

# Designing and delivering pre-apprenticeships

**IN-VEST 2: Integrated Vocational  
Employability Skills Training**  
*Ireland*



## IN-VEST 2: Integrated Vocational Employability Skills Training - *Ireland*

### Case study summary

IN-VEST 2 aims to deliver an integrated employability programme for young unemployed people to provide direct pathways into a range of ICT focussed apprenticeships. The programme supports the development of ICT skills, alongside soft skills, that are transferrable to any career.

IN-VEST 2 targets young people aged 16-30 that have the interest and potential to do an apprenticeship but due to their disadvantaged background have been unable to take advantage of these opportunities via traditional routes.

This case study specifically highlights best practice on how the integration of transversal skills with ICT skills ensures that the learning of soft skills is contextualised, and participants understand the importance of developing these skills for successful progression into the workplace.



## Country context

The Irish economy is the fastest growing in the Eurozone and is one of the largest tech hubs in Europe; the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) sector employs over 37,000 people, generating €35 billion in exports annually.<sup>1</sup> The country is the European base for some of the most successful multi-national technology and software companies in the world.

Until relatively recently, apprenticeships in Ireland have remained focussed on traditional, vocational trades such as construction. However, the last few years has seen rapid development of new apprenticeships offering opportunities to access a much wider variety of roles and industries, particularly in the fast-growing tech sector.

The Government and the Apprenticeship Council committed to more than doubling the number of new apprentices registered in Ireland, to 9000, by 2020 and to expanding the range of New Tech Apprenticeships (the 2018 budget allocated more than 120 million euros to apprenticeship training, up 24% on the previous year, to help to achieve this goal).<sup>2</sup> FIT (Fasttrack to Information Technology), a large organisation in the technology sector, expect there to be around 400 Tech apprenticeships available in 2020, rising to 1,000 by 2021.

Pre-apprenticeships in Ireland are still in their infancy although a growing number of providers

are offering programmes to support young people into apprenticeships; the Access to Apprenticeships programme for example, is aimed at young men and women aged 16-24 living in Dublin who experience social and economic barriers to progression.<sup>3</sup> Government policy, including the National Skills Strategy 2025, aims to significantly grow work-based learning over the coming five years using apprenticeships and traineeships as the key vehicles for learning and skills development.<sup>4</sup> An example of this is the new ESF funded Pathways to Apprenticeship initiative, which offers a range of courses for young people to develop essential skills, with the aim of enabling them to access and transition into a full apprenticeship.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic the youth unemployment rate in Ireland was lower than the average for EU countries (11.8% in January 2020 compared to an average of 14.9%).<sup>6</sup> In June, using this standard measure, the monthly unemployment rate was 12.8% (compared to an EU average of 16.8). However, a new COVID 19 Adjusted Measure of Unemployment, released by Ireland's Central Statistics Office indicated a rate as high as 45.4% for those aged 15 to 24 years if all claimants of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment were classed as unemployed.<sup>7</sup>

Apprenticeships have a key role to play in the Government's approach to quickly building the skills needed to support economic recovery

following the pandemic. As part of its COVID action plan, financial incentives have been introduced to encourage and support employers to take on and retain apprentices.<sup>8</sup>

### Ballymun Job Centre



Ballymun Job Centre (BJC)<sup>9/10</sup> is a community-based charity operating in north Dublin, one of the most disadvantaged areas of the country. It was established in 1986 in response to persistently high levels of unemployment in the Ballymun area; the 2016 census showed that Ballymun had an unemployment rate of 27% compared to 13% nationally. Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, the percentage of people unemployed in the area was falling at a slower rate than in the rest of the country (a fall of 7% in Ballymun for those under 25 compared to 19% nationally, over the year to December 2018).<sup>10</sup>

BJC has a strong commitment to testing new ideas and ways of working to bridge gaps in services and support for disadvantaged job seekers. It works with partner countries on a variety of innovative European Union funded programmes and transfers learning from these projects to improve services for BJC clients. An example of this is the Youth Employability Competences Project, which aims to help young people and youth workers identify key gaps in employability competences and address these through youth worker led training modules.

<sup>1</sup> Industrial Development Agency Ireland 2019 [https://www.idaireland.com/newsroom/publications/ida\\_facts\\_about\\_ireland\\_2019](https://www.idaireland.com/newsroom/publications/ida_facts_about_ireland_2019)  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-12-08.html>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Technological-University-Dublin-Access-to-Apprenticeships-Ireland.pdf>  
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/81efg-action-plan-to-expand-apprenticeship-and-traineeship-in-ireland-2016-2020/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://learningandskills.ie/pathways-to-apprenticeship/>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>  
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/monthlyunemployment>  
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/561g1-skilling-beyond-covid-19-ireland-s-approach-to-appre>  
<sup>9/10</sup> Ballymun Job Centre | Local Employment Centre for local people in Ballymun (bmunjob.ie)

# The pre-apprenticeship at BJC

IN-VEST 2 (Integrated Vocational Employability Skills Training) is a free, accredited pre-apprenticeship programme for young people interested in exploring new apprenticeships in the ICT and financial services sectors while developing IT skills and soft skills that are transferrable to any career.

IN-VEST 2 builds on learning and experience from the original IN-VEST programme which ended in August 2019. IN-VEST was set up by BJC in 2017 to support unemployed people in the Ballymun area to access and sustain new ICT employment opportunities created by the growth in the tech sector in Dublin. In particular, the programme aimed to respond quickly to identified skills shortages in the sector. The 2014 Skills Audit undertaken by FIT, highlighted 7000 live vacancies, linked to skill gaps, the majority of which were in entry level roles. A more recent FIT audit, in 2018, identified a range of skills needed to build on and plan for this rapid growth in the sector and emphasised the value placed by sector employers on soft skills, at all levels, including in entry level roles.

Despite this skills shortage, unemployed people in Ballymun, and other disadvantaged communities, face a range of barriers to entering employment in the tech sector. These include not only a lack of relevant skills and educational qualifications but also challenges emerging from personal, social and family factors such as a lack of self-confidence, lack of awareness of the opportunities open to them in new sectors and low levels of aspiration.

Given the growth in tech apprenticeships and the aspirations of some IN-VEST participants to access an apprenticeship, BJC recognised that a future version of the programme, with stronger links to the apprenticeship system, would add value. Feedback from participants also highlighted that, in a competitive labour market, young people would value the programme more if it led to a qualification. As a result, BJC have developed IN-VEST 2 as an accredited pre-apprenticeship programme designed to provide participants with the qualifications needed to progress into an apprenticeship or employment.

## Aims of the programme

The overall aim of IN-VEST 2 is to deliver an integrated employability programme for young unemployed people to access apprenticeships or employment where an understanding and knowledge of ICT is an important element of the apprenticeship. The programme supports the development of ICT skills, alongside soft skills, that are transferrable to any career.

IN-VEST 2 is designed to provide direct pathways to a range of new ICT-focussed apprenticeships in Ireland, including software development, networking engineering, cyber security, financial services, accountancy, logistics, and insurance.

Many of the young people BJC work with have low aspirations and require support to build confidence, recognise their own abilities and develop the transversal skills needed to progress in their careers and wider lives. IN-VEST 2 therefore aims to enhance and grow participants employability through development in three inter-related areas, their human capital, their social capital and their psychological capital.

## Project based approach

A core element in the approach taken by BJC to deliver IN-VEST 2 is project work. Throughout the programme, young people work on projects both individually and in small teams, creating their own portfolio of projects and skills. These activities are designed to simulate the environment and behaviours of a real workplace and provide opportunity for participants to practice their ICT skills alongside the development of soft skills.

Soft skills, and an understanding of their importance in the workplace, are integrated throughout the pre-apprenticeship programme. Through the project-based approach, young people develop and improve skills in:

- Setting achievable professional and educational goals
- Time management and punctuality
- Verbal and non-verbal communication and presentation skills
- Adaptability and resilience
- Knowledge and awareness of professional boundaries and the nature and demands of work
- Ability to accept and give feedback
- Teamwork and critical thinking skills

The content of project work is tailored to the interest and skills levels of young people on the programme. This helps to maintain engagement and levels of motivation. In the last cycle of IN-VEST for example, several young people with a shared passion for environmental issues were grouped together to work on a project:

*"They created a web page based on green issues, and how people could shop more responsibly. They would use different IT tools. They would be using their social media skills, web designing, polling, but all on issues they were passionate about. They would have to send these things that they had designed and created to the group at the end to work on their presentation skills as well." - INVEST co-ordinator*

Feedback from IN-VEST participants indicated that learners felt empowered by this approach:

*"...they felt like their opinion mattered, that they would be treated like adults, that what they said had an impact on how content was delivered, and that they had a voice. Saying, 'Well, this is what interests me. This is what I want to learn.' So, just feeling empowered in that way, to speak up and know that the instructor cared and wanted to put value on the lessons for them" - IN-VEST co-ordinator*

In the earliest cycles of IN-VEST, soft skills and ICT skills were taught separately by different tutors on different modules. However, feedback suggested that participants struggled to understand the relevance of soft skills to the workplace when taught in isolation. Based on this learning, in the later cycles of IN-VEST and continuing in IN-VEST 2, soft skills are integrated into ICT lessons so that they are more contextualised for the world of work and the tech sector environment.

## Programme content

IN-VEST 2 is delivered by two members of BJC staff – a dedicated programme co-ordinator and a careers guidance counsellor.

BJC staff will coordinate the programme including work experience, company visits and career guidance. The City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) will deliver the training modules including:

- **Communications (QQI Level 5 accredited)**
- **Presentation skills**
- **Project management skills**
- **PowerPoint**
- **Online Essentials and Word Processing (accredited)**
- **Skills sampling**
  - Software development
  - Network engineering
  - Web design
  - Graphic design
- **Career planning**
  - Online applications
  - CVs and cover letters
  - Interview skills

The primary target group is people aged 16-30 that have the interest and potential to do an apprenticeship but due to their disadvantaged background have been unable to take advantage of these opportunities via traditional routes. A small number of places are retained for over 30s, in recognition that people are working longer and there is an increasing need for people to retrain throughout their working lives.

Participants must have a minimum of a Junior Certificate<sup>11</sup> or equivalent qualification and pass a basic literacy assessment. The programme is open to participants from low-income backgrounds, who are unemployed, long-term unemployed or at risk of unemployment, with low or no employment history. Priority will be given to participants from Ballymun and female participants.

Participants are generally referred internally from BJC career guidance staff or externally through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and from local community-based organisations. The programme is also advertised through promotional literature, e.g. flyers and social media including a Facebook page.

Due to COVID 19, it is likely that future recruitment strategies will need to focus more heavily on online methods.

<sup>11</sup> Post-primary education consists of a three-year Junior Cycle (lower secondary), followed by a two or three year Senior Cycle (upper secondary). Students usually begin the Junior Cycle at age 12. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years. <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Post-Primary/>



## Partnership working

In designing the IN-VEST programme, BJC set up an advisory board including representation from companies operating in the 'new tech' apprenticeship areas such as software development, ICT and finance. The group also includes representatives from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The advisory group has played a role in shaping the curriculum of the programme, including the specific content of modules. This ensures that the programme remains relevant to opportunities in the ICT sector and that content is tailored to the eligibility requirements for the different apprenticeships. In addition to informing curriculum development for IN-VEST 2, the advisory board also assists in engaging employers to provide work experience placements and company visits for programme participants. Input from the Advisory Group during the design stage for IN-VEST 2 helped to identify the skills and the most relevant ICT certification that the programme should seek to develop along with the overall accredited course certificate that would best facilitate progression of participants into ICT-focussed apprenticeships.

Through the networks facilitated by the advisory board and BJC's wider work, IN-VEST 2 benefits from relationships with over 500 employers in the Greater Dublin area, ranging from small local businesses to large multi-nationals operating across a variety of sectors such as hospitality, health care and financial services as well as ICT.

Programme staff acknowledge that engaging employers is an ongoing challenge. This is likely to be exacerbated as a result of the pandemic. For IN-VEST 2 they are exploring putting an existing relationship with a large local recruitment agency

in Dublin on a more formal footing, including representation on the advisory board, to facilitate work experience opportunities across a range of industries. There is also potential for this partnership to provide a pathway for programme participants into an HR apprenticeship. The new partnership with CDETB, who have strong employer relationships will also provide a link into new employer contacts.

Continuing to build partnerships with employers and training providers will help to build sustainability into the programme:

*"...I would just like to have more connection with employers and apprenticeship providers, just so, like, it can be more sustainable, so that we can offer really strong work experience placements. So, IN-VEST 2 becomes a really well-known and, kind of, I don't know if 'respected' is the right word, but just, like, that people acknowledge what it is and know that it's of value, and that if they do take on somebody from Invest 2, they're making a good decision." - INVEST Co-ordinator*

In addition to employer links, BJC has also established and continues to develop close working relationships with a wide range of public, private and community organisations.



## Model of delivery

IN-VEST 2 is a five-month pre-apprenticeship programme, in which participants attend Monday to Friday. The programme is delivered across three phases, with hours increasing gradually to give young people opportunity to settle into the training, understand what is expected of them and build confidence. This ensures that by the time they enter the final work experience placement at the end of the programme they are better prepared for a full working day.

Upon completion of the programme, participants will have completed a total of 400 hours, of which 280 hours is training and 120 hours (minimum) is work-based.

The application process takes place over two weeks. During half day sessions 30 young people take part in activities including:

- information sessions about the programme structure and expectations
- awareness raising sessions about ICT-focussed apprenticeships
- basic literacy assessment
- online digital literacy assessment
- psychometric assessments
- mock classroom sessions to assess skills such as time management, interpersonal and teamwork skills.

Although the baseline skills assessments are used to inform decisions about programme eligibility, the primary aim of assessments is to inform tutors what level young people are working at when they start the programme. This enables them to tailor learning to meet the different needs of the group and to provide extra support during classes, where needed. For the digital literacy assessment, participants are sent a link to complete and return the assessment online. This helps staff to gauge the motivation of potential participants as well as providing an indication of their digital capability. Assessments are repeated towards the end of the programme to measure improvement.

These activities are followed by informal one-to-one interviews with IN-VEST 2 staff to enable them to get to know individual participants better, including their background, interests and any additional support that might be needed to enable them to take part in the programme.

At the end of the two weeks, 20 young people are accepted onto the programme; the remaining 10 receive ongoing career guidance from BJC including exploration of alternative progression options and signposting to additional support, for example literacy support.

### Holistic support

In addition to one-to-one interviews on programme entry, IN-VEST 2 staff have regular meetings with individual young people throughout the programme, allowing participants to develop trust in programme staff. This encourages disclosure of any challenges young people are experiencing at home, on the course, or in their wider lives and means that support can be put

in place early, helping to reduce the chances of young people dropping out of the programme. BJC view the one-to-one guidance role as crucial to IN-VEST 2, not only in identifying appropriate progression pathways to apprenticeships but in ensuring access to additional support such as counselling, literacy support, ESOL courses or childcare. This was a key learning point from the previous IN-VEST pilot that has informed the new, IN-VEST 2 programme. On IN-VEST, BJC found that the ability to provide tailored and flexible support to meet the needs of a diverse cohort and to be accessible and available enhanced engagement with programme participants.

Another key learning point from the IN-VEST pilot programme was that financial factors play a huge role in the retention of participants. Some young people left the programme to return to low paid work when the need arose in their personal life. Participants under 25 years of age who are on a jobseekers payment receive €100 a week but if they enrol in a CDETBA-accredited course, their payment is increased to €195 per week which is a significant incentive to stay engaged and motivated to complete the programme.



### Project phases

The pre-apprenticeship programme is delivered in 3 phases, with potential adaptation required to respond to the impact of COVID, such as a shift towards more online delivery, fewer participants to accommodate social distancing in the classroom and different activities due to potentially reduced levels of engagement from employers.

#### **Phase one – 6 weeks of training (120 hours total / 4 hours per day); 1-week of work experience (20 hours minimum)**

The focus in phase one is on participants finding out more about the programme structure, the types of skills they will develop and how these are relevant for the future labour market.

Programme staff provide an introduction to the ICT-focussed apprenticeship sector, the potential progression pathways and some of the key entry level requirements. Company visits or presentations on relevant apprenticeships e.g. Software Developer, Cyber Security and Network Engineer, are designed to motivate participants, spark interest and help them to consider what type of tech skills and careers they might wish to pursue.

During this phase, staff complete individual assessments with young people, including using BJC's E-guide psychometric tool. Based on the Holland codes<sup>12</sup> the tool supports young people to build a profile of their interests and personality to help them discover more about themselves and their career interests.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.123test.com/holland-codes-career-tests/>

Participants are introduced to the concept of a project portfolio and will take part in activities to build confidence, motivation, resilience, and coping skills as well as team working and presentation skills.

In addition to learning work related basic IT skills e.g. composing professional emails, participants start on the accredited or certified ICT module, which includes, for example MS Word and Excel. Recognising the different levels of self-esteem and skills that young people may have when they join the programme, activities in this early phase are designed to provide a balance between technical training and the opportunity for participants to develop their confidence.

*"I felt so much more confident in myself. I came out feeling a lot better, a lot happier and even my parents, they noticed. They're saying, like I just seemed a lot more positive when I came out of the course. Yes, I have a brighter outlook on [the] future... I felt so great coming out of the course thinking, 'Oh, I can do this, I can get a job in different fields,'" – IN-VEST Learner*

### **Phase two – 5 weeks of training (100 hours); 2 weeks of work experience (40 hours minimum)**

The key focus in Phase 2 is the development of project management skills for the workplace, including planning, organising, identification of resources, identifying one's own role in a team, leadership skills and time management. These skills are developed through participation in a variety of individual and group projects, as described by a learner.

*"The goal was to come up with an idea to help the community and because it was an IT course, we were tasked with setting up the Facebook page, with setting up the Twitter page, all that kind of stuff. We were setting up a banner for it and we also had to come up with a story, because one person had to write all the stuff, one person had to do some research and that was great because it kind of made each other work. It kind of made us all work together and talk about what we wanted to do and then also, at the end, we had to present it. A lot of people on the course were very shy so it was great going up in front of the class and, I guess, fighting your fear with standing up in front of people and talking about what you've done. It makes you feel really proud of yourself."*

#### **IN-VEST Learner**

During the project activities, tutors allow time for participants to discuss and identify solutions to any challenges they encounter, for example in communication between team members. Following the activity, young people are supported to present the project to other course participants. This helps to develop both technical skills, for example word processing and PowerPoint, which are part of the accredited ICT module, as well as building soft skills such as public speaking, leadership, teamworking and project management.

The project-based approach allows tutors to tailor activities to the needs, skills and interests of individual participants. One learner for example, whose career goals included teaching IT and media skills, described how the tutor encouraged and supported her to design and deliver a session on coding skills to other participants and how this had boosted her self-belief:

*"I had brought up the coding and how I thought it was really fun, and a great way to be creative, and she asked me back at the end and went, 'Can you code?..' I was like, 'Yes, I've coded games, websites, small stuff..' She was like, 'If I give you next week's shorter session, would you be willing to do a session for me, just write it up for me and present it?...' 'I got my moment to stand up and teach half an hour's worth of coding, which I did enjoy a lot, and a few people engaged, 'Will you help me after?' we talked a lot more after... It was pushing me a bit because public speaking and teaching at the time was not my thing... It was the kind of push I needed to go, 'If I can do this, I can teach 20 kids.'" – **IN-VEST Learner***

During this phase, participants attend further presentations from apprenticeship providers and ICT employers and go on company visits. This is designed not only to provide young people with a greater insight into their chosen careers but also to further build their psychological capital – their levels of aspiration and self-belief about what they can achieve - prior to starting work experience.

*"They were...getting out of their community and seeing what else was out there, and what other opportunities were available to them. Exposing them to different settings, and experiences in general. Helping them to learn what it is to network and talk with people that are from a totally different background, whether it's education wise, or class wise, or even a different area".*

#### **IN-VEST 2 Co-ordinator**

Essential employability skills such as writing CV's and application letters, applying for jobs online, interview techniques and practice interviews are also an important part of this phase.



Five weeks of classroom training is followed by two weeks of work experience which may be part-time or full-time depending on employer capacity. As far as possible, programme staff work with young people and employers to identify work placements that are matched to the young person's career interests and needs.

### **Phase three – 3 weeks of training (60 hours); 3 weeks of work experience (60 hours minimum)**

The main goal at the start of Phase 3 is for young people to finish any outstanding projects or assignments that go towards the accredited qualification. Participants also deliver a final presentation to other course members on their portfolio of projects.

This phase also includes further work preparation modules including interviews with and advice on developing individual CVs from employees from partner companies. Learners explained how this more formal interview helped them to build confidence in coping with interviews.

*"Although it's not actually an interview, there was still the same kind of nerves as an interview ... I had that mindset where this is like really formal and most interviews that I've had in the past weren't that formal. They weren't that bad. So, yes. It kind of let me prepare in the sense that if I can do this, I can do anything else".* **IN-VEST Learner**

In this final phase of the programme IN-VEST 2 staff will work with individual young people to identify suitable progression pathways, including apprenticeships, employment, or education. This also provides opportunity to discuss further training needs or skills development and provide

advice on issues or challenges which may arise during the first months of an apprenticeship or employment.

At the end of the pre-apprenticeship programme, participants attend a further six weeks of work experience. This might be with the same or a different employer to the previous work placement depending on employer capacity and the needs and interests of the young person.

Although not part of the formal programme, IN-VEST staff stay in touch with young people once they complete the programme and make it clear that they are available for participants to provide additional guidance or referral to other BJC services as appropriate.

### **Work placements**

Many of the young people joining the IN-VEST 2 pre-apprenticeship programme have no employment history. For these young people, work experience is an invaluable first step towards an apprenticeship and future opportunities in the labour market. Work experience also helps young people to better understand which apprenticeship and career option is most suited to them in the long term.

During the early stages of IN-VEST, BJC staff found that retaining young people on the programme was a particular challenge. Feedback from participants indicated that one reason for this was the long wait before undertaking work experience; the early phases of the programme were classroom based only, with one six week work placement completed at the end of the programme. Based on this learning, for IN-VEST

2, work placements are included at different stages of the programme and integrated with classroom training. BJC find that as well as helping to maintain motivation and support retention of participants, this helps to contextualise the importance of skills learned on the course.

*"Like, you're going to need digital literacy skills. You're going to need to be able to manage your time, to be able to navigate conflicts. So, it just, kind of, gives them a place to practice this and then take it back to the course and say, like, 'Oh, maybe I need to improve on this before I feel totally comfortable in a real work environment.'"* **IN-VEST 2 Co-ordinator**

Prior to the work experience placement, employers are provided with a competency template which sets out the level and types of skills the young person has developed on the course, helping to ensure that the duties of the role are appropriate for the participant.

In consultation with the employer and course tutors, a structured work experience plan is created and put in place for each participant in advance of their placement start date. A work experience manual is also being provided to participants, so they have a clear understanding of the expectations to be met and goals to be achieved during the placement. During the work placement, IN-VEST 2 staff contact the participant and employer on a weekly basis to check how things are going, deal with any emerging issues and monitor progress.

At the end of the placement programme staff have a one-to-one meeting with the young person to review what went well, explore any challenges and discuss whether they are still

interested in pursuing this type of career. Based on this feedback, the participant may choose to remain with the same employer or try a different employer and progression pathway for their next work experience placement in Phase 3.

Participants then come back together to present to the group about their experience of the placement using a “teach-back” format.

### Outcomes for young people

The first young people to participate in the IN-VEST 2 pre-apprenticeship programme will not complete until the end of January 2021, at the earliest, so information on progression outcomes is not yet available.

The evidencing of outcomes for participants and wider stakeholders was a key part of a 2019 Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation of IN-VEST<sup>13</sup>. Of 25 young people surveyed for the evaluation – out of 73 participants enrolled, 100% reported feeling more employable, more skilled and more confident since participating in the programme as well as a range of other benefits including improved mental health and a greater sense of connection to their local community.

BJC use a number of tools which are completed by participants at the start and end of the programme to measure the impact on soft outcomes. These include the Cantril Ladder<sup>14</sup> which asks individuals to reflect on where they are in terms of their employment and career goals, as well as hopefulness and self-esteem scales.

Programme staff continue to see the development of soft skills as a key benefit for young people completing the pre-apprenticeship programme:

*“the biggest thing that resonated for me with IN-VEST 1 is just, like the change that you saw in people’s attitudes toward themselves and what their capabilities were, and their self-worth...to, kind of, actually go through a course where people are listening to you and asking you how you feel and what you think and what you’re getting out of it really does a lot for people. I think you could, kind of, see that from, like, day one until graduation, a change in people and how they felt about themselves and about, like, their community and their relationships with other people.”* **INVEST Co-ordinator**



However, the key difference in outcomes between IN-VEST and IN-VEST 2 is expected to result from the introduction of accreditation. Leaving the programme with relevant qualifications will support participants to progress into a range of

new tech apprenticeships and open the door to a wider range of employment opportunities. This is particularly resonant given the increased competition for apprenticeships in the ‘new’ non-traditional sectors.

In addition to progression into an apprenticeship, employment or further education, the success of the programme will be measured against outcomes including

- Increased ICT specific skill levels
- Increased understanding of the workplace and what it means to take on responsibility at work
- Enhanced independence including taking responsibility for progression in life and career
- Increased aspirations
- Improved confidence, resilience, self-esteem and coping skills
- Healthier lifestyle

The programme co-ordinator will monitor and evaluate participants’ progress on an ongoing basis and meet regularly with BJC management and the advisory board to review progress against programme objectives. Feedback from employers, participants, tutors and staff, at the end of each five-month course, will be used to inform improvements to the programme.

<sup>13</sup> Ballymun Job Centre INVEST: Integrated Vocational Employability Skills Training Final Evaluation Report November 2019

<sup>14</sup> Levin, K.A., Currie, C. Reliability and Validity of an Adapted Version of the Cantril Ladder for Use with Adolescent Samples. Soc Indic Res 119, 1047–1063 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-013-0507-4>

## Effective practice

- **Strong links to major employers/industry leads and apprenticeship providers** ensures that the design and content of the programme supports progression into relevant apprenticeships and employment opportunities in the ICT sector
- The **strong focus on soft skills and integration with ICT skills** ensures that the learning of soft skills is contextualised, and participants understand the importance of developing these skills for successful progression into the workplace
- The **project-based approach to learning provides flexibility** to tailor activities to meet the individual needs, interests and skills-levels of participants helping to maintain motivation and support retention
- **One-to-one support from programme staff** helps to motivate young people, identify challenges early and reduce the chances of them dropping out. In addition, BJC is embedded in the local community. This ensures that the programme has a clear understanding of the specific challenges for young people in the local area.

