



# Evaluation of the Building Better Opportunities Programme

Summary of Evaluation Findings 2020

The National Lottery Community Fund is matching funds from the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 programme to provide joint investment in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion, and supporting the hardest to reach groups to progress towards and into employment. This summary brings together evidence from the national evaluation of the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme to present an overview of the latest developments and achievements.

## Programme delivery in line with Fund strategic priorities

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### Projects are demonstrating some excellent work in line with the Fund's strategic priorities:

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- Effective practice in the BBO programme to support **individuals with multiple and complex needs** includes navigation support for participants to identify and access appropriate services and the use of peer support.
- **Young people** are being supported to achieve and evidence their experience and new skills through the use of digital badges<sup>1</sup> and other mechanisms.
- BBO projects are successfully addressing **social isolation** through a range of individual support, complemented by group activities, focused on promoting social interaction and building confidence. Relationships developed with mentors or coaches are proving to be important in reducing social isolation, as is peer interaction.
- Participant involvement is strong across BBO projects, responding to the Fund's **People in the Lead** strategy. Participants are variously involved in deciding the focus of support sessions, as well as increasingly assisting with and leading the delivery of such sessions. The role participants play in supporting marketing and communications is also highly valued by projects.
- As well as an overall aim of the programme to support **communities to thrive**, projects are engaging participants in a range of community focused activities and volunteering that is delivering real benefits to local communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Digital badges communicate skills and achievements by providing visual symbols of accomplishments alongside data providing context about the achievement: i.e. evidence of what individuals did, and who says they did it. Further details: [www.thersa.org/cities-of-learning/how-it-works#badges](http://www.thersa.org/cities-of-learning/how-it-works#badges)

# Projects have responded well to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic experienced by the UK in 2020 has necessitated that BBO projects adapt their delivery mechanisms, allowing support to participants to continue while lockdown measures are in place. Projects responded quickly with communications to participants and stakeholders to provide reassurance that they were still open, accepting referrals and available to support participants.

With face to face delivery of support largely not possible within the restrictions put in place in late March 2020, projects have had to adapt the way they are in contact with participants. Commonly this has involved swapping to the use of telephone calls, emails, online messaging or video calls to maintain contact in terms of one-to-one support delivered by mentors or key workers.

Projects are reporting success in the levels of engagement they are maintaining and they have placed a strong emphasis on mental health and wellbeing themed support, recognising the increased need to support participants who are particularly vulnerable during a time of heightened anxiety and isolation. Providers delivering BBO support are also aware that the resulting economic crisis may impact their future achievement of results, and so are considering how to mitigate this while continuing to be responsive as the situation develops.

**HEADSUP CONTINUE TO OFFER OUR EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMME**

We wanted to get in touch to let you know that despite everything that is happening at the moment with the Coronavirus, HeadsUp are still offering our employability service to people across Essex who wish to seek work, training or start job searching. We specifically support people who have had or are currently experiencing common mental health problems such as anxiety or depression.

Circumstances mean that unfortunately we will not be able to meet with participants face to face for a while, but we can support anyone who is referred using phone, email, video call and postal methods. Please do still refer anyone who you feel might benefit as we really can still help people to take positive steps.

Indeed, at a time when we are all required to adapt our approach to working with clients we invite you to get in touch if there is any activity that you feel might benefit from our collaboration or sharing of information. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

To find out more please check out our website  
[ENABLEEAST.ORG.UK/HEADSUP](https://enableeast.org.uk/headsup)

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# Engagement targets have been exceeded

89,969 participants have been engaged up to June 2019, meaning the programme has exceeded its participant numbers target set for the delivery period up to the end of 2020. The programme is continuing to reach some of the key target groups identified in the national ESF Operational Programme. Of note is the particularly positive performance in terms of engaging participants with disabilities (currently 49% of all participants engaged).

# The benefits of achieving employment are clear

Performance in terms of ESF results is good. 26,020 positive ESF results covering employment outcomes, engaging in training and job search have been achieved to date.

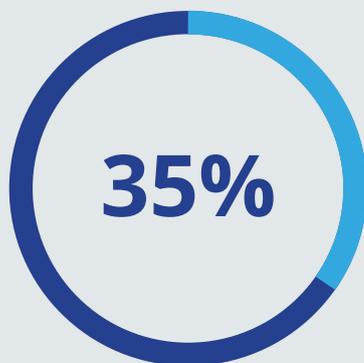
The programme has exceeded its target for participants entering employment, with 14% of all participants in employment on exit, a good result given the nature of the target groups supported by BBO. The employment gained by participants shows some permanency and security, with all participants who responded to the BBO evaluation survey and reported being in employment having permanent roles, with only one participant being on a zero-hour contract.

Moving into employment has wider benefits for participants and their families. The financial security provided from paid employment came through particularly strongly in participants' responses to the survey. However, it was equally clear that participants value the wider impacts of entering work, in terms of building a social network and the sense of independence and value this provides.

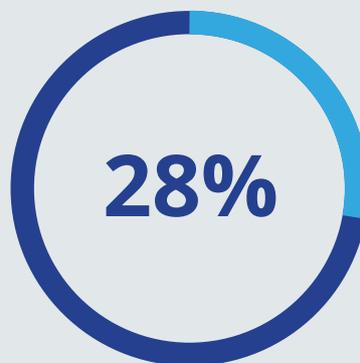
## Results

# 35,292

participants who have exited the programme



in employment



in education or training



in job search

**“It has made quite a lot of difference; it has made me more confident in myself and made me feel more valuable and independent.”**

(Participant)

**“It has helped in every way; I feel that I am doing something worthwhile and it has obviously helped with my financial situation.”**

(Participant)

**“I think it helped me to get my confidence back and get back into a routine, which was good for my mental health and wellbeing.”**

(Participant)

## Wider outcomes are equally valuable

For some participants, progressing towards employment will be, and is, as important as gaining a job, given their starting point. The destinations of other participants who may not have secured employment are equally worthy of note, given the evidence of progression they provide. Survey results suggest participants have moved into a volunteering role (11%), education or employment (7%) or a work placement (2%) which all demonstrate positive outcomes which are common elements of a progression pathway towards work. Volunteering is also known to bring many personal and social benefits, and this was also evident for BBO participants:

**“I am working at the moment as a volunteer in my local community, which I enjoy very much, making some new friends along the way.”**

(Participant)

The survey results also provide evidence on the wider outcomes from the programme for participants, most notably that just under three quarters of participants reported having gained confidence. Using the short version of the Warwick Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS),<sup>2</sup> results from the survey also suggest there has been a meaningful change in the average mental wellbeing of BBO participants at the end of their support. Equally just under half of participants directly reported improved confidence.

### Wider outcomes were achieved



of survey respondents  
gained confidence



of survey respondents  
improved their wellbeing

<sup>2</sup> SWEMWBS is a scale which has been validated for the measurement of mental wellbeing developed.

Participants also reported that improved confidence in turn led to increased motivation, improved self-esteem and reduced social isolation. Along with improved confidence, such outcomes have also encouraged participants to think about how they would like to progress in the future

**“It has helped me to realise that I do want to work eventually, hopefully in the future I will be in a position to get a job and try to build my life up again.”**

(Participant)

## The programme has significantly benefited delivery organisations

Increased organisational capacity to deliver as well as knowledge of complex funding represent key outcomes reported by grant holders and partner organisations involved in delivering the BBO programme. 84% of grant holders reported that receiving BBO funding has helped their organisation's capacity and 96% of partners now reported that their organisations were 'knowledgeable' or 'very knowledgeable' of complex funding, a 30% increase on their perceived position prior to applying to BBO. This has led to tangible changes in processes and systems within organisations, which is credited by some projects as directly supporting the organisations involved to be successful in securing subsequent funding.

**“Our involvement in BBO has had a very positive impact on the organisation. It has strengthened its ability to develop a project from scratch and lead a partnership of organisations. Processes implemented have been shared as best practise across the whole organisation”**

(Grant holder)

## Future evaluation needs to recognise the current situation

The current COVID-19 pandemic may potentially present challenges to the future delivery of BBO and the profile of results and outcomes achieved in the next phase of delivery. This will be a focus in future evaluation activity in order to contextualise further reporting of results. More broadly, evaluation activity is planned to continue alongside the extended delivery period for projects to ensure ongoing learning and evidence is captured for the full lifetime of the programme.

