

New Futures pilots

Evaluation report

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- Community-based charities that are under unprecedented strain
- Charities supporting the most vulnerable – in particular, families and children living in poverty and older people in isolation
- Initiatives to promote wellbeing and mental health across society

About New Futures

New Futures, led by Learning and Work Institute and funded by the Covid-19 Support Fund, is supporting workers who need to reskill and change career as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The programme includes:

- Place-based pilots to test potential solutions to reskilling and career change
- Evaluation and analysis
- Sharing what we learn to help shape policy and practice

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Executive summary

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) developed a pilot programme of support for career changers, called New Futures. New Futures aimed to support career changers who needed to reskill as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and was funded by the Covid-19 Support Fund. Grants were awarded to place-based pilots in Edinburgh, Belfast, Tees Valley and Wales.

The pilots were designed to build locally led solutions, tailored to the needs of local labour markets. The intention was that each pilot should include the following features:

- targeted outreach and engagement with potential career changers
- high-quality careers information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- access to skills training
- plans to build the capacity of voluntary and community sector organisations
- support to ensure sustained job outcomes. This included working directly with employers and/or offering participants in-work support.

The evaluation aimed to assess the effectiveness of the pilots in supporting individuals to retrain and change career, and to build the evidence base on what works in supporting career change.

Methods

The evaluation drew on data collected during pilot delivery. This included analysis of management information (MI) supplied by pilots, and qualitative data based on participant focus groups, local area observations and in-depth interviews with pilot staff, partners, employers, programme staff and participants. Pre- and post-intervention surveys of participants were also conducted but only limited cross-sectional analysis of survey data has been possible, due to low response rates.

Participant numbers

MI returns showed 639 participants registered to participate in the pilots. This included 36 participants in Belfast, 250 in Edinburgh, 278 in Tees Valley and 75 in Wales. Most pilots experienced a steady fall in numbers from initial engagement and registration to participation in careers advice activities and training.

Participant characteristics and engagement

The New Futures pilots as a whole attracted a diverse range of participants, but there was variation between individual pilots, reflecting differences in the intended targets. Over one quarter of participants (27%) were from minority ethnic backgrounds, and 58% were out of work when they registered on the pilot. Participants were motivated to participate in the

pilots for a range of reasons, including a general desire to change career, seek work after a career break, upskill, or due to discontent with their previous role.

All pilots used a variety of methods to engage potential participants. Using multiple methods of engagement was important to successful outreach, particularly in the initial stages of pilot delivery. Across most pilots, in-person engagement was considered an effective means of outreach and engagement. Referral and local community networks played a key role in engaging participants, as did word of mouth during the later stages of delivery. Across pilots, staff felt the initial emphasis on the impact of Covid in outreach materials was ineffective, but reported that adjusting the messaging helped overcome initial recruitment difficulties. Participants interviewed were generally positive about how the support the pilots could offer had been communicated and the ease of registration.

Employment outcomes

In total, 280 participants progressed into a new job – representing 44% of registered participants. There was little difference in employment outcome by prior employment status. A third of participants (33%) were employed on joining the pilot, with 45% of these starting a new job; 58% were out of work on joining the pilot, with 44% starting a new job¹.

There was some variation between pilots: Belfast had the highest rate of employment outcomes (26 out of 36), followed by Wales (52 out of 75), Tees Valley (41%) and Edinburgh (35%); although participants in Belfast and Wales were broadly closer to the labour market prior to commencement. Employment details were not available for all participants, but MI analysis showed that – where data were available – 72% of those with an employment outcome had changed career².

Participants experienced a range of employment-related outcomes through participation in the pilots, including gaining a promotion, starting an apprenticeship or vocational training and increased technical and employability skills. Participation also built resilience to continue looking for employment. Participants experienced a range of wider outcomes, including increased confidence, self-belief, self-worth, motivation to continue learning and, in the case of Belfast, the development of a participant network.

Key components of career change support

Personalised support

Pilot staff saw personalised support as an important part of delivery. They described how establishing trusting relationships with participants was key to providing support which would help individuals to reskill. Holistic wraparound support also helped participants to

¹ As detailed in the Methods section, a separate impact evaluation will be conducted for pilots with a sufficient participant population for statistical analysis. This will compare employment outcomes against an estimate of counterfactual outcomes.

² Career change is defined as working in a different sector or a substantially different occupation within the same sector.

overcome individual barriers to work. Staff emphasised how resource-intensive this could be, but felt New Futures was adequately funded.

Careers advice and employability support

Careers advice and employability support were integral to all the pilots, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants. Careers coaches were most valued by participants when they had a strong understanding of the local labour market and connections with employers. Pilot staff reported that effective support depended on tailoring careers guidance to the individual. Support with practical employability skills, such as CV writing and interview practice, was highly beneficial to participants, helping them to gain employment and giving participants confidence in their own ability to apply for jobs.

Training offer

Across pilots, the training offer was considered a successful part of New Futures, and a key driver of participants' employment outcomes. Participants benefitted from intensive training, which enabled them to develop the technical skills required for career change. The findings also demonstrated the importance of training that was sufficiently comprehensive to meet employment goals, and flexible enough to be beneficial for participants with different levels of ability.

The accessibility of training courses was an important consideration as some potential participants were unable to attend training delivered during working hours or due to childcare responsibilities. Although some pilots offered more flexible provision, such as evening sessions or blended learning, barriers to access limited the attraction of pilots to employed career changers. Financial challenges also limited access to the Belfast pilot, since many participants needed to resign from their existing job to attend training.

Wraparound support was important in supporting participants to complete training. Pilot staff and participants saw the identification and development of transferrable soft skills as being vital to help career changers achieve their long-term employment ambitions.

Sectoral focus

Two pilots had a sectoral focus; Wales and Belfast focused on technical training and careers support to enter the technology sector. In Wales and Belfast participants often cited the sectoral focus as a key motivator for their involvement.

Importance of pilot staff

The qualitative fieldwork demonstrated the importance of highly skilled and effective pilot staff to successful pilot delivery. Pilot leads and participants emphasised that careers coaches had extensive knowledge of local labour markets, which enabled them to provide a package of support tailored to local vacancies. Participants appreciated careers coaches' person-centric approach, which included dedicating time to understand participants and identifying their transferable skills. In addition, staff across pilots made use of contacts in existing networks to generate referrals to the pilot.

Impact of employer involvement with staff design

Pilot staff and employers in Edinburgh and Belfast highlighted how employer co-design of training packages ensured participants were equipped with skills needed in the industry in which the career changer was seeking work. Greater employer involvement was thought to increase the likelihood of positive job outcomes. It was also thought beneficial to involve more than one employer in the design process to reduce reliance on individual employers.

New Futures framework

Pilot staff felt the focus of New Futures on supporting career change through a combination of reskilling, careers advice and coaching set it apart from other interventions. Ensuring support was distinct from existing provision was essential to the success of New Futures. In addition, pilots had sufficient flexibility to design provision to meet local needs. However, this level of flexibility also resulted in some aspects of delivery being beyond the original scope.

Working with other organisations

Across pilots, employers had different levels of involvement in pilot design. This could range from playing a central role in pilot design to leading careers sessions and, on some occasions, providing work placements. Direct interactions with employers helped participants learn about a range of careers and understand skills requirements, as well as providing networking opportunities. Employers reported that engagement with the pilots aided recruitment and candidates were generally high calibre. However, pilots reported difficulty in securing buy in from larger local employers who did not always understand the career change goals of New Futures, especially as they often had no direct involvement in the pilot. In addition, job opportunities for New Futures participants did not always materialise on completion of courses.

Pilots benefited from partnership working between lead organisations and local stakeholders, such as skills agencies. Local stakeholders signposted support to a broad range of potential participants and enabled staff to build on their local knowledge and expertise in particular sectors. Partnership working was most successful where pilots were able to leverage existing relationships with staff at partner organisations. In some cases pilots found referral partners had difficulty in understanding the career change aims of New Futures, and so occasionally referred unsuitable participants.

Working with voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations was a core requirement of New Futures funding. Although there were some limited examples of VCS involvement, L&W programme staff felt that it did not meet initial expectations and was often seen as a box to tick rather than an opportunity to maximise long term outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Delivery organisations and commissioners should ensure career change provision incorporates personalised tailored support, careers advice and guidance, targeted training provision and wraparound personal support. In-work support should also be

available but is likely to be required by only a small proportion of participants. Programmes should also identify, and seek to address, local gaps in provision.

2. Delivery organisations and commissioners should ensure that practical employability skills, such as CV writing and interview practice, and support to identify transferable skills are included alongside tailored careers advice and guidance in career change programmes. Commissioners should also consider the wider benefits of these aspects of provision outside the achievement of immediate employment outcomes.
3. The use of multiple media and methods of engagement is important for successful outreach and recruitment to career change programmes, with in-person engagement especially effective. Delivery organisations and commissioners should also ensure that sufficient time and resources are available prior to commencement for the development of a detailed and flexible recruitment strategy.
4. Delivery organisations should ensure that messaging in recruitment materials focuses on the core aims of the programme and how it will support participants, tailored to the local context. Messaging should continuously be tested and adapted during delivery to ensure it is effective and supports recruitment.
5. Delivery organisations should consider how training could be made more accessible, such as by providing increased flexibility in delivery times and options for less intensive provision over a longer duration. Where participants are required to leave existing employment, delivery organisations and commissioners should consider whether financial support could be built into programmes.
6. Delivery staff should leverage their existing networks for participant referral, identification of appropriate training provision and employer engagement. Where staff do not have access to existing contacts, delivery organisations should encourage their rapid development. In addition, it is essential for delivery staff to have sufficient labour market knowledge for the programme's area of focus.
7. Delivery organisations should ensure that referral partners are fully aware of, and understand, eligibility criteria, to prevent referrals of individuals outside of the scope of the programme. Findings demonstrate the importance of a level of flexibility within funding criteria, to enable adaptation of delivery if required.
8. Delivery organisations and commissioners should ensure that employer engagement is a key focus of programme development, and that sufficient time and resources are available for this activity. All parties should also consider potential volatility in terms of the level of interest, engagement and commitment of individual employers, and ensure that engagement plans are realistic and flexible prior to commencement.

Introduction

Policy context and background

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) developed and delivered pilots that aimed to support workers who needed to reskill as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. While Covid-19 was primarily a public health crisis, it also led to economic challenges, with workers in some sectors having to find alternative employment. These employment impacts were not equally distributed and in many cases exacerbated previous inequalities, with individuals in low paid work, living in localities with already high unemployment and working in at-risk sectors among those most likely to lose their job³.

The pandemic accelerated a wider trend towards career changing, caused by longer working lives and long-term shifts in demography, technology and policy leading to an increasing need for people to update their skills and change roles more often during their careers.⁴ In order to address this challenge, L&W identified that there was a need for high-quality, locally-based programmes of support with career change. These programmes would ideally seek to engage at-risk workers, developing and delivering skills provision to meet the needs of current and future jobs.

New Futures

L&W developed a pilot programme of support for career changers, called New Futures. This was financed by the Covid-19 Support Fund and aimed to support workers who needed to reskill as a result of the pandemic. Place-based pilots were designed to build locally-led solutions to tackle retraining challenges, tailored to the needs of local labour markets and the skills of local populations. Alongside the pilots, L&W evaluated the interventions to develop the evidence base on supporting reskilling for career change to inform future policy and practice.

New Futures was designed in response to:

1. the existing adult reskilling crisis, further accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic
2. the decline in participation in learning and training in the UK over the last decade
3. the evidence gap regarding effective reskilling interventions.

Grant funding was awarded to organisations to run pilots in the following areas: Edinburgh, led by Capital City Partnership (April 2022 to September 2023); Belfast, led by Belfast City Council in collaboration with FIT (June 2022 to September 2023); Tees Valley, led by Tees Valley Combined Authority in collaboration with Redcar and Cleveland District Council (October 2022 to December 2023); and Wales, led by Chwarae Teg (February 2023 to

³ Learning and Work Institute, 2021. [One year on: The labour market impacts of coronavirus and priorities for the years ahead](#).

⁴ Learning and Work Institute, 2023. [All change: Understanding and supporting retraining and career change](#).

October 2023).⁵ A fifth pilot commenced in Devon, led by Devon County Council, but closed soon after starting as it was unable to recruit a sufficient number of participants (see New Futures overview chapter).

Each New Futures pilot was required to include the following features:

- targeted outreach and engagement with potential career changers
- high-quality careers information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- skills training
- building the capacity of voluntary and community sector organisations
- availability of support to ensure sustained job outcomes. This included working directly with employers and/or offering participants in-work support.

The specific delivery model varied between pilots based on local factors such as growth sectors, infrastructure and needs, and based on the characteristics and experience of the pilot leads. In addition, pilot design evolved over the course of New Futures. These issues are discussed in more detail in the New Futures overview chapter.

Aims of evaluation

The evaluation aimed to explore the extent to which interventions consisting of the delivery elements described in the previous section are effective in supporting individuals to retrain and change career. This included considering the extent to which different outreach approaches were effective in targeting and recruiting those who may not have previously accessed employment support services. The evaluation also sought to assess what works in supporting individuals into reskilling for career change, how the approaches used produced an effect and in what circumstances. The evaluation also explored the impact of pilot activities on different groups of participants, taking into account their personal characteristics and background.

At a programme level, the evaluation aimed to identify contextual factors which affected pilot delivery, including how outcomes varied with different pilot designs. It also sought to identify lessons learned to inform future delivery and national policy.

Evaluation activities focused on:

1. understanding and monitoring the implementation of the pilots and their outcomes
2. identifying and documenting key learning on what does, and does not, work in pilot delivery

⁵ Commencement dates refer to when pilots were open to participant registration or referral.

3. assessing the pilots' impact on their intended beneficiaries and the mechanisms that led to those changes.

Structure of report

This report begins by setting out the evaluation methods and giving an overview of New Futures and of the pilots. It then discusses the evaluation findings and lessons learned in relation to four key areas: participant engagement; participant outcomes; what works in reskilling; and working with other organisations to deliver reskilling programmes. The report concludes by summarising the key findings and lessons learned.

Methods

The following data sources were used to evaluate the New Futures pilots:

- management information (MI) collected by pilot staff
- qualitative data, based on in-depth interviews with pilot staff, partners, employers, programme staff and participants, participant focus groups and local area observations
- pre- and post-intervention surveys of pilot participants.

This report draws on data collected, and fieldwork conducted, across the course of pilot delivery, including qualitative fieldwork and analysis of MI data transferred by pilots. There is also limited analysis of pre- and post-intervention surveys, but, given low response rates⁶ it has not been possible to conduct in-depth or distance travelled analysis of survey responses. Therefore, only limited cross-sectional analysis of survey data has been included. Surveys were distributed by delivery partners, and it is likely that low response rates were at least partially due to the lack of direct contact between L&W and participants; this limited our ability to send reminders and chase responses.

Qualitative fieldwork was conducted in two waves. The timing of the first wave of interviews depended on the stage of delivery that the respective pilots were at. In Belfast and Edinburgh, fieldwork took place between October and November 2022, in Tees Valley fieldwork was in January 2023, while in Wales it took place in April and May 2023. Across all sites, wave 2 interviews were conducted between October and December 2023⁷.

Observational site visits took place between the two waves of interviews in June and July 2023. The following table maps the number of interviews, focus groups⁸ and observational site visits conducted in each pilot area across these two waves. The report also draws on regular discussions with pilot staff over the course of the evaluation. In the analysis of qualitative interviews, references to **pilot staff include staff who were involved in day to day delivery of pilot support**, such as careers coaches, as well as staff from the organisations responsible for leading each pilot. **Programme staff are those who were responsible for developing the pilots** at L&W and who had oversight of delivery across all pilots.

⁶ The pre-intervention survey was completed by 111 participants, including 21 in Belfast, 16 in Edinburgh, 42 in Tees Valley, and 32 in Wales. The post-intervention survey was completed by 72 participants, including 10 in Belfast, 19 in Edinburgh, 21 in Tees Valley, and 22 in Wales. Only 28 participants completed both surveys.

⁷ Some of the participant interviews were conducted outside of these windows, depending on their availability.

⁸ In person participant focus groups were conducted only in Edinburgh and Tees Valley during the first wave of fieldwork. There were challenges recruiting enough participants for individual virtual interviews, so this was addressed through face to face focus groups.

Table 1: Fieldwork conducted for each pilot

Pilot	Fieldwork	Wave 1	Wave 2
Belfast	Staff interviews	4	2
	Employer interviews	2	0
	Stakeholder interviews	0	0
	Participant interviews	6	11
	Site visit	1	0
Edinburgh	Staff interviews	6	3
	Employer interviews	3	2
	Stakeholder interviews	1	1
	Participant interviews	3	10
	Focus group attendees	5	0
Tees Valley	Site visit	1	0
	Staff interviews	4	3
	Employer interviews	0	1
	Stakeholder interviews	1	1
	Participant interviews	2	6
Wales	Focus group attendees	4	0
	Site visit	1	0
	Staff interviews	4	2
	Employer interviews	0	1
	Stakeholder interviews	3	2
Other	Participant interviews	8	11
	Devon staff interviews	0	1
Other	Programme staff interviews	0	2

Impact evaluation

A separate impact evaluation will be conducted for pilots with a sufficient participant population for statistical analysis. The analysis will use data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to estimate counterfactual outcomes (the outcomes that pilot participants would have been expected to attain, had they not taken part in the pilot). These counterfactual outcomes will be deducted from observed outcomes for pilot participants to estimate the causal impact of participation in the pilot. It is necessary to wait for publication of detailed quarterly LFS datasets for the relevant time periods before conducting the impact analysis, so it has not been possible to incorporate this into the current report. Instead, a separate report on the impact evaluation will be published in Autumn 2024.

Limitations

Data collected in the qualitative interviews indicated that some participants were not in fact ‘career changers’ – the target demographic for New Futures. Although some pilots did adhere closely to the eligibility criteria and ensured funding was used to support people who were genuinely looking to explore a new career path, a number of participants in some pilots did not strictly meet these criteria. For example, some were entering the labour market for the first time having just completed a degree, and others had been out of work for a long time and had significant barriers to employment. The inclusion of those who were not ‘career changers’ in some pilots limits the extent to which conclusions can be drawn about effective practice for career changers.

New Futures overview

This chapter gives an overview of New Futures, including the programme-level theory of change, a description of each pilot and an overview of participant numbers.

Programme-level theory of change

Each pilot was supported to develop a theory of change (ToC) for their delivery prior to commencement. Individual pilot ToC's were used alongside programme-level documentation and the overall aims and features of New Futures to develop a programme-level ToC. This is shown in figure 1, with relevant context, assumptions and risks summarised in figure 2.

The programme-level ToC sets out the relationship between inputs and activities common across the pilots, with the expected outputs, outcomes and long-term impacts. This is framed against the wider context and rationale of New Futures, alongside relevant assumptions and risks. The evaluation report explores areas of focus and research questions identified in the programme-level ToC.

The programme-level ToC is based on common elements across the pilots. However, although all pilots shared the same core features (as outlined in the Introduction), there were some key differences in their design and delivery. These included:

- **Employer involvement.** The nature and level of employer involvement varied substantially across the pilots. The Belfast pilot had the greatest employer involvement, with active involvement in course design, guaranteed work experience and job interviews. The Edinburgh pilot involved employers in the co-design of one specific training route, but otherwise employers did not have direct involvement in pilot design or delivery. In other pilots involvement by employers was limited to highlighting vacancies to pilot staff or providing short placement opportunities for participants.
- **Target sector.** The Belfast and Wales pilots specifically focused on the technology sector. In contrast, the Edinburgh and Tees Valley pilots did not have a specific sectoral focus.
- **Target cohort.** Most of the pilots were open to anyone who met the eligibility criteria⁹. However, the Wales pilot focused specifically on women. This was intended to address the underrepresentation of women in the technology sector and occupations, and to address the specific needs of women changing career. As well as checking eligibility, the Belfast pilot also included a formal selection process. This was included to make sure that potential participants were best suited to the intensity of the delivery of the support in this pilot. This process was unique to the Belfast pilot.

⁹ The original criteria were that the pandemic must have affected participants' employment. They may have been subject to furlough or at risk of redundancy. Some participants may have become unemployed and found a new job but were keen to secure a career change.

- **Intensity of provision.** Participation in the Belfast pilot and one stream of the Wales pilot required full-time attendance, which would not be suited to the needs of those in full-time work. In contrast, other provision in the Wales pilot and provision in Tees Valley and Edinburgh was less intensive, and aimed to fit around employment.

Figure 1: Programme-level theory of change

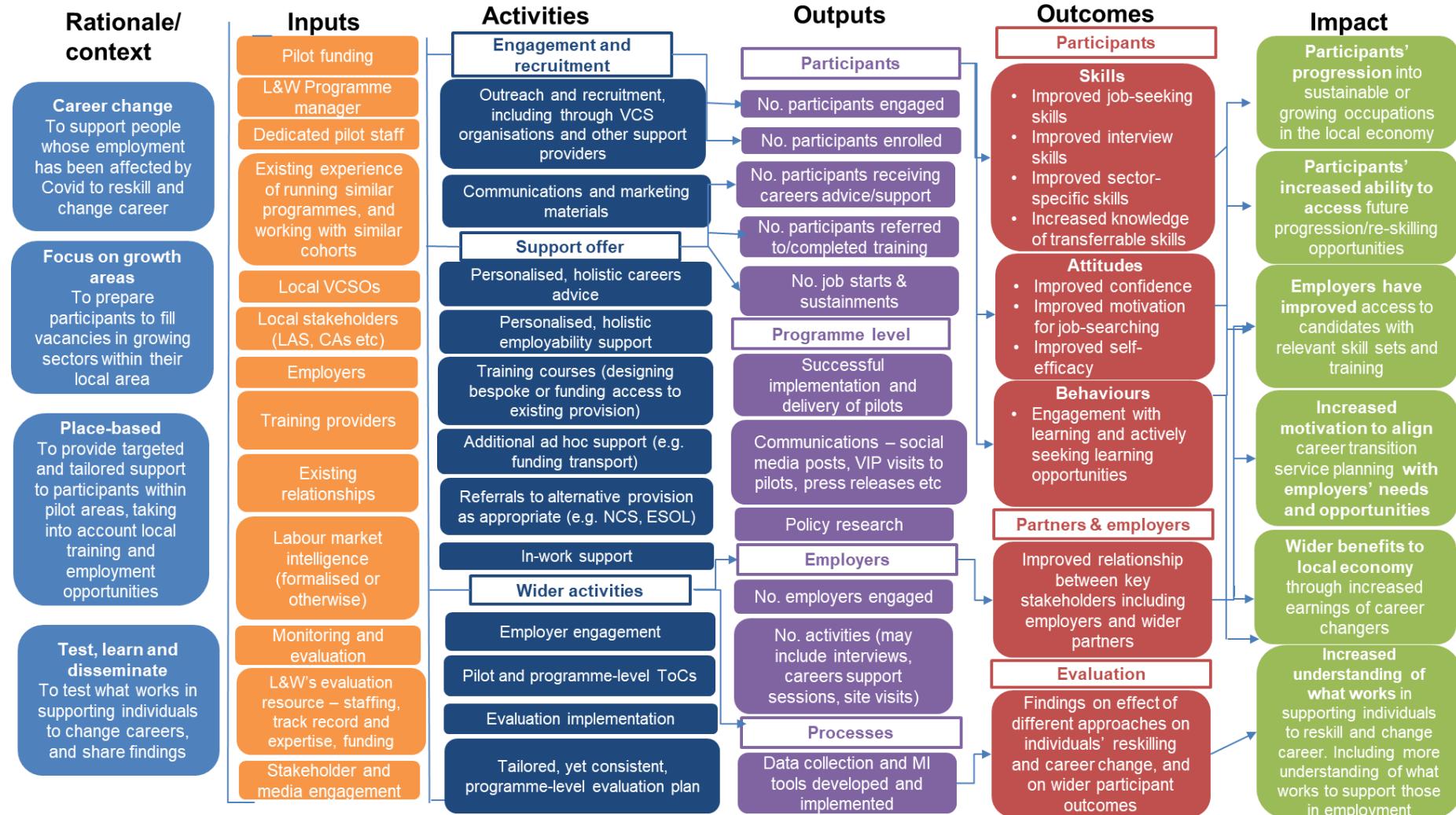
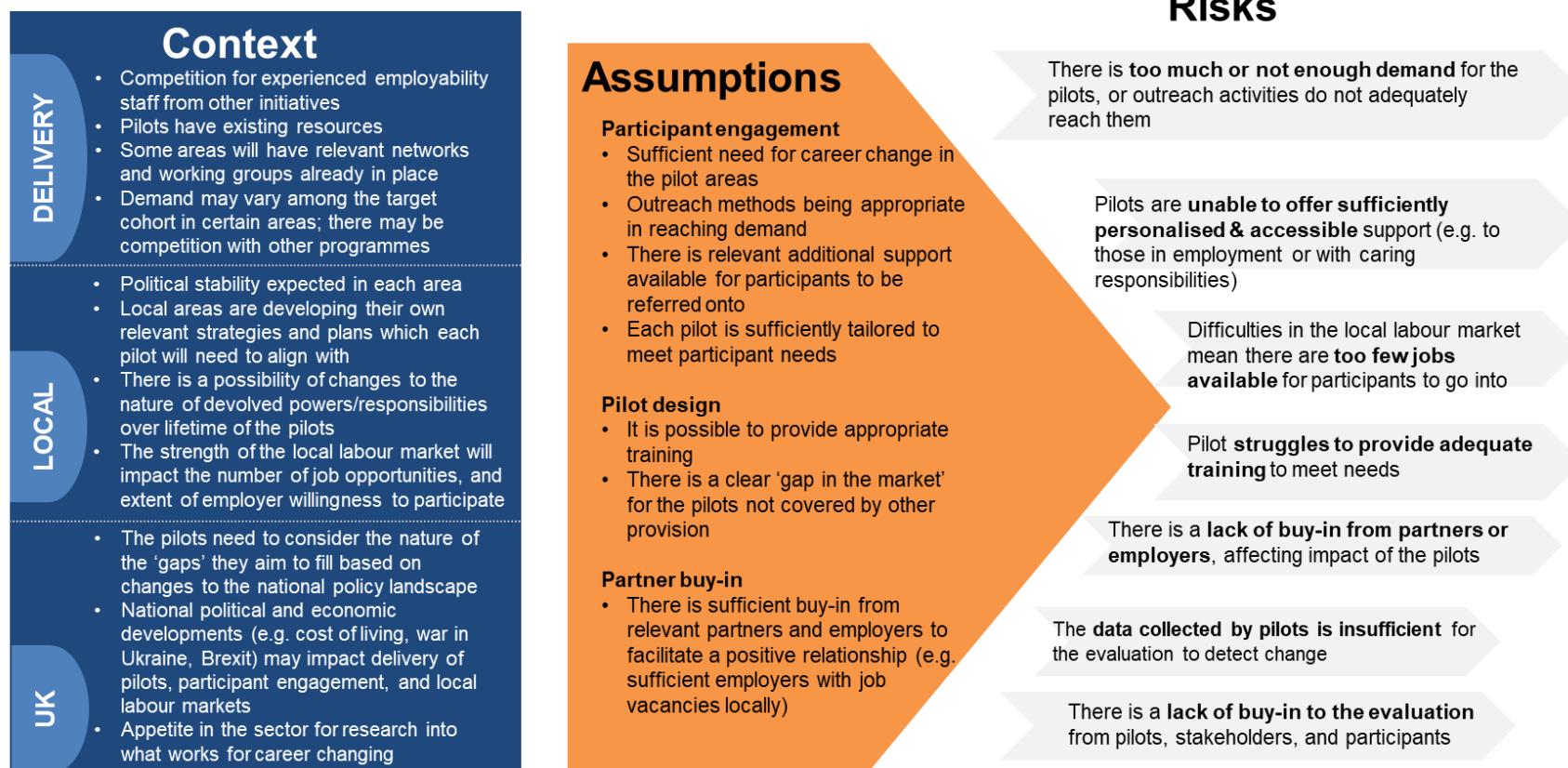


Figure 2: Programme-level context, assumptions and risks



Pilots

This section outlines the original design for each of the pilot areas and details differences between this and subsequent delivery.

Belfast

The Belfast pilot was led by Belfast City Council (BCC) and delivered by FIT Ltd. The pilot was based on an existing model of delivery of employment support through an intensive academy programme. It sought to test using this existing model to support participants to change career and gain employment in the technology sector. The pilot also aimed to test the effectiveness of involving employers in the design and delivery of support.

Participants were selected to receive support from the pilot after completing an aptitude test and informal interview. It was envisaged that after running a full-time Tech Academy (lasting for 16 weeks) that other Tech Academies would run during the period of pilot delivery. A period of work experience was to be included in each academy so that participants could access work-related learning as part of the support. FIT staff were to offer employability support to all participants both during the academy, and upon completion. Employers in the technology sector were to be integral to the design of the academies, so that the skills participants gained matched employer needs. These employers typically recruit graduates with relevant degrees, so it was hoped that the academies would enable employers to recruit from a broader candidate pool. All participants were to be offered a job interview with one of the employers involved in the co-design toward the end of the support.

The Belfast pilot delivered three full-time academies, involving employers in the co-design. The first academy had the most success in terms of participants moving straight into job roles with employers in the technology sector on completion of the support. BCC found it challenging to identify a different group of employers willing to engage with the subsequent academies (in part due to a slow-down in technology sector recruitment in Northern Ireland). This reduced opportunities for work experience and guaranteed interviews for later participants. FIT staff were able to provide employability support to participants once their Tech Academy had ended, but take up of in-work support among participants who gained employment has been limited.

Edinburgh

The Edinburgh pilot was led by Capital City Partnership and built on existing employability infrastructure. The design recognised that career changers are more likely to be in employment than traditional users of employment support and may not have used employment support services previously. Participants were to be offered flexible career information, advice and guidance from a careers advisor to help them to identify a feasible career pathway. They would also be supported through a flexible programme of training and upskilling drawn from an existing Training and Skills Framework, with a focus on helping participants to gain employment in growth sectors. It was envisaged that the pilot would liaise with local employers to identify their skills and recruitment needs to provide participants with tailored support aligned with the job opportunities likely to be available in

the local labour market. The pilot aimed to test the efficacy flexible, person-centred careers advice and coaching.

The pilot provided intensive support to participants, but for those participants who were in employment when they enrolled, it proved challenging for them to fully engage with all aspects of the support, especially as accessing training courses during the working day was not a realistic option for some participants. Engaging employers was also challenging, so pilot staff drew on their own knowledge of the local labour market, rather than tailoring provision to the skills needs of specific employers. Pilot staff also found it difficult to provide in-work support to those who successfully gained employment.

Tees Valley

The Tees Valley pilot was delivered by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council on behalf of the Tees Valley Combined Authority. Central to the support were careers coaches who were to provide holistic support to participants. This was to include the provision of information, advice and guidance, developing skills and career plans, identifying and supporting participants into training, and support with job search. Part of the budget was set aside as a flexible pot to fund relevant participant training not eligible for funding through the Adult Education Budget (AEB). It was planned that coaching support would continue for all participants for up to six months once they had gained employment. Support was to be offered to local residents over the age of 30 and it was envisaged that a large number of participants would be able to upskill and take up employment opportunities at the Teesworks Freeport. It was also hoped that the voluntary and commercial (VCS) sector would play a key role in referring participants into the support. The pilot hoped to test the effectiveness of an intensive and sustained careers coaching model.

The intensive, person-centred model was a success, but pilot staff found it challenging to focus the provision on those most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Referrals into the support were also challenging as the envisaged volume of employment opportunities at Teesworks was not available during the time period of pilot delivery. It had been hoped that the need for workers to re-skill to enter the new jobs created would provide pilot staff with a core group of participants. As this did not happen it meant that pilot staff had to spend more time than anticipated identifying suitable participants. Individuals who were being supported by the local VCS sector had different priorities and needs compared with the pilot cohort, so the number of participants that they were able to refer was limited. Pilot staff found it challenging to keep in touch with participants who gained employment, so they were not able to offer the planned six-month in-work support package to many participants.

Wales

The Wales pilot was led by Chwarae Teg and aimed to support women to change career into roles within the digital sector, where there are skills shortages in the South Wales area. The pilot sought to address potential access barriers which are disproportionately

encountered by women. This included providing support with childcare and transport and using a blended hybrid approach for delivery. The pilot aimed to provide access to digital skills training, supported by a Chwarae Teg careers coach tasked with giving guidance to help participants build a career pathway into the sector. Pilot staff were also expected to signpost participants to activities designed to build their career and overall confidence. Digital skills training was to be offered by two key delivery partners: Code First Girls and the Open University. The pilot also partnered with FinTech Wales to help broker employment opportunities for participants.

Referrals into the pilot were to be achieved by pilot staff running preview events focused on the need for more women to enter the digital sector and giving information about available job opportunities. Social media campaigns, partnership working with referral agencies and community and business engagement activities were also expected to be key outreach activities.

The start of pilot delivery was delayed due to challenges in recruiting staff to run the pilot and delays in setting up a funding contract. This had an impact on the scale and impact of outreach activities. Due to this delay, pilot staff had to focus on making sure participants were enrolled in time to start the digital training courses, as the start dates were immovable. This meant that some participants commenced their training courses without having had an appointment with their careers coach. Due to data sharing restrictions, pilot staff were not able to access contact details for all of the women who enrolled on the Code First Girls short courses. This meant that they were reliant on participants to approach them for the career support and coaching elements of the pilot, rather than pilot staff proactively contacting all participants as was originally envisaged. Another challenge was that the anticipated volume of vacancies in the digital sector in Wales failed to materialise during pilot delivery, which had a negative impact on employment outcomes.

Devon

The Devon pilot was led by Devon County Council and aimed to test the role of housing associations in supporting career change, and sector-specific mentoring. The pilot was specifically focused on developing green skills for roles in the retrofit and construction sectors, as well as signposting to support and training for other sectors where appropriate. Participants were to have access to intensive and personalised careers coaching and mentoring, as well as relevant skills training and work experience to enable them to change career. The target cohort was residents from a local housing association.

The pilot was unable to attract potential participants and so it was agreed that the Devon pilot would close. One of the main challenges experienced by the pilot was that the number of individuals wishing to change career in the target area was much smaller than expected, with staff explaining that local residents did not understand the retrofit industry. In addition, the need for retrofit skills and associated jobs in the local area did not expand as predicted. Taken together, these factors substantially reduced the pool of potential local participants and viability of the pilot.

Participant numbers

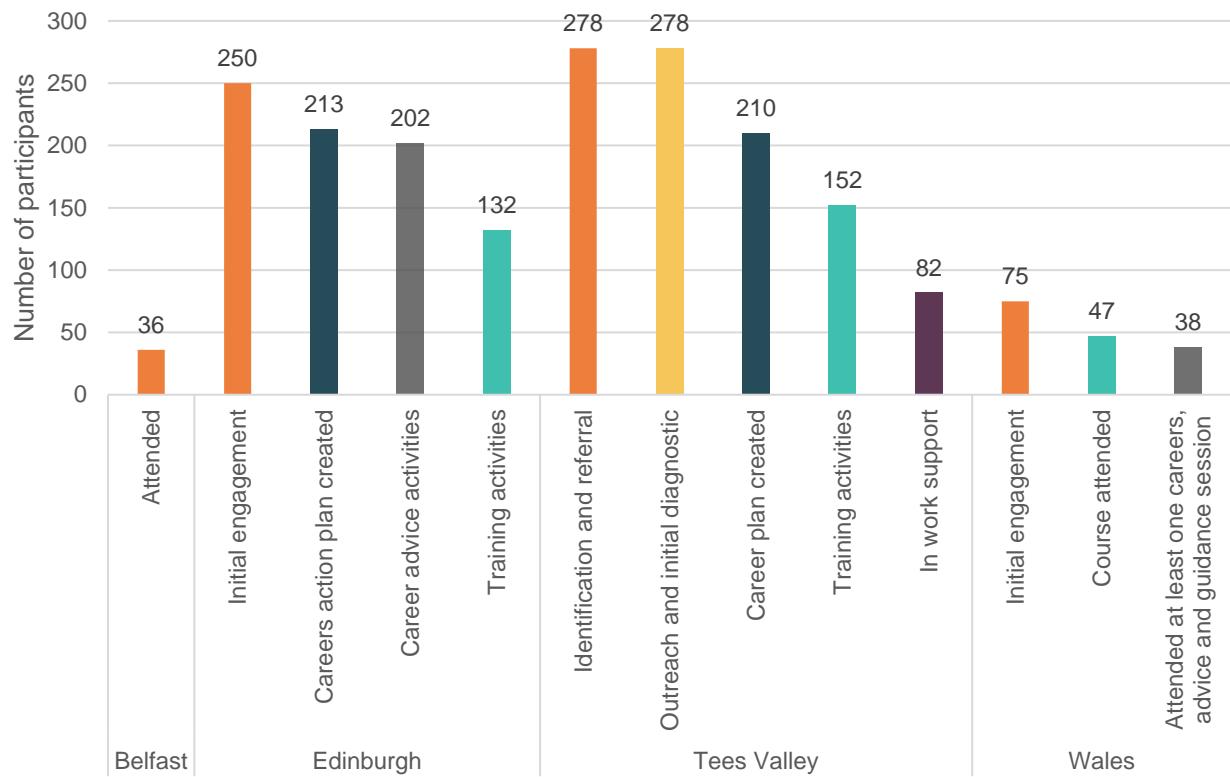
The pilot sites reported that a total of 1,143 individuals had some level of interaction with New Futures. However, a high proportion of these did not register on the pilots, and so cannot be considered participants. This is a common feature of many pilots where outreach engages a larger number of people than ultimately take active part in the pilot.

MI returns showed 639 participants registered across all pilots. This included 36 participants in Belfast, 250 in Edinburgh, 278 in Tees Valley and 75 in Wales. However, these figures included participants with substantially different levels of involvement in pilot activity. Figure 3 shows participant numbers by pilot stage. Although the actual stages varied between pilots, it is apparent that for most pilots there was a steady drop in numbers from initial engagement and registration to participation in careers advice activities and training – with a substantial minority completing no activities after registration. Again, it is common for pilots to have drop off between stages as people decide it is not for them or get help from other sources or find jobs themselves. The exception is Belfast, where the design of the pilot ensured all participants took part in each stage of delivery.

In both Edinburgh and Tees Valley, a large majority of registered participants took part in careers advice activities. In Edinburgh, 85% of participants completed a careers action plan after registration, and 81% completed at least one careers advice session. In Tees Valley all registered participants received an initial diagnostic interview to assess their current employment status, work experience and skills, and just over three quarters (76%) completed a career plan. In contrast, due to its different design, only one half of registered participants in Wales (51%) attended at least one careers, advice and guidance session.

Just over one half of registered participants in Edinburgh and Tees Valley participated in at least one training activity, with respective figures of 53% and 55%. This comparatively low figure is due to training not being considered necessary for some career plans in Tees Valley, and some participants in both pilots dropping out of delivery or progressing into employment between the development of career plans and the start of training sessions. In addition, sessions on employability and transferable skills in Edinburgh may have been included in careers advice activities, rather than recorded as separate training. Due to its different design, a slightly higher proportion of registered participants in Wales attended a training course (63%).

Figure 3: Participation by pilot stage



Base: Belfast = 36; Edinburgh = 250; Tees Valley = 278; Wales = 75

As noted, stages of delivery varied across pilots. Therefore, to facilitate comparison across pilots, specific stages were identified where individuals would have had comparable levels of participation in pilot activities. In the remainder of the report, statistical analysis focuses on the subset of participants who engaged in particular activities in each pilot, unless otherwise stated. This included:

- Belfast - everyone who attended delivery sessions (36)
- Edinburgh – everyone who attended at least one career advice activity (202)
- Tees Valley – everyone who had created a career plan (210)
- Wales – everyone who attended at least one careers, advice and guidance session (38).

Participant characteristics and engagement

This chapter describes the characteristics of New Futures participants, including their demographics and employment status prior to commencement, based on analysis of MI data¹⁰. It also discusses the methods used to engage participants across the pilots, including their effectiveness and the challenges faced.

Participant characteristics

The findings show that New Futures as a whole attracted a diverse range of participants, but there was a high level of variation between individual pilots.

Gender

Analysis of MI data shows that, overall, the pilots engaged a higher proportion of men (58%) than women (42%). **However, there was a large variation between pilots.** Tees Valley had a substantially higher proportion of men, who composed 82% of participants. Similarly, Belfast had a higher proportion of men than women (21 out of 35). In contrast, Edinburgh was the most gender-balanced pilot, with women making up 56% of participants and men 44%. Due to its specific focus on women, all participants in the Wales pilot were female.

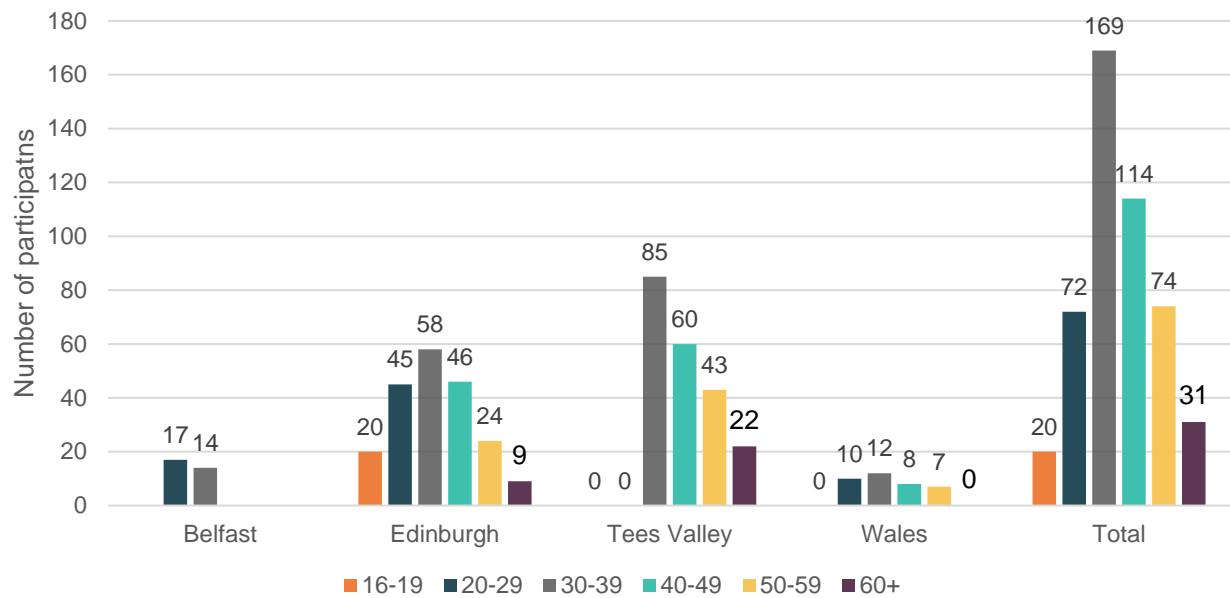
Age group

At a programme level **participation was greatest among those aged between 30 and 39**, who represented over a third of participants (35%) (see Figure 4). Take-up by those aged 20 to 29 (15%) was less than half the level of the 30 to 39 group. Just under one quarter (24%) of participants were aged 40 to 49, while 16% were aged 50 to 59. There were relatively few participants aged between 16 and 19 (4%) or 60 plus (6%). This is in part due to the focus of New Futures on supporting career change by those who were already in the labour market and wished to move into a new sector.

The largest group of participants in each individual pilot was also those aged 30 to 39, with the exception of Belfast where the largest age group was those aged 20 to 29 (17 out of 36 participants). Belfast also had fewer participants in older age groups, with only four participants aged 40 and above. In addition, due to its restrictions on eligibility, Tees Valley did not have any participants aged under 30.

¹⁰ The analysis focuses on cases where the characteristic is recorded in the MI; since data are missing for some participants, totals vary.

Figure 4: Participants by age group



Base: Belfast = 31; Edinburgh = 202; Tees Valley = 210; Wales = 37

Ethnic group

Across New Futures, 70% of participants reported that they were from white backgrounds¹¹, with over one quarter (27%) from minority ethnic backgrounds (see Figure 5). This is substantially higher than the equivalent figures for the combined pilot areas, where 8% of the working age population (16-64) and 7% of 25-49 year olds (the group most likely to be career changers) were from minority ethnic backgrounds¹². This suggests that **New Futures has been successful in reaching minority ethnic career changers**. The most common minority ethnic group among pilot participants was those from Asian backgrounds¹³ (13%), followed by black¹⁴ (9%) and mixed/other¹⁵ (7%).

However, **there was substantial variation across pilots**. In Tees Valley, for example, only 4% of participants reported being from minority ethnic backgrounds – compared with 9% of working age residents and 11% of 25-49 year olds in Tees Valley¹⁶. In contrast, over one half of participants in Edinburgh (51%) identified as being from minority ethnic backgrounds. Given that the equivalent figure for the working age population of Edinburgh

¹¹ There were slight variations in ethnic categories and data collected across pilots, but broadly this group included white British, white Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller and other white background.

¹² L&W calculations. Annual Population Survey (Jan to Dec 2023). Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. [Census 2021](#). It should be noted that an ethnic breakdown of Belfast residents aged 25-49 could not be identified, and so the calculation includes the working age figure for Belfast.

¹³ This group broadly included Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and other Asian background.

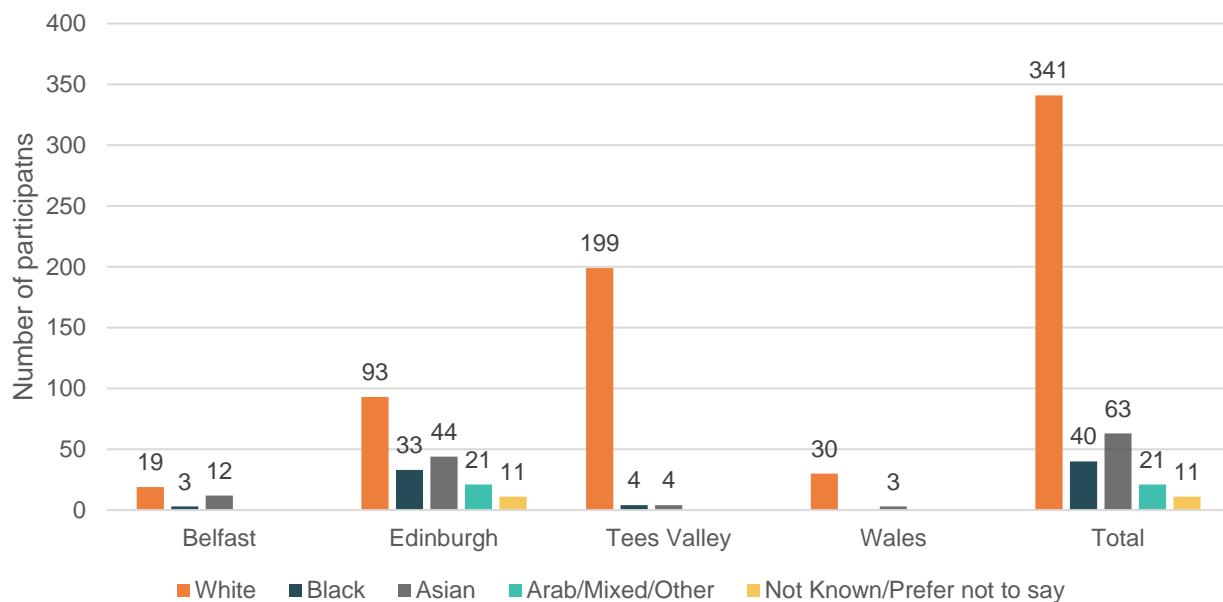
¹⁴ This group broadly included African, Caribbean and other black background.

¹⁵ This group included all other ethnic groups.

¹⁶ Annual Population Survey (Jan to Dec 2023).

is 15% and for 25-49 year olds is 14%¹⁷, this suggests the Edinburgh pilot was particularly successful in engaging participants from minority ethnic backgrounds. Although based on far smaller numbers, the figures show reasonable representation in Belfast (17 out of 36, compared to 7% of the working age population¹⁸) and Wales (7 out of 37, compared to 6% of the working age population and 7% of 25-49 year olds¹⁹).

Figure 5: Participation by ethnic group



Base: Belfast = 34; Edinburgh = 202; Tees Valley = 207; Wales = 33

Employment status

The majority of participants for whom data were available (65%) were out of work when they started on the pilot, with under a third (32%) employed or self-employed (see Figure 6). A further 4% were in full-time education. **However, there were large variations in the proportion of employed participants between the different pilots.**

Almost all participants in Wales were in employment on starting the pilot (37 out of 38). Across the other three pilots fewer than one half of participants were in employment, with the next highest proportion in Belfast (17 out of 36). Fewer than one quarter of participants in Edinburgh (23%) or Tees Valley (21%) were in employment on commencement.

Where participants were out of work at the time of starting the pilot, just under half (49%) had been out of work for less than six months. A further 15% were out of work for between six months and a year, 17% between one and two years, 8% between two and three years and 11% for more than three years.

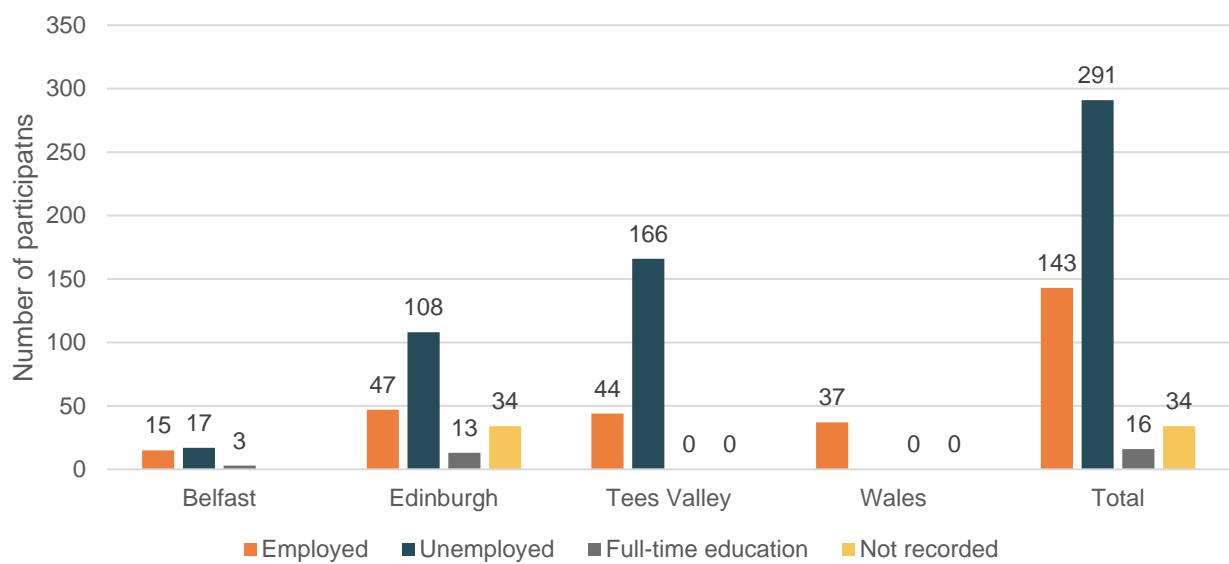
¹⁷ Annual Population Survey (Jan to Dec 2023).

¹⁸ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. [Census 2021](#). An ethnic breakdown of Belfast residents aged 25-49 was not available.

¹⁹ Office for National Statistics. [Annual Population Survey \(Jan to Dec 2023\)](#).

While a substantial minority of participants appeared relatively far from the labour market upon commencement, the majority of respondents to the pre-survey had performed at least one action to actively look for work within the previous four weeks. These activities included searching for jobs, or information about jobs, online (77%) and asking friends or contacts about job opportunities (47%).

Figure 6: Participant employment status



Base: Belfast = 35; Edinburgh = 202; Tees Valley = 210; Wales = 37

Benefit status

Over three fifths of participants were claiming benefits prior to commencement (62%), including both out of work and in work benefits. The most common benefit claimed was Universal Credit; 73% of benefit claimants were claiming Universal Credit while out of work, 7% were claiming it while working and 5% were claiming it with an unknown employment status. A further 7% of benefit claimants were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance. Twelve per cent of benefit claimants were receiving another benefit such as Employment Support Allowance or Disability Living Allowance.

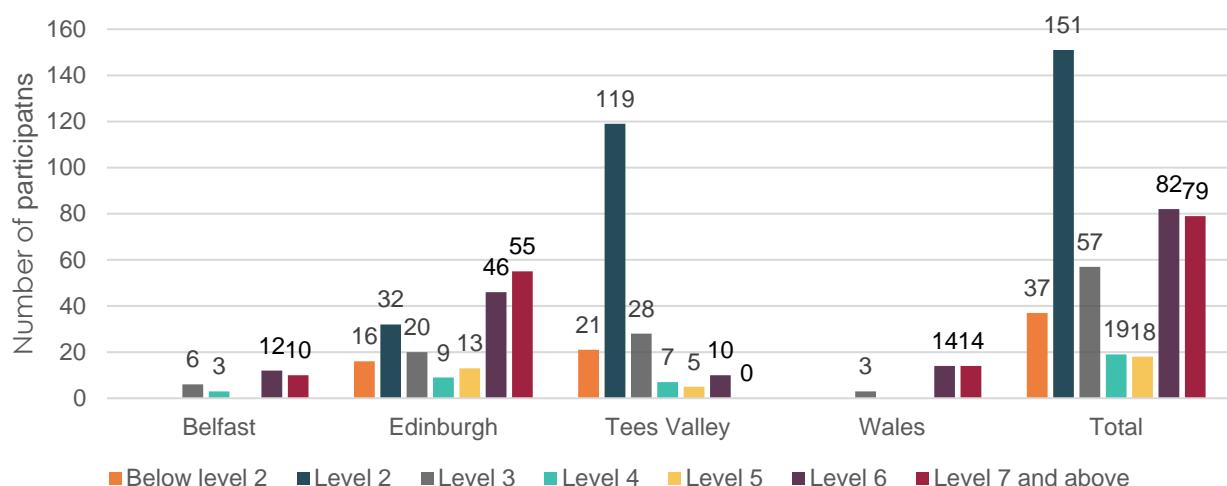
However, there was substantial variation in benefit receipt across the pilots, reflecting the varied socioeconomic background of pilot cohorts. Tees Valley had the highest proportion of participants claiming benefits (81%), followed by Edinburgh (56%) and Belfast (36%). In Wales only 3 in 38 participants were in receipt of benefits.

Highest qualification

Across New Futures as a whole, the most common highest level of qualification when starting the pilot was level 2 (34%). However, there was a substantial difference between Tees Valley and the other pilots (see Figure 7).

In Tees Valley, the highest qualification level of 63% of participants was level 2; it was below level 2 for 12% of participants and at level 3 for 15%. Only 12% of participants were qualified to level 4 or above. In contrast, in the other three pilots over one half of all participants were qualified to level 6 or above. This was the case for 28 out of 37 participants in Wales, 22 out of 36 in Belfast and 53% in Edinburgh. These findings further demonstrate the large variation in the background of pilot cohorts. They also suggest that **further targeting may be needed to ensure that participants with lower qualification levels access support.**

Figure 7: Participants' Highest Level of Qualification



Base: Belfast = 36; Edinburgh = 191; Tees Valley = 190; Wales = 37

Effective practice

All pilots used a variety of methods to engage potential participants. These included talking to people at jobs fairs and in community and public spaces such as libraries and local markets, using printed and online promotional materials, engaging community networks, referrals, and word of mouth. The use of multiple media and methods of engagement was important to successful outreach – particularly in the initial stages of pilot delivery. As pilot delivery progressed, pilot staff reported that word of mouth became especially effective for recruiting new participants.

Across most pilots, **in-person engagement was consistently considered an effective method of outreach and engagement.** Pilot staff described direct contact with participants as being integral to identifying participants who would benefit from the support. Pilot staff explained that some individuals wrongly assumed that they would not be eligible as they were currently employed. Others believed that their existing qualifications would preclude them from accessing the support. In-person contact gave staff the opportunity to clarify eligibility. For example, Edinburgh pilot staff found that in-person events such as job fairs helped them to reassure potential participants that they were eligible for the support. Additionally, in Tees Valley and Edinburgh around one half of the participants interviewed

had heard about New Futures in person at a job fair – demonstrating their effectiveness in raising awareness of the pilots. One Edinburgh participant said that talking to pilot staff face to face had motivated them to get involved because they were able to get lots of information about the pilot.

Staff acknowledged that they might not have had the same levels of engagement from participants if only online messaging had been relied upon. In Tees Valley, pilot staff explained that meeting potential participants face to face had been vital to establishing good rapport. In addition, one of their referral partners commented that they felt that their own use of direct marketing (both online and physical) was ineffective at engaging participants – and that most of their referrals were due to existing networks and contact with potential participants. On the other hand, online searching and online materials played a bigger role in participants discovering the pilot offer in Wales and Belfast. Since these pilots were focused specifically on the technology sector, these findings suggest that online marketing can play a more important role when offering a specific and focused training course than when offering more generalised careers advice.

Participants interviewed were generally positive about the messages they had received about the pilot support and **ease of registration**. The informal and person-centred nature of the initial outreach was appreciated by the majority of those interviewed, as was the support provided during the registration process. Individuals explained that this had put them at ease and had enabled them to feel confident to ask questions about what would be expected of them during the support.

“What I think they did that was great was they set up an initial meeting to talk you through the registration, so, you weren’t just doing it by yourself, you were talking face to face online as we are now, talking about confidentiality and things like that, and just talking you through the process instead of you having to do it yourself.”
(Edinburgh participant)

An exception to the positive view of the support among participants was that in Belfast some of the participants found the three-stage application process was challenging and would have appreciated more clarity on exactly what would be covered during the 16 weeks of the academy. In Wales, a few participants also faced challenges when registering that meant they were unable to participate in the training course. These findings highlight the **importance of a simple registration process and ensuring participants are supported to complete registration documents**.

All pilots also **made use of links that they had with local community networks**, such as having a physical presence at local community hubs, as a key part of their outreach activities. Pilot staff explained that potential participants could learn about the pilot support in these familiar spaces, helping to build trust between staff and participants. In Tees Valley one member of pilot staff explained that a presence in community spaces such as libraries had been important to outreach, although another felt that over-reliance on the

community hub had limited their reach within the community as a whole. A member of pilot staff in Belfast outlined just how important this type of engagement was.

“...you can’t walk into East Belfast and say, ‘I’m recruiting for a course, does anybody want to go?’ It doesn’t work like that, you have to collaborate with the local community, with those representatives that’re there in the heart of the community, that’re working with these people, there is a trust.” (Belfast pilot staff)

Indeed, as pilots became established, **word of mouth through communities became an increasingly important aspect of engagement** according to pilot staff. In Tees Valley, pilot staff said that word of mouth had played an integral role in engagement, but staff members disagreed on how effective it had been at reaching a diverse variety of people who were genuinely ready for career change. In Edinburgh, staff targeted specific communities with engagement activities with the hope that word of mouth would then spread through that community. In Belfast, participants reported having heard about the academy through word of mouth or from a friend more often than in other pilots. This was particularly mentioned by those from the Indian community.

Referrals were used across most pilots as a means of engagement and were a key way that participants had heard about the pilot. These referrals came through community organisations, training providers, and job centres. In Wales, the nature of the pilot’s relationship with the training partners meant that referrals between the pilot delivery staff and training providers went both ways – some came to New Futures and then were offered a training course, others found the training course and then were introduced to the pilot delivery provider once they had signed up.

Motivations for accessing support

Participants mentioned a number of different motivations for accessing support through New Futures. A **general desire to change career, seek work after a career break, upskill, or a feeling of discontent in their current role** motivated participants across the pilots but came through particularly strongly as reasons in Wales and Belfast. The most common career aspirations of participants who completed a pre-intervention survey were to gain new skills (68%), find a new role in a different sector or industry (47%) and gain a qualification (41%).

In Wales and Belfast the focus that the pilots had on the technology sector was a key reason why participants engaged with New Futures. Other important factors included the values and cultures of delivery organisations. For example, participants in Tees Valley described how they were motivated by friendly and approachable staff. Participants in Wales were inspired by the commitment Chwarae Teg staff demonstrated in supporting and empowering women to upskill.

“I respect the support [Chwarae Teg] offer, I think they understand women and the issues that we face.” (Wales participant)

Some practical considerations were also mentioned by participants, including the timing of support fitting around their busy working lives, and the provision of childcare support in the Belfast pilot.

Challenges with engagement

Staff across pilots identified the **emphasis of initial messaging on the impact of Covid as a key challenge** to participant engagement in the early stages of delivery. Pilot staff explained that, as time passed and the country moved on from the immediate impact of pandemic restrictions, some participants found it difficult to link their current situation to being directly impacted by Covid. Despite pilot staff identifying clear negative impacts of the pandemic on participants, especially in relation to mental health and participants' confidence in their ability to reskill,²⁰ they believed that the focus of messaging on Covid discouraged engagement. In response to this issue, pilots adapted messaging over time to reduce the focus on Covid. Pilot staff in Edinburgh explained that once more emphasis was placed on support for reskilling, more participants came forward for the pilot. These findings demonstrate the **importance of understanding the impact of messaging on the target audience and maintaining a flexible approach**.

Linked to this, pilot staff in Edinburgh described how the original Covid-related messaging had led to an **initial cohort of participants with particularly complex needs**, who required intensive mental health support. This had been challenging, as despite the individuals having a clear need for employment support, the breadth of their needs was wider than the expertise of delivery staff and the scope of the pilot.

The pilot in Wales also encountered specific challenges around engagement. Due to delays in pilot set up, **staff did not feel that they had sufficient time to adequately plan a recruitment strategy**. Pilot staff therefore had to rely heavily on their existing networks to recruit participants. Engagement activities were misaligned with the start dates for the courses on offer, and coincided with school holidays. Recruitment for courses that were running during school holidays was a particular challenge for the Wales pilot due to their women-only focus, and increased the likelihood of female participants experiencing barriers related to childcare responsibilities. Pilot staff believed that these factors negatively impacted engagement and prevented them from reaching the breadth and diversity of participants they had originally hoped to engage.

Lessons learned

- New Futures attracted a diverse range of participants, although there was a high level of variation in the characteristics of participants between individual pilots. Pilots were able to tailor their aims to meet local needs and target specific groups, with individual

²⁰ Pilot staff believed that this lack of confidence was due to individuals having to change employment sector due to pandemic restrictions and/or having had a period of unemployment due to the impact of restrictions on their sector.

pilots reaching traditionally underrepresented groups such as minority ethnic participants and women in the technology sector.

- Participants were motivated to participate in pilots for a range of reasons, including a general desire to change career, seek work after a career break, upskill, or due to feelings of discontent in their current role. Over two-thirds (68%) of pre-intervention survey respondents said that gaining new skills was one of their career aspirations, and just under one half (47%) sought to find a new role in a different sector or industry.
- The use of multiple media and methods of engagement was important to successful outreach. While in-person engagement seemed the most effective way of engaging participants, other methods, such as online marketing, also played a strong role - especially when promoting technical training courses and in the initial stages of pilot delivery. An informal and person-centred approach to outreach was particularly successful, and enabled potential participants to be confident in asking questions about the pilots. Word of mouth through communities was also found to be a strong route to engagement in some pilots – particularly in the later stages of delivery.
- Across pilots, staff identified the initial emphasis of outreach materials on the impact of Covid as a challenge to recruitment. It was important for pilots to understand the impact of messaging on their target audience and to maintain sufficient flexibility to modify it as required. In addition, the findings demonstrate the importance of setting aside sufficient time to develop a recruitment strategy to ensure support reaches a diverse range of participants in a target cohort.
- Referral and local community networks played a key role in engaging participants. However, the findings demonstrate the importance of having robust pre-existing relationships with partners – or building these early in delivery.
- Although most participants found the registration process straightforward, some identified specific challenges which, in a small number of cases, prevented them from participating in training. This demonstrates the importance of a simple registration process that participants are supported to complete to ensure there is equal knowledge of, and access to, training and careers support opportunities.

Participant outcomes

This chapter explores the outcomes experienced by New Futures participants, including employment, skills and wider outcomes.

Employment outcomes

In total, 280 participants progressed into a new job.²¹ This represents one quarter (25%) of the 1,143 individuals identified by pilots as having had some level of interaction with New Futures. However, as described in the New Futures overview section, for some pilots the total number of participants included individuals who had not registered with the pilots and for whom no MI data were collected. Focusing on the 639 registered participants for whom MI data were available, the employment outcome rate was 44%. There was little difference in employment outcome by prior employment status. A third of registered participants (33%) were employed on joining the pilot, with 45% of these starting a new job; 58% were out of work on joining the pilot, with 44% starting a new job. A further 3% were in education on joining the pilot, with 35% starting a new job. Prior employment was not recorded for 6% of participants, with 41% starting a new job²².

There was variation in employment outcomes between pilots. The highest proportion of participants attained an employment outcome in Belfast (26 out of 36 participants), followed by Wales (52 out of 75). Registered participants in these pilots were more likely to be closer to the labour market than those in the other pilots, with 17 out of 36 employed prior to starting the pilot in Belfast, and 73 out of 75 in Wales. Over two fifths (41%) of Tees Valley participants secured an employment outcome, from a base of 30% of registered participants in employment prior to commencement. Over a third (35%) of Edinburgh participants secured an employment outcome; 41% of registered participants were in employment on joining the pilot.

There were small variations in employment outcomes by participant characteristics. In Edinburgh, women were more likely than men to achieve an employment outcome (43% compared to 29%). In addition, in both Edinburgh and Tees Valley participants who were employed prior to commencing the programme were less likely to secure an employment outcome than those who were out of work, with respective figures of 30% vs 38% for Edinburgh and 20% vs 43% for Tees Valley. **Rates of employment outcomes were otherwise broadly similar across participant groups.**

Matched data on salary before and after changing job were available for a small number of participants. In Tees Valley, out of 30 participants with matched salary data 17 had an increased salary in their new job and 13 a reduced salary. The median increase in gross annual salary was £7,439, and the median reduction £3,000. It is not clear why some

²¹ Based on final pilot MI data transfers. This can include employment outcomes up to 6 months post-delivery, but in most cases will be much sooner.

²² As detailed in the Methods section, a separate impact evaluation will be conducted for pilots with a sufficient participant population for statistical analysis. This will compare employment outcomes against an estimate of counterfactual outcomes.

individuals experienced a reduction in salary. However, given the small sample size these figures should be treated with caution.

Career change

The primary focus of New Futures was to facilitate career change rather than supporting participants to achieve employment outcomes alone. Although details of employment were not available for all participants, MI analysis showed that – where data were available – 72% of those with employment outcomes changed career.²³

For all pilots except Wales, the majority of participants with an employment outcome – for whom data were available - changed career. This included 10 out of 11 participants in Belfast, 45 out of 55 participants in Edinburgh and 73 out of 88 participants in Tees Valley. The exception is Wales, where only 19 out of 49 participants with employment outcomes changed career, and only 9 moved into the target technology sector.

There was variation between pilots in the number of participants who had secured a new role or successfully changed careers. However, across the pilots, participants, pilot staff, partners, and stakeholders shared their experience of participants who had moved into new roles, either paid or voluntary, been promoted within their current role, or started apprenticeships and other training that was expected to lead to employment. For example, one participant in Wales said that the support they'd received through New Futures had felt transformative, giving them the confidence and skills to change careers:

“I feel like, without going through this process, I would have never had a lot of confidence. Now, I feel like I've been able to upskill, and then I've been able to change careers, and then even in sessions where I'd be public speaking and things like that, that's things that I would have never done, and I would have never even seen myself doing. But I feel like now this process has changed me, in a sense.”
(Wales participant)

While not all participants successfully moved into work or changed career, there were other benefits that participants gained from the support that moved them closer to securing work. There was a sense among participants and staff in most pilots that even if they had not got a new job, participants felt **more confident in their ability to apply for jobs** and be successful in interviews. This was either because of technical training they had received, particularly in Belfast and Wales, or because of wider careers guidance and practical support to apply for jobs. Several participants, including some who had not yet received job offers, noted that they had gained an enhanced understanding of processes such as writing a tailored covering letter and presenting themselves in an interview. For one Tees Valley participant, the practical support to apply for jobs ultimately ended in them getting a new role:

²³ Career change is defined as working in a different sector or a substantially different occupation within the same sector.

“I wouldn’t have got the interviews without the CV support. I wouldn’t have got the job without the interview support. So, I can’t say one was more important than the other, they were both equally important, in my opinion.” (Tees Valley participant)

Some participants in Edinburgh noted that the specific worksheets and toolkits supplied by pilot staff would help them **write a cover letter and CV** in the future. One member of pilot staff in Edinburgh noted the support had prepared participants for independent job search.

“It’s given people a bit more independence so that they’re not solely relying on meeting with an employability support worker to do their applications” (Edinburgh pilot staff)

Securing employment through the pilot could also be associated with wider personal benefits. For example, one participant in Belfast highlighted that securing a job offer had been great for their confidence and mental wellbeing.

“It’s been really positive for me to prove to myself that I’m maybe not quite as useless as I was feeling before doing this programme. It’s not pleasant being out of work for an extended period, being on benefits and just existing, and trying to get these opportunities and getting denied left, right, and centre. It’s just feeling a lot more positive about things having had the results of the [job] offers” (Belfast participant)

Challenges

In Wales and Belfast, fewer participants than expected moved into work upon completion of the pilot. Pilot staff in Belfast attributed this to unforeseen changes to the labour market that influenced the availability of jobs with the employer partners. These businesses had been expected to provide jobs for most of the New Futures participants in Belfast and the reduction in job opportunities had a knock-on effect on participant employment outcomes. However, pilot staff reflected that there were still jobs in the technology sector available locally with other, smaller, employers and they tried to build relationships with these employers to encourage them to employ New Futures participants. They did this by encouraging them to consider applicants without a relevant degree and explaining the skillset participants had developed through the academy. However, at the time fieldwork took place, this had not yet resulted in jobs for participants. In addition, Wales pilot staff reported challenges around the lack of entry level roles in the technology sector and the unwillingness of businesses to take on people who were not fully qualified. These findings demonstrate the importance of **ensuring pilot design takes into account the preferences of employers and is sufficiently flexible to reflect changing labour market conditions.**

Improving skills

Over one half of participants who completed a post-intervention survey (40 out of 72) believed that they had gained new skills through participating in New Futures.

In particular, participants across the pilots who had received technical training described how they had **improved their technical skills**. This was most prevalent in the Wales and Belfast pilots because of the focus on technical training, where participants made substantial improvements to their skill set.

Despite improved technical skills, some participants in Belfast and Wales felt that the training did not upskill them enough to be ready to move into a role in the technology sector. Some participants considered it overambitious to expect them to be ready to change careers and successfully secure a role in the technology sector after completing the pilot, given the limited time spent learning new skills.

“I think they were a little bit too advanced, saying, ‘You can go off and now and be a developer.’ You couldn’t, after doing that limited amount of time.” (Wales participant)

While the academy in Belfast provided a longer training course which went into more depth than in Wales, participants who had moved into work still commented that they had only learned fundamental skills through New Futures. Some felt that the specialised nature of roles in the technology sector meant the skills they learned were not always applicable to the role they ended up doing.

“[The academy] was kind of a fundamentals course, but at the end everyone got on different things [jobs] and none of them were really applicable with the course.”
(Belfast participant)

However, other participants in Belfast reported using some of the technical skills from the academy in their day-to-day role. One participant commented that, prior to attending the academy, they had applied for several roles with one of the employer partners and been unsuccessful. Due to the technical training they received they had since secured a job with the employer, suggesting that in some cases participants were upskilled enough to move into employment. Similarly in Wales, several participants had successfully changed to a technology role as a result of the technical training they received from Code First Girls.

Some participants said they felt more confident and **motivated to continue learning** after accessing training through New Futures. For example, one participant in Wales felt inspired to continue developing their technology skills.

“I think it did inspire me to learn more, and to, sort of, carry on learning those skills.”
(Wales participant)

Another participant in Wales had initially taken an introduction to technology course through New Futures but then continued onto the Code First Girls degree, which helped them get a job in the technology sector:

“I signed up originally for an introduction course. So, I took the introduction course and I discovered that I actually enjoyed what I was doing. And then I progressed

into self teaching on YouTube and then I got an email from Code First Girls for their degree course.” (Wales participant)

In Tees Valley and Edinburgh, pilot staff felt that a key outcome of their support offer was making participants more aware of their **transferable skills**, and how these could be applied to a different industry, through career guidance sessions. For example, a participant in Edinburgh said this support helped them to recognise the skills they already had in order to ‘sell’ themselves when applying for jobs. Another participant in Tees Valley commented that they realised the skills they had from running a home were transferable to the workplace.

“We did skills and transferable skills, which helped you, skills I didn’t really know I had like running the house. To me that’s just normal but you budget things and you do all sorts which is transferable skills, which I didn’t even know I had.” (Tees Valley participant)

Attitudes, confidence, and wellbeing

Beyond employment and upskilling, participants and staff across pilots felt that New Futures had improved the **confidence, self-belief, and self-worth** of those who participated. Participants usually attributed their improved confidence to the careers coaches, although some also mentioned the networking benefits of meeting other people with similar experiences. For some, improved self-belief meant they felt more able to pursue the career they wanted.

“I think it helped me to believe in myself and to pursue that career here, and I can actually do it.” (Belfast participant)

For others, New Futures gave them the **resilience to continue to apply for jobs**. Often, participants attributed this simply to having someone available to support them, rather than because of any specific support they were offering. Participants also highlighted the personal qualities of careers coaches, such as being friendly, knowledgeable, and professional, and their proactive approach to communication, as important factors in encouraging ongoing job search.

“I think it had a positive impact and gave me the resilience to keep going with it, because otherwise if I wasn’t speaking to anybody about it then it may just come to a halt. So, it was quite nice to have that kind of reassuring and consistency, you know, someone not pushing you but someone encouraging you along the way.” (Edinburgh participant)

Some participants felt their **overall wellbeing had improved** because of the support. In particular, in Wales some participants said that they felt empowered because of the wrap-around support received from Chwarae Teg and the opportunities to meet other women.

“I think just a general confidence boost to people that probably were really looking for it and needed it just really, I don’t know, it just uplifted people and made them, not necessarily want to pursue a new career straight away but meeting new people, meeting women in similar boats to you or similar journeys to you seemed really positive.” (Wales participant)

Pilot staff and participants in Belfast also highlighted that the model of a cohort going through the same training package together led to strong relationships being formed between participants. They believed this would serve as a **useful network for them in the future, both personally and professionally**. Some participants explained that the social aspect of the academy helped them make friends, which in turn made them feel less isolated.

“I think the social benefits, you know, connecting with people. I’ve made friends out of it. ... Social bit’s been the big thing for me probably.” (Belfast participant)

Lessons learned

- New Futures supported individuals to achieve employment outcomes, with 44% of participants who engaged with the pilots being employed after participation. Although there was variation between pilots, even in the pilot with the lowest proportion employed over a third of participants (35%) achieved employment outcomes. Over seven tenths (72%) of those with employment outcomes changed career.
- Participants experienced a range of employment-related outcomes through participation in the pilots, including gaining a promotion, starting an apprenticeship or vocational training course, increased technical skills and increased employability skills. Participation also built resilience to continue looking for employment, even when individuals were unsuccessful with job applications. The person-centred focus of the support helped participants cope with setbacks.
- Participants experienced a wider range of outcomes from participating in the pilots, particularly around confidence, self-belief, self-worth and motivation to continue learning. This demonstrates the importance of considering the wider impact of career change programmes on individuals, rather than only employment-related outcomes.
- The design of the Belfast model, which focused on a single cohort of career changers participating in the same training package, facilitated the development of a network between participants which provided both personal and professional support.

Key components of career change support

This chapter focuses on the key learning about the main components of the pilots that supported individuals to reskill and change career. Although these findings are focused on career change, it should be noted that - as described in the Methods chapter - the qualitative interviews identified some participants who would not necessarily be defined as 'career changers'. This may therefore effect some of the findings.

Personalised support

All pilots included an element of personalised support delivered by pilot staff. However, in the Tees Valley and Edinburgh pilots this flexible, person-centred approach made up the main body of the pilot support offer, whereas in Wales and Belfast technical training was at the heart of the pilot and personalised support acted as a wraparound to the training.

"There is no clear, 'this is what we do', one size fits all. Everything is different, depending on the client" (Tees Valley pilot staff)

Pilot staff saw personalised support as an important part of pilot delivery. They described how **building trusting relationships with participants** was key to developing a package of support that would have the most impact on the ability of the individual to reskill. Where training programmes were more structured and lacked flexibility – such as in the Belfast and Wales pilots - participants were more likely to struggle to balance training sessions with other commitments, and according to staff interviews Wales in particular had a high participant attrition rate.

In most pilots the wraparound and pastoral support that participants were offered was seen as a key element of success, particularly in helping participants **overcome individual barriers to work**. Participants were particularly positive about the way the careers coaches listened and understood their situation and preferences, before suggesting appropriate career paths.

"I told everything to [the careers coach] and they noted it so well. It's like they have a recorder in their brain for whatever I was saying. They then picked out some really suitable jobs based on that" (Edinburgh participant)

The careers coaches in Edinburgh and Tees Valley also highlighted **open and honest communication** as an important part of the support. A participant would be informed about the practicalities of what a particular job involved, and the qualifications or experience needed, and would be challenged when their preferred employment goals were unrealistic. Pilot staff in Tees Valley felt that a person-centred approach was key to ensuring participants achieved their desired employment outcomes rather than securing a role that was not suited to their skills and interests.

"One of the things that we ... always say, because there's multiple provision out there, [is] forget about your targets and your referrals and all of that sort of thing."

The best thing that we need to be doing is [considering] what's right for that person."
(Tees Valley pilot staff)

Some pilot staff reflected that working in a flexible, person-centred way meant they had to **dedicate more time to each individual**. While this way of working was seen as effective in helping participants to reskill and change career, staff emphasised the funding and resourcing needed to make this approach work and praised New Futures for being able to provide adequate funding. Despite this, some participants in both Edinburgh and Wales said having more, or more frequent, sessions with pilot staff would have helped them to feel properly supported to reach their career goals. It is therefore important for pilot staff to consider when individual participants might benefit from additional support and accommodate this where possible.

Careers advice and employability support

Careers advice and employability support were integral elements of all pilots. Feedback from participants about this support was overwhelming positive; the only challenges raised by participants were a desire for more careers advice sessions, and a wish for greater flexibility in when careers advisors could meet participants.

Pilot staff used their **knowledge of the local labour market** to signpost candidates to roles to which they were expected to be suited, thereby providing employers with a pipeline of candidates they might not have reached through their own recruitment activities.

Requirements for labour market knowledge varied across pilots. In Edinburgh and Tees Valley, pilots did not have a specific sectoral focus and so required more general knowledge of the local labour market. In both pilots, participants felt that pilot staff had strong labour market intelligence and were able to align participant interests and goals with local jobs.

In contrast, both Belfast and Wales had a specific focus on the technology sector. Participant perceptions varied between these two pilots. In Belfast, careers advice was provided by those with a strong understanding of the sector and participants were happy with the support they received. On the other hand, participants in Wales highlighted that **careers coaches did not always have the specialist technical knowledge** they needed to support them to move into a career in the technology sector – and could only provide general careers advice, rather than guidance about the skills needed for specific roles in the technology sector. Some participants felt that this advice did not complement their technical training well enough to help them move into a technology career.

"I think they could have done with somebody who actually had a little bit of a background in [the technology sector]" (Wales participant)

These findings highlight the importance of local labour market knowledge for all careers advisors, including the need for in-depth sectoral knowledge when support is focused on a specific sector or industry.

In most pilots, staff went beyond traditional careers advice, providing holistic support to help participants build confidence and self-belief, and remain motivated to apply for jobs and tackle barriers to moving into work.

“[It was] more than careers advice, it was careers advice with a background of helping me be brave enough to speak my truth and ask for a promotion, basically tell them that I'm worth more than this.” (Wales participant)

Pilot staff in Tees Valley and Edinburgh reported that **careers advice and coaching** was driven by participant needs. As a result, meetings with participants were arranged as and when required to ensure they met their goals, rather than being limited to particular points during the participant's engagement with the pilot.

Pilot staff reported that effective support depended on **tailoring the structure of careers guidance to the individual**. In most cases, developing a personalised action plan ensured that careers coaches understood the participant's situation, and could recommend appropriate next steps. However, pilot staff in Edinburgh discovered early in delivery that intensive careers advice and action planning was not appropriate for all the participants they supported – particularly those who were able to proactively take ownership of their own career planning after an initial session with a careers coach. The approach therefore shifted towards **assessing participants on a case-by-case basis**. Similarly, Belfast pilot staff took a case-by-case approach to careers support as some participants moved straight into employment after completing their technical training, while others required longer term follow up support - particularly later in the pilot when fewer jobs were available with employer partners. As the pilot progressed, Edinburgh pilot staff also found that **careers advice was particularly effective when coupled with training courses**. Courses were run by external partners but were highlighted to participants by New Futures staff, who also provided careers advice to complement the training.

“Running [careers advice] alongside the training courses has been the really successful element of [the pilot] where you can actually practically say very quickly, 'Well, here's an employer, we've got a 4-week, 6-week course with a guaranteed interview at the end of it, we're running it flexibly around what your circumstances are,' that, the careers advice alongside the practical skilling is what's really worked.” (Edinburgh pilot staff)

Importance of support to develop employability skills

New Futures pilots supported participants to develop employability skills including CV and cover letter writing and how to perform well in a job interview. Across the pilots, participants found this support helpful, irrespective of whether they had a relatively up to date CV or had not practised these skills for some time. A fifth (22%) of respondents to the

pre-survey were not confident in their ability to make the best impression and get their points across in a job interview, 27% were not confident in talking to contacts to discover job openings and 38% were not confident in contacting and persuading potential employers to consider them for a job.

Some participants felt that the employability support available through the pilots gave them confidence in their own ability to apply for jobs, while others felt this practical support was instrumental in securing employment. Interview preparation also made a real difference in boosting the confidence of participants to sell their skills and abilities to employers.

“I think the New Futures support has given me more, I guess, confidence as well in my own ability to apply for jobs and to progress my career. I had CVs and cover letters at hand and they’re quite encouraging saying that, you know, what you have here is quite good, but then they would always give me tips and guidance, but they also encouraged me and said that, ‘What you have is great, but try this and that.’”
(Edinburgh participant)

“I wouldn’t have got the interviews without the CV support. I wouldn’t have got the job without the interview support. So, I can’t say one was more important [in helping me to get a job] than the other, they were both equally important, in my opinion.”
(Tees Valley participant)

These findings demonstrate **the importance of including employability support in career change programmes**. This can be particularly beneficial for participants with little recent experience of applying for jobs, or who wish to move to a sector where the job application process differs from what they have been used to in the past.

Training offer

The opportunity to complete fully funded vocational training courses was a key component of the pilots. As described previously, the pilots took different approaches to training. For Wales and Belfast, a standardised training programme was the core of the pilot. In contrast, Edinburgh and Tees Valley offered enrolment in a variety of training courses aligned with career plans or goals.

Across the pilots, the training offer was considered to be a successful part of the offer. Many participants felt that the positive work outcomes they experienced following the pilot were driven by the skills and confidence they had gained through training provided or funded by the pilots. Strengths of the training offer across pilots included the provision of intensive and interactive courses, wider support to enable technical upskilling that was tailored to each participant and the links to local employers.

In addition, the findings demonstrate the importance of ensuring that the structure and format of training meet participants’ needs. For example, participants generally approved of **training courses which encouraged active participation**, such as being assigned work to complete at home or when tutors sought to engage with participants in the

classroom. In general, **active participation was felt to be better facilitated through in-person classroom based learning**, though this learning approach did not suit all participants. In-person learning better ensured that participants properly understood content and enabled consolidation of learning throughout the course. They could then identify weaknesses and seek support from course tutors.

“At the end of each training, you need to reflect on what you've learned so far and put it down in writing which was very helpful for me.” (Edinburgh participant)

Across pilots, participants thought that the provision of **personalised wraparound support** alongside training helped them to reskill for career change. Examples of personalised support included one-to-one sessions with tutors, where participants could ask for extra help with technical learning, careers advice, academic mentoring and financial support. The extent of this wraparound support varied across pilots.

Belfast staff reflected that wraparound support was a major strength of their training offer. In addition to supporting participants to develop technical skills, tutors also fulfilled a pastoral role in building participants' confidence for change career. They also offered financial support to those enrolled on the training to enable participation. Staff suggested that each of these factors contributed to the low participant attrition rates from their pilot.

“I think [participants' ability to reskill] probably comes down to that belief in them, that positive reinforcement that they can do this, that they've got the potential here to do this. It's very much a hand held process as well, they're very heavily supported the whole way through.” (Belfast pilot staff)

Soft skills

Across the interviews, pilot staff and participants saw the identification and development of transferrable soft skills as being vital to help career changers achieve their long-term employment ambitions. Training courses were often designed to **help participants to develop soft skills**. For example, some courses included a group work element, enabling participants to build team working and project management experience. In Belfast, **participants also received support on communication and presentation skills and professional workplace demeanour and conduct**. Participants found support to improve public speaking and presentation skills particularly helpful and often expressed a sense of pride in their ability to overcome their nerves when talking to a room of people. In this sense, the support improved participants' feelings of self-worth and bolstered their belief that they could take on new challenges and be successful. Belfast pilot staff felt that the elements of support that boosted participants' soft skills and employability were key to the success of the pilot and complemented the technical training.

“I think we have definitely showcased a very different model from just straightforward teaching somebody how to use IT...it's all of those sorts of [softer] skills [and confidence] that we've been able to improve and to impart has helped with the success.” (Belfast pilot staff)

Pilot specific findings

Due to differences in the training offered by each pilot, many of the findings in this area are pilot specific. Nevertheless, some of the findings are applicable to the design of wider career change programmes.

The qualitative fieldwork identified high drop out rates for the Open University training offered as part of the Welsh pilot. On this course participants were offered limited support from the pilot while completing this training. Participants explained that they would have appreciated another point of contact, in addition to their class tutors. This gap was also recognised by Open University and an employer who partnered with the pilot. The employer felt the training could be improved by including more regular check-ins between staff and participants to enable staff to identify those who would benefit from extra support. They also suggested this would allow staff to make more accurate assessments of participants, which could then be shared with employers, giving them confidence to make hiring decisions. When compared with the higher level of support offered by the Belfast pilot, these findings suggest that **regular support and check-ins during training is important in aiding retention on the pilots.**

Compared to Belfast's longer term 'Tech Academies', the Welsh pilot predominantly supported participants through shorter online courses offered by Code First Girls or the Open University. Employers involved in the Wales pilot were impressed with training content, but felt that many courses required participants to have at least some level of background knowledge. Despite this, the courses were accessed by participants with a broad range of abilities. As a result, those with less experience found it challenging to keep up with teaching, while more capable students were held back as tutors tried to accommodate other learners. Offering different training sessions based on prior knowledge or ability might help to address these issues. Participants also suggested that having access to pre-course materials before starting the academies could have helped them familiarise themselves with course content.

Pilot staff saw the course as a solid grounding for a career in the industry, rather than a direct route into employment.

"The 219 women we have given courses to, or have completed the courses, many of them have this foundational knowledge, rather than the knowledge needed to get themselves the job. So, they're all on the first step." (Wales pilot staff)

The training offer was a particular strength of the Belfast pilots, which centred on upskilling participants for a career in the technology sector. Academies took place over several months and were relatively intensive, running for 16 weeks with daily classes from 9:30-4:30. Participants felt these longer running courses were necessary to provide them with the skillset for roles in the technology sector, including how to use relevant software packages, such as, SQL, Python, Java and Excel. This view was supported by several employer interviews who explained that the fact that participants had been through a more comprehensive training programme gave them evidence to assess the skills and work

ethic of participants. Taken together, these findings emphasise the importance of **ensuring that training is sufficiently comprehensive to meet employment goals, and flexible enough to account for differing participant abilities.**

The Tees Valley pilot adopted a different, less specific, approach to training. Part of the budget was set aside as a flexible pot which could be used to fund participant training in any field if it aligned with the pilot's aims to reskill participants and support career change, including training not eligible for funding through the AEB. There were a broad range of uses of this flexible fund, including a participant who paid for a Level 3 teaching qualification and another who used it to help her start a crafts business. The flexible fund enabled participants to enroll on courses that were unrelated to their current roles and were relatively costly. Careers advisors explained that these were often superior to free AEB funded courses available to participants, who would ordinarily have been priced out of accessing them.

“There is a lot of free provision about, but, going on a 6-month waiting list for then a course that should take 3 days, which is then put over 3 months.” (Tees Valley pilot staff)

People in employment could be fast tracked on to paid courses to be rapidly upskilled when a relevant vacancy arose. In contrast, without the flexible fund they would have had to wait for a place on an AEB funded course (which are often oversubscribed), by which time the new position would have been filled.

These findings demonstrate the **benefits of a flexible training offer for career change programmes without a sector-specific focus.**

Challenges

Making training provision accessible was the main crosscutting challenge affecting all pilots. Across New Futures those with childcare responsibilities or in employment found it difficult to access training provision. MI showed that just under a third of participants (32%) had childcare responsibilities, rising to 45% (17 out of 38) in the Wales pilot, which specifically aimed to support mothers with childcare responsibilities.

Balancing participation with work commitments was particularly difficult for those with regular '9 to 5' working hours. This working pattern was largely incompatible with training available through the Wales and Edinburgh pilots. In Belfast, the full-time nature of the academy model meant that it lacked the flexibility to be accessible to people who couldn't commit to full-time training. To attend the academy, the structure of the model also meant that many individuals had to resign from any existing employment, which created financial pressures that may have discouraged enrollment.

“Expecting people to give up a job with no training allowance... I think that would be a big thing for people, there’s that 4 months of no money and no guarantee of a job at the end of it.” (Belfast pilot staff)

Individuals with health problems and caring responsibilities participated in the pilots. Across all pilots, 24% of participants had experienced a health problem in the previous 12 months and 6% had caring responsibilities. However, these figures were lower for pilot participants than those for the wider working age population (36%²⁴ and 10%²⁵ respectively)

Financial pressures were a major barrier to participation in Belfast, with some participants reporting that they were only able to access the academy because of financial support from family members and/or partners.

Other pilots tried to **incorporate flexibility into their training offer to accommodate employed learners**. These approaches included running evening sessions, blended online and in-person learning and having self-guided courses. In Edinburgh a participant explained that their course offered multiple sessions for each stage, enabling them to balance training with their university commitments.

Overall, the pilots did not offer fully flexible provision, which limited the numbers of 'career changers' they were able to attract. New Futures programme leads recognised that this was a recurring challenge in many of the employment support and reskilling programmes in which they had been involved. They felt that the pilots could have made flexibility more of a priority when designing their support offer.

"Provision needs to be flexible, it needs to be affordable... we say the same thing over and over again and the reason why it doesn't get fixed is because it's not easy. So, we weren't necessarily going to crack that through this pilot but I do really feel like the pilots didn't necessarily try and they didn't fully acknowledge that they weren't doing it either." (New Futures programme staff)

Sectoral focus

Two pilots had a sectoral focus; Wales and Belfast focused on technical training and careers support to enter the technology sector. The programme-level theory of change highlights that the intention was that pilots would focus on preparing participants to fill vacancies in growing sectors in the local area, taking into account local employment opportunities.

In Belfast, pilot staff described how they chose to focus on the technology sector because it is a prominent sector locally that has grown over the last 10-15 years, but which also faces recruitment challenges. They cited previous research which indicated that around 60% of roles in the technology sector did not require degree-level education and therefore the suitability of a vocational reskilling programme to train residents to move into roles in

²⁴ The Health Foundation, 2023. [What we know about the UK's working-age health challenge](#).

²⁵ Office for National Statistics. [Census 2021 \(England and Wales\)](#). Unpaid care was defined as help or support given to anyone who had long-term physical or mental ill-health conditions, illness or problems related to old age.

the technology sector. In Wales, the technology sector faces similar recruitment challenges due to a shortage of people with the right skills to work in the sector. Chwarae Teg also wanted to inspire and motivate women to consider a career in technology, as a male-dominated industry.

In Wales and Belfast, the focus on the technology sector was successful, with participants often citing the **sectoral focus as a key motivator** for their involvement. Pilot staff in Belfast also felt that the high levels of interest in the pilot were partially due to the appeal of working in the technology sector. For both pilots, the choice of sector reflected the local context. In Wales, the M4 'high-tech' corridor meant that there was already a good local awareness of technology companies and careers and an appetite for roles in this industry. Similarly, in Belfast the academies were developed in partnership with two large local employers in the technology sector, ensuring that there were clear career pathways for participants.

These findings show the importance of **taking local context into account** when designing career change programmes, and – where programmes include a specific sectoral focus – **ensuring there is sufficient local demand for jobs in the sector**.

Importance of pilot staff

The qualitative fieldwork demonstrated the **importance of highly skilled and effective pilot staff to successful pilot delivery**. For example, the **experience of careers coaches** was highlighted as a strength across pilots. Pilot leads and participants emphasised that careers coaches had extensive knowledge of local labour markets. This meant they could identify growth industries and locations where jobs were likely to be available. Participants then received a package of support that was tailored to local vacancies, for example, referrals to relevant training or industry-specific CV writing support.

In each pilot, participants appreciated careers coaches' **person-centric approach**. This involved dedicating time to understand participants and identifying their transferable skills, which could then be emphasised in job applications. Identifying transferable skills was key to supporting career change, given participants were unlikely to have direct experience of their desired job role. The person-centric approach also involved providing a flexible service, for example, accommodating participants by offering multiple time slots or the chance to have in-person or online/telephone sessions.

In the early stages of delivery, the Tees Valley pilot had difficulty attracting suitably experienced careers coaches, struggling to compete with existing employment schemes. This is difficult for other employability programmes as well as New Futures.²⁶ However, this issue was resolved later in delivery.

²⁶ Other L&W research, including our [evaluations of DWP's Restart scheme](#) and Catch-22's Horizons programme, have identified a similar challenge of a shortage of experienced careers coaches.

“There’s a shortage of people with IAG qualifications. It seems to be a common thing... It’s supply and demand. There was more demand [for IAG qualifications] than there were people available” (Tees Valley pilot staff)

Participants also referenced the commitment of **careers coaches to helping them find a job**. They appreciated having someone on their side to give them confidence applying for jobs, particularly when they had no recent experience of applications or were new to the UK labour market. Some work coaches helped participants with wider aspects of their personal lives which had a bearing on their ability to find work. For example, a work coach in Edinburgh helped a participant who had recently arrived in the UK to find childcare and financial support for her disabled son. She reflected that this help lessened her mental burden and freed her to start a regular voluntary role.

The reputation that delivery organisations had in the local community also affected participation in the pilots. For example, in Wales the dedication staff demonstrated in supporting women, and the reputation of Chwarae Teg as an organisation, was attractive to career changers and meant that they were able to recruit a large number of participants in a short space of time.

In addition, staff across pilots explained that they had made use of their **contacts in existing networks** to help them disseminate information about the support available. For example, links with intermediaries who provided employability support, Jobcentre Plus staff and contacts at local authority or council level all played a role in signposting potential participants to pilot support.

Impact of employer involvement with support design

Pilot staff and employers in Edinburgh and Belfast highlighted how **employer co-design** of training packages was important in ensuring participants were equipped with the skills required in the industry in which the career changer was seeking work. They recognised that success, in terms of job outcomes, is reliant on employers wanting the candidates that the pilot produced. Therefore, greater employer involvement drove positive outcomes.

“The training was completely fit for purpose, and the reason it was completely fit for purpose was because it was the employers who dictated what was included within that” (Belfast pilot staff)

In Belfast two technology employers were actively involved in the design of the academy support offered by the pilot. This enabled them to have input into the technical knowledge included in the academy sessions. Employers welcomed this as they felt confident that the skills that participants developed were closely aligned to their needs. This meant that participants were equipped with skills that were desirable to local employers who were then willing to recruit them on completion of Tech Academies. The clear pathway from training into employment that the Belfast pilot could advertise was key to attracting participants.

“We are very clear where our skills shortages are, what roles we have at an entry level, the types of skills we are looking for, and the core things we would expect from candidates coming through, and just making sure we covered those.” (Belfast employer)

Insights from interviews with pilot staff and several employers in Edinburgh and Belfast suggest that having **more than one employer involved in designing a training programme worked well**. Employers with similar training requirements were often willing to compromise and work together on the design.

New Futures framework

Pilot staff were clear that the focus on **supporting career change through a combination of reskilling, careers advice and coaching were the unique selling point of New Futures**. They felt that this overarching framework was what set New Futures apart from other interventions.

They also felt that the level of flexibility that they had in designing and delivering their provision was beneficial. This allowed them to **design provision based on local need** and offer very different packages of support in each pilots. For example, Wales and Belfast were able to focus on the technology sector specifically, based on labour shortages identified in these areas. On the other hand, the Edinburgh and Tees Valley pilots adapted their support to each individual. Pilot staff could refer participants to a broad range of training packages suitable for their career goals and aligned with their needs.

The flexibility afforded to pilot staff also allowed them to adapt to changing national and area-specific contexts. For example, the original focus of the support on those impacted by Covid became a less salient issue, but pilots were able to alter plans to target different audiences.

Programme staff²⁷ reflected that **some participants supported by New Futures were not strictly career changers**. Though there is no clear definition of a ‘career changer’, for some participants New Futures support meant receiving help to find a job or training to upskill in their existing career. Pilot staff suggested that the flexibility in design and delivery enabled this diversion in focus.

“I think sometimes our money was a bit too flexible, like, setting people up in a self-employed business is not really what we were thinking of.” (New Futures programme staff)

Programme staff felt that in several cases one or more of these original components were omitted from pilots. Specifically, there were limited examples of pilots fulfilling the requirement that their projects helped to build the capacity of voluntary and community

²⁷ Programme staff are those who were responsible for developing the pilots at L&W and who had oversight of delivery across all pilots.

sector organisations. Programme staff reflected that this was a drawback of the flexibility afforded to pilots in the design stages.

Programme staff suggested that for any future interventions there would be value in offering greater clarity **about the reporting requirements** expected of the pilots during the design stage. They explained that pilots were often reticent about sharing information, including partnership agreements and career change success stories to be used in promotional materials. They felt it would be beneficial to secure the commitment of the pilots to these activities before delivery started.

These findings indicate that **the overall framework and level of flexibility in New Futures worked well** for delivering career change pilots. However, future programmes would benefit from including **strengthened guidelines about eligibility and programme requirements**.

Lessons learned

General

- Pilot staff considered that the focus of New Futures on supporting career change through a combination of reskilling, careers advice and coaching set it apart from other interventions. Ensuring support filled a gap in the local skills, retraining and employment landscape, rather than duplicating existing provision, was essential to the success of New Futures. In addition, the level of flexibility enabled pilots to design provision based on local needs, and to test different approaches. However, this level of flexibility also resulted in some aspects of delivery being beyond the original scope.
- The findings show that key to the success of the pilots was the incorporation of personalised, tailored support. This helped build relationships with participants and facilitate the development of a targeted package of support for reskilling. Holistic wraparound support also helped participants to overcome individual barriers to work. However, pilot staff emphasised the high funding and resourcing requirements of this provision; although this was able to be adequately met by New Futures, it may not be feasible across all programmes.

Careers advice and the local labour market

- Careers advice and employability support were integral elements of all pilots, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants. Careers coaches were most valued by participants when they had a strong understanding of the local labour market and connections with employers. The findings show the importance of employing highly skilled and experienced careers coaches. They also demonstrated that - where pilots were focussed on a specific sector - careers advice was more effective when careers coaches had in-depth sectoral knowledge.
- Support with employability skills, such as CV writing and interview practice, was highly beneficial to participants, increasing confidence in their ability to apply for jobs and gain

employment. This was particularly important for a career change programme, given that many participants had little recent experience of applying for jobs, or were moving into sectors with different application processes.

- Where employers were involved in co-designing pilot support, participants were able to develop skills that directly matched employers' skills needs. It was beneficial to involve more than one employer in the design process, to gain additional input and reduce reliance on individual employers.

Training

- Across the pilots, the training offer was considered a successful part of New Futures, and a key driver of participants' employment outcomes. Participants benefitted from intensive training, which enabled them to develop the technical skills required for career change. The findings also demonstrated the importance of training that was sufficiently comprehensive to meet employment goals, and flexible enough to account for differing participant abilities.
- The accessibility of training courses was an important consideration as some potential participants were unable to attend training delivered during working hours or due to childcare responsibilities. Although there was some adaptation by pilots, such as evening sessions or blended learning, these barriers limited the attraction of pilots to employed career changers. Financial challenges were also a key issue in the Belfast pilot, since many participants needed to resign from their existing job to attend training.
- Participants had a preference for training courses which encouraged active participation. This was often considered to be better facilitated through in-person learning than online courses.
- Extra wraparound support was important in supporting participants to complete training. For instance, tutors offered participants encouragement and helped to identify extra support needs. Similarly, pilot staff and participants saw the identification and development of transferrable soft skills as being vital to help career changers achieve their long-term employment ambitions.

Working with other organisations

This chapter outlines how pilots were able to successfully incorporate elements of partnership working into delivery and considers the challenges faced. It focuses on three key groups of partners – employers, stakeholder networks and voluntary and community sector organisations.

Employers

Engaging employers was an important focus for each New Futures pilot. Pilot staff considered employers' interests and, where possible, worked to involve them directly in the pilot. Employers were involved in several ways, including providing input into the design of training and supporting events and hosting work placements for participants. More generally, pilots also engaged with employers to help participants to secure jobs.

Pilots varied in the extent to which they involved employers. In Belfast and Wales, local employers were seen as key to positive employment outcomes for participants. These pilots developed a clear employer engagement strategy implemented throughout the pilot. Conversely, Edinburgh and Tees Valley initially placed less weight on the need to engage with employers in order to secure employment outcomes. This was because these pilots thought employment outcomes would be forthcoming provided participants had developed their technical skills and were supported through careers coaching and employability support.

Barriers to employer engagement

Programme staff felt that all pilots experienced more barriers to employer engagement than expected and this had negatively impacted employment outcomes. This view was shared by pilot staff, who reflected that employer engagement was one of the most challenging aspects of New Futures.

Employer buy-in

Each pilot had difficulty **securing buy-in from larger local employers who often struggled to understand the career change goals of New Futures**. Tees Valley pilot staff reported that many employers failed to understand that the pilot was designed to support career change. In their view, employers saw the pilot funding as a cost-free way to upskill their existing staff; for example, one employer requested money to renew staff members' forklift licences. Pilot staff felt that a higher level of employer engagement would have been beneficial to the pilot. For example, they suggested visits to industrial sites could have been used to identify career changers and those at risk of redundancy, to target support to those who would benefit most from having access to funded upskilling.

Similarly, Belfast pilot staff described how relationship building was more challenging than expected and required many conversations to secure employer buy-in. They encountered initial positivity about New Futures when they spoke to staff in senior leadership positions, but by the time this cascaded down the organisation it was seen as just another (often less preferable) hiring route for managers.

Pilot staff in Edinburgh reported that some employers may have been reluctant to engage with the pilot as they had their **own training and induction programmes**. Pilot staff felt employers tended to prefer training employees in-house rather than taking on participants trained by providers.

“I think the level of engagement has been lower than expected and that's been a disappointment. I think a couple of the pilots could have done a bit more. I think Edinburgh and Tees Valley could have done a bit more to engage with employers.”
(New Futures programme staff)

Taken together, these findings suggest that **career change programmes should ensure sufficient time and resources are available for clear, proactive and frequent engagement with employers** to ensure full understanding of the support being offered by the programme and the benefits of participation.

Securing employment outcomes

Despite employer commitments in the early stages, **job opportunities for New Futures participants did not always materialise** on completion of courses. Such was the case in the Wales and Belfast pilots, neither of which met their targets in terms of immediate job outcomes. **The pilots argued this was mainly due to a change in economic outlook in the technology sector, which deteriorated over the course of the pilot** resulting in fewer vacancies than expected with employer partners. As a result, not all participants who had been guaranteed a job interview were given one. Participants felt that there should have been greater clarity from the outset about the number of job vacancies available. This would have enabled them to make a more informed decision about whether resigning from their existing role was worthwhile.

“We had to manage that and we had to let them in a sense grieve that they weren't getting, they didn't get that job and try to understand and process why. It wasn't anything to do with them, it was the restructuring of [employer name], their position to hire. It took a while, it did take a little while for that to be accepted and to be understood.” (Belfast pilot staff)

The project lead in Belfast reflected that their engagement with only two large employers resulted in the pilot being too reliant on the performance of a small number of stakeholders. **Partnering with multiple organisations** of a range of sizes would have reduced this risk.

Staff in each pilot felt that **prevailing employer attitudes** were a key barrier to positive job outcomes. Though employers made assurances that they were willing to recruit more diverse candidates, staff felt that employers did not see the pilots as viable pathways into skilled work. This was clearest for Belfast and Wales. Despite the technical knowledge gained by participants who took part in these pilots, pilot staff suggested some employers held the view that entry-level jobs in the sector should be filled by university graduates. To mitigate this, pilot staff in Edinburgh encouraged employers to change their expectations in job advertisements and to focus on candidates' transferable, rather than technical, skills.

This approach yielded some success in terms of job outcomes. However, across the pilots, pilot staff recognised that employer attitudes about who they recruited were often deep rooted and unlikely to change over the relatively short delivery period.

“Large [technology] employers, they’re very inward looking at the moment. They have a lot of questions around their own scale and size of business, and that is having an impact on our recruitment and conversion on our academies.” (Belfast pilot staff)

Successful engagement

Despite these challenges, there were examples of successful collaboration with employers in each pilot area.

Pilot design

The benefits of employer involvement in pilot design have been outlined in the What Works in Reskilling chapter. Across pilots, employers had different levels of involvement in pilot design. For example - as described previously - in Belfast employers played a central **role in pilot design**. Companies in the technology sector were engaged early in the development process, enabling them to feed into the design of their Tech Academies.

There were also smaller scale examples of pilots involving employers in the design of training, on a case-by-case basis. The Edinburgh pilot co-designed a childcare training course with several employers from the sector. One of these employers described how this was a positive collaborative relationship, and explained that they regularly met with New Futures tutors who visited the site to check-in on participants who were working for them. However, at a programme level this level of collaboration was relatively unusual. Pilot staff in most areas reflected that **they may have achieved more success in securing employment for participants if they had involved employers at an earlier stage**.

Mid-way through delivery, Edinburgh also sought employer involvement by gathering data on the location of jobs offered by local employers. They then targeted activities based on this; for example, hosting job fairs in these locations to attract candidates relevant to available roles. This change in delivery approach part way through the pilot was made as staff recognised the benefits to participants of providing employer-led support.

Involvement with delivery

The Wales, Belfast and Edinburgh pilots each held **employer-led careers sessions**, which provided participants with networking opportunities. For example, a participant in Wales reflected positively on the connections they had made with two large employers. She explained that a session run by one of these employers focussed on women in the technology sector. This gave participants a chance to hear about female employees' pathways into the industry and the range of entry level opportunities available. The Tech Academy she was enrolled in culminated in an awards event where they met employees from the other employer. Having met this employer, she sent them her CV and enquired about job openings. In general, **participants welcomed opportunities to meet**

employers. These interactions helped participants to gauge what skills and attributes employers were looking for in candidates, which built confidence when sending applications.

There were several examples of pilots **incorporating work placements** into their support. The support offered to some participants in Belfast and Edinburgh included a work placement with local employers, with the aim of securing full time employment on completion of the pilot. **While participants could use placements to build relationships with hiring managers, employers valued the opportunity to make accurate evaluations of candidates.** For example, participants on the Belfast Tech Academies built relationships with staff at employer partners. They reflected that the placements gave them a good insight into the nature of job roles and career pathways. For many, **this experience boosted their confidence ahead of interviews** they had at the end of the pilot support.

“[Employers] get to see all these people and get to know them before [they] buy them. It's like a four week interview, induction where someone else is taking care of it all for you. Removing all the barriers, providing in work support, they love it, why wouldn't they?” (Edinburgh pilot staff)

Taken together, these findings **demonstrate the importance of direct interactions between employers and participants** in career change programmes.

Recruitment

Several employers who were **struggling to recruit** staff viewed New Futures as a potential solution to help them to find suitable candidates with the skills they needed.

“...employers are really struggling to fill jobs just now, so if there's a recommendation that comes from one of our advisors, we're in a position to quite often just say, 'I'm working with this individual, I think they'd be a good fit, take a look at their CV.'” (Edinburgh pilot staff)

In Edinburgh, Belfast and Wales, employers described how the **calibre of the candidates** supported by the pilots exceeded their expectations. For example, one Edinburgh employer explained that participants came to interviews genuinely motivated to work with them. In this regard they compared favourably to candidates referred for interview by other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus. Employers were also impressed with the level of knowledge participants had of their organisations and job roles, suggesting they had been prepared well by New Futures careers coaches.

“...the candidates we were getting [from Jobcentre referrals] weren't the standards that we were needing so this is why we've engaged with [the Edinburgh New Futures pilot] and told them this is the standard we're looking for, this is the sort of

candidates and it's really good that they source all the candidates." (Edinburgh employer)

In general, pilots benefitted from **close relationships with local employers**, who were willing to have an input into the design of the pilots and support the delivery of New Futures funded activities. Employers were then willing to hire candidates who they could trust had received high quality training and IAG.

Networks

Pilot areas benefitted from existing relationships between pilot staff and local stakeholders. In several pilot areas staff had well established connections with employers, skills agencies, voluntary sector training providers and community groups.

Successful use of networks

Where pilot staff were able to **leverage strong relationships** with employers, pilots tended to be more employer-led, which contributed to positive job outcomes. In Belfast, the city council had worked with employer partners in the delivery of previous training academies. Using these relationships, they were able to consult these employers early in development to secure their input into pilot design. As described previously, this involvement helped to ensure that participants developed the skills that these employers required, increasing the chances of successful employment outcomes.

Experienced **career advisors' deep knowledge of local labour markets** was also important in building new networks of employers. They understood where there were jobs available and what skills were in demand, which then shaped the careers advice given to participants. This encouraged employers to engage, as they had confidence that pilot support would help to develop participants to fill their skills gaps.

Pilot staff explained that **partnership working** had also been beneficial in terms of referring participants to the pilot. For example, in Edinburgh a collaboration of public, third sector and government agencies worked with the pilot to refer participants. Pilot staff in Edinburgh reported that the support of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) was particularly useful.

"It's quite a small world sometimes, Edinburgh employability, so we all know each other, we all have links and relationships to all the different projects and programmes" (Edinburgh pilot staff)

Similarly, in Belfast referrals were boosted by an existing relationship with a local employability support agency.

In addition to referrals, Skills Development Scotland supported the development of Edinburgh pilot staff as mentors, shared their careers advice toolkits²⁸ and helped staff to

²⁸ The employability toolkit provided advice around CV writing and aimed to prepare participants to do job searching and applications independently.

refine these for use in the pilot. In general, it was clear from interviews that linked employability and careers organisations in the city were willing to help each other to maximise the pilot's employment outcomes.

Challenges

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) was considered a useful partner by each pilot, although experiences differed. JCP staff often made referrals to the support. However, in several cases pilot staff felt that JCP staff failed to understand that New Futures was focussed on career change, so often **referred unsuitable participants** who failed to engage with the support they received.

In Tees Valley, pilot staff described how the number of referrals they received from JCP was lower than expected. Staff believed that this was because they had not developed close working relationships with new JCP staff, following personnel changes. This highlights the importance of **pilot staff taking time to build close ties with key partners, who can raise awareness of New Futures**.

Some pilot staff suggested that it would have been useful to have **online referral routes and customer relationship management (CRM) systems accessible by key partners**. They believed this would have made it easier to signpost participants to wraparound support and clarify what type of support participants had accessed in the past. In Edinburgh there was a CRM system that enabled cross-referrals to be made, but staff felt that there was scope to increase transparency around the level of support offered to each individual.

Programme staff reflected that they would have liked **clearer processes** on partnership working between the pilot lead organisations and other stakeholders. For instance, programme staff did not always receive partnership agreements and expressed frustration that partners did not always attend meetings. This made monitoring and evaluation difficult.

“We should have seen partnership agreements with anyone who had any sort of partnership that was going to impact on the programme....and I should have been referring to those partnership agreements when there were any problems and I couldn't because I hadn't seen them.” (New Futures programme lead)

Failure to draft a clear partnership agreement had a significant impact on the Wales pilot. The training provider did not share details of participants who had completed their Tech Academies with the pilot lead organisation, as they considered it in breach of their GDPR obligations. This impacted the number of participants who received careers advice, the next stage of support provided through the pilot, and the overall number of participants completing the pilot. This had a detrimental impact on the relationship between pilot staff and the training provider.

Voluntary and community sector organisations

Working with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) was one of the core requirements of New Futures funding. As a condition of receiving funding, pilots were obligated to invest in VCS organisations to support design and delivery. The expectation was that this would boost their capacity, helping to ensure that New Futures had a legacy impact in local communities. Programme staff also saw New Futures as an opportunity to support organisations in this sector, who had suffered during the Covid pandemic.

In general, programme staff felt that **VCS involvement in pilots did not meet expectations**. While each pilot included at least one VCS organisations in some capacity, they felt this element of New Futures was often seen as a box to tick rather than an opportunity to maximise long term outcomes.

“The one bit that I wish the pilots had been better with on partnership working is involvement with the [voluntary and] community sector. This was supposed to be a key part of New Futures, to make sure that a decent chunk of the money was given to voluntary sector organisations working on the ground, and I think it became a bit of a fudge.” (New Futures programme staff)

Programme staff also reflected that failure to incorporate the VCS significantly limited the potential to understand the roles of different organisations in relation to interventions to support career change.

“I think the second thing, connected to that, that we missed out on, is understanding what are the roles of different players in the system... Well, we know training providers, and employers, and potentially local authorities have a role here. But, again, thinking about where adults are and the services that they come into contact with, what are the roles of those other organisations?” And, I think, not involving VCS meant that we learn less from the pilots on that.” (New Futures programme staff)

There were, however, several positive examples of partnership working with local VCS organisations. The Tees Valley pilot invested some of their grant funding in a local career support charity. This charity's careers coaches worked with participants in a different location to the core delivery team and had expertise in supporting people facing multiple barriers to work, thereby expanding the reach of the pilot. Having received careers advice, participants were referred to New Futures staff to fund their training needs. Pilot staff were very positive about this partnership. The charity's staff were similarly positive, and explained that New Futures funding had been vital in the continuation of their 'Into Work' initiative, highlighting the role career change programmes can play in VCS capacity building.

The Edinburgh pilot partnered with a social mobility charity which provides training opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This charity has close ties with a national bank and were a pathway for New Futures participants who were

interested in banking and accountancy. They ran three weeks of training for New Futures participants and prepared them for an interview with the bank. They also provided in-work pastoral support for participants if they were hired by the bank. As a result of this pathway, several New Futures participants ultimately started on customer service apprenticeships with the bank. The charity also benefitted from the partnership, explaining that it was useful in giving them access to an extra pool of young people in the city that they could support.

“It would be really good if we could get more introductions to more provisions in Edinburgh, more chances to, obviously, bring our programme to young people, so that we’re giving those young people more of a chance of gaining a successful career with a really big bank.” (Edinburgh stakeholder)

Although limited, **these findings demonstrate the benefits of engaging with VSC organisations**, both for the delivery of, and outcomes from, career change programmes and for the organisations themselves.

Lessons learned

- Successful employer engagement was key to the success of pilot delivery. In addition to involvement in the design of training programmes, employers also led careers sessions and, on some occasions, provided work placements. The findings demonstrate the importance of direct interactions between employers and participants, which enabled participants to learn about a range of careers and understand the skills required by employers. These interactions also provide networking opportunities. Employers reported that engagement with the pilots aided recruitment and they generally found candidates to be of a high calibre.
- However, pilots reported difficulty in securing buy-in from larger local employers and promises of job opportunities for participants did not always materialise on completion. The findings demonstrate the importance of establishing strong relationships and commitments early in delivery, building on existing relationships where possible and ensuring sufficient time and resources are available for clear, proactive and frequent employer engagement. It was also important for pilots to be realistic in marketing communications and during delivery about job prospects upon completion.
- Pilots benefited from partnership working between lead organisations and local stakeholders, such as skills agencies. Local stakeholders provided a range of benefits, including offering an additional participant engagement route, signposting support to a broad range of potential participants, providing a progression route for participants and enabling staff to build on their local knowledge and expertise with particular employment sectors.
- It was beneficial for pilots to leverage existing relationships and networks with local stakeholders. Where relationships did not already exist, the findings demonstrate the

importance of taking time to build close ties with key partners. They also show that regular engagement is key to maintaining relationships with partners.

- The Wales pilot was impacted by a failure to draft a clear partnership agreement with a key partner delivering training to participants, which made it impossible to offer careers advice to all participants. This demonstrates the importance of ensuring that partnership agreements and data sharing is agreed prior to the start of delivery.

Summary

New Futures has supported many adults to retrain and upskill, receive tailored careers advice and guidance, secure an employment outcome and change career. A total of 639 adults registered across the four pilots, with 486 attending at least one careers advice activity, 367 receiving training and 280 achieving an employment outcome. Qualitative findings suggested that participants experienced a range of wider outcomes, such as gaining confidence in their ability to conduct job search, enhanced wellbeing and increased motivation.

New Futures as a whole attracted a diverse range of participants, with variation in participant characteristics across the pilots. Overall, more men participated than women – although this varied substantially by pilot. Across all pilot sites, participation was greatest among those in the 30 to 39 age group. This is in part due to the focus of New Futures in supporting career changes in the labour market, rather than younger people transitioning from education. While many of the participants reported being from white backgrounds, the proportion of participants from minority ethnic backgrounds was higher than the equivalent figure for the working age population; this indicates that New Futures did reach minority ethnic career changers, albeit with some variation between pilots. Overall, fewer than a third of participants were employed prior to commencement, with a substantial minority relatively far from the labour market when they started.

Participants were motivated to participate in pilots for a range of reasons, including a general desire to change career, seek work after a career break, upskill, or due to discontent with their current role. To reach the broadest range of possible participants, a combination of multiple media, use of existing networks and face to face engagement was key to spreading information about the pilots and encouraging participation, especially in the early stages of pilot delivery. As delivery progressed, in-person engagement generally seemed to be the most effective way of reaching potential participants, with word of mouth through communities found to be particularly effective in some pilots. Across most pilots the initial focus of messaging on the impact of Covid was thought to have discouraged engagement, and this was subsequently adapted.

Participants experienced a range of employment-related outcomes as a result of participating in the pilots, including gaining a promotion, starting an apprenticeship or vocational training course, increased technical skills and increased employability skills. Participation built resilience to continue to look for employment, with the person-centred focus of the support being key to building self-efficacy. Participants also experienced a range of wider outcomes, particularly around confidence, self-belief, self-worth, and motivation to continue learning. This demonstrates the importance of considering the wider impact of career change programmes on individuals, rather than focusing solely on employment-related outcomes.

In terms of the impact that the pilots had on participants' ability to re-skill, the findings show the importance of ensuring support fills a gap in the local skills, retraining and

employment landscape, rather than duplicating existing provision. Pilot staff considered that the focus of New Futures on supporting career change through a combination of reskilling, careers advice and coaching was its unique selling point and what set it apart from other interventions. The personalised, tailored support provided by pilot staff was also key to the positive impact of the support.

Careers advice and employability support were integral elements of all pilots and this had a positive impact on reskilling, with overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants. Support with practical employability skills, such as CV writing and interview practice, was highly beneficial, supporting participants to gain employment and giving them confidence in their own ability to apply for jobs. The training offer was considered to be a key driver of participants' employment outcomes. The findings demonstrate the importance of ensuring that training is sufficiently comprehensive to meet employment goals, and flexible enough to account for differing participant abilities. Extra wraparound support was important in supporting participants to complete training sessions. A lack of accessibility of training courses was, however, a key barrier to participation among some participants.

Successful employer engagement was vital to the success of pilot delivery, especially where pilots were able to facilitate direct interactions between employers and participants. Where this was the case, participants learnt about a range of careers and developed an understanding of the skills required by employers, as well as benefiting from networking opportunities. Pilots found it challenging to secure buy-in from larger employers, which highlights the importance of building on existing relationships early on in pilot delivery, as well as having clarity about the level of employer commitment from the outset.

Working with local stakeholders brought a range of benefits to the support pilots offered. As with employers, pilots benefited where existing relationships and networks with local stakeholders could be leveraged. Where these relationships did not exist prior to the pilot, staff needed to invest time to develop workable partnerships. Regular engagement was key to ensuring the full benefit of including stakeholders in pilot delivery was realised.

Recommendations

1. The findings demonstrate the importance of several key elements of career change support, and their effectiveness when delivered in combination. When developing programmes to support career change, **delivery organisations and commissioners should ensure provision incorporates personalised tailored support, careers advice and guidance, targeted training provision and wraparound personal support**. In-work support should also be available, but is likely to be required by only a small proportion of participants. **It is also important for programmes to identify, and seek to address, local gaps in provision, rather than duplicating existing support.**
2. Participants placed a high value on receiving guidance and training in practical employability skills, such as CV writing and interview practice, and support to identify

transferable skills. **Delivery organisations and commissioners should ensure that these aspects are included alongside tailored careers advice and guidance in career change programmes.** Although resource intensive, the findings suggest that even limited provision has a large benefit for this cohort. **Commissioners should also consider the wider benefits of these aspects of provision outside of immediate employment outcomes, and their potential for supporting future career development.**

3. **The use of multiple media and methods of engagement is important for successful outreach and recruitment to career change programmes.** In-person engagement and a presence at locations such as careers fairs and local community spaces was found to be especially effective, particularly early in delivery. **Delivery organisations and commissioners should also ensure that sufficient time and resources are available prior to commencement for the development of a detailed and flexible recruitment strategy.** Registration processes should be simple and straightforward, with adequate time for participants to register and additional support available, if required.
4. The findings show the impact of programme messaging on participant recruitment. Delivery organisations should ensure that messaging in recruitment materials focuses on the core aims of the programme and how it will support participants, tailored to the local context. **Messaging should continuously be tested and adapted during delivery to ensure it is effective and supports recruitment.** Where expectations around delivery or outcomes change, messaging should be updated to ensure participants are given up to date information.
5. Ensuring access to training provision was a challenge across pilots, particularly in relation to participants with work commitments or childcare responsibilities. **Delivery organisations should consider how training could be made more accessible, such as by providing increased flexibility in delivery times and options for less intensive provision over a longer duration.** Where participants are required to leave existing employment, delivery organisations and commissioners should consider whether financial support could be built into programmes. In addition, both parties should be aware of the implications for benefit eligibility if participants are not actively looking for work during participation. The possibility of negotiating exceptions with Department for Work and Pensions should be considered in the programme design phase.
6. The findings emphasise the importance of delivery staff leveraging their existing networks for participant referral, identification of appropriate training provision and employer engagement. **Where staff do not have access to existing contacts, delivery organisations should encourage their rapid development.** In addition, **it is essential for delivery staff to have sufficient labour market knowledge for the programme's area of focus**, whether geographically or sector based.

7. Commissioners of programmes to support career change should ensure that eligibility criteria are clearly defined. **In addition, delivery organisations should ensure that referral partners are fully aware of, and understand, these criteria, to prevent referrals of individuals outside of the scope of the programme.** Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate the **importance of a level of flexibility within funding criteria**, to enable adaptation of delivery if required.
8. The findings demonstrate the importance of engaging with employers in the design and delivery of career change programmes. **Delivery organisations and commissioners should ensure that employer engagement is a key focus of programme development, and that sufficient time and resources are available for this activity.** All parties should also consider potential volatility in terms of the level of interest, engagement and commitment of individual employers, and ensure that engagement plans are realistic and flexible prior to commencement.