offered them vacancies on an ongoing basis. This included employers in sectors such as retail, care homes, manufacturing, cleaning services and logistics. In one case, the provider had tried to match the employers in their network with the participants they work with. One of their two ESF contracts focused on families, and they found that among mothers their biggest barrier was finding employers who could accommodate their need to only work during school hours, as they could not afford childcare. The provider therefore set up a scheme with local schools offering these women roles in school kitchens.

Providers working with individuals further from the labour market typically focused on offering volunteering and job placements with employers in their network.

“We do not talk to our employers about CVs, because our participants won’t have much on it. We talk to them about attitudes and behaviour and about eagerness to work. We have about 10 employers who buy into that approach and give opportunities to our hardest-to-help customers.”

Employer engagement advisor, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

One provider offered participants placements with employers in their network, with salaries paid from ESF funds. The provider felt that this arrangement worked well for both employers and participants; while participants gained a unique opportunity to get work experience and to showcase their abilities to an employer, the employers got an opportunity to train a new employee free from financial cost or risk. According to one staff member: “the financial cushioning means that from a business perspective there is no risk”. The scheme had been successful, with one employer so far taking on eight participants following successful placements.

Others with established relationships with a network of employers also said this was a valuable offer for employers. While it could potentially save employers on recruitment costs by recruiting through these organisations, employers also had access to ongoing support from providers as new recruits settled in. One provider said they were able to have any difficult conversations with individuals on behalf of the employer, which employers could be reluctant to have on their own.

“We encourage all employers to carry out interviews and induction sessions in our offices. It means it is a bit more familiar and comfortable for the participants, as interviews can be nerve-wracking, but also means we are on hand to help with the transition. Then we offer the after-care as well, in the form of in-work support. We speak to the participant but also to the employer, so we get both sides of the story and can smooth out any concerns the participant might not be aware of.”

Employer engagement advisor, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

While these established relationships were seen as valuable and a cost-effective way of finding vacancies for participants, not all of the individuals providers worked with found these pathways suitable. One provider estimated that around 40% of their customer base went through these established pathways, but that the remaining 60% required a more ad-hoc approach, which was considerably more resource intensive.

One provider without an existing network of employers stated that employer engagement could be time intensive and that it felt like an old-fashioned approach to supporting out-of-work individuals. Staff felt teaching participants more contemporary methods of job seeking, such as where to look for vacancies online and how to apply digitally, were more valuable.

Funding for work related expenses

Most projects also had access to funds to pay for small, one-off expenses related to job search. Examples included outfits for interviews, uniforms, travel to interviews or to work and certificates needed for specific roles. Some of the projects operating in rural areas also paid for participants to travel to appointments or sessions and felt individuals would otherwise not be able to access the support.

In-work support

Many projects offered in-work support for those who progressed into employment, in order to sustain these job outcomes. The amount of time support was offered for varied but was usually around three to nine months. Advisors said this support was particularly valuable during the first couple of months of employment, but that some needed support for longer.

In-work support was usually offered in a fairly informal way, and typically took the form of regular phone calls or email conversations to check in and make sure the transition back into work was going well. Staff felt this was especially valuable for those who had been long-term unemployed, as they were sometimes unsure of suitable workplace behaviour or of their rights in the workplace. Others were reported to find starting a new role overwhelming, especially after long-time unemployment, and simply needed someone they trusted to listen and offer reassurances and provide ideas for ways to manage their anxiety. In-work support also included practical support, such as help finding suitable childcare, accessing payslips or applying for child tax credits.

Staff found that while some participants found in-work support hugely helpful others were reluctant to take it up. Advisors said individuals who found work often wanted to move on from what had been a difficult phase of their life, and therefore disengaged from support services straightaway.

Participant experience

Participants overall described a service that was holistic, personalised and flexible. They tended to describe a very positive and trusting relationship with their advisor, key worker or tutor and stated that this relationship had helped them become more confident in their ability to move closer to employment. Some also suggested this

increase in confidence was coupled with an increase in resilience in the face of long-term unemployment:

“Looking for work can be very isolating. They are so supportive and give you the confidence when you feel like giving up.”

Participant, DWP, IP 1.2 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Some recognised the patience shown to them by their advisor when they - for various reasons such as literacy or health conditions – needed a long time to complete forms or applications and appreciated this flexibility.

It was common among those interviewed to believe that advisors were going above and beyond what was required of them in their role to support them. Examples included ongoing communication outside scheduled appointments and accompanying them to meetings with other services or with potential employers.

“I know they will always be there for me, I can call at any time, about anything, and they will help.”

Participant, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Participants felt the support and the approach to job seeking was tailored to them. It was common for participants to say they felt the emphasis of the support was on finding a job that fits with their skills, background, interests and situation and therefore one they can sustain, rather than on finding any job, regardless of whether it was suitable or sustainable.

“Here I feel respected and valued”

Participant, Direct Bid, IP 1.2 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people)

“Here they see you as a whole, they understand your story and who you are.”

Participant, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

“Here, you’re more than just a number”

Participant, Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

They often felt this approach was in direct contrast to their experience from other organisations in the past, and particularly from JCP.

“The support I received from the Jobcentre was not personalised or tailored. I did not feel like there was any interaction, any exchange or content, I felt I was just there to say I had attended.”

Participant, Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

The relationship with their advisor was clearly the most valued aspect of the delivery for the participants interviewed. Of the activities delivered by their advisor, several participants stated support with CV writing was helpful, especially understanding how to tailor a CV to specific roles:

“You would not know it, but just making the smallest changes to your CV can make such a big difference to whether an employer looks at it.”

Participant, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Participants also said they appreciated guidance from their advisor on what types of roles they should be applying for. Some mentioned feeling very unsure of what types of roles would be suitable to them before receiving the support and that the guidance they had received had made their job search feel more focussed.

Mock interviews and training sessions focused on interview skills were also described as valuable. One participant suggested the skills she had learned, coupled with the increased confidence she had from working with her advisor had made her more prepared for job interviews:

“Before I had no confidence, I would get nervous, I had no motivation and I was scared of interviews. Now I have gone for an interview and it felt like a big achievement. It’s not something I would have been able to do before, but [my key worker] got me there.”

Participant, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Those who had received in-work support were also positive about this. Reflecting feedback from advisors, participants described this support as informal, usually taking the form of short phone calls every couple of weeks. Participants said advisors tended to ask how they felt about work and tried to address anything they might be anxious or worried about, such as relationships with co-workers or lack of confidence. Two of the participants interviewed had struggled with mental health issues and for them the in-work support included guidance on how to balance work and their health and ways to manage mental health in the workplace.

Challenges to delivery

Providers described some common challenges to delivery. While some of these were related to the local area or participant group, others were linked to ESF processes and working relationships.

Insufficient lead time

Some strategic staff felt they did not have enough time for the setup and embedding of the project locally. This was especially the case among providers with limited or no experience of ESF projects and some acknowledged that at the time of bidding they did not appreciate what was required of them in terms of reporting and evidencing and that getting to grips with ESF processes took up a lot of time which could otherwise have been spent on delivery.

Staff also said they underestimated the amount of time and resource needed to build awareness locally and to establish relationships with organisations responsible for referrals, and that more of this work should have been done before the delivery started.

As projects took longer to build momentum, this meant that some providers initially were not meeting their targets and had since been working to catch up.

Registration and eligibility checks

Frontline delivery staff described the ESF registration process and eligibility checks as overly complicated and cumbersome. Staff felt it was crucial to develop rapport and build trust with participants straight away, to minimise dropouts, and felt the registration process made this challenging. Providers worked with individuals who faced challenges such as reading and writing difficulties, English as a second language, learning difficulties or were wary of giving up personal information, all of which made completing the registration process more difficult.

“Building rapport in the first session is really key and the paperwork hinders this.”

Strategic lead, Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Relationship with CFO contract managers

There were a few examples of projects that faced challenges early on due to poor communication with CFOs and contract managers. In one case, a nine month delay to having their project inception approved by the CFO meant they were unable to enrol any participants or deliver any activities during this phase. In another case, delays of outcome payments of up to six months presented ongoing challenges to business continuity as the delivery organisation encountered cashflow difficulties as a result. There were also examples where strategic staff felt they were given unclear or insufficient information about eligibility criteria and evidence requirements which led to some of their claims being rejected. In one case, the strategic lead stated some of the information about eligibility as well as data sharing agreements participants must sign upon enrolment were shared by the CFO contract manager after they had begun delivery, which meant some of their enrolments were not approved.

In most cases where projects reported challenges in the relationship with CFO contract managers, this had improved significantly since the early phases of the project. In one case, the prime contractor notified the CFO that they had concerns about the knowledge and experience of their contract manager and the CFO responded by adding more senior oversight to the project.

Managing a complex participant group

According to delivery staff, their participants could be unpredictable to work with, due to the complexities of their needs. Staff worked to minimise dropouts by handholding participants through every step of their journey closer to employment, especially if they were signposted to external provision. Staff achieved this through ongoing, informal communication over phone, email or text. Despite this, they still experienced dropouts which was challenging as, depending on when in the process the

participant disengaged, significant staff time could have been invested in a participant which they can no longer claim outcome funding for.

Transportation

In some areas, transportation was a challenge and delivery staff had responded to this either by funding public transport for participants to travel to their office, or by going out into the community to meet participants, either in their home or at a local venues such as libraries or community centres.

Universal Credit

A few providers stated that the roll out of Universal Credit had presented challenges to their delivery. Some had found their participants needed support making an application and ongoing support navigating the system, which took time away from other activities advisors would typically offer. They also experienced participants with financial difficulties as a result of the five-week payment window between making an UC application and receiving a first payment, and advisors spent time supporting with this or signposting to other services.

Some providers also stated that those who had been claiming UC for a longer period of time could be difficult to work with because they had had limited engagement with JCP work coaches. Whereas their participants who were JSA claimants had been used to regular interactions with coaches, ESF staff found that out-of-work UC claimants tended to have had fewer interactions and were therefore less used to the structure of employment support, and to having challenging conversations about their own job search behaviour.

Outcome-based funding model

The outcome-based funding model presented challenges for smaller delivery organisations in terms of cashflow. These delivery organisations were entirely dependent on ESF funding to operate and any delays to funding or rejection of claims created cashflow difficulties. There were examples of prime contractors taking a mentoring approach and offering partners support with business management, despite this not being part of their contractual role. This was sometimes in the form of advice on how to maximise the funding they could draw down or minimise their expenses. There were also examples of primes awarding delivery partners upfront payments to ease the pressure on cash flow.

Enablers of effective delivery

Strategic and delivery staff described some common elements that they believed supported effective delivery, across investment areas. These are detailed below.

Positive working relationships

Positive, supportive and collaborative working relationships were seen to be important enablers of effective delivery. These relationships had several layers:

- A supportive relationship between prime contractors and their delivery partners was important. The delivery partners were often small organisations who sometimes struggled with the administrative burden of an ESF contract

and they were therefore dependent on the prime contractor for guidance on eligibility and evidence requirements.

“The relationship [with the prime] has been fantastic. [Our contract manager] is fantastic. There’s no ‘I’ll call you back’, she always picks up the phone and her communication skills are second to none. I’ll email her to ask for guidance and she always responds to emails by the end of the day... Communication is key but I also feel they fight our corner...When they have told us they need some piece of evidence for auditing purposes and we say we don’t think that’s quite right, they go back and challenge the LEP or the ESFA and they fight our corner.”

Training provider, Construction, ESFA co-funded, IP 2.2 (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning)

- A collaborative relationship with the LEP, where the delivery organisation was clear on local priorities and the LEP understood the nature of the programme and the participants, was also influential to delivery. There were cases where organisations felt the LEP did not fully understand the nature of their delivery and that the priorities of the LEP were at odds with those of the individuals they worked with.

“The relationship with the LEP has been fantastic. There was an opportunity for growth funding and they really wanted us to get it. It was great to see their support. They decided to write a supporting statement to ESFA alongside our bid, and that [really helped].”

Delivery staff, ESFA co-funded, IP 2.1 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people)

- Finally, the relationship between the prime contractor and the CFO contract manager influenced delivery. Where this had worked well, the CFO contract manager offered guidance on changes to eligibility criteria and evidence requirements and had been supportive in enabling organisations to access growth funding. Where the relationship had been less strong, strategic leads felt the CFO had not had capacity to engage as frequently as was needed or had an insufficient level of understanding of ESF processes.

“It feels to us like [the CFO] are somewhat overlaid with work, and like they do not have capacity to engage. This had a big effect when we were setting up.”

Strategic lead, Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Previous experience

Previous experience of delivering ESF contracts enabled projects to be up and running and delivering outcomes far sooner than those with little or no previous experience delivering such contracts. These organisations that took longer to be fully-functioning stated that they underestimated how long it took to become

integrated in the local community and maximise their recruitment channels and that this meant it took a while before they were achieving outcomes.

Project outcomes

This chapter outlines providers' experiences of achieving positive outcomes for participants. It will then discuss enablers and challenges to achieving such outcomes.

Outcomes achieved

ESF outcomes overall

The England European Social Fund (ESF) and Youth Employment Initiative 2016-2018 Leavers (YEI) survey explored the experiences of people in England who had recently left work-related courses/programmes funded through the ESF, including the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The research, conducted by IFF Research on behalf of the DWP, involved a large-scale quantitative telephone survey with 19,769 participants who had left the ESF provision between December 2015 and December 2018, and YEI provision between December 2015 and May 2019. It is worth examining the findings of this research as an outline of the types of outcomes under discussion in this chapter.

Improvements in soft-skills as a result of receiving ESF provision were widely reported. Around seven in ten reported improved self-confidence in working, improvement in ability to do things independently, improvement in communication skills and improvement in ability to work in a team. Alongside this, participation appeared to have greatly increased optimism about finding employment. Eight in ten participants (81 per cent) who were inactive or unemployed on entry reported that the course/programme helped them find a job or made it more likely that they would find work. Just under half said it had helped them a lot.

Half of YEI leavers received a job offer in the six months following provision. These jobs were usually considered good quality, and the vast majority offered a job went onto accept. Across the programme as a whole, the proportion of participants in employment increased from 29 per cent on entry to 54 per cent 6 months after leaving (a 25 percentage point increase). Nearly all of those who received in-work support were still in employment 6 months later, a large minority reported progress at 6 months and nearly all reported improved prospects for the future.

Results from the survey show that employment outcomes were widespread across the different co-financing organisations. Around four in ten participants on projects co-funded by HMPPS (44%), DWP (35%) and National Lottery Community Fund (41%), as well as Direct Providers (39%) had found work between enrolment onto the programme and six months following provision. The increase was smaller for the ESFA (18%) because it was more common for their participants to be in employment on entry.

Types of outcomes by project type

Every case study project had set outcomes that performance was measured by, however the nature of these outcomes varied across the different investment priorities. The table below (table 1.8) contains a broad overview of the types of outcomes projects in each investment priority might look to achieve, drawing on the objectives outlined in DWP's 'European Social Fund Operation Programme 2014-2020' outline document⁵.

Table 1.8: Overview of outcomes by investment priority

Investment priority	Outcomes
1.1: Access to employment for job-seekers and inactive people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the employability of long-term unemployed people • Provide support to individuals from groups which face particular labour market disadvantage • Encourage inactive people to participate in the labour market • Address the basic skill needs of unemployed and inactive people • Provide support for women at a disadvantage in the labour market to help address the gender employment gap
1.2: Sustainable integration of young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the rise in the participation age by supporting additional traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities • Engage marginalized 15-18 year olds and support them to re-engage with education or training • Address the basic skills needs of young NEETS so that they can compete effectively in the labour market • Provide additional work experience and pre-employment training opportunities to unemployed 18-24 year olds • Support young lone parents to overcome the barriers they face in participating in the labour market
1.3: Youth employment initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the rise in the participation age by supporting additional traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities for 15-29 year old NEETS in YEI areas • Engage marginalized 15-29 year old NEETS in YEI areas and support them to re-engage with education or training • Address the basic skills needs of 15-29 year old NEETS in YEI areas so that they can compete effectively in the labour market • Provide additional work experience and pre-employment training opportunities to unemployed 15-29 year old NEETS in YEI areas • Support 15-29 year old lone parents who are NEET in YEI areas to overcome the barriers they face in participating in the labour market
1.4: Active inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support people with multiple and complex barriers to participation to address those issues to move closer to or into the labour market

⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750497/ESF_operational_programme_2014_2020.pdf

Investment priority	Outcomes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support prisoners in custody and on release, and those without work who are serving sentences in the community, to improve their employability • Engage marginalized individuals and support them to re-engage with education, training, or in employment
1.5: Community-led local development (CLLD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver additional, localized support to people in particularly deprived areas, so that they move towards or into employment
2.1: Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the basic skills needs of employed people, particularly in SMEs and Micro businesses • Increase skills levels of employed people from existing level to the next level up, to encourage progression in employment • Increase the number of people with technical and job specific skills to support business growth • Increase the skills levels of employed women to encourage progression in employment to help address the gender employment and wage gap
2.2: Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote improvements in the labour market relevance of skills provision through active engagement with relevant institutions and employers

Views on outcomes achieved among case study projects

At the time of fieldwork, most case study projects were either on track to achieve their outcome targets or already exceeding them. Some case study projects reported they were still catching up after a challenging first phase of delivery but were confident they would achieve their overall targets by the end of the delivery period.

Strategic and delivery staff emphasised that there were additional outcomes for participants that were not captured by their ESF outcome data. Staff and participants interviewed highlighted confidence and motivation as an area of significant progress. It was also common for participants to report a better understanding of the types of roles they should be applying for and how to go about this. Some participants also said they felt more resilient and positive about the process of job searching, even if they were still at some distance from employment. Other areas of development included communication skills, overall wellbeing, presentation skills, social isolation and appropriate job behaviour (e.g. being on time).

Some staff also noted that participants were more equipped to engage with other forms of provision going forward as a result of taking part in ESF funded support. In one example, a strategic lead said the qualifications they offered made participants more likely to be able to engage with learning going forward.

“[The project] is more focused on soft skills as well as accredited learning so particularly for people who haven’t or have felt unable to engage with conventional learning methods [it is helpful]. A lot of the projects we have funded are more soft skills based so participants are getting more transferable

skills but in more of a friendly way so they can engage more positively with other learning in future”.

Strategic Lead, ESFA, IP 1.4 (Active inclusion)

Although they were on track to achieve their targets at the point of being interviewed, the strategic lead of a delivery organisation working with NEET young people reported that their targets and budget per learner did not reflect the complexities of the audience they worked with. Their per learner budget only covered one qualification and, in their experience, most needed more than this to move closer to further education or employment. According to staff, most needed a mix of Functional Skills qualifications and courses focusing on soft skills, such as self-esteem.

Drivers of positive outcomes

Analysis of information provided by strategic and frontline staff, as well as participants, enabled some conclusions to be made about what elements of project design and delivery appeared to lead to positive outcomes for participants.

Supportive working relationships

As discussed in the previous chapter, working relationships and the approach to project management had an impact on ongoing delivery. It also clearly impacted the extent to which projects were able to achieve outcomes. This was evident in the following ways:

- At an overall level, positive working relationships between prime contractors and their delivery partners enabled them to flexibly adjust targets and funding between delivery organisations according to which contracts were performing or under-performing. This allowed the prime contractors to maximise the funding available to them and achieve a higher number of outcomes.
 - Supportive relationships between prime contractors and delivery partners also meant that delivery organisations received support and guidance on evidencing outcomes, which was especially important during the early stages of each project.
- Relationships with other stakeholders, such as JCP or health services, were crucial for quantity and quality of referrals, which in turn meant providers were better placed to achieve outcomes.
- Relationships between CFO contract managers and prime contractors were important as receiving communication and guidance about changes to eligibility or availability of additional funding ensured continuity of delivery and allowed prime and delivery organisations to plan future delivery more accurately.

Voluntary nature of provision

Strategic and delivery staff felt the voluntary nature of participation in their projects was important. They felt that this meant that those that enrolled in the project were genuinely engaged and willing to work with their advisor on addressing their barriers.

Long term support from a key worker

Provision aimed at moving unemployed or inactive people closer to employment tended to include support from a key worker and this relationship was described by

both staff and participants as crucial to achieving positive outcomes. Delivery staff said having a consistent point of contact over a long period of time allowed for a trusting relationship to develop between advisor and participant. They felt this in turn made participants feel at ease about opening up and enabled advisors to challenge participants' perceptions, attitudes or behaviour when it came to job search.

Participants described a supportive relationship with their advisor, who they generally felt was understanding of their situation, empathetic and caring. This relationship was usually felt to be different from support they had previously received, for example through JCP, in that they had a consistent point of contact and significantly longer to work together. Being able to build this relationship over time was clearly dependent on key workers having a smaller caseload than would be the case with mainstream JCP provision.

"The constant on-going support and interview tips that have enabled me to secure a full time job. I do not think I would have been able to do this on my own, I think it would have been extremely hard for me to find work. My advisors helped boost my self-confidence and belief that if I work hard, I can achieve anything."

Participant, Direct Bid, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Personalised support

Participants receiving support from a key worker described this as personalised and genuinely tailored to their needs and barriers. The support was also described as more holistic, in that it addressed other barriers, such as housing, debt, health and alcohol and drug abuse. They felt this holistic focus was more likely to lead to sustainable employment outcomes.

"It is about providing an unlimited service and meeting the whole human."

Strategic lead, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Flexibility

A flexible approach to delivery was important for both projects working directly with individuals and those working with employers.

Those working with individuals out of work recognised that participants' lives could often be chaotic and unpredictable and tried to accommodate this as far as possible. Although most had scheduled appointments with participants every two weeks, it was also common for advisors and participants to meet outside these appointments and to communicate regularly over telephone, email and text in between appointments. As far as possible, advisors accommodated last minute changes, such as participants being unable to show up for meetings or courses.

Those working with employers echoed the importance of offering provision which fitted employer working patterns. This included offering training over several short, 'bitesize' units to avoid the employer having to release staff from their duties for too

long and delivering the training on the employers' premises. Employers were positive about this approach; while they valued the training provided to their employees they were keen to balance this against the loss in productivity involved in taking them away from duties. It was also common for providers to overbook training courses in anticipation of dropouts on the day.

A varied supply-chain

Within the 20 case study projects sampled for this study, there were examples of larger prime contractors working with a supply chain purposefully put together to offer a range of fairly niche provision, both in terms of the support offered and in terms of the client groups they worked with. Projects working with very vulnerable groups felt this range of provision meant they were able to engage individuals who would not engage in more mainstream provision. While some of the delivery partners focussed their employment support on specific areas, such as self-employment or work in the music industry, the support was often still holistic, in that it addressed a wide set of barriers to employment.

Strategic staff emphasised that managing a wide range of small contracts with small delivery partners was labour intensive and that many of these providers found the administrative tasks of an ESF contract very challenging. However, they also considered that a varied and flexible supply chain was crucial to supporting those with complex barriers to employment.

CASE STUDY: Direct Bid, IP 1.2 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people)

This project supported NEET and inactive young people aged 16-30 in the region to move towards the labour market. Strategic staff said a varied supply chain was necessary to engage with this group, who had often disengaged from more mainstream provision.

The prime contractor carried out a needs assessment with new participants, before referring them onto one of their six delivery partners for employment related support. The delivery partners varied in their focus; while one aimed to build the skills needed to build a business another focused on the skills needed to work in the music industry.

According to strategic staff, the different focus of the various partners ensured individuals stayed engaged with the programme and were able to pursue job-seeking and education in line with their own interests.

“They receive one-to-one support from us, to work on confidence building and on addressing any barriers they might have. Once they’ve overcome that issue they might want to go and do Maths and English qualifications with [a partner] or music courses with [another partners] or we might move them on to a different delivery partner. Perhaps they need to [be referred to] the main mental health service in the region... they might need 6-8 weeks of support there and then come back to us. So we [are able to refer them] to wherever is best for them”

Delivery staff

Local knowledge

Strategic staff felt a good understanding of the needs of the local population, as well as knowledge of the needs of local businesses was key to achieving positive outcomes. A good understanding of the local economy was also considered to be more likely to lead to support from other stakeholders in the community, as is exemplified by the quote below:

“The delivery model CLLD is a very good approach, particularly if you want local people to feel empowered about decisions on this kind of funding.”

Strategic Lead, Direct Bid, IP 1.5 (Community-led Local Development strategies)

Employer engagement

The majority of projects with an element of employer engagement felt creating these links between employers and the participants they worked with was crucial to achieving employment outcomes. As many of the participants they worked with

lacked work experience, staff felt they were likely to be overlooked by employers if they applied for vacancies through the usual channels. They therefore felt that work placements or trials were very valuable opportunities for participants. Some also said that having built up a track record over time meant employers trusted them to appropriately screen and prepare candidates before putting them forward. Staff also felt that these schemes could benefit the local economy more broadly, as they ensured employers were recruiting locally.

In-work support

Projects offering in-work support stated that this type of support was important to ensure employment outcomes were sustained. Advisors felt that the transition back into employment could be overwhelming, especially among those who had been out of work for longer periods of time, and they felt frequent contact and guidance during this period was helpful. Delivery staff said conversations with employers were also useful during this period, as employers could be more comfortable revealing concerns about participants' behaviour or performance to advisors rather than directly to the individual.

However, staff found that not all participants took up this element of the support. In some cases, they found participants disengaged from support once they started work because of a desire to move on from a difficult phase in their life. There were also examples of projects working with ex-offenders and individuals with mental health conditions who did not wish to disclose their history to their new employer and therefore did not want their advisor to speak directly to the employer.

Challenges

Strategic and delivery staff reported facing several challenges with regards to both achieving and evidencing outcomes. These are discussed below.

Employment outcomes

Staff delivering projects aimed at harder-to-help groups, such as the long term unemployed, ex-offenders, NEET young people and people with health conditions or disabilities, sometimes felt their employment targets were not appropriate and that they did not take the complexity of individual situations into account.

CASE STUDY: National Lottery Community Fund, IP 1.4 (9i), Promoting social inclusion, combatting poverty and any discrimination

This project supported over-25s who were not in employment to move closer to the labour market through holistic support including health & wellbeing, financial and digital inclusion, confidence-building, voluntary work, and advice on training. Many of the participants were long-term unemployed or had been inactive in the labour market for several years due to caring commitments or issues relating to health or a disability. While the project had employment-related outcome targets, it emphasised to participants that they would not be 'forced' into looking for work or into any job, and the onus was on them becoming more work-ready by addressing wider barriers in their lives and building confidence through smaller steps, which can take a lot of time. Key workers described the need to balance supporting participants to build confidence and address barriers, with the need to keep them progressing in terms of employability and, for some, becoming more active in the labour market. Some staff and delivery partners regarded the project's employment outcome targets as being too high given the complex and often long-term support needs of the people they worked with.

There were also cases where providers felt employment targets did not reflect the nature of their provision. In one example, a project predominantly offering in-work training had targets for progressions into employment. While part of their contract was to work with those at risk of redundancy, this meant they accessed these individuals before they were made redundant, which meant that any new employment secured could not be claimed as an employment outcome.

"Because we are a predominantly Skills Support for the Workforce provider, we access those people before they are made redundant, so they are never unemployed. Our partnership manager is now trying to forge new links with JCP so we can address those targets."

Delivery staff, ESFA co-funded, I.P 2.1 (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning)

In-work progression

Evidencing in-work progression was described as challenging. Evidencing a change in role required signed job descriptions pre and post provision of support and evidencing a change in salary required a series of pay slips. Providers stated that getting this information could be highly challenging if they did not have an existing relationship and process for this with employers.

Some providers also said employers were not necessarily looking for training to progress employees into higher positions. One provider working closely with employers in the construction sector said the majority of their training needs were

around ratifying new workers, rather than progressing existing ones into higher positions.

Traineeships and apprenticeships

Projects with targets for apprenticeships and traineeships said these were difficult to meet. Staff found awareness of apprenticeships among employers was low and this required them to communicate the potential benefits and what was involved, which staff often felt they did not have spare capacity to do. It was also not seen as a worthwhile investment, because once employers understood what offering apprenticeships involved, they found interest was limited.

Similarly, staff reported that the appetite among learners for apprenticeships and traineeships was low. Delivery staff said there were some common misconceptions around apprenticeships and whether or not an apprenticeship would leave individuals better off than in minimum wage jobs. Staff also acknowledged the wider context of apprenticeship starts having fallen in recent years, especially at Level 2.

“The problem we are facing at the moment is moving people into apprenticeships. They are just not the flavour of the month at the moment and it’s very hard to get someone to commit to going on an apprenticeship. They do not like the end point assessments, they do not like the Functional Skills tests. It’s very hard for us to hit those targets when participants just do not want to go on an apprenticeship.”

Health and Social Care Training provider, ESFA co-funded, I.P 2.1 (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning)

Some projects also said there were few providers offering traineeships in their area, which made these targets difficult to meet.

“There are not a lot of training providers offering traineeships in our area at the moment. That’s a major problem for us, because we can’t find any traineeships to put people on. So traineeships targets are at 0 at the moment, because there simply aren’t any.”

Delivery staff, ESFA co-funded, IP 2.1 (Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people)

While some projects had revised their apprenticeship and traineeship targets others had made changes to their delivery in an attempt to increase the number of these outcomes. A few prime contractors had brought in a delivery partner specialising in apprenticeships specifically to address the shortfall in their outcomes. Another prime contractor organised a special partnership meeting for all its sub-contractors specifically aimed at sharing ideas for moving learners onto apprenticeships.

Evidence requirements

The ESF evidence requirements were felt to be stringent and not always possible to fulfil within the eligibility window, which meant there were outcomes projects could not claim for and which were not included in their monitoring data. This was especially the case for employment outcomes and for progression within work, because the evidence requirements were seen as particularly challenging.

If a participant disengaged from the programme upon finding work and had not given their advisor permission to contact their new employer collecting the necessary evidence within the 28-day window became even more difficult. Projects with existing relationships with local employers tended to find this less challenging.

Reporting requirements were especially challenging for smaller providers with limited resources for administrative tasks. In one case, a prime contractor had to reduce the number of delivery partners they worked with from 16 to eight, as the other eight were not able to cope with the reporting requirements. Another reflected that they should have placed more emphasis during the commissioning and setup phase to consider whether a supplier was able to cope with the requirements, before bringing them onboard. Supporting small providers had required significant resource and led to some 'lost' outcomes due to quality issues. A strategic lead for a CLLD project said this project by its very nature was working with very small providers and that this structure was at odds with the level of administrative tasks required:

“Although CLLD is meant to be community-led, the ESF model does not reflect this because the expectation of reporting and processing of documents is not more relaxed... this causes additional challenges to us as the accountable body because ESF expects and asks for the same level of detail...but the partner feeding us [the information] are not able to maintain the same standard because they are smaller local groups ...so on one hand we are claiming to run a community-led local development model, but on the other we are expecting a high level of administration to go into the project which is not realistic within the constraints of CLLD”

Strategic Lead, IP 1.5 (Community Led Local Development (CLLD))

Areas for improvement

Strategic and delivery staff were asked for ways in which the current ESF design could be adapted to improve delivery and outcomes. Although they were not asked directly for input on the design of the Shared Prosperity Fund, discussions of areas for improvement were relevant to the design of the fund, going forward, in order to avoid replicating some of the issues raised under ESF, and to maximise the scope for achieving positive outcomes.

Streamlining of registration and eligibility-checking processes

Delivery staff suggested streamlining some of the ESF processes and administrative tasks, to ensure a smoother delivery for participants. This was particularly the case with the registration and eligibility checks. Delivery staff stressed the importance of building rapport and trust within the first meeting to minimise dropouts and said the registration and eligibility process made this challenging. Staff also said the vulnerable nature of many of their participants, who sometimes struggled with literacy issues, spoke English as a second language or had health conditions or disabilities, often found the process cumbersome and difficult. It was also common for individuals to be reluctant to give up personal information and, unless the advisor had already built some trust, asking for the information needed for conducting eligibility checks could be difficult.

“It needs to put the end user at the heart of the design. At the moment it has become too overcomplicated and does not reflect the group we’re working with.”

Strategic lead, DWP co-funded, IP 1.1 (Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people)

Evidence requirements

While both strategic and delivery staff acknowledged the need for strict evidence requirements, they felt the current requirements put a strain on their delivery, as evidencing took up significant resource. This was especially challenging for small delivery organisations. It was common for small delivery organisations to require significant support and guidance from either prime contractors or from CFO contract managers in order to correctly provide evidence and some said they still struggled with this despite being a year into a contract.

The exception to this was evidencing progressions into education, apprenticeships and traineeships which was described as relatively straightforward, provided projects had a good relationship with education providers.

Employment outcomes and progressions within work were felt to be most challenging to evidence. With regards to progression within work, staff questioned whether a statement signed by both the individual and their employer could be sufficient evidence. While some staff questioned whether HMRC payments could be used to evidence employment outcomes, others acknowledged that this may not be feasible within the necessary time limitations.

As well as making sure they had enough resource to manage ESF paperwork and administrative tasks, strategic staff said the outcomes-based funding model is difficult for small delivery organisations to manage from a cashflow perspective. Strategic staff suggested investing more resource into quality assuring organisations during the procurement phase of new contracts and shifting more of the funds to upfront payments, rather than having the entirety of the funding come through activities and outcomes.

Capturing soft outcomes and distance travelled

Those working with individuals who were distant from the labour market argued that ESF places too much of an emphasis on employment outcomes and does not sufficiently acknowledge distance travelled. Staff said the nature of the group they worked with meant that it would not be possible for all participants to move into work within the length of the programme but that in most cases participants still moved significantly closer to employment but that there was no way to evidence these progressions in the current ESF framework. Some organisations had developed their own distance travelled tools in order to capture some of this progress. Strategic and delivery staff suggested including measures for soft outcomes, such as increased confidence and motivation or improved understanding of employment requirements and allowing projects to draw some funding for these.

CASE STUDY: National Lottery Community Fund, Priority Axis 1 - Inclusive Labour Markets, IP1.4 (9i) Promoting social inclusion, combatting poverty and any discrimination

This project supported NEET young people to move closer to the labour market, through a combination of work experience, training, support for specific issues such as mental health conditions and substance misuse, and broader, confidence-building activities. Many of the young people it worked with had been socially isolated and had complex, multiple support needs to address before they were ready for progression into work or college.

The project initially used a journey mapping tool to assess 'distance travelled', with young people 'scoring' themselves out of 10, based on how they felt about soft outcomes related to skills, relationships, information and health & wellbeing, with support from their key worker. This self-rating exercise was repeated at four-weekly intervals through their time on the project, with the final score compared back to their 'reflection score' (the second set of ratings they did, rather than the first, as the view was that initial ratings could be overly optimistic). Progression was attributed if there was any positive increase in their score throughout the journey.

Now in its new phase of funding, the project was seeking to improve this distance travelled approach to make it more individualised and intuitive for their participants. The numerical rating system was being removed, with participants instead drawing their own scale to plot their journey against specific individualised outcomes (for example, to increase their confidence in presentation skills) under the same four themes. The new approach was more visual and more user-friendly for young people who have learning disabilities. Delivery staff felt:

"Before, the paperwork was designed for a key worker, not for a young person. It's being redesigned around the young person's perspective and gives them something more personalised to work for."

The overall project manager echoed this view, adding that an additional benefit is that the new tool *"gives the young people something more tangible that they can take away with them"*.

Sustained employment

A few organisations said there were additional outcomes which could be included in the ESF framework. One organisation working with individuals with mild to moderate mental health conditions said they measured employment sustained beyond six months, as there was evidence to suggest benefits for mental health increased

beyond this point, but there was no target or funding for these outcomes in the ESF contract.

An ESFA funded project working with NEET young people similarly queried why they did not have targets against sustained employment and felt this could be a relevant addition. This was something the LEP was interested in and they therefore captured this information already, by asking delivery partners to call former participants to check they were still in work.

Local integration

Strategic and delivery staff felt integration between local services was important as the majority of participants receiving ESF provision were either already engaged with other services or needed signposting onto other support. However, strategic staff reported that local services often operated in silos or that there was too little collaboration and communication between services. Staff delivering support to individuals with mental health issues said there was a disconnect between health and employment services both locally and centrally and that while health services do not always recognise the potential of employment to lead to positive health outcomes, employment services do not always recognise the impact of unemployment on mental health.

Other projects felt there was not enough collaboration between local services in areas such as housing, mental health and drug and alcohol abuse and that stronger relationships would make referrals and handovers more fluid and lead to a smoother delivery and better outcomes for participants.

Sustainability

Evidence collected through this study suggests that more could be done to improve sustainability of provision. The projects included in this study were overall fully dependent on funding and several projects have had to be put on hold at times when they have run out of ESF funding or while waiting for an extension to become available.

Some strategic staff also noted that the funding available was not sufficient to cover the need locally. As part of a project working on IP 1.2 (Sustainable integration of young people) several delivery organisations said they sometimes had to turn individuals away due to lack of funding. In some cases, they tried to refer the young person onto other provision in the area. In other cases, they found ways to enrol the young person, either by finding alternative sources of funding or by putting them through the programme for free. One lead said he took another full-time role for four months in order to avoid paying himself a salary to free up funds to keep delivering training.

HM Prison and Probation Service Delivery

This chapter details findings from the six HMPPS case study visits. It first discusses the design of the CFO3 programme, including the needs and barriers among participants. It then discusses project delivery, including recruitment, before providing an overview of the activities delivered as part of the provision, challenges faced and the experience of participants. Finally, this chapter discusses outcomes, and the drivers of and challenges to achieving these.

Project design

Working with those without access to mainstream provision, HMPPS CFO3 aimed to identify and remove barriers to employment experienced by offenders in custody and in the community. HMPPS provision has been a part of ESF programmes for some time but under previous programmes, the HMPPS offer was included under 'employment' objectives but under this programme it has taken more of a 'social inclusion' focus. As such, in the CFO3 programme, HMPPS acknowledged the distance its participants were at from employment and focused on encouraging them to take small steps towards work, as well as addressing wider barriers to improve inclusion and reduce rates of reoffending. HMPPS viewed this approach as setting apart the CFO3 provision from other support available within prison and probation services.

“CFO3 when it started was different in that it took a holistic and structured approach...before, if someone wanted to become a chef you would point them in the direction of a kitchen. With CFO3, the approach is ‘right, you need food safety training but first of all you need to tackle your drug problem, and you have a debt problem which we need to sort out, and maybe some business studies because you may want to run a restaurant rather than be employed by one’. We were the first to do that, to take that approach...I think there are still few people taking that joined up approach.”

Strategic lead, HMPPS

The ESF offer aimed to fill a gap in what was otherwise unavailable to those in prison or on probation, by offering holistic support to those hardest to help.

“While there is education in prison, there is probation that offers resettlement services, but there has never been a programme that focuses specifically on

those that are the most difficult to work with. The people we work with would not typically be able to access mainstream provision or they would not be able to cope with it. Yes, there is training, yes there is health support for drug and alcohol abuse but the cohort we work with just would not access it.”

Strategic lead, HMPPS

In the case studies, staff often mentioned the ongoing communication that they had with HMPPS education staff to avoid duplicating provision and ensure that the ESF offer was truly ‘additional’.

While the provision was centrally managed by HMPPS, it was delivered through regional contracts (across four delivery partners), which were tailored to the local area and prison depending on what subgroups regional stakeholders wanted them to focus on. However, eligibility criteria were the same across all areas.

“In one area, we may be working with people trying to exit gangs, in another it might be people with serious mental health problems and some might work with vulnerable women...it will also depend on what else is available. We are in some very rural areas where we are the only provision available while in some very rural areas there may be lots of other provision and we work to fit within that.”

Strategic lead, HMPPS

Unlike other ESF funded projects, only half of the contract value was based on a payment by results model and there were payment stages for activities on the programme, rather than only for outcomes. This reflected the project’s focus on helping those furthest from the labour market and on recognising distance travelled rather than only hard outcomes.

Nature of participants

Participants faced numerous barriers to employment upon release beyond their criminal record. According to MI data shared by HMPPS, the initial needs assessment carried out to determine eligibility suggested nearly all participants faced barriers related to finance and to attitudes and life skills. Around nine in ten faced barriers related to education and to health, while eight in ten faced barriers around housing. Substance abuse was identified as a barrier for around seven in ten, while around half had barriers related to social relationships.

Delivery staff interviewed reiterated that debt, mental health, substance abuse, literacy, housing and a lack of work experience and qualifications were the most common barriers and that negative self-perception and lack of confidence presented additional barriers for many. Staff felt that for many of their participants, facing multiple barriers was overwhelming and could leave them feeling powerless to change their future.

“There are individuals who come out of prison without ID, without a birth certificate, absolutely no family support and completely computer illiterate. Finding paid employment is for those people the furthest thing from their mind

and being able to address those small things will make a massive difference to their ability to move on with their life.”

Probation officer

While it was common for individuals receiving support to be in debt, because of falling behind on payments, such as rent and council tax, as well as debt accrued as a result of substance abuse, it was also common for individuals to have been unable to apply for benefit payments without support, which potentially exacerbated the issues related to debt. Staff reported that the pressure of debt could make focusing on securing lawful work, rather than going back to criminal behaviour, difficult and felt that it was therefore important to address these issues as far as possible as part of the ESF provision.

In a women’s prison, staff found domestic abuse to be a common barrier among participants. While this situation prevented the women they worked with from moving closer to employment on release, staff stated that it also contributed to the likelihood of reoffending, and addressing this for the women affected was therefore a core component of their delivery.

Staff in one of the custody settings reported that they began working with participants up to three years before their release, but that the nature of the support changed over this time period and was usually intensified three months before participants were due to be released to help them with lining up job opportunities and interviews. Other sites started working with individuals once they were closer to release. In one site, staff tended to wait until individuals had three months or less left of their sentence. Based on their experience, staff at this site felt that in most cases a ‘short and sharp’ intervention in the lead up to release was more effective than engaging less frequently over a longer period of time.

Recruitment channels

Providers operating in prisons had various channels of communicating their offer to participants. These included:

- Advertising through induction booklets as well as giving face-to-face briefings on the support available during induction sessions;
- Advertising on an internal Prison Radio programmes;
- Letters sent to prisoners approaching their release;
- Referrals through Criminal Resettlement Services.

Some sites also received self-referrals from participants who heard about the service from others in the prison. This was more common in lower security sites as prisoners have more interactions and have more freedom to drop-in to services.

Community based provision was linked to probation offices and this ensured a continuous supply of potential recruits. While those interviewed in community based

provision stated they did receive participants from custody based provision, this represented a small proportion of their caseload and most of their enrolments were participants new to the service.

Eligibility

Initial assessments were designed to identify which barriers caseworkers needed to address to move participants closer to the labour market. Individuals were rated red (high need), amber (need) or green (no need) against six barriers; unemployment, skills, housing, financial situation, mental health and substance misuse. Individuals had to receive a red rating in at least two areas in order to be eligible for the provision. There was however some discretion applied to this and if a case worker believed an individual would benefit from the programme there was a process for putting a suggestion forward to more senior staff. Staff said there were cases where individuals were not picked up by the assessment criteria but would benefit from the programme. This sometimes happened with sex offenders, who might appear to face fewer barriers than some other offenders but still faced significant difficulties finding employment due to the nature of their offence.

Effectiveness of recruitment and challenges faced

Generally, there were no major challenges around recruitment for any provider. Delivery staff found prisoners keen to engage to fill their time and enhance their connection to the outside world as they got closer to their release.

Prisons are managed by governors, who are responsible for prison security, standards and budgets. They also control what provision is delivered within the prison. One provider stated it could be difficult to promote their offer to governors because a large part of their value is in supporting soft and, often difficult to measure outcomes. They also suggested governors could sometimes feel involving external providers was an admission that they had gaps in their own provision. Staff on another site stated they sometimes felt they were competing with other providers to attract the most engaged prisoners. Among the 300 prisoners at this particular prison, staff felt there was only a relatively small group that were open to engagement in learning and development and that there were several providers 'competing' to work with these individuals.

A provider in a women's prison found that it was difficult to enrol new participants due to the size of the population and the limited movement within it. This meant they had worked with nearly everyone who was eligible and so were envisaging struggling to meet enrolment and outcome targets in the future.

Project delivery

Management and governance structure

All providers used a case management model which involved individual case workers in the prison and probation sites conducting one-to-one work with participants over a

sustained period. Case managers tended to have a caseload of around 50 individuals and were normally overseen by a regional team manager. All regional contracts were overseen by HMPPS contract managers, who felt the national co-ordination of the programme led to more effective delivery through less resource spent on governance than would be the case with a more fragmented approach.

Experiences of performance monitoring

The approach to quality assurance was considered rigorous. HMPPS monitored contracts on a monthly basis and sent contract managers an update of the previous month. Delivery staff uploaded evidence for every stage of support they delivered (e.g. core activity or training), which was first reviewed by the provider's internal quality assurance teams, before being uploaded to the HMPPS live monitoring system. Claims and associated evidence were then reviewed by HMPPS quality assurance staff, who either accepted, rejected or escalated the query to senior staff. If a claim was rejected, providers were given a chance to address the issues identified and resubmit.

At an overall level, HMPPS used the system to monitor performance across each sub-contractor. HMPPS also used enrolment data to check that providers were working with the types of people the contract was designed to engage.

While providers were initially somewhat resistant to the monitoring system, because of the administrative burden placed on case managers, they reported that they had since become confident using it and acknowledged the benefits of it from an auditing perspective.

HMPPS were also audited by ESF every 6 weeks for their financial claims and participant data in addition to system audits.

Delivery structure

Activities were structured into a package which participants had to move through sequentially for the delivery organisations to be able to draw funding for activities. While some providers preferred a short intervention, working with participants for up to three months, the full participant journey tended to take six to eight months on average but could take up to three years.

Case workers

Key to the delivery of the ESF Programme was allocating a case-worker to each participant who would then form their main point of contact throughout the programme. These case-workers were vital to keeping participants engaged with the programme. They often had to spend considerable time keeping participants motivated and chasing up participants who had failed to attend sessions to encourage them to re-engage. Generally, case-workers had regular meetings with participants throughout the programme even when they were engaged with elements delivered by others. In custody settings this often involved simply dropping-in on participants while they were engaged with other prison activities (e.g. in workshops) just to have a 10-minute chat about how they were feeling. Often case-workers engaged in activity to 'trouble-shoot' problems that participants were experiencing in

their lives that had potential to impact on their continuing involvement with the ESF programme.

During the first meetings with participants, case workers created an individual action plan addressing needs and barriers identified in the initial assessment. This then formed the basis of their ongoing interactions with participants, which typically involved activities such as debt advice, CV writing, support writing disclosure letters, housing support, help getting identity cards and bank accounts and referrals to health and substance abuse treatment. It also included discussions of potentially sensitive issues, such as family relations, substance abuse and thoughts of re-offending. Generally, meetings with participants were conducted through appointments although some providers mentioned that drop-ins were also available if participants were having a difficult day and need someone to speak to. This flexibility was valued by participants and staff felt that it made the ESF provision a fairly unique offer within a prison setting.

Core activity

After completing enrolment forms and eligibility checks, participants were offered a package of activities referred to as core activities, which were generally delivered one-to-one with an advisor and often focused on elements such as employment advice, disclosure guidance, supported job search, CV and application writing and goal setting. In probation-based provision, staff sometimes also helped participants to develop digital skills as a core activity. At least two of these core activities had to be completed before participants could move on to supportive measures.

“Technology has moved so fast and for some of the guys we meet it has completely left them behind. They do not know how to use computers, they do not know how to get an email. We help a lot with technology usage and their understanding of it.”

Delivery staff, probation-based support

“There are some who are not computer literate, who may be scared of technology. The way things are nowadays, you’re barely even a person if you do not have online [abilities], even basic things like being able to fill in an online application form is a massive barrier. Even to claim benefits you need to be able to go online. Some of the people we work with do not even have stable accommodation, let alone access to the internet. So [ESF that] support with that.”

Probation officer

Staff reported that these core activities were not initially seen as the most compelling part of the provision by participants but they were generally prepared to engage with them in order to be able to access the later stages of the provision that they felt were more directly useful. Staff on the other hand felt that participants needed the type of support delivered through these core activities (even if participants felt they did not) and believed that often completing these first meant they were able to get more out of the later stages of the programme.

Education While on Project

In addition to the support offered by case workers, participants were offered access to a range of courses through the ESF provision. These courses were often delivered through external partners. While some of these were job specific qualifications, such as forklift truck driving, Personal Track Safety (PTS) courses for railway work and CSCS courses for construction roles, other focused more on soft skills, such as confidence and motivation or anger management. Across all sites, vocational courses were very popular and were, alongside funding for items such as ID cards, seen as key to attracting new participants. Delivery staff at sites offering a forklift qualification stated this was introduced partially because it was relevant to employers in the area and some participants had been able to use their qualification to access work placements and trials upon release. Similarly, staff felt construction and railway qualifications were valuable because these were seen as stable employment pathways for ex-offenders. At a site where prisoners were allowed release on temporary licence (ROTL) to work some participants had gone on to work on railways after their qualification.

Training courses focusing on soft skills were also described as useful and were popular among participants. The provision in a women's prison included a course on overcoming domestic violence, which staff and participants described as very valuable. Staff reported that domestic abuse was a barrier to employment for many of the women they worked with, but that it also contributed to their likelihood of re-offending and that the course aimed to tackle both of these issues.

Several delivery sites, both in custody and in the community offered courses on employability skills. These typically included confidence and motivation sessions, interview skills, discussions of suitable work behaviour and resilience training. An example of such a course is given in the case study below.

CASE STUDY: Custody-based provision

Participants were offered a group-based training programme focusing on employability skills, attitude change and critical thinking skills. The facilitator of the course was an ex-offender with a history of drug and alcohol abuse, which participants felt helped them relate to him and the content he was trying to convey.

“He speaks our language, we know what he is saying and he knows what we are going through.”

Participant

As part of the course, participants were encouraged to reflect on how low self-esteem and self-worth influenced behaviour and how critical thinking could help challenge such beliefs about oneself. Participants were asked to reflect on how they would feel coming back into the community and the negative feelings that might occur from being around friends and family who have comparatively more stable lives. They were then asked to consider how these feelings might contribute to their likelihood of reoffending and what they could do to combat these.

The course also included mock interviews, discussions of how to identify suitable roles and goal setting. According to staff, the course was also valuable because it encouraged participants to work and progress as a group. Group based activities were relatively rare within prison due to concerns around violence but staff found learning how to cope with a group setting was important preparation for taking part in mainstream provision in the community.

As well as training delivered through the programme, advisors often referred participants onto other specialist services available more widely. These included education, drug and alcohol interventions, counselling and resettlement/housing services. Case-workers made referrals to these services and often helped participants to connect with them (for example by making appointments or even actually attending appointments with them). As such case-workers felt that part of their role was to help ‘stick together’ services for their participants.

“One of the benefits is also bridge the gap between [probation] and the agencies working with people with criminal convictions so people can more easily access those. They might otherwise not be able to, or not feel confident enough to access those services.”

Probation officer

Discretionary Action Fund

Staff also had access to the Discretionary Action Fund (DAF) which could be used to fund items which support participants to move closer to work. This was often used to

pay for DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks, photo identification and CSCS cards. Being able to secure funding for these items was a big draw for participants and often what persuaded them to engage with the provision early on.

Employer Engagement

In community settings another key part of the provision was to offer connection to local employers for work trials or interviews.

One delivery organisation working in the community had a dedicated employment engagement team which worked with local employers to create training opportunities, work placements and vacancies for paid roles. The majority of these links were with employers in railway and construction sectors.

Engagement staff felt some employers were already open to employing ex-offenders, but faced challenges such as getting the right documentation and a fear of re-offending. Others were more reluctant and needed convincing. Engagement staff worked with employers to reassure them that recruiting directly through them had potential to lead to both cost savings and better recruitment outcomes, as candidates were pre-screened by the provider and came with ongoing in-work support to address any issues.

In-work support

Community based services also offered in-work support. The support tended to be informal and was usually offered by telephone or email. While some participants needed support managing their finances or had questions about suitable work behaviour or about workplace rights, advisors said that most merely needed someone to listen and share their experiences with, as transitioning back into employment was challenging.

Movements between sites and into the community

The live management information system enabled case managers to continue provision with offenders who were transferred in from other sites where they were previously receiving ESF funded support. This meant case managers could continue the progress made elsewhere and having background information available before meeting new participants meant they did not have to repeat questions about needs and barriers. This helped build rapport and reduced dropouts.

The live system also allowed case managers to refer a prisoner who was approaching release on to community support. Staff felt these handovers were very helpful and ensured participants were supported 'through the gate'. Initially, handovers to other custody sites and on to community-based support only happened if an individual stayed within the same contract area and therefore the same delivery organisation. One regional team leader however stated that they had since built stronger relationships with other delivery organisations and made efforts to contact the relevant teams over email to refer someone on to other providers.

Challenges to delivery

Logistical challenges

Staff found the logistics of delivering support within the constraints of the prison schedule to be challenging. Particular difficulties included having a limited time window within the day to engage with participants, as well as difficulties finding suitable spaces for group activities. At one site, staff mentioned that there were only a few spaces suitable for group activity and that securing these was difficult, as other activities were often seen to take priority. Schedules were also often disrupted through lockdowns when prisoners are not allowed to leave their cells.

Working relationships

Staff felt that effective delivery within custody was, to a large extent, dependent on a positive working relationship with other staff including prison officers, as delivery staff required support to make sure participants were made available to attend appointments or training. In some cases, ESF delivery staff felt other prison staff did not fully understand the service they were offering or did not appreciate the value of it to participants and that this impacted on the extent of collaboration between them. For example, delivery staff sometimes needed an education tutor to release a participant to attend a meeting but would have this request rejected. ESF delivery staff were also dependent on collaborating with other departments to juggle appointments to make the most of the 'core day'.

Delivery staff also said they were dependent on good working relationships with other prison departments to avoid competing with them or replicating work. For example, in one prison, staff regularly spoke with the education provider working in the prison to make sure they were not offering similar courses. Staff at another site mentioned that there was sometimes competition among providers for the most engaged prisoners in order to boost their outcome data.

Staffing

Providers found that recruiting good case managers tended to be difficult. They acknowledged that they were looking for a very specific skill set but also felt that the salaries they were able to offer might not be competitive with those of other comparable roles.

Once a member of staff was recruited, the provider had to seek clearance for them to be able to work in custody and strategic staff stated that this could take up to nine months. This presented challenges to delivery as providers had stages where they lost momentum while waiting for new staff to be given clearance.

Administrative burden

Delivery staff found the administrative burden of uploading information to the HMPPS monitoring system for ESF to be considerable and difficult to balance with engaging directly with participants. Those working in prison sites however appreciated the value of having a system which allowed them to access up-to-date information about an individual who had transferred from another site.

Those working in community-based provision expressed more frustration with the system. Referrals from custody-based provision represented a minority of their case load and they therefore had less exposure to the benefits of the live system.

Unpredictable participant group

Staff also mentioned challenges related to working with what is, in their view, a highly unpredictable client group. Staff worked to minimise dropouts as far as possible, but drop outs still happened relatively frequently, particularly when individuals were transferred to different sites.

As many of their participants struggled with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and low levels of motivation, staff often found it difficult to get them to attend appointments.

“Some days they may just wake up and not feel like it and you won’t know why. You don’t know if something has happened to them or if they just don’t feel like it.”

Staff, custody-based provision

Attendance was also affected by prisoners occasionally being sent to confinement or being released at short notice. In higher security prisons, sudden shutdowns of wings of the prison could also impact turnout.

Staff found this unpredictability to be a challenge in terms of managing their funding, especially with regards to training courses, for which they often had external costs. Once participants were signed up to a course or a meeting, staff did their best to remind, nudge and encourage attendance but dropouts inevitably occurred and this was especially the case with sessions that covered sensitive subjects, such as the domestic abuse course offered on one site.

Staff working in custody said the circumstances of life in custody presented further challenges to moving participants closer towards employment. This included ongoing substance abuse and debt accrued in custody from buying illegal items or contraband, such as drugs, cigarettes or mobile phones. Those with debts to other prisoners were often under intense pressure to pay them off and in some cases applied for transfers as a result. Substance abuse and the impact this had on an individual’s physical and mental health was also a challenge. While staff said they could refer participants to substance abuse treatment within custody they felt this was often under-resourced.

Convicted sex offenders were found to be a particularly challenging group for staff to work with. Staff reported that their employment and educational background was often much more mixed than other groups, but due to their offence they were unable to return to the careers they previously had. Staff reported that some individuals were resistant to a transition into a new career, often at a lower pay and that it could take a lot of work to convince participants of the need for this.

Staff also worked with individuals with terrorism convictions and reported that these individuals had even fewer employment options open to them. Staff reported that

most of these individuals wanted to return to work but were frustrated by the limitations of their options. This required case managers to have some difficult conversations with individuals about what was possible and to manage expectations, while still acknowledging the individual's needs and wishes. In one example, a participant rejected the case manager's suggestions that he explore retail or entry level construction (as rail work would be impossible given his conviction). Instead they agreed he would pursue a university degree, to enable him to work in science. Before applying for a university placement, his case manager discussed with him the types of employers that might accept his conviction once he had a degree.

Staff working in probation based services reported that women were often harder to help than men because in addition to the barriers that come with having a criminal record and with having been in custody, they often had childcare responsibilities which meant they were unable to attend courses and struggled to find roles that fitted the hours they could work.

Limitations in pathways available to ex-offenders

Although construction and rail were very popular pathways among their participant group, delivery staff reported that not all individuals were interested in or suited to these roles and that creating opportunities outside these pathways was challenging. Staff also found that construction and rail routes were less popular common among women, who tended to prefer roles in retail or administrative roles. The employer engagement team in one probation-based site had worked to develop relationships with retail employers in order to give participants a greater range of options, but said opportunities in this sector were still limited. They found creating pathways for administrative roles was also difficult and roles were typically explored on an ad-hoc basis (rather than developing a sustained partnership with particular employers).

Staff also found that rail and construction routes did not always lead to sustainable employment. For example, staff had experiences of participants who were employed on zero-hour contracts and did not receive enough hours to be financially better off than on state benefits and therefore ended up returning to advisors to ask for guidance. Advisors were not able to formally assist participants once they had exited the programme and were therefore limited in what support they could offer in these circumstances. In these cases, advisors tended to offer advice and guidance outside of their official caseload.

Housing

Staff in both custody and probation sites stated that housing was a common barrier, which was often difficult to address and had a significant impact on the individual's ability to progress closer to employment. Difficulties in securing housing were felt to be particularly acute for younger individuals, as staff felt local councils were more likely to offer social housing to older clients. Staff reported that participants were rarely able to pay for a deposit for a commercial lease and therefore relied predominantly on social housing. While some participants were able to find temporary housing others relied on couch surfing or rough sleeping.

“One the hardest things for [participants] to do is to get a roof over their head.”

Delivery staff, probation-based support

Evidence requirements

Providing evidence in order to claim outcomes was also described as challenging. Getting the necessary documentation from an employer often took a significant amount of time and resource, and case managers were concerned about risking the participant's relationship with a new employer if they pushed too hard for this. Furthermore, once a participant found employment, they were often eager to move on with their lives and tend to disengage from the support service.

Staff reported that providing evidence of exits into training or education was sometimes challenging, as providers did not always have the necessary documentation. The team leader in a community-based team gave an example, where some of the providers they accessed through their local council were not set up as companies and therefore were not able to supply VAT registration numbers, which they needed in order to evidence the outcome.

Staff working in community-based provision said the challenges of acquiring evidence were mitigated by having established relationships with employers and training providers. This meant employers and providers were already familiar with the documentation needed and had processes for delivering this correctly and in a timely way.

Participant experience

Participants interviewed were extremely positive about their experience with the ESF programme, with some describing it as a "lifeline". They spoke highly of case workers who were described as friendly, supportive and non-judgemental. Participants said they felt staff were on their side and wanted the best for them.

It was common for the participants interviewed to say they were initially interested in the programme either because they had heard advisors could help them get photo ID or because they wanted to take part in a training course. Vocational courses were often especially appealing to new participants.

"I asked my probation officer whether I could do any courses. I wanted to do the CSCS course or maybe a Personal Training course because I like working out in the gym. She referred me [to CFO3] and said they do courses."

Participant, probation-based support

Participants described the support as flexible and felt case managers were available to them whenever they needed them. One participant described their case worker as going above and beyond to help him saying that "if they can help, they will help, they'll do anything they can." Another participant described his advisor taking a more flexible and personalised approach than he received from his probation officer (which he attributed to the heavy workload of probation officers).

"When I see my probation officer there's no time to have a proper conversation. It's just 'have you been behaving and here's what's happening next'. But with [my case worker] we talked about courses and how I felt. And it

was someone listening to what you want to do which is good. It made me respect it and actually attend, because you know they're not doing it for them, it's not about just hitting numbers."

Participant, probation-based support

Participants interviewed as part of case studies described being supported in a range of ways, including debt and housing advice, health and attitudes to work. One participant said support from the debt advisor was "life changing", as it enabled a significant amount of council tax arrears to be cleared, which she believed would make a difference to her ability to start over upon release. Another participant had fallen into rent and council tax arrears after applying for Universal Credit and his advisor helped him clear much of this. He described feeling very anxious speaking to council and JCP staff on the phone himself and felt that without the support of his advisor he "would not know where to start."

Participants were also positive about the courses they had attended. The domestic abuse course run in a women's prison was highly regarded by those who had attended it. Participants noted how the course made them reflect on how the abusive relationship was affecting their behaviour and the ways this was linked to their criminal offense.

Participants on probation also said they appreciate advisors' abilities to signpost them onto other provision, such as training courses or mentoring services.

"When I got out on probation I did not know where to go, I did not know what was possible. They can refer you to lots of things like courses which is good."

Participant, probation-based support

Similarly, participants in both custody and probation said they felt unsure what roles they could apply for with their conviction and that advisors' knowledge about potential employment routes and ability to signpost accordingly was very helpful.

The availability of funding to pay for one-off expenses was also appreciated. One participant who wanted to go on a CSCS course was unable to secure funding through his Universal Credit work coach because his partner earned too much. His ESF advisor was able to access funding through DAF to pay for the course. She was also able to use the fund to pay for clothes for an interview, which ultimately led to full-time employment.

"The most useful thing has been having someone point me in the right direction and have the funding to pay for courses and clothes for interviews."

Participant, probation-based support

Outcomes achieved

HMPPS data shared with IFF Research from July 2015 to 31st July 2019 tracks progression within the programme and outcomes upon leaving for 59,732 participants. This includes those who left the programme for other reasons, such as a

sentence being complete, an individual transferring to another site where there is no capacity for support services to engage with them, an individual no longer being eligible for the support (due for example to an increase in their sentence beyond three years or no longer having the right to work in the UK) or the individual transferring to a prison without CFO delivery.

Among those who had either completed or left the programme (n=32,337), 11 per cent of participants moved into employment on leaving and two per cent moved into education. Individuals who took part in the programme while on probation were more likely to move into employment (16 per cent compared with six per cent who took part whilst in custody) and into learning (three per cent compared with 0.5 per cent who took part while in custody).⁶ Employment outcomes were also more common among male participants (12 per cent compared with five per cent of female participants).

There were no statistically significant differences among subgroups for education outcomes upon leaving or completing the programme. Looking at those who took part in education while on the programme, this group were slightly more likely to be male (30% compared with 25% of females) and – as may be expected – of core working age (30% of those aged 21-60 compared with 21% of those aged 16-20 and 18% aged 61+).

Furthermore, analysis from the Justice Data Lab⁷ shows that there was a reduction in the re-offending among those who had received ESF funded support. While generally 42% of those leaving custody commit a proven offence within a year, this was the case for 35% of those who had received ESF support. The HMPPS group also had significantly fewer reoffences per person (1.4 per person) compared to the comparison group (1.7 reoffences per person).

Staff interviewed were positive about the programme and its ability to deliver outcomes, although they felt somewhat constrained by evidence requirements.

“One participant I worked with while on probation was in his 40s and had never worked. After a year we got him a job. When it got to Christmas that year he called me and said ‘this is the first year in my entire life that I am going to buy presents for my family’. That represents a huge change not just for him, but for his entire family. He was proud but he also knew his kids were proud of him too.”

Delivery staff, probation-based support

⁶ It is worth noting that these participants may have also received support while in custody but transferred into probation-based support on release.

⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/816029/Justice_Data_Lab_Statistics_July_2019.pdf

Participant views of outcomes achieved

Participants said the programme had helped them overcome barriers and enabled them to see the steps they needed to take to move towards employment. Most described an increase in confidence and motivation as a result of their interactions with their case manager and felt this was the most valuable aspect of the programme. A participant interviewed described how she previously felt so insecure and anxious she was not able to make eye-contact and struggled with group activities:

“Before, I would not even be able to be in the room [with someone I do not know]. I definitely would not be able to have a conversation.”

Participant, custody-based provision

Others said the courses they attended were valuable, especially vocational courses with a clear pathway to employment, such as forklift truck driving, railway safety and construction.

One participant said he wanted to pursue a career as a mentor and originally planned to work in schools. His advisor explained this would not be possible due to his conviction but referred him to an organisation delivering mentoring support for ex-offenders. He went on a course focusing on rehabilitation with the organisation and subsequently attended a job interview. His advisor was able to access funding to pay for clothes for his interview which he said helped build his confidence. At the point of being interviewed, he was working full-time as a mentor, helping ex-offenders transition back into the community.

“It’s my first job but it is what I always wanted to do. I can give back and help because I’ve been in the same position.”

Participant, probation-based support

Drivers of positive outcomes

Discussions with staff and participants highlighted some common drivers of positive outcomes. Several of these mirror drivers identified in the previous chapter on outcomes achieved within non-HMPPS ESF provision.

Key worker

Although participants often said they were interested in the programme for practical support, such as help getting photo identification or receiving job relevant qualifications, the relationship with the advisor appeared to be the most important driver for positive outcomes. According to staff, building a trusting relationship early on allowed them to take a holistic approach and to challenge participants on some of their behaviour and attitudes and to have honest conversations about difficult topics, such as drug and alcohol abuse or fears of re-offending.

“Although we are measured on employment outcomes and training outcomes, it is very much about those softer skills and outcomes. It’s about making referrals to others in the community who can help, it’s understanding what are

their barriers and what is going to make them re-offend, it's about goal setting and helping them solve their own problems."

Delivery staff, probation-based support

Participants seemed aware that there were several barriers facing them (e.g. debt, lack of work experience, low self-esteem, housing) and felt anxious about navigating these. Having one point of contact who could help with all these things and offer an ongoing relationship appeared to be very valuable to these participants.

"The continuous help has made the biggest difference. I can still call her if I need work [even though I am now in work]."

Participant, probation-based support

Staff felt they could have a positive impact because they were seen as separate from the rest of the prison and probation staff. Although staff were proud of their 'hard' outcomes some argued that a lot of their added value was in softer outcomes which were not necessarily captured by monitoring data. For example, staff said simply having time to be with, listen and speak to people was somewhat rare and therefore hugely valuable within a prison setting. Staff in one prison said that in some cases simply completing the initial assessment form with a participant could take over an hour, because it became a way of 'unloading' for them.

There were examples of case managers going 'above and beyond' what was required of them, for example walking individuals to meetings with landlords to make sure they secured suitable housing, accompanying them to interviews and first days at work, calling or even turning up at the individual's home in the morning of an important meeting or first day of training, to make sure they attended. There were also examples of case workers continuing to work with individuals even if they had been found to be ineligible for more funding or had exited the programme.

Flexible approach

Staff said that ensuring positive outcomes was dependent on a flexible approach; being prepared to work with individuals as and when they were able to engage and making the most of short windows of availability. Among staff working on probation sites, it was common for communication with participants to be ongoing in between scheduled appointments, through text, phone and email.

"I have one guy who has told me I should not call him, because he is worried about debt collectors and won't pick up. So, with him I know I always have to text or use Whatsapp. It's remembering to tailor it like that to each person."

Delivery staff, probation-based support

"It all depends on where they are on the journey. You may not see someone for a while if they have gone on an educational course, but you would still keep in touch. I have someone now who is on a course so I text him throughout the week and over the weekend just to say 'how are you getting on.'"

Delivery staff, probation-based support

Staff also said successful outcomes were dependent on a lot of handholding and trying to ensure seamless transitions between services. Gaps in provision anywhere along the journey, from first meeting to receiving support, to training courses, to employment, could often lead to dropouts and case managers therefore put significant effort into bridging these gaps. For example, case managers mentioned that occasionally employers postponed start dates, which was difficult for participants to manage both because participants needed the income and because this broke the momentum and risked participants losing confidence. This handholding continued after participants found work as case managers offered in-work support as a 'safety net'.

Employer engagement

Those working on probation sites felt an established relationship with local employers was important. Those working on employer engagement said that breaking down misconceptions about ex-offenders and building relationships took time but that once a relationship was established it provided live pathways to employment to offer participants, and this was often an important 'hook' to get them interested in the support in the first place. One delivery organisation said being a reputable charity helped secure buy-in from employers.

Relationship with probation services

Community-based support providers maintained close relationships with probation services as this helped to maximise demand for their service. Providers based in probation offices commented that participants were more likely to turn up for a one-to-one meeting with a case manager if this was scheduled around a mandatory probation meeting.

"If we were out-of-house it would not work. We need to be in the same building [as probation services] in order to be visible, otherwise we would not get referrals. It is about having that relationship with probation and being able to relay information back and forth and make sure probation know what you are doing to support people so they keep referring. There are a lot of other services out there and you need to make sure you showcase your knowledge."

Delivery staff, probation-based support

Areas of improvement

As with drivers of positive outcomes, there were commonalities with non-HMPPS ESF provision in terms of areas of improvement raised by delivery staff.

Evidence requirements

Similarly to ESF provision delivered outside HMPPS, those delivering the support felt the evidence requirements for claiming ESF payments were difficult to achieve. Staff argued that ex-offenders were even more likely to disengage from the support once they had found a job than other participants, as this marks a new phase in their life,

and that this made evidencing employment outcomes challenging. The fact that individuals sometimes chose not to disclose their offence to their employer was an added complication. Among those in probation services, established relationships with employers helped with this process.

Capturing soft outcomes and distance travelled

While the structure of delivery and, in particular, the core activities were designed to allow delivery organisations to evidence and draw funding for moving a participant closer to work, staff still felt there is progress made among participants which was not captured by the current framework.

“Because it is a payment-by-results model it only captures outcomes, it does not always capture progress. We all have examples of cases where we have done really good work, but it does not quite hit the criteria and so it is not recorded. So there are some medium term outcomes that are lost.”

Delivery staff, probation-based support

The outcomes that staff felt were not sufficiently recognised included progress on soft skills, such as confidence, self-esteem and communication skills, as well as attitudes towards work.

“It is about attitudinal changes. Changing someone’s attitude from thinking they are not worthy of ever working again, and thinking ‘no one in my family is working, so why should I’, to an attitude of thinking ‘work is realistic and achievable and I can go for it and be the first person in my family to work.’”

Delivery staff, probation-based support

Conclusions

Drawing on the findings discussed in this report it is possible to make the following conclusions regarding ESF delivery and outcomes.

Structure

A complex but generally effective supply chain has been built over many rounds of ESF funding. Within each contract area there were networks of sub-contractors with specialisms in different types of provision or working with different client groups. Over time, good working relationships within the supply chain of each project had generally been developed and these were highly influential both to the efficiency of delivery and a project's ability to achieve its outcome targets.

Generally provision was entirely dependent on ESF funding and will not be sustained without it. The projects covered by these case studies were funded exclusively through ESF and strategic staff could not envisage being able to continue the projects without a substitute funding source.

The prime provider model seemed to have been effective for the delivery of ESF provision. There were several examples of prime providers being able to facilitate the participation of smaller organisations in ESF programmes that might not otherwise have been possible. Smaller delivery partners tended to be dependent on ongoing support from prime contractors both in order to manage ESF reporting and monitoring requirements and to ensure continuity of delivery. Prime providers were able to take on the burden of developing reporting systems and sometimes were able to shield subcontractors from the cashflow challenges of outcome-based funding by providing some up-front payments. Prime contractors also often played an important role in keeping the programme focussed on its objectives both by supporting subcontractors to target particular individuals or secure particular outcomes but also sometimes by moving funding between partners depending on performance in order to maximise outcomes achieved overall.

Where effective, the CFO structure was been important to help providers navigate the complexities of the ESF programme effectively. Prime contractors themselves had often been dependent on support and guidance from their CFO contract manager with regards to eligibility criteria and opportunities for growth funding. The success of these working relationship with the CFO appeared to be dependent on the contract manager's knowledge and experience of ESF and their caseload. In some cases, prime contractors felt a lack of confidence in their contract manager's understanding of ESF eligibility criteria or worried that they did not have sufficient capacity to support the projects in their caseload.

Organising ESF provision through the LEP model helped to maintain a strong focus on local needs. The LEP structure helped to ensure that there were ongoing conversations at a local level about how ESF provision was lined up with local needs and often good working relationships had been established. Tensions had sometimes developed where providers felt that the focus that the LEP wanted for the project was at odds with the overall aims and client groups of the ESF programme (for example where the LEP was looking for more of a focus on niche sectors perceived by ESF providers to be unlikely to employ the long-term unemployed). ESF providers sometimes felt that the LEP could have done more to support the integration between local services which would have benefitted programme delivery. Projects working with services in health, social care and housing found these services tend to sometimes operate in silos and that more partnerships between services would better serve individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

Delivery

ESF provision successfully engaged with very vulnerable individuals. ESF funded projects often reached vulnerable individuals facing multiple barriers to employment or with high degrees of social isolation. These individuals were often a long way from the labour market at the point of engagement and providers felt that there were not many other forms of provision available that could achieve positive outcomes for them. ESF funded provision delivered through HMPPS reached a vulnerable population otherwise unlikely to engage with other provision available in custody and on probation.

Provision also reached those working for employers who might otherwise have had limited access to development opportunities. Among those working directly with employers, provision tended to allow businesses to access training which would otherwise not be funded, and this was especially the case among employers in the construction sector.

The resource-intensive case-workers or mentor model was integral to delivery across all strands. Within both the provision delivered through HMPPS and that delivered through DWP, ESFA, National Lottery Community Fund and Direct Bids the key worker model was identified by staff and participants as a key driver for positive outcomes. A consistent point of contact over a long period of time, coupled with a holistic approach to support, allowed for a strong relationship between participant and advisor to develop. This allowed staff to have some potentially challenging and sensitive conversations with individuals about issues such as attitudes and job search behaviour, substance abuse, mental health and criminal offenses. Often participants had not experienced this level of 'wrap around' support before.

Flexibility of delivery was critical. The nature of the client groups meant that provision had to be able to encompass last minute changes to arrangements. It generally meant that there had to be some scope for ad-hoc support – be it through drop-in sessions, telephone calls, texts or e-mails when individuals needed advice at short notice. It also meant that there had to be acceptance of the need for 'second chances' when appointments were missed or clients disengaged for some periods.

Provision delivered to employees also had to be flexible to accommodate the demands of individuals' jobs – this often meant delivering on-site outside of core-working hours (e.g. early in the morning or at the end of the working day) and delivering provision in a number of short sessions.

Often a key element of the ESF support was to help connect individuals to other support – ‘to be the glue sticking services together’. Projects working directly with individuals tended to take a holistic and personalised approach to delivery which staff and participants argued set it apart from mainstream provision. While many participants had barriers that could be addressed through working with external agencies not funded through ESF, such as mental health or housing issues, the ESF provision played a vital role in helping participants to access these services. This was achieved partly by helping individuals to recognise these barriers, incorporating access to external services into individualised action plans and physically helping them to access them (e.g. through making appointments, conducting warm handovers or accompanying them to meetings).

Participants are not always the best judge of the extent of their needs and having a tangible ‘hook’ that matches an obvious need can secure engagement. Staff often felt that they added most value in helping individuals tackle barriers holistically and achieving soft outcomes around attitudes and behaviour. Similarly participants who had been on programmes for a long time often acknowledged that the biggest benefits for them had been around soft outcomes such as being able to believe in a brighter future. However, staff reported that it was often the more concrete support that helped to draw participants in to the programme e.g. around funding for ID or clothes for interviews and hence the ability to offer this type of support could provide the hook that ultimately led to much bigger outcomes. In some provision, participants had to pass through stages delivering softer outcomes to be eligible for this more tangible support and this helped to sustain engagement.

For projects to be effective it is key that they have clear plans for generating referrals and that they have sufficient resource for this. Generating sufficient referrals and referrals that matched the overall profile of participants required for the ESF programme was often an area where providers had needed to devote more resource than anticipated. Several projects working with unemployed populations relied on referrals from JCP but had found this required more work than they had initially envisaged. Securing a flow of referrals from JCP generally required both engagement with work coaches early on to build awareness but then ongoing work to ensure that the project remained in the consideration of work coaches who were often referring to a range of provision for similar participant groups within one area. Some providers had found that maintaining a presence in JCP offices was required. Additional outreach work was also often required to reach other groups under-represented at Jobcentres such as the economically inactive or lone parents.

Registration processes and eligibility checks were seen as a barrier to building rapport with participants early on. Staff felt that simplifying these would have improved their delivery. They felt that the weeks sometimes required to verify

eligibility for the Programme could sometimes lead to individuals disengaging altogether.

Outcomes

Payment-by-results models have kept delivery focussed on programme targets. Delivery staff were generally very clear on the outcomes that they needed to achieve and how these had to be evidenced.

However, providers felt that the programme should place greater emphasis on the soft outcomes that client groups are more likely to achieve within the timeframe of ESF delivery. For most CFOs, the ESF programme did not include payment stages or outcome targets for softer outcomes or distance travelled towards employment/education but only on hard targets of entry into education or employment. Most projects working with those who were not employed believed the individuals they worked with made significant progress while on the programme which was not currently recognised within the framework and suggested that any successor to the ESF placed more emphasis on this type of progress. The support delivered through HMPPS did go some way towards recognising distance travelled, through the inclusion of supportive measures as a payment stage and this was appreciated by delivery staff (although they felt that there were still some softer outcomes that they achieved which were not recognised or rewarded).

Measurement of achievement of soft outcomes is clearly challenging but the HMPPS 'core activities' approach is a potential workable structure. Very few providers had effective ways of measuring progress on soft outcomes. Some had systems in place but they tended to rely on subjective measurement by frontline staff or on the self-reporting of participants. Within the HMPPS framework, each of the core activities is accompanied by prescribed content that has to be worked through in order to claim progress against softer outcomes such as confidence building. This does allow an objective measure of progress.

Evidencing of outcomes is time-consuming. Delivery staff frequently voiced frustrations that the amount of time taken up in the administration of ESF processes detracted from the amount of time that frontline staff were able to spend with participants. Prime contractors were able to provide some support with this and to provide systems and processes to help minimise the tasks requested from smaller providers as far as possible but many still felt the administrative burden to be too heavy. Securing the necessary evidence of employment outcomes in particular was felt to be time-consuming and often impossible.

Appendix 1: Topic guides

These topic guides have been adapted for publication and exclude information provided to the participant about the research, consent and data protection.

1. [Strategic Lead discussion guide](#)
2. [Delivery staff discussion guide](#)
3. [Employers discussion guide](#)
4. [Participant discussion guide](#)
5. [Participant guide \(HM Prison & Probation Service provision\)](#)
6. [Distance travelled table](#)

Strategic Lead discussion guide

Section A: Project design and objectives (10 mins)

- A1 Can you tell me a bit about your role in the project?
- A2 At what stage did you become involved in the project?
- A2A How much experience do you have in delivering this type of project?
- What similar projects have you worked on before?

Rationale for the project

- A3 What's your understanding of the rationale behind the project?
- A4 How did the project first come about? Who was involved?
- A5 What are the main issues it is seeking to address? Why is that an issue in this area?

Objectives

- A6 Can you talk me through what the key objectives of the project were at the outset?
- A7 Which types of individuals was this project looking to engage?
- Does it target individuals who are in or out of work? Or both?
 - Were there specific targets for particular groups of individuals? Who / what were these?
 - What if any challenges did this present to the project?

IF DELIVER BOTH IN-WORK AND OUT OF WORK SUPPORT

A8 How do the objectives differ for those in and out of work?

Outputs / outcomes / impacts

A9 And what were outputs the project hoped to achieve? By this, we mean direct results/targets from the project activities? (e.g. X number of participants achieving a qualification)

A10 And what were the main outcomes that the project hoped to achieve? By this, we mean the medium-term effects of the project?

- And were there any longer-term impacts expected?

A11 What were your initial impressions of these objectives? Please try and think only about your initial feelings prior to delivery of the project

- Did you think they were sensible / realistic? Why / Why not?
 - How did you think they could be improved?

A12 To what extent does this project fit in with other existing projects in the local area?

- Was it designed to plug any gaps, or to link with existing projects?

A13 To what extent were local needs and priorities taken into account in the project design? How much flexibility was there to do this?

- Have you engaged with local LEP or ESIF (European Structural and Investment Funds) committees? If so, what if any influence have they had on the project?
- Does the project address the needs of local employers? How?
- What, if any, challenges has a local focus presented in terms of delivery? What opportunities?

A14 What if anything has your project done to embed the following cross-cutting ESF themes?

PROBE:

- Equality
- Sustainable development

Section B: Inputs / funding (5-10 mins)

B1 What are the main inputs for this project?

- What are the sources and levels of funding?
- How were sources of funding identified?
- How are you monitoring spend vs budget?

B2 Have there been any other contributions 'in kind' from local business or charities? (e.g. use of premises)

- Who from? What were these?

B3 How specifically have ESF funds been used for the project?

PROBE:

- Staffing
- Marketing activities
- Delivery / resources for project activities
- Anything else?

B4 How much does it typically cost to put a participant through this project?

PROBE IN TERMS OF DELIVERY STAFF TIME AND/OR OTHER MONETARY COSTS SUCH AS PROVIDING CHILDCARE SUPPORT TO PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THE PROJECT

- Does this vary by activity or type of participant? If so, how?

B5 How easy or difficult has it been to attract match funding?

- Why do you say this?
- Where has it come from?

B6 Do you assess value for money in terms of what you use the funding for? How do you go about this?

Section C: Management Structure / Governance (10 mins)

C1 Can you talk me through your operational management structure for [PROJECT]?

- How are the projects being managed? Centrally vs. different teams managing different activities / strands?
- What has been your personal involvement since delivery has started?
- Who leads the projects on a day-to day-basis?
- Presence of steering groups?
- Other direct stakeholder involvement

INTERVIEWER TO CHECK WHETHER THEY HAVE ANY ORGANISATIONAL CHARTS THEY CAN SHARE OR ANY OTHER USEFUL DOCUMENTATION – COLLECT AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

C2 Are you using any recognised project management models? Why this?

- What are the benefits in structuring project management in this way?

C3 Discuss collaborative organisations / partners.

- Who are the key partners and organisations involved?
- How well formed were these partnerships before the [PROJECT] started?
- How did you find it getting other organisations on board? What have been the challenges and successes of partnership working so far?

C4 Thinking about the overall structure and governance and lessons to take forward...?

PROBE:

- How well did this go / is this going?
- What challenges were / are being faced?
- Positive aspects / successes?
- Have any approaches changed / developed?
- Lessons to take forward?
- Any examples of best practice?

Section D: Project delivery (10-15 mins)

D1A Moving on, I'd like to discuss with you the delivery model for the project? Is there any sub-contracting involved?

IF YES:

- How many other delivery partners are involved? Who are these?
- How well has this worked? Why do you say this?
- Are there any lessons to take forward?

D1 And can you talk me through the process of recruiting project participants?

- Who is involved?
- How are suitable participants identified?
- What systems were in place for doing this?
- Does the project identify suitable candidates, do you rely on referrals, or is it a bit of both?
- IF ANY REFERRALS: Can you tell me a bit more about how this process works?
- IF ANY REFERRALS: Are any referrals mandated by Jobcentre Plus? What proportion?
- IF BOTH DIRECT RECRUITS AND REFERRALS: What is the balance between your own recruits and referrals?

D2 How well has the recruitment process itself worked?

- What worked well / less well?

D3 What challenges have you faced in recruiting participants for this project?

- Are there any groups who are more or less difficult to engage?
 - Who are these? Why are they difficult to engage?
- How have you tried to overcome these challenges? What success have you had?

Activities

D4 Could you talk me through the specific activities delivered via the project?

- What is the content of the project?
- Have you tried anything different or what you'd perceive to be innovative? What was this? Why did you decide on that?
- How many participants engaged in the project? IF MULTIPLE ASPECTS, PROBE FOR EACH ASPECT
- What do participants get as a result of these activities? Do they lead to any formal qualifications?
- Who is delivering these activities? What key organisations are involved?
- How is the project being delivered? (e.g. classroom based-training, one-to-one support, work experience, etc.)
- What would a typical participant journey look like?

Section E: Project monitoring (5-10 mins)

E1 Can you talk me through how project performance is being monitored for this project?

Interviewer note: if necessary, prompt with outputs from B7 and ask how each is monitored

PROBE:

- Is management information being collected? How do you collect management information? Who is responsible for this?
 - What data is collected?
 - PROBE: Are you collecting any additional management information, on top of the Managing Authority's standard requirements? If so, what and why?
- How is participant satisfaction monitored, if at all? (e.g. surveys, feedback forms, informal observation)
- How are medium and longer-term outcomes being monitored?
 - Is there any follow-up contact with participants?

E2 How effective have these processes been?

E3 Are there any other ways in which 'softer' outcomes or 'distance travelled' by participants are monitored?

PROMPT IF NECESSARY: this could include outcomes such as improved confidence, motivation, or communication skills?

- What tools do you use to do this?
- How effective has this been?

E4 What (other) challenges, if any, have you faced in monitoring project performance?

- How have you addressed these challenges?

E5 Are there any ways in which you think project monitoring could be improved?

- What shortcomings, if any, are there?
- In your view, is the current model of project monitoring sufficiently capturing positive outcomes? Why do you say this?

Section F: Views on the project to date (10-15 mins)

F1 I'd now like to move on to explore what else the project has achieved to date. Firstly, can you tell me what immediate outputs the project has achieved?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Try to prompt the respondent on key metrics and collect figures if possible. prompt with outputs mentioned at B7 if necessary

- Is this on track with what you expected at this stage of the project?
- Which ones are being met successfully? Which ones less so?
- Are there any particular groups that you have been more successful with in reaching desired outputs? If so, who and why?
 - And are there any particular groups of individuals for whom you have been less successful? If so, who and why? What if anything being done to try to address this?
- IF NOT ON TRACK: Why do you say that? Are there any barriers that are preventing objectives from being met?

F2 And has the project begun to realise any longer-term or wider impacts yet? What are these?

F3 Do you think the project in its current form has the capability to meet...

INTERVIEWER NOTE: prompt with INFORMATION GIVEN AT A7 AND A8

- The intended (or revised) outputs?
 - Why do you say this?
 - IF UNLIKELY TO MEET: What barriers are there to meeting these outputs?
- The intended (or revised) medium-term outcomes?
 - Why do you say this?
 - IF UNLIKELY TO MEET: What barriers are there to meeting these outcomes?
- The intended (or revised) longer-term impacts?
 - Why do you say this?
 - IF UNLIKELY TO MEET: What barriers are there to meeting these impacts?

F4 Has the scope of the project changed at all since it started being delivered?

IF YES:

- How has it changed? Why?
- PROBE: Were any of the changes influenced by efficiency gains/ improved value for money? What were these?
- What impact have these changes had on project objectives?
 - To what extent do you think the activities being delivered align with the original objectives? Why do you say this?

- IF NOT COVERED: What impact have these changes had on targeted outputs, outcomes and longer-term impacts?

F5 Think of the local economic conditions both prior to the development of the project and currently. In what ways, if at all, have local economic conditions changed?

IF FEEL THEY HAVE CHANGED:

- How substantial have these changes been?
- Has this impacted on the project? In what ways?

F6 Is there anything that you would change to improve the project, currently? If you were running it again in future, what if anything would you do differently?

F7 And is there is anything that you think the Managing Authority should be doing differently, either now or in future?

Allow spontaneous response and then probe. if yes, ask reasons why.

FOR BOTH G6 AND G7, PROBE FOR ANY CHANGES IN RELATION TO:

- Project design / objectives
- Management / governance
- Funding – e.g. is a grant based system preferable to contract based system?
- Delivery / activities
- Project monitoring
- Anything else?

F8 What if any risks to the project do you foresee, going forward? PROBE for views on long-term sustainability.

Delivery staff discussion guide

Section A: Project design and objectives (10 mins)

A1 Can you tell me a bit about your personal involvement in the project?

A2 At what stage did you become involved in the project?

- To what extent were you or others in your team involved in the design of the project?

A2A How much experience do you have in delivering this type of project?

- What similar projects have you worked on before?
- What training, if any, did you receive in order to deliver this project?

Rationale for the project

A3 To the best of your knowledge, what did you understand to be the rationale behind the project?

A4 How did the project first come about? Who was involved?

A5 What are the main issues it is seeking to address? Why is that an issue in this area?

- To what extent do you think the project is tailored to local needs and priorities?
- What, if any, challenges has a local focus presented in terms of delivery? What opportunities?

Objectives

A6 Can you talk me through what the key objectives of the project were at the outset?

A7 Which types of individuals was this project looking to engage?

- Does it target individuals who are in or out of work? Or both?
- Were there specific targets for particular groups of individuals? Who / what were these?
- What challenges did this present to the project?

IF DELIVER BOTH IN-WORK AND OUT OF WORK SUPPORT

A8 How do the objectives differ for those in and out of work?

Outputs / outcomes / impacts

INTERVIEWER: TAKE DETAILED NOTES OF OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES/IMPACTS AT B7 AND B8

A9 And what were outputs the project hoped to achieve? By this, we mean direct results/targets from the project activities? (e.g. X number of participants achieving a qualification)

A10 And what were the main outcomes that the project hoped to achieve? By this, we mean the medium-term effects of the project?

- And were there any longer-term impacts expected?

A11 What were your INITIAL impressions of these objectives? Please try and think only about your initial feelings prior to delivery of the project

- Did you think they were sensible / realistic? Why / Why not?
- How did you think they could be improved?

No Section B for Delivery Staff

No Section C for Delivery Staff

Section D: Project delivery (15-20 minutes)

D1 Moving on, can you talk me through the process of recruiting project participants?

- To what extent are you personally involved?
- Who (else) is involved?
- How are suitable participants identified?
- What systems were in place for doing this?
- Does your organisation identify suitable candidates, do you rely on referrals, or is it a bit of both?
 - IF ANY REFERRALS: Can you tell me a bit more about how this process works?
 - IF ANY REFERRALS: Are any referrals mandated by Jobcentre Plus? What proportion?
 - IF BOTH DIRECT RECRUITS AND REFERRALS: What is the balance between your own recruits and referrals?

D2 How well has the recruitment process itself worked?

- What worked well / less well?

D3 IF PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN RECRUITMENT: What challenges have you faced in recruiting participants for this project?

- Are there any groups who are more or less difficult to engage?
 - Who are these? Why are they difficult to engage?
- How have you tried to overcome these challenges? What success have you had?

Activities

D4 I'd now like to understand a bit more about the delivery of the project activities. First, could you talk me through the structure of the project?

PROBE:

- What specific activities do you as a provider deliver for this project?
- Are these activities independent from one another, or are they structured as a course of activities?
 - To what extent do they complement each other?
 - What is the typical participant journey?
- To what extent are activities tailored to specific individuals?
- Have you tried anything different or what you'd perceive to be innovative? What was this?

FOR EACH SPECIFIC ACTIVITY MENTIONED, PROBE:

- What does this activity involve?
- Is this activity targeted to particular types of individuals? Who? Why?

CHECK SPECIFICALLY IF TARGETED TO THOSE IN OR OUT OF WORK

- How many participants have engaged in this activity?
 - What organisations are involved in this aspect of the project? Are any other partners involved?
 - How is this activity delivered? (e.g. classroom based-training, one-to-one, by phone, online?)
 - IF ACTIVITY IS F2F: Do you think this type of activity could be delivered on the phone, or online? How well would it work in this format?
 - IF IN-WORK SUPPORT: How is support scheduled around their existing job? What challenges does this create? How if at all are these being addressed?
 - How long does this activity last?
 - How much does it typically cost per participant to run this activity in full? PROBE IN TERMS OF STAFF TIME AND/OR MONETARY COST
-
- What do participants achieve via this activity? Does it lead to any formal qualifications?
 - How well has delivery of this activity gone so far?
 - What has worked well?
 - What has worked less well?
 - Are there any specific groups that this activity has been particularly effective for? Why do you think this is?
 - And are there any specific groups that this activity has been less effective for? Why do you think this is?
 - What has the reaction been towards this activity from participants? How engaged have they been?

Section E: Project monitoring (15-20 mins)

E1 Can you talk me through your involvement in monitoring project performance?

Interviewer note: if necessary, prompt with outputs from A7 and ask how each is monitored

PROBE:

- What management information is being collected?
 - What data is collected?
 - How have you found this process?
 - What challenges, if any, have you faced in collecting this data?
- How is participant satisfaction monitored, if at all? (e.g. surveys, feedback forms, informal observation)How are medium and longer-term outcomes being monitored?
 - How effective have you found these processes?
- Is there any follow-up contact with participants?
 - IF YES: What successes or challenges have you had in keeping in touch with participants to track their progress?

THERE IS NO QUESTION E2

E3 Are there any other ways in which 'softer' outcomes or 'distance travelled' by participants are monitored?

PROMPT IF NECESSARY: this could include outcomes such as improved confidence, motivation, or communication skills?

- What tools do you use to do this?
- How effective has this been?

E4 What (other) challenges, if any, have you faced in monitoring project performance?

- How have you addressed these challenges?

E5 Are there any ways in which you think project monitoring could be improved?

- What shortcomings, if any, are there?

In your view, is the current model of project monitoring sufficiently capturing positive outcomes? Why do you say this?

E6 I'd now like you to think about how participants have benefitted from the project. To do this, I'd first like you to fill in the following table. As you do this, I want you to try to think about the participants you have worked with throughout the project. Although I realise experience will vary from one participant to another our aim is to get your thoughts on how much progress they have made as a whole.

Hand respondents [distance travelled table](#)

Firstly, please think about the skills that participants had before starting the project. For each row, please write in a '1' in the column that best describes their skill level at the start. *ALLOW RESPONDENTS A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE*

And now, thinking about the participants' current skill levels in those areas, for each row please write in a '2' in the column that best describes their current skill level. Please try to be as honest as possible, even if they haven't improved in every/any skill areas.

ALLOW RESPONDENTS A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE

FOR EACH SKILL AREA IMPROVED IN (OR A SELECTION IF IMPROVED IN A HIGH NUMBER):

- How has the project helped participants develop this skill area?
- Was this an intended outcome of the project?
 - Is this the level of progression you were expecting? Why do you say this?

FOR EACH SKILL AREA IMPROVED IN (OR A SELECTION IF IMPROVED IN A HIGH NUMBER):

- Was any participant improvement intended in this skill area?
- Do you think the project could have, or should have done more to help participants progress in this skill area? If so, how?

Section F: Views on the project to date (10-15 mins)

F1 I'd now like to move on to explore what else the project has achieved to date. Firstly, can you tell me what immediate outputs the project has achieved?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Try to prompt the respondent on key metrics and collect figures if possible. prompt with outputs mentioned at B7 if necessary

- Is this on track with what you expected at this stage of the project?
- Which ones are being met successfully? Which ones less so?
- Are there any particular groups that you have been more successful with in reaching desired outputs? If so, why?
 - And are there any particular groups of individuals for whom you have been less successful? If so, why?
- IF NOT ON TRACK: Why do you say that? Are there any barriers that are preventing objectives from being met?

F2 And has the project begun to realise any longer-term or wider impacts yet? What are these?

F3 Has the scope of the project changed at all since it started being delivered?

IF YES:

- How has it changed?
- What impact has this had on project objectives?
- IF NOT COVERED: What impact has this had on targeted outputs, outcomes and longer-term impacts?

F4 Think of the local economic conditions both prior to the development of the project and currently. In what ways, if at all, have local economic conditions changed?

IF FEEL THEY HAVE CHANGED:

- How substantial have these changes been?
- Has this impacted on the project? In what ways?

F5 Do you think the activities you are delivering in their current form have the capability of meeting...

INTERVIEWER NOTE: prompt with INFORMATION GIVEN AT A7 AND A8

- The intended (or revised) outputs?

- Why do you say this?
- IF UNLIKELY TO MEET: What barriers are there to meeting these outputs?
- The intended (or revised) medium-term outcomes?
 - Why do you say this?
 - IF UNLIKELY TO MEET: What barriers are there to meeting these outcomes?
- The intended (or revised) longer-term impacts?
 - Why do you say this?
 - IF UNLIKELY TO MEET: What barriers are there to meeting these impacts?

F5A Thinking more broadly, do you have any particular examples that spring to mind of participant journeys which led to positive outcomes? Can you talk me through this / these?

PROBE:

- Recruitment of participant
- Activities delivered to the participant
- Participant engagement
- Outcome for participant (e.g. in paid work)

F6 Beyond anything we've already discussed, is there anything that you would change to improve the project, either now or in the future? If so, in what ways?

Allow spontaneous response and then probe. if yes, ask reasons why.

PROBE:

- Project design / objectives
- Management / governance
- Funding
- Delivery / activities
- Project monitoring
- Anything else?

Employers discussion guide

Section A: Establishing role and nature of involvement (5-10 mins)

A1 Can you tell me a bit about your organisation?

- Sector
- Whether part of a larger organisation or not
- Number of staff at this site/ in total (if part of larger organisation)
- Main types of job roles (occupations/ skills required; whether most jobs are full-time or part-time; permanent or temporary/ casual)

A2 And could you tell me a bit about your role in the organisation?

A3 And can you tell me a bit about your organisation's involvement in the project?

- When did the organisation first get involved with NAME OF PROJECT?
- Why did it get involved (if known)? Eg community links, recruitment pipeline, corporate social responsibility, etc.
- Establish how organisation interacts with participants
 - Is the organisation involved in delivery of the project itself? In what way(s)?
 - Providing work experience / work placements for participants? Providing training? Work shadowing opportunities? Mentoring?
- How are you personally involved?

Section B: Project delivery (10 mins)

B1 [IF NOT COVERED ALREADY]: To what extent are you involved in the process of recruiting project participants?

- [IF YES]: How are suitable participants identified? What systems were in place for doing this?
 - Does your organisation identify suitable candidates, do you rely on referrals, or is it a bit of both?
 - IF ANY REFERRALS: Can you tell me a bit more about how this process works?
- IF BOTH: What is the balance between your own recruits and referrals?
- IF NOT EMERGED ALREADY: What if any other organisations do you work with on NAME OF PROJECT?

B2 From your perspective as an employer, how well has the recruitment process itself worked?

- What worked well / less well?
- How it at all could it be improved?

B3 What if any challenges have you faced in engaging/ working with participants on NAME OF PROJECT?

- Are there any groups who are more or less difficult to engage/ work with?
 - Who? Why are they difficult to engage?
- How have you tried to overcome these challenges? What success have you had?

Section C: Views on the project to date (15-20 mins)

C1 I'd now like to move on to explore what NAME OF PROJECT has achieved to date. How has your experience of being involved with the project compare to your expectations?

- Is this on track with what you expected at this stage of the project?
 - PROBE: skill level of participants, level of readiness for work of participants
 - Better or worse than expected? Why do you say that?

C2 Has the scope of the project changed at all since it started being delivered?

IF YES:

- How has it changed?
- What impact has this had?

C3 Think of the local economic conditions over the course of your involvement in the project. In what ways, if at all, have local economic conditions changed?

IF FEEL THEY HAVE CHANGED:

- How substantial have these changes been?
- Has this impacted on the project at all? In what ways?

C4 From your perspective, what do you feel has worked well about being involved with NAME OF PROJECT? Why do you say that?

- What would you say are the 'key ingredients' of the project, from your perspective; and what about from the perspective of participants?

C5 Do you have any particular examples that spring to mind of participant journeys which led to positive outcomes? Can you talk me through this / these?

PROBE:

- [IF RELEVANT]: Recruitment of participant
- Activities delivered to the participant
- Participant engagement
- Outcome for participant (e.g. in paid work)

C6 What benefits has being involved in the project had for your organisation, if any?

PROBE AS RELEVANT TO INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROJECT:

- Hiring additional staff/ filling vacancies
- Upskilling existing staff
- Increased output/productivity
- Improved 'business culture'/ quality of service

C7 What impact would it have on your organisation if the project didn't exist, if any?

- PROBE for any financial costs/ impacts e.g. increased recruitment costs, increased training costs

C8 Based on your experiences of the project so far, to what extent do you feel that it is designed to meet the needs of local employers?

- Why do you say that?
- How well do you feel the project adapts as the needs of local employers as these change over time?
- [IF PROJECT DOES ADAPT TO CHANGING NEEDS]: How has the project adapted to these changing needs? PROBE FOR SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

C9 From your perspective, what if anything has made it difficult for NAME OF PROJECT to reach its full potential? Why did this cause difficulties?

- How could this be improved in future?

C10 Beyond anything we've already discussed, is there anything that you would change to improve the project, either now or in the future? If so, in what ways?

Allow spontaneous response and then probe. if yes, ask reasons why.

PROBE:

- Project design / objectives
- Management / governance
- Funding
- Delivery / activities/ time commitment needed
- Project monitoring/ support
- Anything else?

C11 Would you recommend getting involved with NAME OF PROJECT to another employer similar to yourself, in future? Why/ why not?

Participant discussion guide

For HM Prison & Probation Service participants a separate guide is used – see below.

Section A: Participant background (10 mins)

To start us off, I'd like to understand a bit about what you were doing before you became involved in (NAME of the project):

A1 Can you tell me briefly a bit about what you were doing before starting (NAME of the project)?

PROBE:

- Main activity prior to starting
 - Whether in employment, and if so whether full time/part time, what sort of job, how long they had been in it
 - PROBE for whether they liked the job/work, how relevant it was to their skills/interests/experience, how suitable the working hours were
 - Whether in training / study – if so, whether full time or part time, nature and level of qualification
 - Whether looking after home/family – how long for, have they ever had a paid job/ when was their last paid job and what sort of work did they do

A2 IF UNEMPLOYED PRIOR TO PROJECT: How long had you been unemployed for at the point of starting the project?

A3 Thinking back to before you started the project, what would you say were the main challenges for you in terms of finding employment?

PROBE FULLY TO GET RANGE OF REASONS

- Highest level of qualification
- Employment history (PROBE for whether the issue is a lack of recent work experience, or having done lots of short-term jobs – is this due to temp/casual work or because they find it difficult to sustain a permanent job)
- Finding a job to fit with childcare commitments/costs or other caring responsibilities
- Health issues
- Lack of employment opportunities in local area
- Lack of transport

A4 Before taking part in this project, had you been involved in any similar projects?

- IF YES: What did this involve? How long ago was this? What did they feel they got out of it/ was it worthwhile?

Section B: Experience of the project (10-15 mins)

I'd now like to move on to talk about what you've done on NAME OF PROJECT so far.

B1 How long have you been involved with NAME OF PROJECT?

Hearing about the project and getting involved

B2 How did you first hear about NAME OF PROJECT?

- Where/who did you hear about it from? PROBE for Jobcentre Plus, National Careers Service, local Children's Centre, etc
- What were your first thoughts about it? PROBE for first impressions – positive or negative?
- When you first heard about it, what if anything did you expect the project would help you to do?

B3 How did you become involved?

PROBE:

- Did you have a choice about getting involved? (If not: why not? What did you think about that?)
- Did it appeal to you straight away, or did you take some time to think about signing up? Why was that?
- What worries or concerns did you have, if any?
- Did you seek advice from anyone about whether you should take part? If so who, how did they help?
- Did you feel you understood how NAME OF PROJECT could help you, at the point of signing up? What would you say it was trying to achieve?
- What did you personally want to get out of your involvement with NAME OF PROJECT?

Activities

B4 Can you talk me through the types of activities you have been doing at NAME OF PROJECT?

PROBE FULLY:

- What are the main activities you're involved in? PROBE for: training/ courses, CV writing, interview skills, confidence-building, work tasters, etc (based on advance prep on the project)
- Did you have any choice about which activities you took?
- How are these run? E.g. one-to-one sessions, classroom/group environment, self-learning, work placement?
- Do you take part face-to-face, on the phone, or online?
 - IF F2F: Do you think this could be delivered on the phone or online? Why do you say this?
 - Frequency of involvement? Time commitment involved?
- Working towards or achieved any qualifications? Which ones?
- IF IN WORK SUPPORT: How did the support fit around your job?

B5 How much contact do you have with staff at NAME OF PROJECT?

- How frequent is this contact?
- Is this contact only during pre-arranged activities/ meetings, or do you have much contact with staff outside of this? For example can you give them a call or drop in if you need to.

B6 Do you feel you had enough support from the staff at NAME OF PROJECT?

PROBE:

Why/why not? What type of support did you get?

(IF RELEVANT): What (more) support would you have liked?

Section C: Project outcomes/impacts (20 mins)

Now I'd like to talk about whether and how you feel taking part in NAME OF PROJECT might have helped you, or not, and whether it could be improved.

C1 How if at all do you feel you have benefited from taking part in NAME OF PROJECT?

PROBE:

- In what ways?
 - PROBE FOR SPECIFIC EXAMPLES, e.g. qualifications, employment outcomes, soft outcomes like increased confidence, in-work progression outcomes such as gaining a promotion, improved pay or working hours
 - IF IN-WORK SUPPORT: How much, if at all, has the support made you better at your job? Why do you say this?
 - IF IN-WORK SUPPORT: How much, if at all, has it led to/ improved your chances of getting a better job? Why do you say this?
 - IF IN-WORK SUPPORT: Do you feel more secure in your job as a result of participating in the project? Why do you say this?
 - IF OUT OF WORK SUPPORT: Have you moved into work since you started on the project?
 - IF YES: Can you tell me a bit about your new job?
 - Full or part-time
 - Permanent or temporary contract
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - How do you feel about this job?
 - To what extent do you feel you were able to get this job because of the activities you did/ support you got from (name of project)? Why do you say that?
 - IF OUT OF WORK SUPPORT BUT NOT IN WORK: Has the support made you feel more confident about getting a job? Why do you say this? How does this compare to your expectations at the start of the project?

Now I'd like to explore how much, if at all, the project has helped you to develop or improve specific skills. To help us do this, please could you fill in this table.

HAND RESPONDENTS [DISTANCE TRAVELLED TABLE](#)

Firstly, please think about the skills you had before you started the project. For each row, please write in a '1' in the column that best describes your skill level at the start. ALLOW RESPONDENTS A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE

And now, thinking about your current skill level in those areas, for each row please write in a '2' in the column that best describes your current skill level. Please don't worry if you feel you haven't improved in every/any skill areas. ALLOW RESPONDENTS A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE

FOR EACH SKILL AREA IMPROVED IN (OR A SELECTION IF IMPROVED IN A HIGH NUMBER):

- How has the project helped you develop this skill?

- How has improving this skill helped you, if at all? What, if anything, will improving this skill help you do in the future?

Section D: Overall reflections and areas for improvement (10 mins)

Finally, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about your overall experience NAME OF PROJECT.

D1 Which specific parts of NAME OF PROJECT stand out for you?

- Why is that?
- What has been most helpful aspect of the activities you've done or the support you've received? Why is that?
- What has been the least helpful aspect, and why?

D2 Have you experienced any difficulties or problems with any part of NAME OF PROJECT [so far]?

- What have you found difficult?
- Why do you think that this was the case?
- What could be done differently to help you with that?

D3 Overall, how well suited do you think NAME OF PROJECT has been to you and your situation? Why do you say that?

D4 Would you recommend this project to someone else in your situation? Why/Why not? How would you describe it to them?

PROBE:

How would this help someone like you? What would it help them to do?

D5 What if any changes would you make to improve NAME OF PROJECT?

Allow spontaneous response and then probe.

- Types of activities
- Number of activities

- How delivered, e.g. balance of one to one sessions vs. group sessions
- Location

Participant profile form

Thanks for taking part in the research. We would be grateful if you could spare a couple of minutes to fill out the following form to tell us some further information about yourself. This is just so that when we analyse interviews we can look at any differences between different groups of individuals. The details will be used for research purposes only.

Completing this form is entirely voluntary, and if there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, please select the 'prefer not to say' option.

Any information you provide will be held in confidence and will be handled securely throughout the study and deleted at the earliest opportunity, but a maximum of 12 months from now.

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Ethnicity:

- White British / Welsh / Scottish
- White Irish
- White Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other white background
- Mixed / multiple ethnic group
- Asian / Asian British
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- Arab
- Other ethnic group
- Don't know / prefer not to say

Age:

- 16-18
- 19-24
- 25-29
- 30-40
- 45-54
- 55+

- Prefer not to say

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Which ONE of the following best describes what your main activity was immediately before you started participating in this project?

- Employed, including by a family member
- Unemployed and looking for work
- In education or training
- Not in employment because of sickness or disability
- Working in a voluntary, unpaid role or internship
- Looking after the home or family full time
- Caring for an adult family member, relative or friend who has any long standing illness, disability or infirmity
- Retired and/or claiming a pension / pension credit
- In prison
- None of the above – PLEASE WRITE IN ACTIVITY BELOW:
- Don't know / prefer not to say

Participant guide (HM Prison & Probation Service provision)

Section A: Participant background (10 mins)

To start us off, I'd like to understand a bit about what you were doing before you became involved in (NAME of the project):

A1 Can you tell me briefly a bit about what you were doing before starting (NAME of the project)?

PROBE:

- Current situation – if in prison, length of sentence and length of time to expected release; if on probation, how long for and how long were they in prison before that
- Main activity prior to prison sentence; current main activity if on probation
 - Whether in employment, and if so whether full time/part time, what sort of job, how long they had been in it
 - PROBE for whether they liked the job/work, how relevant it was to their skills/interests/experience, how suitable the working hours were
 - Whether in training / study – if so, whether full time or part time, nature and level of qualification
 - Whether looking after home/family – how long for, have they ever had a paid job/ when was their last paid job and what sort of work did they do

A2 IF UNEMPLOYED NOW (IF ON PROBATION), OR UNEMPLOYED PRIOR TO SENTENCE (IF STILL IN PRISON): How long have you been/ were you unemployed and looking for work?

A3 What if anything would you say is/ was the main challenges for you in terms of getting a job, both now and before your current or most recent sentence?

PROBE FULLY TO GET RANGE OF REASONS

- Highest level of qualification/ lack of skills
- Employment history (PROBE for whether the issue is a lack of recent work experience, or having done lots of short-term jobs – is this due to temp/casual work or because they find it difficult to sustain a permanent job)
- Criminal record
- Finding a job to fit with childcare commitments/costs or other caring responsibilities
- Health issues (including substance misuse)
- Lack of employment opportunities in local area

- Lack of transport

A4 Before taking part in this project, had you been involved in any similar projects?

- IF YES: What did this involve? How long ago was this? What did you feel you got out of it/ was it worthwhile? Why/ why not?

Section B: Experience of the project (10-15 mins)

I'd now like to move on to talk about what you've done on NAME OF PROJECT so far.

B1 How long have you been involved with NAME OF PROJECT?

Hearing about the project and getting involved

B2 How did you first hear about NAME OF PROJECT?

- Where/who did you hear about it from? PROBE for prison/ probation/CRC staff, Jobcentre Plus, National Careers Service, local Children's Centre, etc
- What were your first thoughts about it? PROBE for first impressions – positive or negative?
- When you first heard about it, what if anything did you expect the project would help you to do?

B3 How did you become involved?

PROBE:

- Did you have a choice about getting involved? (If not: why not? What did you think about that?)
- Did it appeal to you straight away, or did you take some time to think about signing up? Why was that?
- What worries or concerns did you have, if any?
- Did you seek advice from anyone about whether you should take part? If so who, how did they help?
- Did you feel you understood how NAME OF PROJECT could help you, at the point of signing up? What would you say it was trying to achieve?
- What did you personally want to get out of your involvement with NAME OF PROJECT?

Activities

B4 Can you talk me through the types of activities you have been doing at NAME OF PROJECT?

PROBE FULLY:

- What are the main activities you're involved in? PROBE for: training/ courses, CV writing, interview skills, confidence-building, work tasters, etc (based on advance prep on the project)
- How are these run? E.g. one-to-one sessions, classroom/group environment, self-learning, work placement?
 - Do you take part face-to-face, on the phone, or online?
 - IF F2F: Do you think this could be delivered on the phone or online? Why do you say this?
- Frequency of involvement? Time commitment involved?
- Working towards or achieved any qualifications? Which ones?

B5 How much contact do you have with staff at NAME OF PROJECT?

- How frequent is this contact?
- Is this contact only during pre-arranged activities/ meetings, or do you have much contact with staff outside of this? For example, can you give them a call or drop in if you need to

B6 Do you feel you had enough support from the staff at NAME OF PROJECT?

PROBE:

Why/why not? What type of support did you get?

(IF RELEVANT): What (more) support would you have liked?

Section C: Project outcomes/impacts (20 mins)

Now I'd like to talk about whether and how you feel taking part in NAME OF PROJECT might have helped you, or not, and whether it could be improved.

C1 How if at all do you feel you have benefited from taking part in NAME OF PROJECT?

PROBE:

- In what ways?
 - PROBE FOR SPECIFIC EXAMPLES, e.g. qualifications, employment outcomes, soft outcomes like increased confidence

- Have you moved into work since you started on the project?
 - IF YES: Can you tell me a bit about your new job?
 - Full or part-time
 - Permanent or temporary contract
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - How do you feel about this job?
 - To what extent do you feel you were able to get this job because of the activities you did/ support you got from (name of project)? Why do you say that?
 - IF NOT IN WORK: Has the support made you feel more confident about getting a job? Why do you say this?
- How does this compare to your expectations at the start of the project?

Now I'd like to explore how much, if at all, the project has helped you to develop or improve specific skills.

To help us do this, please could you fill in this table.

HAND RESPONDENTS [DISTANCE TRAVELLED TABLE](#)

Firstly, please think about the skills you had before you started the project. For each row, please write in a '1' in the column that best describes your skill level at the start. ALLOW RESPONDENTS A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE

And now, thinking about your current skill level in those areas, for each row please write in a '2' in the column that best describes your current skill level. Please don't worry if you feel you haven't improved in every/any skill areas. ALLOW RESPONDENTS A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE

FOR EACH SKILL AREA IMPROVED IN (OR A SELECTION IF IMPROVED IN A HIGH NUMBER):

- How has the project helped you develop this skill?
- How has improving this skill helped you, if at all? What, if anything, will improving this skill help you do in the future?

Section D: Overall reflections and areas for improvement (10 mins)

Finally, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about your overall experience NAME OF PROJECT.

D1 Which specific parts of NAME OF PROJECT stand out for you?

- Why is that?
- What has been most helpful aspect of the activities you've done or the support you've received? Why is that?
- What has been the least helpful aspect, and why?

D2 Have you experienced any difficulties or problems with any part of NAME OF PROJECT [so far]?

- What have you found difficult?
- Why do you think that this was the case?
- What could be done differently to help you with that?

D3 Overall, how well suited do you think NAME OF PROJECT has been to you and your situation? Why do you say that?

D4 Would you recommend this project to someone else in your situation? Why/Why not? How would you describe it to them?

PROBE: How would this help someone like you? What would it help them to do?

D5 What if any changes would you make to improve NAME OF PROJECT?

Allow spontaneous response and then probe.

- Types of activities
- Number of activities
- How delivered, e.g. balance of one to one sessions vs. group sessions
- Location

Participant profile form

Thanks for taking part in the research. We would be grateful if you could spare a couple of minutes to fill out the following form to tell us some further information about yourself. This is just so that when we analyse interviews we can look at any differences between different groups of individuals. The details will be used for research purposes only.

Completing this form is entirely voluntary, and if there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, please select the 'prefer not to say' option.

Any information you provide will be held in confidence and will be handled securely throughout the study and deleted at the earliest opportunity, but a maximum of 12 months from now.

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Ethnicity:

- White British / Welsh / Scottish
- White Irish
- White Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other white background
- Mixed / multiple ethnic group
- Asian / Asian British
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- Arab
- Other ethnic group
- Don't know / prefer not to say

Age:

- 16-18
- 19-24
- 25-29
- 30-40
- 45-54
- 55+
- Prefer not to say

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Distance travelled table

Participants and delivery staff are asked to assess progress by completing the **distance travelled table**. For each of the types of skill listed below, respondents are asked to assess skill levels at the start of the ESF provided support and at the point they took part in the research. Skill levels are defined as:

- A. No skills and do not feel developing them is important to find work.
- B. No skills but know that need to address this
- C. Taken initial steps to develop skill
- D. Taken more substantial steps to develop skill
- E. Feel fully competent in this area

Type of skill:

1. Job seeking skills e.g. writing CV, filling our application forms, interview skills
2. Understanding employment requirements e.g. following workplace procedures such as sickness reporting
3. Delivering employment requirements e.g. producing work to the standard required of you
4. Health and safety e.g. following the health safety policy
5. Reliability e.g. consistent attendance, honesty
6. Equal opportunities e.g. knowing where to go for help and support regarding equal opportunities
7. Time management e.g. starting work on time, arranging personal appointments outside of work hours when possible
8. Adaptability e.g. showing willing to learn new tasks, transferring existing skills to new tasks
9. Motivation e.g. positive attitude, continuing to work after set backs
10. Concentration e.g. maintaining attention, continuing to work through minor distractions
11. Problem-solving e.g. finding solutions, asking for help when needed
12. Communication skills e.g. being polite, using appropriate language
13. Appropriate behaviour e.g. consistent behaviour that is appropriate for the workplace
14. Supervision e.g. carry out supervisor's instructions, ask for supervisor's help when needed
15. Team-working e.g. working in a group, helping colleagues
16. Literacy and numeracy e.g. reading, writing, and maths skills
17. Self-esteem/ confidence e.g. positive opinion of abilities
18. Personal presentation e.g. dress appropriately for work
19. Living skills e.g. managing own money and housing
20. Independent travel e.g. travelling to work using the most suitable route
21. Health and wellbeing e.g. understanding how and when health impacts on work, and when to ask for help