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Research and evaluation specialists

Torbay UKSPF People and Skills Programme

Evaluation, February 2025

**Evaluation of UK Shared Prosperity Fund
“People and Skills” Programme**



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following for taking time to meet with us and providing their views to inform this evaluation study.

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Contents

Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Torbay Shared Prosperity Fund	9
1.2 Evaluation objectives	10
1.3 Methodology	11
1.4 Report format	11
2. Project Performance Reviews	12
2.1 Sound Futures	14
2.2 Digital Skills	22
2.3 Focus Forward	29
2.4 Green Skills	36
2.5 Sector Pathways - Skills Support Programme	41
3. Good Practice	47
3.1 Introduction	48
3.2 Lessons learned from other projects	49
4. Conclusions and Recommendations	53
4.1 Conclusions	54
4.2 Recommendations	60

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Torbay UKSPF

Torbay Council was allocated £1,764,043 of funding from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme with a three-year Investment Plan delivering against three main themes: Communities, Business and Skills. Just over £700,000 was allocated for the "People and Skills" element in 2024/25 (with some resources extended into 2025/26), enabling five projects to be delivered. These targeted a range of needs: people needing intensive, bespoke packages of support to help them become more job ready, including people who are economically inactive; young people including NEETs, requiring alternative provision to engage in positive learning and development activities; people needing support to develop their digital skills to engage in job search and find work; and for employer-focused skills development, courses and training provision. Combined, these five projects aimed to support 885 individuals.

Evaluation

This evaluation sought to review progress made to date, to understand what aspects of the programme had worked well, where there had been challenges, and an assessment on issues such as value for money, delivery timeframes and impacts. A quantifiable assessment of progress made against targets (up to the end of December 2024) drew upon Quarter 3 progress reports and monitoring data. Qualitative evaluation work entailed one-to-one interviews with project leads across two days of fieldwork in Torbay, in January 2025. The Business and Communities strands of the UKSPF programme were subject to an evaluation in summer/autumn 2024.

Findings

1: Progress – targets and timescales: There has been some good progress made by many of the projects, since mobilisation in April 2024. For example, on output measures: young people engaged with key worker support and socially excluded young people accessing support; people engaged in life skills; socially excluded people aged 25 or more accessing support; people engaged in job search; and workers gaining green skills and some other sector-specific skills. However, there are some targets which require significant progress to be made in the final quarter, or may not be achieved within the 12-month timeframe, which has been a challenging parameter. Some key features of success have included: the provision of person-centred support and advice services in welcoming environments; the opportunity to

mix with others and develop confidence by reducing isolation; and the acquisition of new skills and access to new / improved career opportunities.

2: Impacts: Projects are delivering some significant positive changes for people who engaged in support. There have been some people at points of crisis in their life, needing help and advice to help stabilise their position before being able to move forward on their employment journey. Many project participants have been leading quite isolated lives and have benefited from engaging in support with others. They have seen improvements to their self-confidence, self-esteem and have developed a more positive outlook overall. Improvements to financial situations, better digital skills to make use of IT and access services and apply for jobs, and for some, moving into employment, have all been positive outcomes. More work is required to help align skills and training provision with the needs of local employers in key local sectors. Employers in some sectors may need more support to incentivise the release of staff for training and skills development. In general, more efforts are required on employer engagement activity.

3: Value for money: Overall, the basic unit costs across the five projects, is broadly in line with other comparable projects and schemes. In some cases, it has shown better value for money than comparable. Projects providing more intensive and personalised support, to help people with more complex challenges and barriers to engaging in work, need more resources and more time to achieve positive outcomes. For many, the journey towards and into employment will take some time to achieve and will require more of a “hand holding” approach with, inevitably, a higher unit costs than “high volume / quick fix” type services.

Recommendations

The People and Skills programme has aimed to achieve a lot within a short timeframe. Recommendations include future support that:

- Targets young people on the margins of society including NEETs with an increased range of skills opportunities
- Provides greater efforts to support the economically inactive into work
- Delivers a “Pre-Employment” support package for adults in need of more personalised and in-depth level of assistance;
- Provides greater access to informal digital skills support
- Provides a more employer-led range of sector and workplace skills to meet clearly defined opportunities and develops a more consolidated approach to employer engagement.

The first three of these would benefit from some engagement with health and education related stakeholders to add value to “Economic Development” led funding opportunities.

1/ Introduction

1: Introduction

1.1 Torbay Shared Prosperity Fund

Torbay Council was allocated £1,764,043 of funding from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme, as part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda, with a three-year Investment Plan delivering against three main themes: Communities, Business and Skills. UKSPF is the Government programme, providing a follow-on to the closure of access to EU Structural Funds, with investment for business support, regeneration and to boost employment and skills opportunities, with Local Authorities as managing agents. The overall ambition of the Torbay UKSPF programme is "to increase people's life chances and create a Torbay where people are proud to live, work and visit".

Theme	Allocation	Indicative % split	Number of projects supported
Community and Place	£162,323	9%	4
Business and Enterprise	£829,601	47%	6
People and Skills	£701,556	40%	5
Management and admin fee	£70,563	4%	N/A

1.2 Evaluation scope and objectives

Commissioning

This evaluation was commissioned by Torbay Council to evaluate the “People and Skills” component of its UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme. The “Community and Place” and “Business and Enterprise” strands were the subject of an evaluation in summer/autumn 2024, as these had commenced in the 2023-2024 financial year, whereas the People and Skills projects had only launched in April 2024. At the time of this evaluation, projects were entering into their 4th quarter of a one year funding agreement.

The consultancy brief was issued on 3 December 2024, and our proposal (submitted on 13 December) was approved on 17 December with an online Inception Meeting held on 19 December.

Objectives of the evaluation

The core objectives of this evaluation of the UKSPF projects were to:

- Measure the impact of each People and Skills project in Torbay
 - Assess value for money
 - Provide recommendations for future commissioning should UKSPF (or similar) run again in Torbay.
- Particularly, we (Torbay Council) are interested in:
- Based on what has been achieved thus far, how should outputs and outcomes be amended for future programmes to reflect need and demand, as well as achieve tangible impact in Torbay?
 - Have these projects provided value for money in respect of the outcomes delivered?
 - Could outcomes be achieved for less funding, and if so, what is the recommendation for this?

At the Inception Meeting, the Client emphasised some of its key ambitions for the evaluation:

- To assess value for money, aspects of innovation and additionality
- To consider if resources are being “spread too thinly”
- To clarify if the timescales are sufficient to deliver sufficient impact, and more widely
- To provide a steer on how future resources for this agenda could be effectively deployed, to help inform future decision making.

1.3 Methodology

Our methodology included quantitative and qualitative evaluation approaches.

A desk based quantitative review has drawn upon the projects' quarterly progress reports, including the latest that account for achievement up to the end of December 2024.

Our qualitative review work involved a programme of "in person" consultations with each project lead over a two-day period, 14-15 January 2025. We wanted to visit each project on site to get a clearer insight into their work and how they deliver services and activities.

Our lines of enquiry for consultations were grouped into:

- Description of the project and what needs it was addressing
- Progress on implementation and any challenges experienced
- Identification of impacts made
- Targets and value for money / resources
- Management and administration
- Areas for improvement and future needs.

Ideally we would have liked to interview a sample of project participants, but the parameters of the evaluation did not allow for this. However, we drew upon some feedback from participants made available by project leads.

1.4 Report Format

This report includes:

- **Section 1: Introduction** – SPF introduction, evaluation objectives and methodology
- **Section 2: Project Performance Reviews** – a quantitative and qualitative assessment of each of the five "People and Skills" projects
- **Section 3: Good Practice** – lessons learned from the evaluation of other employability projects and key features of success
- **Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations** – key conclusions and considerations for the future for employability and skills support in Torbay.

2/ Project Performance Reviews

2: Project Performance Reviews

2: PROJECT PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Introduction

This section includes a review of each of the five projects supported by Torbay's UKSPF People and Skills programme, informed by Quarter 3 progress reports and interviews held with each project. The review includes commentary on:

- A summary description of each project, its objectives and resources
- Progress towards achieving targets for outputs and outcomes, as of early January 2025 (the time of the consultations)
- Perspectives from project leads
- Beneficiary feedback where this has been made available
- Features of success and impacts
- Value for money
- Future delivery considerations.

Note on quantifiable evidence

The figures and graphs contained within this section draw upon the project monitoring data for outputs and outcomes achieved by the end of Quarter 3 (i.e. by the end of December 2024) compared to agreed targets. The variance is, in effect, what remains to be achieved over the final quarter (January to March 2025) to meet targets.

We gathered an indication as to how realistic this would be for some of the projects, during consultation meetings but for targets overall rather than for every output or outcome measure. In addition, from reviewing Quarter 3 progress reports. The full picture on achievements will only become clear once the final (Quarter 4) progress reports are completed, which is outside of the timeframe for this evaluation.

In general, project leads were all working on delivery to try and meet all targets, but some may be a challenge to achieve. Particularly where individual participant needs have been more challenging to resolve within the timescales available and where the needs or circumstances of key employers has changed.



2.1 SOUND FUTURES

Project Summary

Project Name	Sound Futures
Lead Partner(s)	Sound Communities CIC
UK SPF LOT	Lot 2, E33: NEET Support Programme
UK SPF Funding	£100,000
Timescale	12 months (2024-25)

Sound Communities CIC, established in 2011, specialises in reaching out to marginalised young people and helping them engage in digital media and creative activities (radio, music, creative media production) to build self-confidence, raise aspiration, develop skills and improve their mental wellbeing. With significant experience of working within the NEET sector in Torbay, Sound Communities CIC was well placed to lead on this project.

Aligning closely to its vision of supporting vulnerable young people and helping them develop their employability skills, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment provided resource for an expanded and new service offer, with a dedicated Senior Progressions Lead to deliver a package of group-based and one-to-one support.

The “Sound Futures” project has a target of engaging and supporting 50 young people with three cohorts (two groups in each cohort) run quarterly. Young people engaging with the project have had access to a programme of six project-based group sessions (co-designed by young people) with a typical weekly session lasting four hours. In addition, eight one-to-one mentoring sessions have been made available for each participant.

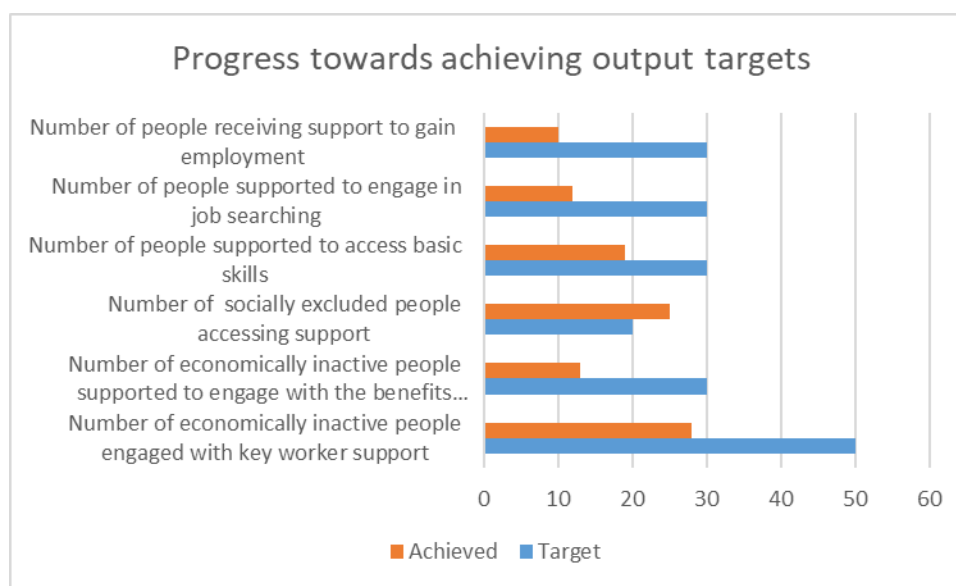
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Progress

Table 1: Sound Futures – outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outputs	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of economically inactive people engaged with key worker support	50	28	-22	56%
Number of economically inactive people supported to engage with the benefits system	30	13	-17	43%
Number of socially excluded people accessing support	20	25	5	125%
Number of people supported to access basic skills	30	19	-11	63%
Number of people supported to engage in job searching	30	12	-18	40%
Number of people receiving support to gain employment	30	10	-20	33%

Figure 1: Sound Futures – outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



The project has made excellent progress engaging with socially excluded young people for them to access support, with the target of 20 having already been exceeded. It also appears to be progressing well regarding its basic skills target.

Sound Communities reports it is likely to fall short on two output targets. One is the number of economically inactive people supported to engage with the benefits system with some reasons cited as young people reticent to discuss personal financial affairs, or reliant on parents to manage benefits on their behalf. The other is the number gaining employment. Whilst there have been some successes, the shortfall will reflect the fact that many of the participants are at an earlier stage in the “employment pipeline”, needing more fundamental help on basic needs and time to change some attitudes.

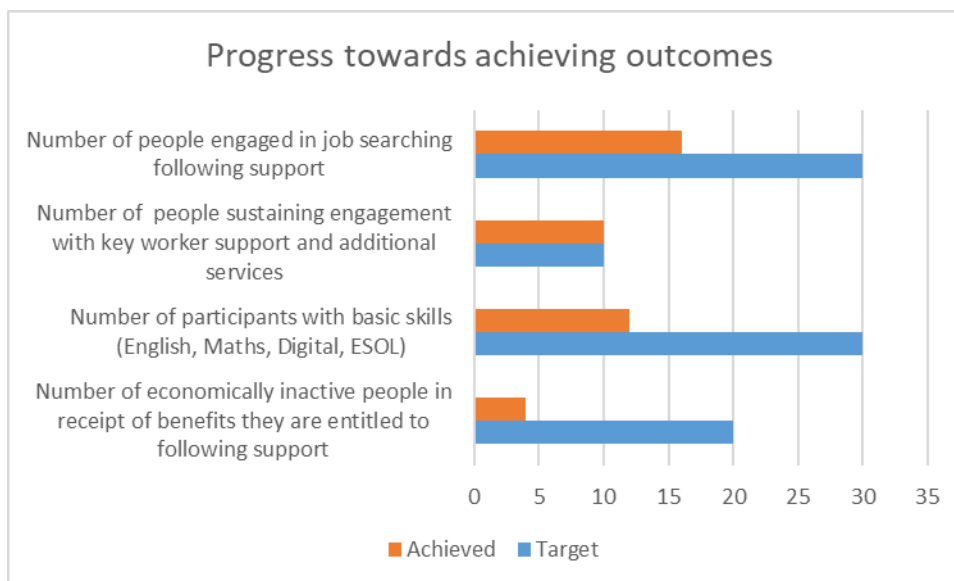
It is hoped that the project meets other output targets.

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Table 2: Sound Futures – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outcomes	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of economically inactive people in receipt of benefits they are entitled to following support	20	4	-16	20%
Number of participants with basic skills (English, Maths, Digital, ESOL)	30	12	-18	40%
Number of people sustaining engagement with key worker support and additional services	10	10	0	100%
Number of people engaged in job searching following support	30	16	-14	53%

Figure 2: Sound Futures – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



Regarding outcomes, the project has met or is on target to meet the number of people sustaining engagement with Key Worker support and additional services, and an outcome measure not originally included, the number of people referred by partners onto upskill courses.

Sound Communities reports it is likely to fall short on two outcome targets. One is the number of economically inactive people in receipt of benefits they were entitled to, and people engaged in job searching. These are linked to the respective output measures on benefits and employment mentioned before.

It is hoped that the project meets its target for participants attaining basic skills.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Perspectives

Feedback from Sound Communities was positive. The Sound Futures project has enabled the organisation to engage with more young people often experiencing traumatic and chaotic lives and additional acute problems. Typically, these range from caring needs, SEN (Special Education Needs) and complex mental health issues to those experiencing homelessness and drugs misuse. Several are neurodiverse. The project, like the wider Sound Communities provision, has engaged young people who need support in an environment very different from school or college-type formal learning environments. This cohort will include young people who disengaged from the more formal education systems and from most other available support structures.

By taking time to build trust and providing a focus on activities that align with their interests (the production of music, radio and creative media) and stimulate their desire to learn, this has led to them feeling more empowered. The project format has had a positive role in providing them with some routine and regularity of contact.

Young people have accessed the project through a number of referral channels, including self-referral, having seen details on social media, through local community groups and sometimes from family recommendations. *“Lots of mums find us on Facebook”*. The Council’s Care Experience and SEN teams have been “very good” for referrals. Very little has come through Job Centres or the College, although the Project Officer has made contact with the Job Centre. Some young people come through this route, but this has only materialised when he has been physically present there.

The project has also enabled Sound Communities to make greater efforts to reach out to wider stakeholders and the business community to promote their work and build partnership links. The wider business community is likely to take a longer timeframe to purposefully engage with a project like this (and the general cohort of young people that SC supports). Some businesses are more open to recruiting from this cohort, but a bigger challenge, and this is not just a Torbay issue, is convincing more employers to look more widely when considering their “candidate pool” and take time to work with those providing support to young people who need more assistance in becoming “work ready”.

In terms of engagement and retention, we were informed that every one of the young people that attended the first session, stayed through to the end of the programme.

“Most are so far away from being work ready it’s a massive ask [to get them into work] but reducing social isolation can be a major achievement”

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

“We pick up on a lot of systematic failures – people who had or need support but have fallen out of the system”

“The root cause is that we are dealing with young people who are not having their support needs met”

Beneficiary feedback

The project has been collecting feedback from participants throughout and some of the comments made by young people accessing support through “Sound Futures” includes:

“Sound Communities staff made me feel comfortable and that I’m not a burden”

“[I am] hoping to come back to work on my own music and potentially help other young people”

“[It has] helped me get out of the house”

“I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here and I have made some lifelong friends, developed my skills and can’t wait to see what next year will hold”

Features of success and impacts

The cohort includes young people with quite pronounced challenges. Autism is prevalent and half the participants say they have acute mental health issues and their personal stories speak of suicidality, self-harming and anxiety disorders (OCD and Agoraphobia etc.).

Many, if not all, lead quite socially isolated lives in the real world, and getting them to engage in a supported activity in the first place is a good initial result. With attendance being voluntary, it is highly encouraging that the retention rate has been 100% and young people are clearly enjoying and benefiting from the support available.

Also, being able to mix with other young people and develop friendships and associations are positive impacts, which in turn can build self-confidence. At Sound Communities they have access to technology, young and experienced practitioners, industry professionals and links to national organisations.

Building trust is vital to the success of the work, with young people who have become very disaffected with “the system” and, perhaps, other support services they might have engaged with.

The programme of support, the style of delivery and person-led approach with friendly and encouraging staff to help them, plays a big part in the success of the scheme and Sound Communities’ work overall.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Some of the key successes of this project include:

- Some routine and focus to those with often chaotic lives
- A reason for them to “get out of the house” and engage in positive activities
- Opportunities to acquire and develop new skills
- An environment within which young people have been welcomed
- An environment which has helped nurture new friendships
- Guidance and information on how their interests and skills can be turned into paid work.

Value for money

Through the project, young people accessed between 32 and 40 hours of “contact time”. At a unit cost of £2,000 per young person participating, this project’s value for money is on a par with some other NEET focused projects.

For example, from evaluating seven of the National Lottery funded “Talent Match” programmes which targeted support to 18-24 year olds who were NEET, unit costs (cost per person engaged) averaged £3,170, although support was often for a longer timeframe and involved more partner organisations in the package of person-centred employability support. For the two YEI (Youth Employment Initiatives) Chimera Consulting evaluated, with over 36,000 young people engaged, unit costs were £3,000, however for Torbay’s Ready For Work project, albeit not specific to young people, unit costs were £1,500 for a coaching-based / short-term model of support.

Even if the project achieved a total of 35 young people engaged by the end of March 2025, that would represent a basic unit cost of £2,857 which is reasonable and still better value for money in comparison to programmes like Talent Match.

Future delivery considerations

A future emphasis for a project like this could include more support for helping young creatives progress into self-employment and increasing access to more connections with the local business community. More support for progression into work or self-employment, and gaining some stability in the workplace, would be a helpful focus for any future iteration of a project like this.

Results don’t come quickly, as it takes time to build trust, and to make more meaningful progress in helping young people get themselves onto a more positive footing.

Although positive impacts are being made within the UKSPF’s funding timeframe, Sound Communities reports that it would like to work with participants over a timeframe of up to 12 months ideally. Other

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

projects and programmes designed to support young people with similar issues and challenges tend to have been funded to enable a support package to be delivered over a year, or up to 18 months in some cases.

The project's ability to support NEETs (of which we were informed there are at least 1,500 in Torbay) is only really limited by physical space (to deliver) and staff capacity, so more young people could benefit from a support model such as this from Sound Communities.

Consideration could be given to widening the skills and activity "hooks" available at Sound Communities, as not every young person will be interested in creative media. The expertise and current offer suits many young people and there has been no lack of demand, but there may be other activities that could draw interest from a wider pool of young people.



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2.2 DIGITAL SKILLS (focusing on digital exclusion)

Project Summary

Project Name	Digital Skills
Lead Partner(s)	Turning Heads CIC in partnership with Maker Arts CIC
UK SPF LOT	Lot 4, E41: Funding support for local digital skills
UK SPF Funding	£50,000
Timescale	12 months (2024-25)

This project has been led by Turning Heads CIC working in partnership with Maker Arts CIC. Turning Heads was established in 2018 with a focus on helping people with disabilities, learning difficulties and those experiencing isolation by providing a range of activities, opportunities and learning experiences. Its Skills Centre facility in Torquay provides day service activities including arts and crafts, woodworking, cookery, computer training and more. It has also recently opened a community café and has plans for expanding its asset base and service provision.

Maker Arts CIC, based in Paignton, was established more recently, providing an arts-based learning environment as alternative provision for young people in care, with Special Educational Needs, and those more generally struggling to engage with mainstream educational provision. Working in partnership, the two organisations have provided a four-week digital skills programme to help local people gain or improve their digital skills to help them further their career choices and general employability, as well as supporting adults who might be “digitally excluded”. Sessions at Turning Heads have been provided twice a week, on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, whereby participants can make use of computer equipment in the ICT space or bring their own equipment (phone, tablet, laptop) and learn how to make use of them. Personal coaching and development support has been made available to them. Maker Arts has delivered sessions from Paignton.

The need for digital skills is becoming more prominent for everyone, for instance in accessing services and information, as well as for most employment roles and in applying for jobs. A lack of digital skills or a lack of confidence in using some of the most basic technology and applications can be a real barrier to searching and applying for, then securing work and one that this project has sought to address.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Each year, Lloyds Bank is commissioned by the Department for Education to run an annual Consumer Digital Index, and this was last published in 2023. This found that 7.5 million people, or 18% of UK adults, lacked the essential digital skills that are needed for the workplace.

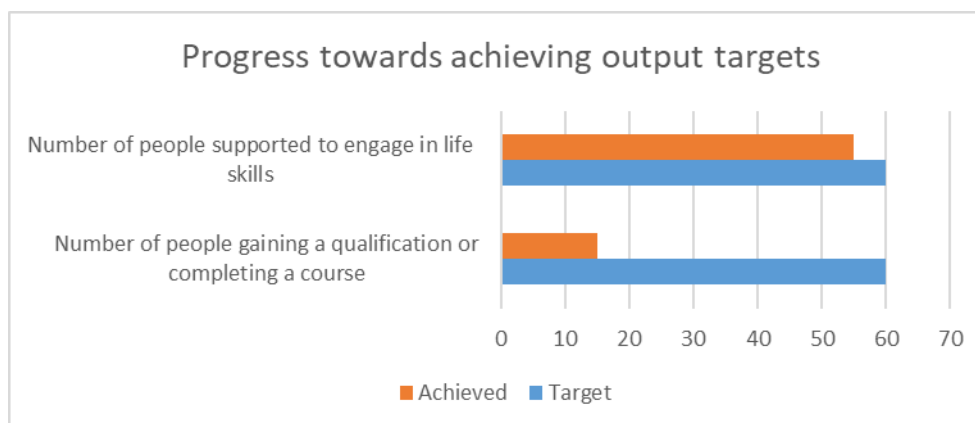
It also found that 46% of businesses have struggled to recruit for roles requiring hard data skills, that the supply of graduates with specialist data skills from universities is limited and that half of all workers surveyed had not received any data skills training in the previous two years. The estimate cost of the “digital skills gap”, to the UK economy, is estimated to be £63 billion per annum.

Progress

Table 3: Digital Skills – outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outputs	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of people gaining a qualification or completing a course	60	15	-45	25%
Number of people supported to engage in life skills	60	55	-5	92%

Figure 3: Digital Skills – outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



The project is making excellent progress on its target to help people engage with life skills, with 92% of its target achieved by the end of the third quarter. It is significantly behind target on the output measure of helping people gain a qualification or complete a course. This is a reflection of the nature of the IT training, with sessions being flexible and based on a “drop-in” approach rather than formal course. Demand for life skills is more in demand by users than achieving an AQA award.

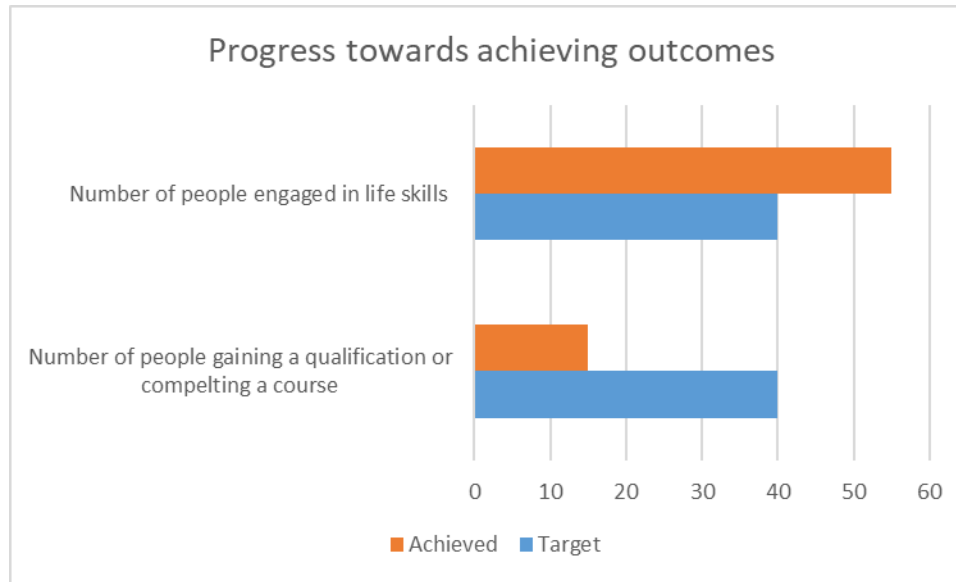
Note: “Life Skills” is defined as additional support which improves confidence, resilience or motivation around the process of job searching and may include basic skills (English and Maths), digital skills, communication skills, presentation skills and activities which reduce social isolation or encourage appropriate employment related behaviours.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Table 4: Digital Skills – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outcomes	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of people gaining a qualification or completing a course	40	15	-25	38%
Number of people engaged in life skills	40	55	15	138%

Figure 4: Digital Skills – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



As reflected in the progress on outputs, the project is making excellent progress on its target to help people engage with life skills and has exceeded its outcome target. On people achieving qualification, outcomes achieved by the end of December are reported as 38% of target.

This tends to align with the previous comment on outputs, that the drop-in nature of IT / digital skills support lends itself more to people gaining confidence in using IT for their own needs and is less suited to AQA awards.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Perspectives

Feedback from the two organisations was very positive about the support they were delivering and the impact it was making. For those who struggle with digital literacy, even creating an email account and sending an email, or developing a CV to then send on to a prospective employer, are skills sets they don't have. The Digital Skills project has been invaluable to them. It was noted that it had taken time to build up awareness of the project, but they have utilised social media, information sent to other agencies, posters at Job Centres, libraries and at events. DWP has also been a good referral partner to the project helped by Turning Heads and its links with the DWP's Access To Work programme, which helps people with a physical or mental health condition or disability get into or stay in work.

The project has engaged with people across a wide range of ages, with a real mix of needs and capabilities. Many have needed help with job search but moreover, building their confidence in using IT.

With group based and one-to-one support, the project also changed some of its approach to delivery, in response to user feedback, with the project investing in an online functional skills programme that clients can log on to, follow a bespoke programme, and work at their own pace and look to improve their skills. Prior to this, the project used an AQA awards, with some tailoring but it did not really cater for the variety of clients that they were seeing. The money from the UKSPF enabled Turning Heads to invest in this.

“There are a lot of people who cannot use things like Indeed (jobs website) or upload CVs and covering letters”

“I think this (SPF Programme) has failed to identify and rectify some of the endemic problems in the workforce of Torbay. Only a very small fraction [of resources] have been directed at digital skills but it is a huge issue locally, especially for the 55+ age group”

Beneficiary feedback

Client feedback for both Turning Heads and Maker Arts was reported to be very encouraging and clients have welcomed the opportunity to learn new (or develop their existing), essential skills. Friendly community environments with supportive staff who have taken time to provide one to one advice as part of the sessions, have been a feature of success. One client simply commented on the support as:

“It has been life changing”

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Features of success and impacts

The project's success lies in its ability to engage with and work with people in very supportive community settings, in the quality and helpfulness of staff and in providing flexibility to users allowing them to work at a pace they can cope with and raise individual queries too.

The issue of digital literacy, particularly (but not exclusively) amongst older age groups is a significant one, and one that acts as a barrier for people searching and applying for employment opportunities. A lack of skills and/or confidence in using IT is also a barrier for people simply wanting to engage more widely, as so many aspects of our lives (access to information and services) are increasingly requiring a level of digital competence.

Value for money

The project received the smallest grant award from the UKSPF People and Skills programme, at £50,000.

Based on project targets, that represents a unit cost of £833 per person engaged and achieving a qualification or completing a course.

Bearing in mind the project's need to provide support in small group and one-to-one settings, this project's costs appear to be very reasonable. There are some digital skills courses available at no charge, funded by the UK Government, but these have two drawbacks for the cohort targeted by this project:

- The need to be quite confident and competent in basic digital skills to use an online format of training, and
- The benefit of a project like Torbay's Digital Skills is the personalised "show and tell" nature of delivery. Many people prefer small group scenarios to large classroom-based learning environments, flexible enough that they can develop skills and knowledge at a pace they can cope with, and make use of IT equipment for specific tasks they need help with (creating an email account, developing a CV, online job-search, making use of "apps", and applying for jobs).

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Future delivery considerations

Whilst the outturn figures for the number of people achieving a qualification / completing a course, will need to be revisited at the end of the project's funding period, there is a demand for helping people improve their digital skills. There will be an ongoing need to help provide digital skills support, especially for older cohorts of working age, and the benefits of friendly, community-based, small group and one-to-one work is an approach that we suggest is built upon.

As is the case for the other projects, the short-term lifespan of the funding agreement (12 months) presents some challenges. Getting the project through the stage of approval to "going live" with efforts to promote and market the service, can lead to slow initial delivery and take-up. Combined with contract end dates looming large not long after organisations are operating at efficient capacity.

Another issue for smaller organisations is cashflow. With payments being retrospective, Turning Heads needed to make use of reserves to "front load" and cover costs, and provide Maker Arts with a cashflow solution.



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 I can do that!



Focus ForWard

FREE 1:1 Mentoring



Are you eligible?

Not in work

Age: 25 - 64

Live in Torbay

TORBAY COUNCIL

 Funded by
UK Government

IF YOU NEED HELP WITH

DIGITAL SKILLS

HEALTH & WELLBEING

CV & JOB SEARCHING

ACCESSING COMMUNITY GROUPS

MATHS & ENGLISH

HOUSING ISSUES

2.3 FOCUS FORWARD

Project Summary

Project Name	Focus Forward
Lead Partner(s)	Eat That Frog CIC in partnership with I Can Do That CIC
UK SPF LOT	Lot 1, E33: Employment support for economically inactive Lot 2, E33: NEET support programme
UK SPF Funding	£242,837
Timescale	12 months (2024-25)

Additional funding secured:

- £61,000 Torbay Council Economic Development budget
- £91,000 Torquay Towns Deal

Focus Forward is a project led by Eat That Frog working in partnership with I Can Do That. Both CICs have a long track record, dating back to 2011, of supporting some of the most vulnerable people in Torbay. They specialise in advice and support on debt, benefits, housing, employment, training and other issues to help people overcome barriers to lead more fulfilling lives. The two CICs have different specialisms, hence by bringing their joint expertise together as a partnership, this has enabled local residents, aged 25-64, to access an array of services and support through the Focus Forward project to move towards and into employment.

The project offers intensive one-to-one support to help identify and overcome barriers to progression to employment, with a focus upon wellbeing, mental and physical health, finance, debt and skills. This is combined with access to group-based opportunities, for some. The project's approach involves an engagement stage to set expectations and help mentors get to know the individual; an initial assessment looking at literacy, numeracy and digital skills capabilities, and identify the person's main needs (health, finance/housing or employability skills). Then working to a personalised "Self-Development Plan", supporting each individual to take a series of steps to help them progress on their own employability journey.

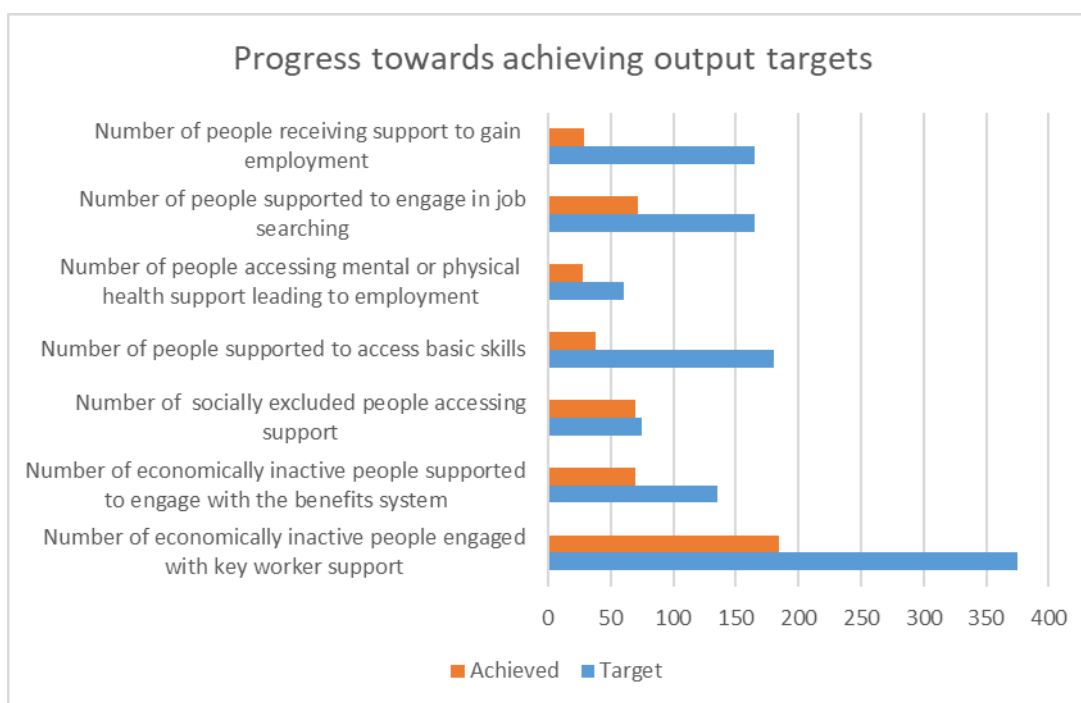
Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Progress

Table 5: Focus Forward – outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outputs	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of economically inactive people engaged with key worker support	375	184	-191	49%
Number of economically inactive people supported to engage with the benefits system	135	70	-65	52%
Number of socially excluded people accessing support	75	70	-5	93%
Number of people supported to access basic skills	180	38	-142	21%
Number of people accessing mental or physical health support leading to employment	60	28	-32	47%
Number of people supported to engage in job searching	165	72	-93	44%
Number of people receiving support to gain employment	165	29	-136	18%

Figure 5: Focus Forward – outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



By the end of Quarter 3, there has been some good progress recorded for the socially excluded accessing support, with 93% of the target achieved. Several other output measures were circa half achieved (job search, economically inactive engaging with the benefits system and with key worker support and people accessing health support).

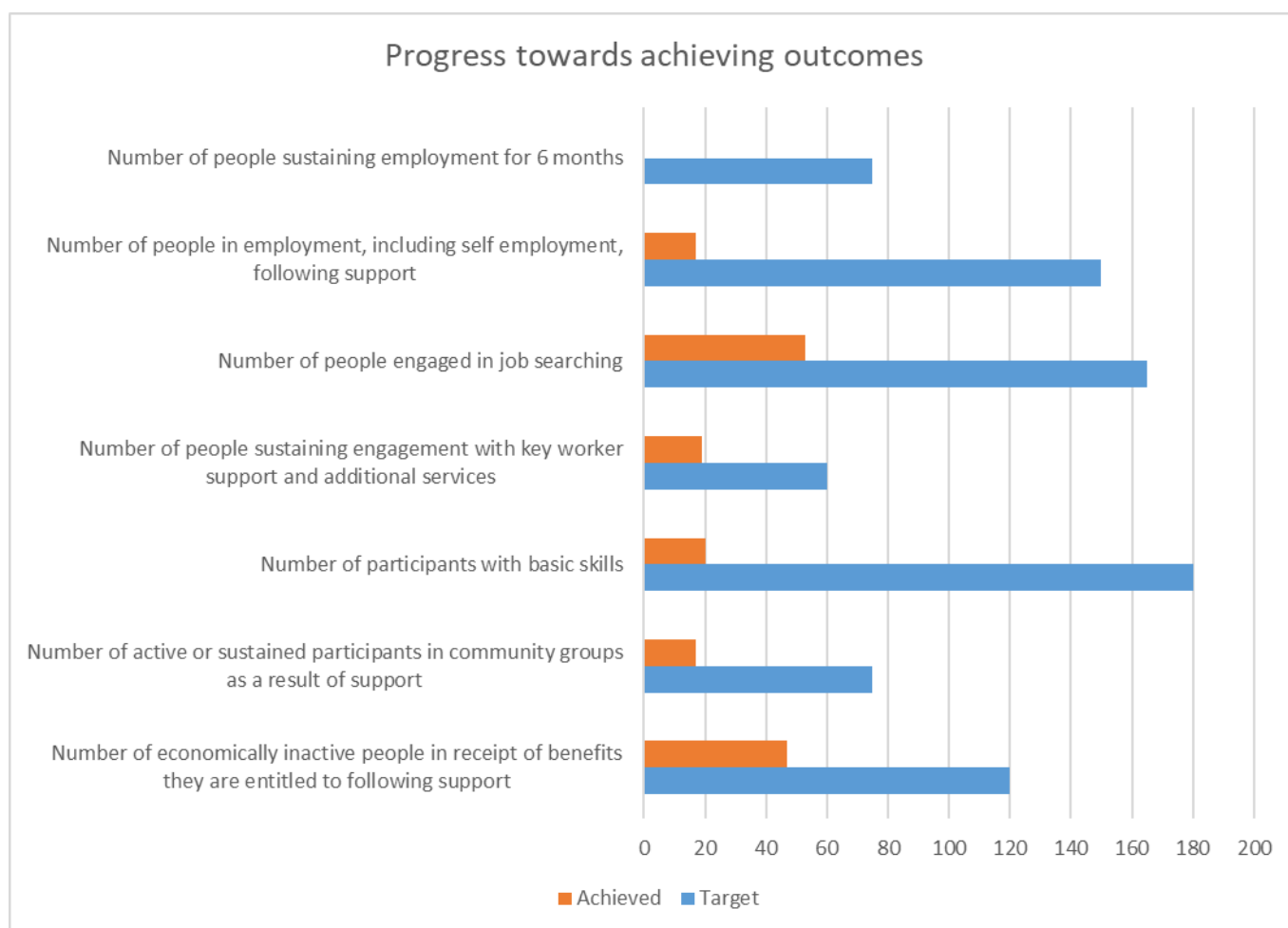
Two output measures appear to be some way behind on their projected targets: the number receiving support to gain employment (18% of target) and those accessing basic skills provision (21% of target). Some of the reasons for this are set out on the next page, as commentary on outcomes.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Table 6: Focus Forward – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outcomes	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of economically inactive people in receipt of benefits they are entitled to following support	120	47	-73	39%
Number of active or sustained participants in community groups as a result of support	75	17	-58	23%
Number of participants with basic skills	180	20	-160	11%
Number of people sustaining engagement with key worker support and additional services	60	19	-41	32%
Number of people engaged in job searching	165	53	-112	32%
Number of people in employment, including self employment, following support	150	17	-133	11%
Number of people sustaining employment for 6 months	75	0	-75	0%

Figure 6: Focus Forward – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



Regarding outcomes, the project has exceeded its target for people engaged in life skills but has some way to go to meet its outcome target for those achieving a qualification or completing a course. The project has reported that basic skills and job search outputs have picked up over Quarter 3. However, the complex needs and barriers of the participants tends to require longer and sustained support to help them move forward. Many are in a position of “crisis” (typically housing and/or debt and finance related) when

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

they first engage with the project. The staff and mentors play a key role in helping them stabilise and then later focus more on progression to employment. For those in financial difficulties, helping them maximise the benefits they are entitled to and tackling debts tends to be the first order of priority work. They will not be able to readily focus on the job search process until some fundamental stability is in place. Another barrier for progressing into work for those that move onto a Debt Relief Order (DRO) which is an alternative to bankruptcy for those with little by way of assets and on low income. A DRO effectively clears people's debts as long as their disposable income remains under £75 a month for 12 months. Taking up a job within that time would likely lead to the disposable income threshold being breached and the individuals would be back to square one. Therefore, they may opt to wait 12 months before actively seeking to find employment.

As is the case for the Sound Futures and Digital Skills projects, it is likely that benefits accrued from the funded phase of the project, will not fully materialise until some time after. It can be hard to predict the "average" time any single participant may need support for. Some may need two months, others more than the six months the project allows for.

Perspectives

Feedback from the two organisations was positive about the opportunity Torbay's UK SPF had given them to develop this scheme.

The two CICs already had brand recognition and an awareness amongst key partners and the community. This project has benefited from referrals from the NHS, Social Prescribers, wider stakeholders and a few through Job Centres (DWP) where the project has had a weekly presence. Also, a high street/shop-front presence visible to the community, and pro-active marketing campaigns led to a number of self-referrals. Many people have engaged with the project having seen social media materials and the Council's Torbay Community Helpline which has provided a rich source of enquiries, with calls triaged and where appropriate, referred to I Can Do That.

"The barriers people are facing are more pronounced than we expected, so it will take longer to achieve targets"

"Many are not mentally well enough to move forward when we first engage with them"

"If you're in a crisis point you don't want to change anything unless it looks better for you and sometimes moving into work does not look better for some people"

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Beneficiary feedback

A couple of quotes from staff on the impact this has had on participants illustrates some of the impact on individuals:

“It’s been a revelation for people – mental clarity and a way forward they couldn’t see that before as they didn’t have anyone to help unpick that for them to put it all in its place”

“We have had people break down in tears out of relief because they have someone helping them”

Features of success and impacts

Like other projects, the calibre, friendliness and supportive nature of staff plays a key role in the success of the project.

Neutral “community” settings and access to one-to-one mentoring are key, as is trust in the support staff, with participants divulging private information about their circumstances.

The person-centred nature of support, with tailored personalised plans setting out steps for people to take, is critical to the success of helping people make progress.

It was reported they had a good relationship with Torbay Council and the project had enabled them to provide services more flexibly. Experience of dealing with funding programmes such as the European Social Fund and using the “YETI” project monitoring software have enabled Eat That Frog and I Can Do That to manage the administrative issues and demands well.

The project has undertaken some “spot purchasing” of specialist services to supplement in house expertise where required, such as talking therapies provided by Devon Clinic CIC.

The impact of the project on the lives and outlook of participants is typically profound. Many will not have known what help was available to them and how issues which can be overwhelming, can be dealt with professionally with the right help, advice and support.

By stabilising and turning around the lives of many Torbay residents, the project is delivering significant impacts that should lead to people leading a more positive life, with a better outlook and improved mental health. In turn, this helps people gain more control over the lives and provides a more positive and sustainable way forward.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Value for money

Taking the overall UKSPF grant figure, and two of the main indicators to develop a basic unit cost, we see that the average cost of engaging an economically inactive resident onto the project is £648 (target of 375 people, with total UKSPF investment of £242,837.)

This is quite a low cost figure bearing in mind the level of support available over a period of up to six months and we believe represents good value for money.

The target of 165 people receiving support to gain employment equates to a unit cost of £1,471 per person moving into employment. Whilst it is looking unlikely that target figure will be achieved, this compares favourably to the £2,000 to £4,000 unit cost has been a typical range for employability projects we have evaluated whose target beneficiaries had very similar issues to those presented to Focus Forward (based on the cost per person engaged on a supported employment programme).

Future delivery considerations

The project leads mentioned that Torbay needs more basic skills provision for local people. Whilst some is available in an online format, many of their clients prefer “in person” training and support. Furthermore, some of the available basic skills training is not accredited so employers tend not to recognise this. An improvement suggested would be to provide more outreach (“in the community”) basic skills training opportunities.

The flexibility to provide some longer-term support for some participants would also be welcomed, and an opportunity to take into account outcomes (such as people moving into employment) that may only be realised post-funding timeframe.

Another area for improvement would be seeking to develop a stronger pipeline of referrals from Job Centres, although this is a challenge for people who are economically inactive as they are typically not engaging with Job Centres.



Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

2.4 GREEN SKILLS

Project Summary

Project Name	Focus Forward
Lead Partner(s)	South Devon College
UK SPF LOT	Lot 3, E39: Green Skills
UK SPF Funding	£100,000
Timescale	12 months (2024-25)

The Green Skills project, led and delivered by South Devon College Forward has aimed to provide technical skills and knowledge-based training to help equip the construction sector with a workforce more enabled to make effective use of green technologies.

UKSPF provided the College with the opportunity and flexibility to work collaboratively with local employers, to co-design course material to meet their specific needs and in line with current and projected opportunities and, more widely, to help Torbay transition to a lower carbon energy future.

It is reported that there are some 1,500 construction workers locally but the pipeline of housing and regeneration projects over the next 10 years will require an estimated 4,500 construction workers. With an ageing workforce, the sector also needs to recruit younger talent to replace them. This clearly is a major opportunity for job creation but will require the requisite skillsets to take advantage of this demand.

The course offered flexible workshops (part-time, full-time or over multiple days) focusing upon skills for: Solar PV; Solar Thermal; Air source heat pumps; Ground source heat pumps; and installation of EV charging points.

Over recent years, the College has, with the benefit of a range of external project funding, made significant capital investment into the green construction sector, a strategic investment that fully underpins the proposed “Torbay Green Skills” programme and links to the Green Energy Centre due to open in April 2025. The project, with “short/sharp employer-informed” interventions, added value to apprenticeship programmes.

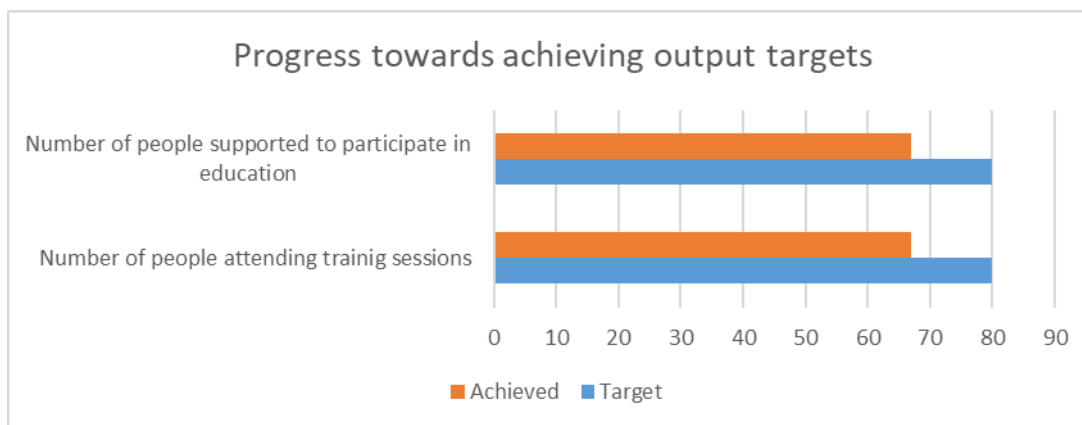
Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Progress

Table 7: Green Skills - outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outputs	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of people attending training sessions	80	67	-13	84%
Number of people supported to participate in education	80	67	-13	84%

Figure 7: Green Skills - outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



By the end of Quarter 3, there has been very strong progress toward achieving output targets.

67 people have engaged with the scheme and accessed training and participated in education. This is 84% of the overall project's targets. Based on original quarterly forecasts, the College is ahead of its projections.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, for the construction sector, 91% of participants have been male with 9% female, although all but one has been in the 16-49 age group.

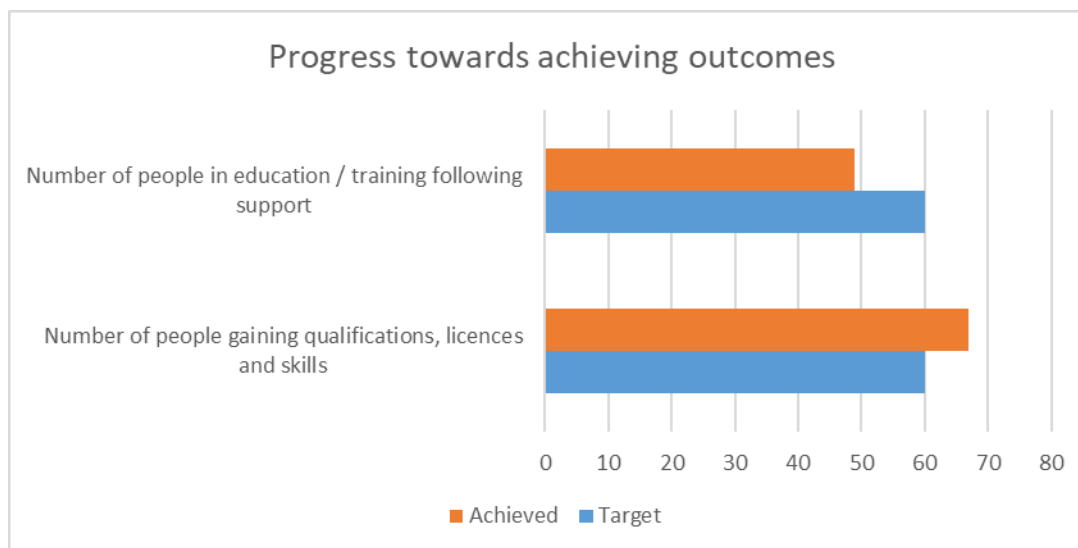
The progress report highlights that recruitment has been successful, with strong interest in and demand for the programme.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Table 8: Green Skills – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outcomes	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills	60	67	7	112%
Number of people in education / training following support	60	49	-11	82%

Figure 8: Green Skills – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



Regarding outcomes, the project has already exceeded its target for people gaining qualifications, licenses and skills. It would appear that all 67 participants have achieved this outcome, compared to the planned target of 60 out of the target of 80 participants enrolled.

Furthermore, the number of participants progressing to further training is robust and is ahead of schedule, suggesting that the project is helping to support ongoing professional development.

Perspectives

Feedback from South Devon College staff was positive about this project, highlighting the strong demand and performance. Also, engagement with employers had been quite straightforward and construction employers were relatively clear on current and future skill requirements regarding environmental issues and opportunities.

“The green curriculum is very nascent and we add value to apprenticeships”

“There is a big demand and employers seem to like the programme we deliver”

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Features of success and impacts

This project has been developed as a response to a real and growing needs with good opportunities to upskill some local people to take advantage of existing vacancies and new jobs.

Success features are that it has involved employers in helping develop appropriate course content, benefited from strong demand, provided flexibility in its delivery and has attracted some younger people. The College also has a strength in its links with the business community and employers more generally.

Value for money

At an average cost per head of £1,250, the UKSPF investment appears to be reasonable value for money taking into account how these skills will help local employers take advantage of growing opportunities and benefits to the wider local economy.

One comparator we are aware of, New City Trade Skills courses are priced at:

- Level 3 Air source heat pump, Level 3 (3 days for £650): the Heat Pump Systems Installer training course is designed for qualified plumbers, heating engineers, oil engineers or gas engineers who wish to install Heat Pump Systems.
- EV charging point installers course (3 days for £445): a qualification to install domestic electric vehicle charger units. It includes how to design an installation, inspect, test, commission and maintain installations. We have seen some courses costing up to £1,900.
- Solar Photovoltaics and electrical energy storage systems package (5 days at £900). £600 to £700 appears to be a typical range from others we have discovered online.

Future delivery considerations

One challenge for the College in planning and delivering short-term funded projects, is that its curriculum plans are set in place many months before each academic year (in January for September starts). Being able to integrate shorter-term funding opportunities can take time to arrange, for example, planning for use of facilities and securing the availability of tutors. Longer term funding agreements with longer “lead-in” times would be preferred.

The College reported that an area of relative weakness has been in its ability to engage with people who are economically inactive, and their links into communities at a grassroots level. There is an opportunity to link the community-led organisations, that tend to have key strengths in engaging this cohort, with the College in addressing some skills needs for people who are economically inactive. Although take-up of provision may be more successful in “community-based” environments.



2.5 SECTOR PATHWAYS

Project Summary

Project Name	Focus Forward
Lead Partner(s)	South Devon College
UK SPF LOT	Lot 5, E37: Sector Pathways – Skills Support Programme
UK SPF Funding	£208,719
Timescale	24 months (2024-26)

Additional investment was secured from the Torquay Towns Fund programme and Torbay Council to enhance this two-year project.

The Sector Pathways project, led and delivered by South Devon College aimed to provide a programme of skills development support for employees in economically strategic priority sectors in Torbay, tailored to business needs.

Priority sectors included:

- Microelectronics and Photonics
- Tourism and Hospitality
- Fisheries
- Construction
- Medical and Healthcare
- Creative and Digital

The approach aimed at leveraging the College's existing relationships with employers to co-design and deliver a programme of training to specifically meet local sector needs - to deliver the qualifications, licences and skills in demand from local employers and equip employees with the very skills needed by their employers. An additional benefit of this approach was to safeguard jobs in the sector.

A common theme across all sectors was the need to attract young people to the jobs of tomorrow. Part of the engagement and co-design activity this project proposed to develop school engagement activities and then work the Devon Careers Hubs to link employers with Torbay secondary schools to develop this pipeline of the future workforce.

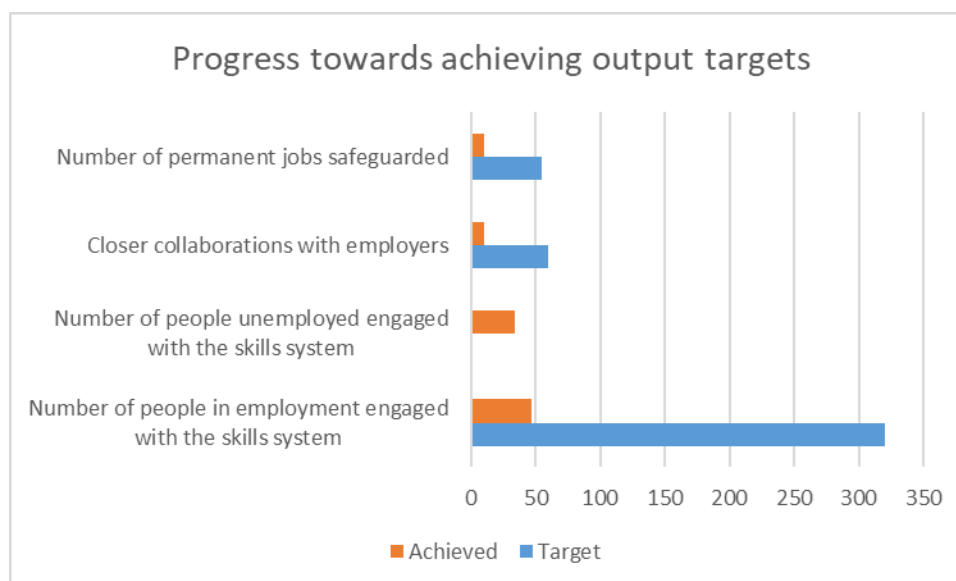
Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Progress

Table 9: Sector Pathways - outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outputs	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of people in employment engaged with the skills system	320	47	-273	15%
Number of people unemployed engaged with the skills system	0	34	34	
Closer collaborations with employers	60	10	-50	17%
Number of permanent jobs safeguarded	55	10	-45	18%

Figure 9: Sector Pathways - outputs targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



By the end of Quarter 3, progress toward achieving output targets has been a challenge. A total of 81 people have participated in the skills programme. The project's Quarter 3 progress report says the College remains confident that the remaining targets will be met, but there is some significant delivery required over the remaining timeframe (to March 2026) to achieve this.

Some of the reasons cited for output delivery being behind schedule, include:

- Health and Social Care: significant slippage in participant engagement in the sector due to problems of ill health (Covid, 'flu and other illnesses). Also, seasonal pressures led to employers being more reluctant to release staff, but there has been a recent improvement in numbers of participants
- Fisheries: the Fisheries Sector Pathways plan has been problematic in that the focus was to be on fish processing training but a change in ownership of the business led to curtailment of the partnership with the College with training less of a priority for the new operators.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

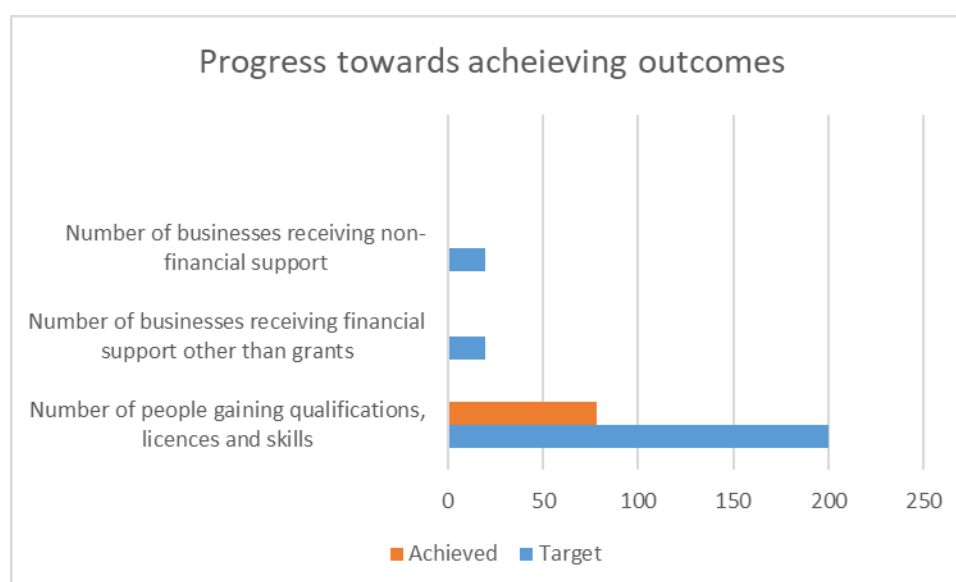
The progress report also says demand has been steady with “strong interest and demand for four out of the six pathways”. Construction and photonics are two sectors where take-up has been strong.

36% of participants were female and 86% aged 16-49.

Table 10: Sector Pathways – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)

Outcomes	Target	Achieved	Variance	% of target
Number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills	200	78	-122	39%
Number of businesses receiving financial support other than grants	20	0	-20	0%
Number of businesses receiving non-financial support	20	0	-20	0%

Figure 10: Sector Pathways – outcome targets and achievements (at end of Q3)



As is the case for output delivery, there is some way to go before targeted outcome are achieved.

Perspectives

South Devon College reported this project had resulted in a mixture of successes and challenges. The successes have been with some hospitality sector courses and masterclasses (including cheffing and barista skills) and a demand for niche management training. Aspiring Managers, Coaching and Team Leading skills development have also been in demand. Positive feedback has been provided on training in Creative and Digital, Construction and Microelectronics and Photonics sectors.

Challenges have been with the Fisheries sector, as mentioned although the College is engaged in discussions with the sector to identify other needs that could be addressed, such as team leadership, mentoring and coaching.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Furthermore, for some sectors heavily reliant on zero-hours contract staff, it is a challenge to get staff training time covered as they get paid for working time only. Also, some employers are less willing to release staff (notably in the hospitality and social care sectors) for skills training as they are more reliant on staff being present in the workplace at all contracted times.

“It is refreshing that tourism and hospitality is now included as a key sector”

“90% of employers we talk to want enthusiastic, driven individuals with some element of learning they can teach”

“There is a definite changing attitude towards work by young people, especially since Covid. They are less willing to take on “mundane” roles and put in the hard graft to work themselves up a career ladder. They also have less linear career pathways, often leading to them taking a number of jobs over their career pathways”

“We need to do more to promote careers available locally. At jobs fairs, trade fairs and events, parents and other stakeholders don’t seem to be aware of the high tech cluster we have in Torbay or the well paid jobs available”

“A trick was missed in excluding non-employees as we could have done more with people who are economically inactive”

Features of success and impacts

Successes have been realised where some sector specific skills and management/ leadership support has been required. This work is making an impact in helping safeguard jobs and enabling people to progress in their careers.

Value for money

If targets are met, the unit costs equate to £650 per person engaged in skills development and approximately £1,000 per person gaining a qualification or licence. Without a reasonable comparator it is hard to judge value for money, but unit costs are below the Green Skills project.

Future delivery considerations

Again, accommodating short-term funding opportunities not aligned to typical academic year plans can be take some time to arrange and longer-term funding agreements with longer “lead-in” times would be preferred.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

There are concerns that progress has been slow overall, with some sectors proving to be more challenging than others.

It is also unclear on any delineation between targets attributable to each of the key sectors and the level of “additionality” achieved by skills development activities over and above mainstream skill provision. Further review work could help clarify this, but for the purposes of this evaluation, some recommendations are made for future investment in sector skills work.

Whilst relationship between employability and skills service providers was reported to have improved over the last five years, it was said that they “all end up chasing the same pots of money” so there is a desire to respond to opportunities which plays to organisations’ respective strengths. With the numbers and issue of economic inactivity growing (nationally as well as locally), some thought is required by Torbay Council and partners to address this more strategically, with specialist partners working more collaboratively to offer a more wide-ranging menu of support.

3/ Good Practice

3: Good Practice

3.1 Introduction

There are some lessons learned from evaluating other employability projects and programmes that may be of interest to Torbay Council. This draws from a wealth of review work of “supported employment” schemes (designed to meet the need of people with a multitude of challenges and barriers from engaging in work) and targeted youth employability initiatives.

In recent years, Chimera Consulting has evaluated 24 employability programmes that supported over 62,000 people with investment totalling £155 million. Those evaluations included interviews with:

- 225 young people (in person)
- 360 young people (surveyed)
- 232 people aged 25+ (in person)
- 267 people aged 25+ (surveyed)
- 173 strategic level representatives
- 379 delivery staff
- 124 employers.

These included programmes across the East and West Midlands, Middlesbrough, Kent, East Sussex, Essex, Berkshire, and East Anglia, including seven “Talent Match” programmes targeting 16-24 year olds (funded entirely by the National Lottery Charities Board); four building Better Opportunities programmes (funded by European Social Fund and the National Lottery Charities Board); and two YEI (Youth Employment Initiatives) funded by ESF and DWP; together with Community Renewal Fund (UKSPF precursor) and the UK Government’s City Deal.

Group-based and one-to-one, in depth, consultations across those programmes provided a rich source of information and feedback highlighting what features of employability support programmes had worked well, and reasons why.

Section 3.2 sets out some of those key features of success, specifically for programmes that targeted people with major challenges and leading quite socially isolated lifestyles, and often considered far from being “job ready”.

3.2 Lessons learned from other projects

Issues faced:

Many people faced barriers to finding or securing work, and many were not even in pro-actively looking for work. However, all needed some form of help and the majority were leading quite isolated lives and were low on self-esteem and self-confidence.

Young people were often NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), reported bad experiences of formal education. Bullying, isolation, loneliness, friends in online communities rather than real life, mental health struggles, depression and anxiety were common. Most led quite chaotic lives with little routine and a lack of social interaction with people of a similar age.

Older people tended to experience challenges such as a lack of digital skills or confidence in using IT, a lack of a support network, unemployment after a long period of time in the same job (job security), some with drugs/alcohol misuse issues, debts and financial worries, loneliness, physical and mental health challenges and more. Above all, low levels of self confidence and a lack of engagement with wider society and “touch points” with organisations / services that could support them were commonplace.

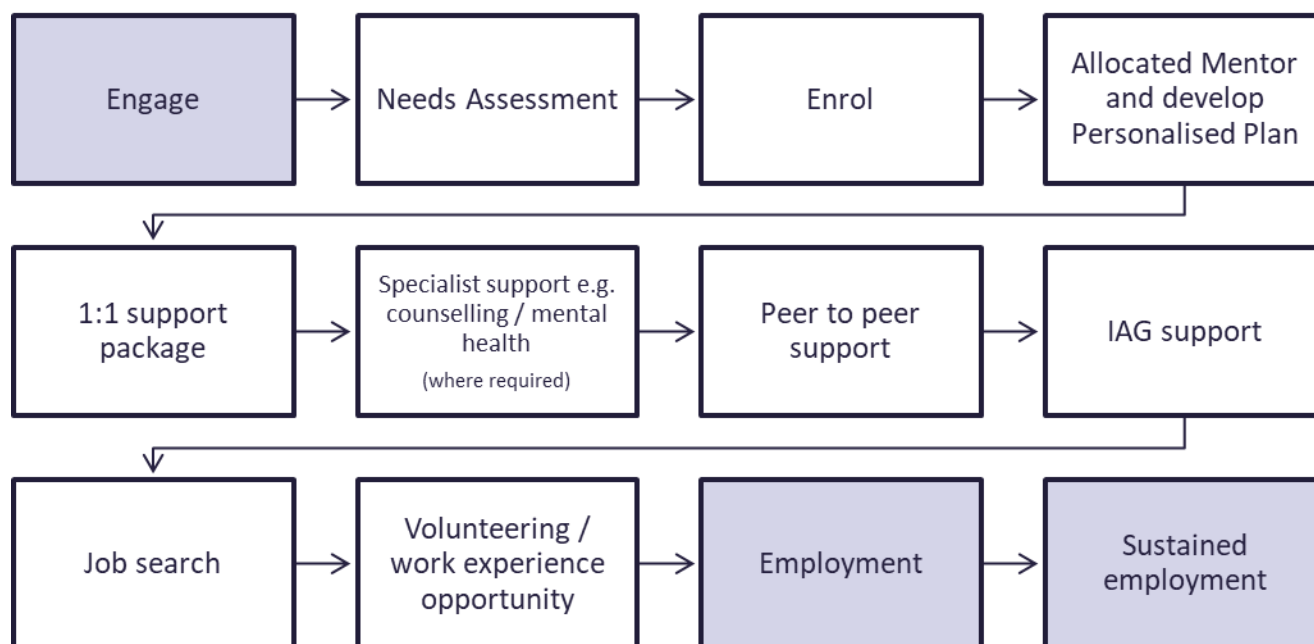
Programme support:

Typical support models were often led by or heavily involved local voluntary and community sector organisations, and adopted service delivery models that included:

- The provision of a team of mentors (or coaches / advocates) to provide a consistent point of contact and support throughout the participant’s journey
- A support period of typically between 12 and 18 months
- Access to most / all forms of specialist support required to help meet individuals’ needs
- User panels / forums to help influence and become involved in programme delivery and oversight, plus provide opportunities for peer-to-peer support
- Job search and interview technique advice
- Support and advice on personal care issues (personal hygiene, appearance etc.)
- Access to volunteering, work placements, employer open days
- Support in securing employment and for the employers too.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

A typical employment pathway



Features of success:

Note that the majority of these programmes were forged in partnerships, with a lead managing agent and engagement with other organisations. The main “success factors” observed have been distilled into a form of a “how to guide”. They include:

1: Set up – Partnership Team

- Invite key stakeholders from VCS, public and commercial sectors
- Think about a small strategic core and wider delivery team
- Agree objectives, ethos and obtain commitment
- Active team building
- Play to respective organisational strengths / complementarity

2: Programme design – involvement of users (more relevant for youth based support)

- User input into programme design
- Involve some in service commissioning
- Create user panel and / or network of advocates
- Allow for an ongoing feedback mechanism
- Good marketing campaign to raise awareness

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

3: Allocated Mentor (probably the most important feature of success)

- It takes time to build rapport, trust and nurture relationship with participants
- Consistent point of contact on the journey to employment – essential
- Hand holding / guide and provision of assurance and encouragement
- Flexibility to varying needs and emergencies
- Understand some people will need more time than others

4: Person centred support and personalised action plan

- Sit down and listen to them in a place they feel comfortable to meet
- Get to know the person – their issues, challenges, hopes, ambitions
- Provide realistic advice
- Develop a personalised action plan

5: Address the basics

- Build self-esteem and self confidence
- Encourage group activity to help address social isolation
- Fix the fundamentals and points of crisis (debts, housing, substance misuse) to get them to a place where they are more minded to focus on job search and progression
- Deep seated habits, attitudes and behaviours take time to change

6: Full service offer

- Range of partners to provide full service package
- Framework or spot purchasing to address specific gaps
- Full cost recovery principles
- Clear referral routes between partners
- Good communication
- Links to non-active partners for wider referral opportunities
- Well resourced

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

7: Employer engagement

- Pro-active relationships building – especially locally owned businesses
- Seek a wide range of opportunities to encourage exposure to different workplaces and environments
- Work with “the willing” in the business community, but develop relationships with others to advocate providing opportunities for people who have had more challenges than “ideal candidates”
- Support employers with transition of new recruits into the workplace (in-work support)

8: Marketing – Spread The Message

- Promotional event and campaign pre-launch
- Use of social media and traditional media
- Reach out to all organisations that have exposure to potential beneficiaries
- Use case studies to promote the programmes.

4/ Conclusions and Recommendations

4: Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Reflecting on the overall evaluation research findings, we believe that the Torbay UKSPF People and Skills programme is delivering a number of successes.

It is a challenge to give an entirely full assessment of progress as the true outturn results will not be known until April 2025, so we are making a judgement on what we know at Quarter 3 and drawing upon feedback from consultations with each of the five projects.

The People and Skills projects that have been funded through UKSPF funding have covered a wide agenda and range of issues regarding the skills and employability issues for some Torbay residents. Also, in meeting some business needs with skills development support, although there have been some challenges to this, as noted in the Sector Pathways review, for example: issues of employers being reticent to release staff for training, a change in ownership and priorities (for the Fisheries sector support), and some lack of clarity on specific business skills needs.

Some commented that they thought the UKSPF programme as a whole has tried to do too much with the limited amount of resource available, and this issue was flagged up in the UKSPF Evaluation report (Buckland Associates Ltd.) from autumn 2024.

It presents a challenge to Torbay Council as to where best to focus resources, as the nature of the local economy and labour market provides a wide-ranging spectrum of needs and issues to address.

For illustration, the local economy has several businesses requiring high level skills and the Council, understandably, would want to see these businesses succeed and flourish within the Torbay area, and recruit more people from the local talent pool. There are skills needs whereby targeted interventions can play an important role in nurturing these businesses and opportunities for jobs and economic growth. However, Torbay also has a large proportion of its workforce engaged in lower paid occupations and a reliance on sectors such as tourism and hospitality, which still form a central part of the local economy.

Note: key features of the local economy and labour market are set out on Pages 58-59. From this and from feedback gathered during the consultations for this evaluation study, it provides some context as to where future “employability and skills” related funding could be best targeted.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

We also believe some of the UKSPF funded projects, whilst delivering some excellent work, are “scratching the surface” of what could be achieved. For example, the needs around support for developing digital literacy and skills, basic skills and the more intensive support required to help people experiencing real challenges in their lives are much larger than UKSPF can address within a 12-month programme on current resource levels.

Economic inactivity rates are high, as they are across the country. Almost 4,000 people who are “economically inactive” are reported as wanting to work. With a sharper focus on this cohort, there may be more even more who, if provided with the right support and encouragement, could contribute the local economy.

Summary:

Below are the main conclusions from the review and evaluation process, grouped into key issues:

1/ Meeting local needs: The UKSPF People and Skills projects are addressing some of the main barriers preventing local people engaging with the local labour market. They are also addressing some of the skills gaps that employers need to help them flourish and are in turn, supporting the development of the local economy. Whilst acknowledging these projects are not being delivered in isolation, and form part of a wider portfolio of labour market supply activity across Torbay, they have demonstrated that demands for some of these services are more widespread.

The UKSPF investment is supporting the employment and skills agenda, helping address three broad categories of need:

- **Pre-employment support** – more intensive and personalised packages of support to help address barriers to become more “job ready”. Many of these people are in a state of “crisis” (housing, debt, health-related issues) and need help to stabilise their position before they are ready to move forward with searching for and securing employment.
- **Helping the economically inactive into work**, by assisting those who want and can move into employment with some tailored advice and support and access to developing basic and digital skills.
- **Skills development for employees** to help career progression, increase pay, and meet employers’ skills needs.

Linked with the adjacent business support Torbay UKSPF programme, the People and Skills projects have played an important role in progressing positive outcomes.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

2/ Project awareness: All delivery partners have an established track record and have raised awareness of their UKSPF projects using a mix of promotional materials, social media campaigns, and utilising contacts. Referrals came from a number of sources, although it was noted that some projects struggled to achieve many referrals from Job Centres.

3/ Project management and administration: Feedback from project leads was consistently positive with regard to their relationship with Torbay Council and the level of support and contact they had enjoyed from inception stage through to ongoing delivery. Those that had prior experience of other funding regimes (such as European Social Fund) already had good monitoring and admin systems in place and found UKSPF requirements to be more commensurate and manageable. Retrospective grant drawdown is more of a challenge for smaller organisations with respect to their cashflow position and an issue to consider for future funding packages.

4/ Targets and timeframe: Quarter 3 progress reports show that a number of output and outcome targets may appear to be too much of a challenge to achieve by the end of March 2025. There has been good progress on a number of targets, however one of the main challenges has been the short timeframe for project delivery. A 12-month funding agreement is very limiting for a new project to mobilise, to be promoted, to recruit or deploy staff and then implement the package of services and activities.

It may be that some of the targets set were too ambitious but a more informed view on this requires the full outturn figures to be analysed in April.

5/ Impacts and features of success: The UKSPF investments have made quite life-changing impacts for many people. This has ranged from people being able to confidently use computers to search and apply for jobs online for the first time; people with severe mental health challenges getting support and seeing their self-confidence grow and outlook become much more positive; people in financial difficulties getting help to manage their situation and engage with support to move them towards and into work; and for people in work developing their skills to progress up the career ladder or acquire new skillsets

Features of success have included:

- the provision of person-centred support and advice services in welcoming environments;
- the opportunity to mix with others and develop confidence by reducing isolation;
- the acquisition of new skills and access to new opportunities.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

One essential feature is the personality and character of the frontline support staff who engage with project participants. A friendly, sympathetic and professional approach has been especially important for people who have been leading quite isolated lives and who have had a multitude of barriers and challenges requiring attention.

6/ Value for money: Across the projects, based upon targets, value for money has been reasonable. Skills development costs can range dramatically depending on the hours of learning time that tutors are required for.

Support for individuals with more challenging needs, NEETs and people who are far from being “job ready” require more intensive and complex support, so unit costs tend to be higher. Other projects that have delivered support, typically for a 12 to 18 month period depending on their needs and ability to make progress, have cost in the range of £1,900 to £10,000 per participant although the latter figure was a special case and outlier. Most have been in the range of £2,000 to £3,000 per person engaged, and £2,500 has been an average unit cost from 24 employability projects we have evaluated. These have all had strong VCS sector involvement and, often, project leadership.

For young people, £6,600 has been an average unit cost per person successfully progressed into employment.

7/ Employer engagement: This is rather piecemeal and could be enhanced. South Devon College and its Business Solutions Team have a series of contacts with employers, as do some of the other UKSPF People and Skills partners, but there is an opportunity to do more to link “supply side” support packages through to work opportunities with more defined pathways into employment. Moreover, for those moving into employment, some resource to help facilitate and ensure they “settle” into their role, supporting both the participant and the employer, would be positive. Aiding this transition phase has been vital in some other employability schemes, rather than assuming once someone “exits” a support programme because they secured a job, that there is no longer a need for the project to keep a track of their needs.

Headline notes on the local economy and labour market

Drawing upon information from the latest NOMIS labour market profile, Torbay Council's "Turning the tide on poverty – data" report, and the Council's Economic Strategy (Evidence Base 2022), some of the headline figures and trends, with comparisons to averages for Great Britain, are:

Population and qualifications:

- Working age: recent decrease from 57.3% to 56.8% (GB = 62.9%)
- For people with no qualifications, for Level 1 and Level 2, Torbay outperforms GB averages
- At Level 3 (equivalent of A Levels) and Level 4 (Higher Education certificate level and apprenticeship, first year degree and above) Torbay is behind national averages. At Level 3, Torbay is 61.2% compared to 67.8% nationally. At Level 4, Torbay is 35% compared to 47.3% nationally
- 4.4% of 16-17 year olds are NEET (GB = 5.5%).

Economic Inactivity:

- Almost a quarter (23.1%) of 16-64 year olds are economically inactive (GB= 21.6%)
- 43% of these are inactive due to being "long term sick" (GB = 28.2%), far higher than the national average
- 22.4% (or 3,900 Torbay residents of working age) say they want a job.

Key occupational groups and earnings:

- Occupations where more people work in Torbay compared to national averages:
 - Accommodation and food service activities, 16.3% (GB = 8%)
 - Human health and social work, 26.5% (GB = 13.9%)
 - Wholesale and retail trade / repair of vehicles, 14.3% (GB = 13.7%)
 - Education, 9.2% (GB = 8.6%)
 - Arts, entertainment and recreation, 3.1% (GB = 2.6%)
- Key commercial sectors include tourism and hospitality, retail, construction, fishing and processing, photonics and micro-electronics, and increasingly, digital and creative industries.
- Part-time jobs account for approximately 4 in every 10 jobs locally compared to 3 in 10 nationally
- Full time jobs account for 6 in 10 employee jobs locally, whereas almost 7 in 10 jobs nationally are full-time
- Earnings for full-time workers are 83% of national average.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Businesses and Gross Value Added:

- GVA output per head of £17,233 (in 2022) – lower than Devon, South West regional and GB national averages
- Growth in micro-enterprises and strong presence of micro and small enterprises in Torbay
- Slight increase in medium and large enterprises over the last 5 years
- 45 fast growing business employing 2,680 people, mainly in manufacturing and engineering, and other business and professional services for businesses, mostly linked to eHealth and preventive care sectors.

Deprivation:

- Torbay ranks 38th most deprived community (at local authority level) out of 151 in England.

4.2 Recommendations

Introduction:

Taking into account the findings and conclusions of this evaluation, the following recommendations are intended as key consideration points to help guide future “employability and skills” programmes in Torbay. In broad terms, there are a range of needs across the “employment support spectrum” that the UKSPF People and Skills programme has targeted:

- People with more pronounced challenges and barriers who are quite a long way from being “job ready”. This includes support for young people with alternative provision, and for people who are aged 25 and over
- People who are of working age, economically inactive, but could work given the right support
- People who are in work seeking to develop their skills, to help progress their careers, and to help meet employers’ needs where there are generic and sector specific skills required to help them develop further.

Targeting:

Recommendation 1: Pre-Employment support for adults (25+) and economically inactive

Adults who are out of work, experiencing points of crisis and often major barriers to being in a position of job readiness, would benefit from a personalised and intensive package of support. Torbay has benefited from some strong expertise in this field and the VCSE sector typically provides flexibility and the capabilities to assist people with these issues and are well placed to engage at a local community level. This approach can also include support for people who are economically inactive by providing the right advice, incentives and support to help them take advantage of some employment opportunities

Recommendation 2: Support for young people

For young people who are NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training), who have special educational needs and/or who are quite socially isolated, some form of alternative support provision can be beneficial. There are several young people leading relatively chaotic lives without much of a routine. A more tailored mentor-based support system is needed to help them re-engage in positive activities and lead more fulfilling lives. There has been some excellent work in Torbay to help address these needs and more could be done. This should be more closely linked to a programme of raising awareness of local career opportunities and more defined pathways to employment opportunities.

Recommendation 3: Digital literacy and basic skills

There is a strong demand for more support to help with digital literacy, especially for the older working age cohort. Delivering this in welcoming, community-based learning environments is an opportunity that could be developed and rolled out more widely across Torbay. There is also a request for more community based basic skills learning provision.

Recommendation 4: Digital literacy and basic skills

There is a strong demand for more support to help with digital literacy, especially for the older working age cohort. Delivering this in welcoming, community-based learning environments is an opportunity that could be developed and rolled out more widely across Torbay. There is also a request for more community based basic skills learning provision.

Recommendation 5: Workplace skills

For workers looking to progress their careers, there is some demand for development of management and leadership skills. Not only does this help the individual move into more senior positions and earn more, but also helps the employer with a better equipped workforce and opens up opportunities for others to move into the workplace into the vacated job roles.

Process:

Recommendation 6: Longer delivery timescales

Adults who are out of work, experiencing points of crisis and often major barriers to being in a position of job readiness, would benefit from a personalised and intensive package of support. Torbay has benefited from some strong expertise in this field and the VCSE sector typically provides flexibility and the capabilities to assist people with these issues and are well placed to engage at a local community level. This approach can also include support for people who are economically inactive by providing the right advice, incentives and support to help them take advantage of some employment opportunities.

Recommendation 7: Employer engagement

An effective employability model for Torbay would benefit from deeper relationship with employers, to identify real work opportunities and routes into the workplace for local people supported through the “supply side” packages listed above. There are some good links in place, but more work is needed to widen and develop good relationships with local employers. Support to help people transition into work (to help the individual and the employer) with an “in-work” mentor or advocate to provide assistance.

Recommendation 8: Partnership

The employability and skills needs of Torbay cannot be addressed solely by the Economic Development resources available to Torbay Council. It was clear from reviewing the projects supporting people with major barriers (Focus Forward, Sound Futures and Digital Skills) that many participants have wider health and education related issues. Their needs, together with the support and funding available, cuts across a variety of service areas (housing, health, education, social services and more) and a cross-partner response to the addressing these issues would be useful.

Furthermore, DWP through its Job Centres and array of service provision, plays a key role in this agenda. It is recommended that a high level summit meeting is convened involving senior leadership across the relevant Torbay Council services together with DWP and NHS to discuss an appropriate strategy to address the employability agenda for the longer term.

Evaluation of Torbay UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills Programme

Finally, it is worth noting that there are models that have been adopted elsewhere that merit some consideration. The social impact investment model is one whereby local partners collaborate to devise solutions to address an issue, set clearly defined outcomes to be delivered, and work with a Commissioner-Investor model to procure and finance the support package. The risk sits with the investor if outcomes are not achieved, but there may be philanthropic investor opportunities that can be harnessed alongside Torbay Council and other public sources of ongoing investment.

See more details:

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