

Innovation for Youth and Community

Evaluation Report

The Innovation for Youth & Community (IYC) project was led by Petroc, a general further education college working with a range of voluntary sector partners across Devon. The project involved seven Strands of activity to support young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and adults disadvantaged in the labour market. The IYC project was funded by the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund.

This report was researched and written by Clarity CIC which was commissioned by Petroc to undertake an independent evaluation of the Project.

January 2023

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Executive Summary

The Innovation for Youth & Community (IYC) project was led by Petroc, a general further education college working with a range of voluntary sector partners across Devon. The project involved seven Strands of activity to support young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and adults disadvantaged in the labour market. The IYC project was funded by the UK government's Community Renewal Fund.

Short term outcomes

There is good evidence that the activity undertaken as a result of the IYC Employability Grants Devon programme and delivered by partners in the other Strands has assisted a significant number of beneficiaries to move closer to or into the labour market and be better equipped to sustain employment.

There is clear evidence that a cohort of young people have developed skills and have enhanced employability as a result of IYC activities and some limited evidence from grant recipients that some young people "are better connected with their local communities".

There is no evidence that the IYC Project has had a significant impact on beneficiary's digital skills although Strand 5 "Rural understanding" provides some useful data around young people's use of digital technology and access to digitally based services which is worthy of further exploration. However, it is likely that some of the support activities and interventions undertaken by partners and grant recipients did indirectly enhance the confidence of beneficiaries in using digital technologies and in seeking help in this area.

There is very limited evidence that the IYC Project has explicitly helped communities, especially those in rural and coastal areas, to have increased sustainability, better connection with local services, access to funding for locally led initiatives including regeneration, improving green spaces, working towards net zero etc. However, there is evidence from grant recipients that the Project has assisted these organisations in their development, profile and connections with communities and other organisations.

Long term outcomes

It has not been possible within the scope of this evaluation to provide an informed commentary on the impacts and long-term outcomes that arise beyond the (relatively limited) period of the IYC Project itself. However it is recommended that Petroc seeks feedback from partners and beneficiaries engaged in the IYC project to gain an understanding of these longer-term results.

Lessons, Learning and Recommendations

The Report identifies a number of lessons and learning points arising from the Project which are relevant to Petroc and its project partners as well as other organisations engaged in employability work and funding bodies, including the UK government. These relate to project design and structure, timescales, beneficiary engagement, partner involvement, grants programmes and project management.

1 Background

1.1 The Innovation for Youth and Community (IYC) Project was designed to enhance and expand support for young people and adults who face challenges in accessing learning, training and employment. In particular, the IYC Project sought to trial new and innovative approaches to providing such support, identify and promote good practice and collate and produce resources that will assist organisations working in this field.

1.2 The IYC Project operated across Devon County but with a particular priority given to Torridge and West Devon Districts.

1.3 While the IYC Project was developed in response to the funding opportunity provided by the UK government's Community Renewal Fund, which was launched in November 2021, the Project builds on Petroc's extensive past experience in this field including through the Empowering Enterprise funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and the European Social Fund, Experience Works part funded by the European Social Fund and Personal Mentor Network project funded by the Cabinet Office through the Plymouth and South West Peninsula City Deal.

1.4 The IYC Project was awarded funding (total contract value) of £568,871 from the Community Renewal Fund. This was enhanced by £45,797 in-kind funding from Petroc and a further £20,000 from the private sector. IYC was managed by a small team in Petroc's Programme Management Office.

2 Timetable

2.1 The timetable within which the IYC project operated is highlighted here because the timescale and uncertainties around timing presented a major challenge to all engaged in the project, including Petroc itself, partners and grant recipients. There are key learning points around timescales, outlined in Section 14.

2.2 The IYC project was conceived and designed in Spring 2021 and an application was submitted to CRF through Devon County Council (DCC) in May 2021.¹ However, Petroc, along with other applicants to CRF, did not receive formal notification of the award of a grant until late December 2021. More significantly, at this point the original deadline for the completion of projects (June 2022) was retained with the result that both Petroc, its partners and potential grant recipients had an extremely short window in which to get the project and individual activities up and running, delivered and completed.

¹ Project applications to CRF had to be submitted through Devon County Council as the upper tier local authority for the area. DCC had responsibility for overseeing all CRF funded projects in their area.

2.3 The deadline for completion was later extended through to December 2022, with an end to the project activity in November 2022 although there was a delay in funder DCC verbally reporting that an extension had been agreed (in May 2022) and Petroc being formally aware of this (in June 2022). Petroc was understandably not prepared to confirm an extended timescale with partners and grant recipients until formal written notification had been received.

2.4 A summary of the project timeline is in Appendix 1.

3 Project Design

Strands

3.1 The IYC Project was structured around seven distinct, though related, strands of activity. These strands represent individual work streams and programmes with a specific focus, output and/or target group. They were described by Petroc as below.

Strand 1 Grants Programme - Employability Grants Devon

Pilot activity to complement and/or enhance Petroc's existing ESF Community Grants Programme, particularly focused on the priority places of Torridge and West Devon, as well as North Devon, where take-up had been low.

Strand 2 Community engagement

Designed to build on positive outcomes from the pandemic and develop new volunteering, social action and work experience opportunities for young people.

Strand 3 Adult Success Coaches

Piloting a programme to support the unemployed, particularly in priority groups and those most severely impacted by Covid-19.

Strand 4 User Involvement

Developing end-user involvement in management of projects/initiatives, focused on young people furthest from the labour market, where this had not previously been achieved effectively.

Strand 5 Improved rural understanding

Developing a better baseline understanding of geographical hotspots, connectivity of places, the definition of 'rural' and accessibility of urban services, to ensure future services are better designed to meet the needs of rural communities.

Strand 6 Collaboration and sharing insight

Sharing of insight and undertaking collaborative problem solving regarding identified challenges around accessibility of support services for young people in order to develop systems and resources to help youth workers navigate external support services effectively.

Strand 7 In-Work Support

Develop and pilot innovative in-work support for unemployed/inactive people once they move into employment, to improve their ability to sustain employment and prevent repeated instances of unemployment.

3.2 Once the project got underway it became evident that there were especially close links between specific strands and some activity was undertaken jointly across these strands. This particularly applied to strands 2, 4 and 6.

Partners

3.3 A core feature of the IYC Project was the engagement of partners across several of the Strands. These partners, all from the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and all engaged in supporting adults and/or young people in the fields of training, learning, volunteering and employment were recruited during the project's initial design phase. Partners were contracted to enhance support to their existing beneficiary categories and collaborate with other partners in "their" Strand(s) to collectively produce models of best practice and related resources.

3.4 The table below indicates which partners were involved in the individual Strands.

| Partner organisation | Strands |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Seadream Education CIC | 2,4,6,7 |
| Battling On CIC | 2,4,6,7 |
| Whiz Kidz UK(WKUK) (Plymouth) CIC | 2,4,6,7 |
| Young Devon | 2,4,6, 7 |
| SS Freshspring Trust | 2 |
| Devon Communities Together | 1,2,4,5,6 |

Best Practice Models

3.5 A key outcome of several Strands was the development and production of what were called "Best Practice Models". A Best Practice Model" (BPM) was effectively a published resource of good practice, information and guidance which drew on the experience and expertise of partners, and their learning from their involvement in the IYC Project. The rationale for the BPMs was that they could be shared amongst the staff of the partner organisations and more widely with organisations working with young people and/or adults in the learning and employability fields.

Data Suites

3.6 Two Strands involved the production of “data suites” which collated statistical data and other evidence, focussing especially on rural needs, which would be a valuable resource to guide strategic and operational planning in the learning and employability fields.

Grant Programme Framework

3.7 A further outcome was the production of a Framework for designing and managing a small grants programme drawing on the experience of managing and delivering the Strand 1 programme. The scheme focused on allocating grants to organisations and businesses that offer activities that support the unemployed to make their next steps towards work or education, or to engage with the benefits system.

Independent Partner Manager

3.8 Devon Communities Together (DCT), which has worked with Petroc on past training and unemployment programmes, was commissioned to manage and facilitate the collaborative work amongst partners for Strands 2, 4 and 6. DCT was also engaged to provide capacity building support for the Strand 1 Grants programme and undertake the delivery of Strand 5 (Rural Understanding).

4 Evaluation Approach and Methodology

4.1 Our approach to this evaluation centred on the following key elements:

- Understanding the background to the project including the work and evaluations of other Petroc programmes, notably Experience Works, Empowering Enterprise and Personal Mentor Network, which have informed the design of the IYC project.
- Ensuring we had a thorough knowledge of the operational aspects of the IYC Project – including the strand-based structure, the role of partners, intended outcomes and outputs and processes for collecting monitoring data and feedback from beneficiaries, grant recipients and others.
- Contributing to the design of monitoring processes to ensure these provided data that could usefully contribute to the evaluation.
- Building a strong relationship and maintaining close communication with the Petroc Programme Management Office team and DCT.
- Using a mixed methods approach to collecting evaluation related data from stakeholders – including online surveys, interviews, group discussion and observation.

- Analysing data collected by Petroc as part of the required monitoring and reporting processes.
- Being proportionate in our requests for data and feedback from and discussions with partners and grant recipients given their limited capacity and the reporting requirements built into their agreements with Petroc.

4.2 We had originally intended to work with Petroc and stakeholders at the outset of the Project to develop a Theory of Change or Outcomes/Impact Framework for the Project as a whole. However, it was agreed that there was not sufficient capacity within Petroc and partners in the initial phase, not least because there was an urgency to get the Project underway after months of delay, to make this feasible. Nevertheless, the overall vision, aims and outcomes of the IYC Project, the key components of a Theory of Change, drawn from project documentation, are described in section 5 below.

4.3 We also intended actively to involve young people in the evaluation through training in evaluation methods, co-design of evaluation tools and undertaking a 'reality check' role to test findings and recommendations. In practice this was not possible because of the timescale of the activities and operational limitations of the project partners. Some evaluation data was gathered with beneficiaries by us and also by partners themselves, but it was not a co-designed evaluation.

5 Outputs, Outcomes and Priorities

5.1 The Project Application described a series of short term and medium to long term outcomes (referred to as benefits) that the project was designed to achieve. These are summarised below.

Short term outcomes (benefits)

- Individual beneficiaries will be moved closer to or into the labour market and will be better equipped to sustain employment through activity that will identify and address barriers, raise aspirations and develop skills. This will be achieved through co-designing and piloting new activity, which is not currently available to the target groups.
- Young people will be better connected with and able to support their local communities, equipped with valuable skills for future employment.
- Through continual innovation in the use of digital technologies across all strands of the project, as well as referrals to digital skills provision outside the project, beneficiaries will improve their digital skills and ability to access and participate effectively in a wider range of services and activities.
- Communities, especially those in rural and coastal areas, will benefit from increased sustainability, better connection with local services, access to funding for locally led initiatives including regeneration, improving green spaces, working towards net zero, etc.

5.2 The IYC Project Application noted that each Strand of the project was designed to develop and pilot provision which will generate lessons and recommendations for new and improved services and provision for the future contributing to a range of long-term benefits as set out below.

Medium to long term outcomes (benefits)

- levelling up of disadvantaged communities;
- addressing social and economic inequality for some of the country's most deprived areas;
- improved visibility and understanding of youth services to enable young people and youth workers to access them more effectively;
- achievement of net zero within individual communities;
- access to a better-skilled pool of potential employees for employers, facilitating business growth and improved productivity;
- sustainable rural communities which are well-connected to services and have access to improved spaces; and
- a swifter and more sustainable recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

Beneficiary and Community Priorities

5.3 The IYC Project identified two priority beneficiary groups as follows:

- young people aged 19-24 who are (or at risk of becoming) NEET, have a disability, are in care / leaving care, or face wider barriers to work or learning;
- people over 50, particularly those lacking lower-level transferrable skills; those with a disability, mental health issue or other health related barrier to work or learning.

5.4 In addition two “types” of communities were identified as priorities for IYC activity, as follows.

- rural, coastal and urban communities experiencing significant and ongoing challenges around unemployment, educational attainment, health disparity or other factors which drive local deprivation; and
- communities facing additional economic pressures from COVID-19, notably those with an over-representation of businesses / employment within the Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure sectors.

5.5 Overall, the IYC project identified Torridge and West Devon as priority areas across all strands of activity, with the aim of 32% and 20% of activity and expenditure relating to these districts respectively.

5.6 A detailed breakdown of intended outputs by beneficiary group and type of support and outcomes is provided in Appendix 2.

6 Evaluating Strand 1: Employability Grants Devon

Strand 1 Summary

6.1 The key elements of Strand 1 were as follows.

| | |
|--|---|
| Aim/Purpose | To resource new and innovative activity by voluntary organisations and businesses to support and encourage employment and individual progression, including activities that support the unemployed to make their next steps towards work or education, or to engage with the benefits system. (See Appendix 3 for introductory information on the Petroc website.) |
| Activity | The management of the Employability Grants Devon with an initial budget of £200,000 subsequently increased to £250,000. Grants of between £10,000 and £30,000 were available to VCSE organisations, enterprises and businesses across Devon County Council district area but with a particular priority given to Torridge and West Devon. |
| Management and Grant Recipients | <p>The programme was managed and delivered by Petroc. Devon Communities Together was commissioned to work with Petroc to deliver capacity building activities.</p> <p>The programme drew on past and current experience (within Petroc) of running the ESF Community Grants Programme.</p> <p>Grant Recipients in Strand 1 were: BCre8ive Art Makers CIC, St. Sidwell's Centre, Gifted Women, Motiv-8SW, Be Buckfastleigh, Sion Kemp Health Coaching, Occasion Cards Ltd, Co Create Exeter CIC, WayMakers Devon CIC, Bright Sky Collective Ltd, Jamming Station, Gilead Foundations Charity, Double Elephant Print Workshop and Natural Art Movement</p> |
| Process | <p>Information on the programme and the application process was accessible through the dedicated IYC pages on the Petroc website.</p> <p>Applications could be submitted at any time during the application window which was extended when the overall IYC Project timeline was extended.</p> <p>Applications were considered by a panel of five people drawn from Petroc staff.</p> <p>Grantees were required to submit a final report and relevant additional supporting material at the completion of their project.</p> |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| outcomes | <p>15 organisations secured a grant</p> <p>17 grants were awarded (3 organisations received 2 grants for additional/follow on project activity)</p> <p>8 organisations withdrew their applications or were declined</p> <p>Total of £250,000 in grants provided</p> <p>230 individual beneficiaries were engaged by grantees.</p> <p>7 innovation plans were developed</p> <p>10 knowledge transfer activities and collaborations were developed</p> <p>2 Feasibility studies were undertaken</p> <p>3 Decarbonisation Plans were developed</p> |
|-----------------|---|

Strand 1 Impact Review

Process

6.2 Generally grant recipients were content with the grant application process, clarity of criteria and communication and relationship with the team at Petroc.

“Petroc were excellent – very organised, very supportive, the paperwork was simple for participants, with pre-set guidelines, very manageable”

6.3 However, most flagged the challenges associated with the short timescale between being awarded a grant and expected start date. This was difficult for most grant recipients but was especially problematic for those who were awarded a grant relatively late in the process. The main implication of the tight timescale was the lack of time available for engaging and recruiting beneficiaries. The confirmed extension of the whole IYC project came too late to enable some grant recipients to extend their project activity over a longer and more appropriate period.

6.4 Some grant recipients specifically reported they would have liked to work with beneficiaries over a longer period. However, they were aware of the timeframe they were signing up to.

6.5 Some commented that the personal information required from participants (especially NI numbers) was intrusive and discouraged and possibly prevented some people from participating.

“The application process was pretty straightforward, pretty solid. But the level of questioning to the participants in the questionnaires about National Insurance, benefits etc was too intrusive, it put several people off getting involved. It was too personalised – there wouldn’t have been objections if some of that information had been anonymised.”

6.6 The monitoring and reporting processes and information required of grant recipients was accepted by the majority of recipients although some struggled with this and acknowledged they didn’t build sufficient capacity for management and administration into their project structure and budget.

6.7 We were impressed with the effort grant recipients put into their end of grant

reports, innovation plans, case studies and other submitted material and these provide a rich source of learning and insight which should be made available to those working in the employability field.

Project Design and Management

6.8 We were also impressed by the approach taken by several organisations to manage their projects effectively – especially those involving a range of activities and a large number of individuals and businesses providing support and input.

6.9 Several grant recipients devoted significant effort to collecting outcomes related feedback from their beneficiaries - using a variety of tools to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. These commonly related to such matters as an individual's wellbeing, confidence and connectedness as well as progression into learning, training, volunteering and employment.

6.10 Some projects engaged a small number of beneficiaries from outside of the IYC area of Devon - Plymouth and Torbay in particular. While it was recognised that the outputs and outcomes associated with these beneficiaries could not formally be “counted” in the monitoring and reporting system they are nevertheless valid and should be recognised and recorded.

6.11 One organisation highlighted that they would have liked to involve young people in co-designing the project, but this was not possible within the overall timescale. (Active beneficiary engagement in co-design of employability projects would have been genuinely innovative so it is disappointing that in practice the IYC timescale has made this virtually impossible).

Reach and Engagement

6.12 Several organisations found recruiting and engaging beneficiaries challenging. This was partly down to the short time available for the recruitment phase, because of the overall IYC timescale, as noted above, but it also reflects the inherent challenges in engaging people who experience barriers in accessing employment, education and training. Several projects highlighted the anxiety felt by many potential beneficiaries, especially when considering embarking on something new and unfamiliar, with unfamiliar people and in an unfamiliar place.

6.13 In general, grant recipients used a wide range of methods and channels to market and promote their project – relying especially on social media, informal contacts, face to face conversations and word of mouth. Some grant recipients had expected referrals from public and voluntary sector agencies to be an important way of reaching beneficiaries but in most cases, this was less significant than anticipated. Again, this may be down to the tight timescale; agencies may well be reluctant to refer people to a new, unfamiliar and seemingly untested intervention. Some grant

recipients made specific attempts to connect with the social prescribing system, and in certain cases this was successful in reaching some target beneficiaries.

6.14 Almost all projects were operating in and seeking to engage beneficiaries from predominantly rural and in some cases relatively remote areas. This posed challenges for the organisations who were seeking to reach people who were less connected with or able to access existing employability support and who were more likely to be socially and geographically isolated.

6.15 One project specifically highlighted that they would have welcomed opportunities to work with Petroc's students. Inevitably the relationship Petroc had with grant recipients was primarily as a grant funder with a focus on ensuring the process of managing applications, grant agreements, payments and reporting was handled effectively.

Target Beneficiaries

6.16 Overall, grant recipients were clearly seeking to engage and support people who faced significant barriers in accessing employment, education and training. And, in general the projects appeared to be meeting a need and filling a gap, that existing provision was not addressing.

6.17 Overall, grant recipients engaged 230 people. Of these 157 (68.3%) were female, 66 (28.7%) were male and 7 (3%) did not provide their gender. Only eight beneficiaries described their ethnicity as other than white. A breakdown by age is provided below.

| Age group | Proportion of grant recipient beneficiaries |
|------------------|--|
| 16 to 24 | 14% |
| 25-29 | 10% |
| 30-34 | 10% |
| 35-39 | 12% |
| 40-44 | 13% |
| 45-49 | 11% |
| 50-54 | 10% |
| 55-59 | 7% |
| 60-64 | 8% |
| 65+ | 4% |

6.18 Almost two thirds (54.8%) of beneficiaries reported that they had some form of disability, long term illness or infirmity. 72 (31.3%) reported they experienced mental health issues and 32 (13.9%) reported their mobility was limited.

6.19 84 beneficiaries (36.5%) said they had a neurodivergent condition with 24 (10.4%) stating they were not sure.

6.20 The profile of beneficiaries, summarised above, suggests that overall grant recipients, and thus the Employability Grants Devon programme as a whole, was successful in reaching some of the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and seldom heard people.

6.21 Several projects worked particularly with people with anxiety, mental health issues and/or neurodiversity. This required support to be carefully designed, appropriately paced and with a high degree of personalisation that reflected the particular needs and circumstances of the individuals. Most organisations recognised the importance of this at the start of the project, but some learnt and had to adapt as their project progressed. Some found that they had to provide more one to one and individualised support than they had anticipated – which sometimes stretched their capacity.

“It requires real skill, experience and sensitivity in engaging with people who are anxious”

6.22 There was a strong focus on taking a holistic approach towards addressing the needs and challenges facing beneficiaries across many of the projects. Projects understood, and reflected in their activities and interventions, the importance of helping people to develop their confidence, self-esteem and connectedness and improve their health and wellbeing as key early steps in their journey to gain skills and potentially employment. There was a strong sense of “person-centredness” being a key principle across from the projects.

6.23 It was clear that some projects intentionally described and promoted their work as being about wellbeing and life skills rather than employability, which they felt can be off-putting for some beneficiaries.

“People would have been less interested if we had “sold it” as an Employability Programme, hardly anyone comes forward if it’s advertised that way. We will continue this “indirect” approach to advertising.”

6.24 Some projects explicitly targeted women and their feedback indicates that there is a need to provide support which specifically focuses on the needs, barriers and challenges faced by women in engaging in employment and enterprise. Isolation, lack of confidence and the difficulties of connecting with others with similar experiences, needs and ideas, especially those living in relatively rural areas, was a common theme across several projects.

“The women we are working with are socially excluded, marginalised; those women often don’t feel able to access opportunities, they need support sometimes.”

6.25 Several projects were based around supporting people to develop their skills, confidence, employment and enterprise opportunities in the arts and cultural field. As well as providing valuable support to individuals, collectively these projects demonstrate the economic potential of the arts sector to help create income, jobs and enterprises, especially in rural areas.

“This project has given us an enhanced profile... we have been included in the North Devon Cultural Strategy – on working parties, steering groups etc and long-term we hope that money coming into the region will therefore be targeted at those artists that we’ve been working with.”

Impact for Beneficiaries

6.26 Evidence of the difference the activities supported through the Employability Grants Devon programme has made for individual beneficiaries is provided through the participant data, narrative reports, case studies and other material submitted by grant recipients, feedback obtained through evaluation interviews with a sample of organisations.

6.27 Petroc has collected data from grant recipients on “*what [beneficiaries] are doing following the support [they] have received from this project*”. Of the 230 participants engaged in strand 1, 115 have achieved at least one outcome.

| Post Project Activity | number | percentage |
|--|---------------|-------------------|
| In education or training | 33 | 14.35% |
| In employment or self-employment | 17 | 7.4% |
| Engaged in life skills or volunteering | 69 | 30% |
| Engaged in job search | 18 | 7.8%% |
| Newly in receipt of benefits/planning for benefits | 12 | 5.22% |
| | | |
| Total (for whom data available) | 149 | |

6.28 It is clear from the evidence we have reviewed that the activities supported through the grants programme have had a significant difference especially around individual’s confidence to pursue employment and learning opportunities, awareness of support and opportunities available and greater connectedness with organisations and their community of place and/or interest.

6.29 The following comments from evaluation interviews and grant recipient reports illustrate the ways in which the programme has impacted positively on the lives of individuals.

“As a result, two people have set up a new company in Northam, where they now have a gallery and do framing for artists. 2 others – a glassmaker and printmaker are working together and did an exhibition together this summer in Ilfracombe.”

“We have records for 8 people who went on to do courses at the Phoenix. People have gone on to further education, volunteering, courses and have sold some of their work “

“We are in contact with some of the women who came on the course; they have gone on to do certificated courses in Peer Mentor training with us. They now volunteer with us as Peer Mentors, which has built routine and confidence for them.”

“The outcomes are [include] people going into training, voluntary work, employment or self-employment and actively job – seeking.”

“Working in a team as they did, you could see some taking the lead, could see them using their leadership skills again. Also some people were natural mentors; it helped people to discover new, or rediscover old skills.”

“People had better mental health and team working skills. They worked with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Some have moved on to volunteer with other organisations”

“The short term has seen an increase in the confidence of participants to approach funding bodies, and to join the local artists and makers network. Several participants are now applying for funding for their businesses “

A beneficiary reports: *“I have some very clear next steps for my career choices. I feel more at ease and peaceful in myself. I feel I can step into myself and be seen.”*

A beneficiary reports: *“[I have] a deeper clarity and the acknowledgment of feelings that have been building up and what has not been serving me or my business. I have been overwhelmed and spreading myself too thin. I feel that I am more ready to take the next steps that will support moving forward towards my goals short term and long”.*

“This project engaged 17 new young people, of which 15 are still engaging. All 15 are exploring potential for gaining work experience.”

“The short-term benefits for the participants have been attending a social and interactive group session, in an environment that was created for thoughts and opinions to be shared. The benefit of this is that social interaction, and awareness that they are not alone.”

“Each participant filled in a check-in at the start and end of each session to track the impact of each session itself using 5 simple questions. Some statistics from these evaluations and the participant forms are as follows:

- *100% of participants who completed the participant 2 form said they found the project “useful”.*

- *When evaluated at the start, middle and end of the 8-week programme, participants showed an improvement across an average of 9 out of the 12 categories tested.*
- *There was an average change of +1.6 points on the sliding scale numbered 1-5, across all categories.*
- *The most common improvement is relaxation, for example 21 out of 23 check-in forms show an improvement in this area from beginning to end."*

"Many participants are now connected with Clarion Futures who has signed them up and will be able to provide free 1:1 benefits, job searching, job interview and CV writing support. Some participants told us they now feel more focused on what they want to do, what industries they want to join and how to move forward, as a result of the skills masterclasses.

"I observed an increase across the board in participants' levels of motivation, confidence, social support, connection to nature, professional development, well-being, happiness, and a renewed focus on their physical health (sleep, diet, and movement). The short-term impact is obvious in my final conversations with particular success seen around motivation and physical health."

"Participants gained new creative skills and considered employment options from new angles. There were benefits for individuals' mental health and wellbeing, through being in a supportive environment with people who believed in them and encouraged their creativity. Many of these individuals will continue to find volunteering opportunities and get involved in other community activities as a result of the project and have more confidence accessing a wide variety of services."

"Improved awareness of their own strengths and self-worth; increased confidence; increased knowledge of available services, support, job-searching pathways and options for entering training or employment; increased understanding and awareness of their entitlements and protection under the Equality Act 2010; improved understanding of how to self-advocate; lower levels of stress and anxiety about the prospect of being in employment; new friendships."

Impact for Organisations

6.30 In almost all cases the grant funded projects helped to build capacity in the recipient organisations. The impact for the organisations in some respects mirrors the difference the projects have made for individual beneficiaries: for example, valuable learning, greater confidence, stronger relationships with others and a greater sense of connectedness with local communities.

"This project gave us confidence as a small not-for-profit organisation; we invited Petroc to our end of project celebration. They saw that we had delivered an extraordinary project and suggested that we apply for more funding."

"In the short term, the project has enabled ArtMakers to seriously expand its educational/training programme, which has enhanced its status both within the arts community but also in the wider economic and business communities of Northern Devon.

And in the long term, it has help establish ArtMakers as a go-to organisation for local artists and makers support and engagement. The evidence of need provided by the participants will be used to support the creation of further training sessions in the region. It has underpinned on-going work to establish a successful network for regional artists and makers.”

6.31 Several projects reported that the funding enabled them to test out new approaches and interventions and learn what works and what does not. Some explicitly report that they intend to build on what they regard as a test or pilot project and expand and develop provision in the longer term. For some organisations the grant funding enabled a “proof of concept” phase, effectively providing the platform for securing more substantial funding for a long term and scaled-up programme.

“Yes, it was completely out of our ballpark. We have now expanded out of our comfort zone, pretty much because of this grant.”

“We have gained many new employer partners who can offer work experience and even paid work to women working with us. We have developed new workshop materials and resources which we can use in the future. We have a clear, effective and repeatable employability programme developed that we means we can now pursue accreditation within our employability course. At the employers event we were offered pro bono support with workshop delivery, HR and fundraising.”

6.32 Some projects have developed “innovation plans” setting out how they intend to take forward new interventions in the employability field – this was a specific output that the IYC project sought to encourage.

“This innovation plan sets out a model of providing employability support to a community of women who are experiencing multiple disadvantage and often deemed ‘hard to reach’ by services. It is innovative because existing employability provision can fail to reach this community sector who are often socially excluded and can experience discrimination and stigmatisation (eg. Women who are living with addictions, women who have had their children removed and women in the criminal justice system). Gifted Women offers a trauma-informed group work programme of employability training and confidence building, where women can set individual goals and work towards them in a supportive environment. Gifted Women partners with local employers to provide meaningful work experience placements which are tailored to women’s strengths and ambitions, enabling women to put all their learning into practice and experience being part of a team.”

6.33 Feedback and reports from projects reveals that organisations have gained learning and experience across a number of areas including, in particular, the following:

- Effective means of promoting and marketing new services and reaching and engaging beneficiaries.
- Project design – including building in sufficient organisational capacity at both set up and delivery stages and determining appropriate timescales.

- Understanding of how best to engage and support neurodiverse people and those experiencing high levels of anxiety.
- Collaborative relationships with other organisations.
- Recognising when one to one or group support is most appropriate for particular beneficiary groups.
- The importance of additional support provision for some beneficiary groups such as provision of food or food vouchers and help with child care.

“We have built good relationships with local employers and have created resources for workshops which we will be able to use in future work; these will have long-term benefits for us and our clients.”

6.34 Several organisations reported that they would have valued opportunities to explore collaboration with other funded projects, especially at an early stage in the programme. This seems appropriate given that a number of organisations were working with similar beneficiary groups or in a similar field. We are not aware of any attempt at any stage in the programme to bring grant recipients together with each other or to link into the work of delivery partners in the other strands of activity. This is an important learning point which is covered in the Lessons and Learning section (14).

“It possibly would have helped to link with other IYC projects. There were no joint meetings or get-togethers. Collaboration might have helped – you don’t know do you? We could have done joint advertising, collaborated... with partnership you don’t know where it can lead or how it can complement things until you do it.”

6.35 However, specifically in relation to the grants programme, there are two key points to note. Firstly, considering grant applications individually and on a rolling basis, had the benefit of enabling decisions to be made relatively quickly but made it very difficult to take a more strategic approach and encourage applicants to explore collaboration before a grant was awarded.

6.36 Secondly, the overall initial timing of the programme meant there was insufficient time to facilitate collaboration amongst all grant recipients once they had been awarded a grant but before they commenced delivery.

7 Evaluating Strand 2: Community Engagement

Strand 2 Summary

7.1 The key elements of Strand 2 were as follows.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Aim/Purpose | <p>Strand 2 was designed to build on positive outcomes for young people from the pandemic and develop new volunteering, social action and work experience opportunities for young people.</p> <p>The partners delivered support services and activities to young people, helping them to access work placements and work experience. One of the partners had not engaged in delivery of these types of support before, while other partners had services and activities established.</p> <p>The learning from the partners' projects resulted in the creation of a BPM which focused on four key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increasing young people's confidence, skills, and motivation. -Transport and young people's approach to it. -Finding opportunities. -Encouraging development of suitable opportunities. <p>There was an element of co-design with young people in the development of the BPM as partners fed young people's ideas for what features of the activities had helped them into the BPM.</p> <p>The target beneficiaries were young people who wanted to or needed to access work experience and volunteering opportunities in order to broaden their skills/experiences and strengthen their employability.</p> <p>The partners ran projects in Torridge, South Devon, MidDevon.</p> |
| Management and Partners | <p>Partners in Strand 2 were: Battling On CIC, Seadream Education CIC, SS Freshspring Trust, Whiz Kidz UK CIC, Young Devon, Petroc National Citizen Service and one of Petroc NEETs support including Petroc Skills for Young People, funded by the European Social Fund and the Education & Skills Funding Agency.</p> |
| Process | <p>Partners were brought together for 3 online workshops. These workshops were facilitated by DCT. Some of the partners had not met or worked together before. The workshops outlined the requirements of the Strand and enabled introductions to each partner. Partners were able to find out more about each other's activities related to the Strand and more widely.</p> <p>The final workshop was dedicated to developing the BPM, drawing together key learning and evaluation from each of the partner's activities. The relevance of the BPM for different audiences was discussed, as well as the specific content.</p> |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| | <p>In-between these workshops, the IYC project manager kept in regular contact with all the partners, to discuss their actions plans, identify their research progress and provide support and guidance when necessary.</p> |
| Outcome | <p>The Best Practice Model (BPM) was the main outcome from this Strand, which related to the particular activities they had carried out.</p> <p>The BPM was developed from the learning each of the partner organisations had developed during the project, which was shared during online workshops facilitated by DCT. The BPM is a practical guide aimed at professionals who work with young people (such as youth workers or mentors) on work placements.</p> <p>The BPM is focused on issues that arose for partners during the project and, crucially, discusses how these were overcome. The BPM provides youth organisations with ideas for overcoming challenges they may face when arranging and/or supporting young people on work placements. The challenges vary in scope and complexity. Additional printable information sheets for placement providers and young people is also included in the BPM.</p> <p>The BPM draws on materials that partners used during their Strand project, and examples of these are shared in the BPM (e.g. Progress Star, a Learning Agreement, a Placement Plan). These can be adopted or developed further by the partners and also the wider BPM</p> |

Strand 2 Impact Review

Process and Best Practice Model

7.2 The online workshops provided positive opportunities for learning and networking. Partners varied in the length of time they had been operational, and the numbers of young people they worked with. Smaller and newer partners were able to learn from the more established and larger partners.

7.3 There was shared learning about the challenges of working with young people during the pandemic and post-pandemic. Some similar themes emerged from the discussions and partners discussed how they had adapted their services to meet the needs of young people and employers/placement organisations. These emerging themes then formed the basis of the BPM. DCT's role in facilitating the workshops and referring to the aims of the Strand was crucial to ensuring discussion stayed relevant and targeted.

7.4 The development of the BPM worked well and was embraced by the partners. The differing sizes and experiences of the partners was positive for the BPM content development because the result provides a guide for organisations who may just be starting to work with young people in the area of employment and/or training, as well as being useful for more established organisations. The market for the BPM was discussed in the final workshop and the final BPM is suitable for a range of organisations (e.g. scope, size, location). Therefore, the BPM as a project outcome has the potential to have a lasting impact well beyond the project timescale if it is marketed and distributed widely through the partners and project team.

Benefits for Partners

7.5 The discussions that took place between Strand partners during the workshops, and the time to explore issues arising from the project activities as a group, was very beneficial to the organisations. These discussions were important, although less tangible than specific outputs. Some organisations were very experienced in organising work placements/work experience for young people (e.g., Young Devon, WKUK) and some were much less experienced. The opportunity to learn from each

other's experiences, operational contexts, characteristics and experiences of young people worked with, was valued by all the strand partners.

“The feedback loop model is beneficial – taking what we know and feeding it into other projects and then embed learning.”

7.6 The outcomes for partners related to their individual projects but also the connections that they made with each other. Young Devon is having ongoing discussions with WKUK – *“we're learning how they do things”* – and Seadream CIC made new contacts with SS Freshspring and Battling On through the Strand activities which they may be able to build on in further funding applications.

7.7 One of the partners were able to create capacity in one of their service delivery teams through the Strand, giving them *“the time and space to reflect [on their processes] which was very helpful.”*

7.8 One of the partners commented on the different approach of the Strand and the IYC project more generally. There was time for discussion, shared learning and reflection which they felt was unusual in projects of this type.

“We're more used to the ‘here's the problem, let's solve it approach’ rather than the ‘let's modify what we have approach’.”

Impact for beneficiaries

7.9 One of the partners mentioned that the Strand theme had encouraged them to take a more participatory approach with the young people that they worked with. This had been beneficial in increasing their understanding of young people's perspectives and young people becoming more aware of the benefits of work placements. Participation increased understanding of young people's thought processes about work placements

“Participation by young people increased our understanding of young people's thought processes about work placements – they sometimes see them as slave labour, so they are not interested.”

“Young people could see the benefits of work placements – mutual benefit – through the project.”

7.10 The impacts for this Strand relate to the changes in young people's lives due to their participation in the partners' activities. Some partners gave really positive examples of how young people had moved into employment and/or work

placements. Some partners discussed the increase in confidence that young people had as a result of participating in the activities.

7.11 The partners focused activities on the needs of the young people they worked with, matching provision with their needs. This approach is likely to increase the successful impact of the project for the young people in the longer term

Longer term impact

7.12 The bringing together of the partners in the project has already resulted in strategic impact through relationship building. Partners now know about each other, or more about each other, and the workshops gave opportunity for networking and information sharing. Some of the partners had specific expertise in working with young people who experienced multiple layers of exclusion. Sharing information about how best to support those young people will increase the impact of the activities across all of the organisations.

7.13 Seadream CIC and SS Freshspring are developing collaborations for funding. Young Devon and WKUK are sharing strategic development ideas. These collaborations are unlikely to have developed if it had not been for the Strand activities.

7.14 Partners commented on the benefits of being brought together as a group for the workshops. They reflected on other projects they had been part of which often focused on delivery rather than incorporating discussion and time for shared learning.

“The process made us step back and reflect on why somethings work – good to reflect on the why and then hope this will help other organisations.”

7.15 Some partners had changed their ways of working because of the shared learning during the project Strand. For example, one organisation said:

“We record better and are more systematised about what we do. The meetings helped us with that as we heard what others do to record information. The grant helped us with a review process of everything we do, and also of our procedures.”

7.16 The development of the BPM was a dynamic process rather than it being left to the end of the project. This meant that impact of the project activities and the BPM itself was discussed throughout the length of the project, ensuring it was embedded rather than added on. This approach shows innovation and was well-received by partners.

“It was good to have the space to share practices, develop ideas and reflect with other organisations. It feels good to feed into something bigger that hopefully will be useful (the BPM models).”

7.17 Some partners did express concern over the longer-term impact of the project and how they BPM would be received in the wider sector.

“What will be next from it all?”

“What is the end game?”

7.18 Partners were keen to keep in contact and collaborate in future projects. They were also keen for the learning from the project to be extended to other organisations and for the BPM to be useful to the wider sector.

Learning and Next Steps Recommendations

7.19 All of the partners expressed that they had experienced some level of confusion about the requirements of the project at the start. Partly this was because they were involved in multiple Strands.

7.20 The lengthening of the delivery and reporting timescale was helpful for all of the partners except one whose employee had a contract endpoint that matched the original Strand timescale. They commented that the delivery felt *‘rushed’*.

7.21 Partners felt that the original timescale has been too tight and even with the extended time, it was difficult to deliver on all of the aims well: *‘the focus was on getting it done in time rather than quality’*.

7.22 Bringing together organisations with a range of delivery experiences worked well for shared learning and for organisations with more experience to assist the development of provision in organisations that were less experienced.

“Learned how organisations solve their problems through the information that was shared.”

7.23 The online workshops worked well as a format for information sharing and were facilitated well. Partners found the workshops helpful. Some partners mentioned they would have liked some in-person workshops and some more time for networking with the Strand.

7.24 Although partners expressed that there had been confusion over exactly what the requirements of the Strand were at the start of the project, they gained momentum with delivery and understanding as time went on.

“The meetings were more productive as time went on. “

7.25 Some of the partners have changed some of their ways of working

7.26 The project prompted a lot of thoughts about ways of doing things differently for partners. On one level, they found this helpful, and the project provided a framework and network for exploring ideas about new ways of working. However, organisations do not always have capacity for introducing new ideas or working in new ways without further funding:

“We now have 10 times more things to do [since the project].”

7.27 Partners would have appreciated clearer and more succinct guidance on what was required for each Strand. This would have helped them to ensure that Strand activities did not overlap more than was necessary. It also would have helped them with the planning of activities. The original delivery timescale put partners under a lot of pressure, particularly as they were not clear on what each strand required. The extension to the delivery and reporting timescale was appreciated but the lack of clarity around if and when the Project would be extended was problematic for staffing and capacity building in the smaller organisations.

7.28 The timescale of the project also meant that key learning from employers and young people who had been involved in the Strand activities was not as comprehensive as some partners would have liked (for evaluation and learning purposes).

“What does good look like? Need feedback from all involved in a project, including employers.”

8 Evaluating Strand 3: Adult Success Coaches

Strand 3 Summary

8.1 The key elements of Strand 3 were as follows.

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|--------------------------------|--|
| Aim/Purpose | <p>The original aim of Strand 3 was to pilot a programme to support the unemployed, particularly in priority groups and those most severely impacted by Covid-19.</p> <p>The focus of this Strand later evolved to include meeting the needs of Ukrainian refugees who moved to North and Mid Devon during the Project period.</p> <p>The Strand was based at Petroc. Three Success Coaches were employed to deliver Strand activities.</p> <p>All of the 50 beneficiaries were located in Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge.</p> |
| Management and Partners | <p>Petroc was the delivery agent. Community organisations were involved in helping the Coaches access events to attend in order to meet people who would benefit from coaching: Action for Children Children’s Centres, Pickwell Foundation, Sunrise CIC, RMB Chivenor, WINGS. Coaching was also advertised with Petroc. The coaches have also attended some events at Barnstaple Pannier Market and at South Molton</p> |
| Process | <p>The Coaches accessed potential participants through community organisations and Petroc itself. Three coaching sessions were offered to people who showed any interest in being supported and coached for their career development. The Coaches supported coachees by building their experience into a CV format, conducting mock interviews, supporting with information research, increasing their confidence and exploring some new routes to meet their motivations, and referral to other courses (Smart Skills, ESOL, etc.). The coaching was client-focused to meet the need of each individual.</p> <p>Each coachee was supported to map out a 5-year plan for career development. The Coaches helped the coachees to explore their career ambitions, and then help them to know the steps to fulfil their ambitions.</p> <p>The project manager kept a regular contact with the faculty leads and the adult success coaches to discuss progress and manage paperwork.</p> |

| | |
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| Outcomes | <p>50 people took up coaching during the project. 42 coachees were female; 8 were male. 12 coachees had additional health or learning needs. There is no outcome recorded for 37 of the coachees. In the majority of cases this is because they disengaged from the coaching programme, in some cases having attended at least one coaching session. Two of them returned to Ukraine and 1 to Poland. and 13 entered into training /education courses.</p> <p>The adult success coaches have also achieved an organisation outcome with RMB Chivenor in Braunton – North Devon in the form of a knowledge transfer.</p> |
|-----------------|---|

Strand 3 Impact Review

Beneficiary Outcomes

8.2 The coaching was successful in increasing the confidence of those coachees who fully engaged with the sessions. They were able to receive bespoke coaching, which was very important for matching what they required to education and employment opportunities that were available to them. If the coachees did not have career ambitions (i.e. they were out of employment due to health, disability or other reasons), the Coaches focused on their hobbies and interests.

8.3 The outcomes for the coachees who were interviewed for the evaluation was positive. The coaching had helped to build their confidence, as well as enable them into education and employment. The tailored approach of the coaching meant that advice was based on the expressed needs of the coachees. This was important because of the circumstances of some of the coachees, e.g., being new to the UK or out of employment for a long time. Specific help in crafting their CVs was particularly welcomed by the coachees.

“[Name of Coach] helped me to prepare my CV. She showed me how to portray my CV from Ukraine.”

8.4 The shift towards helping Ukrainian refugees as a priority group was not predicted when the Strand was originally designed but was sensible given the needs of this group and their sudden relocation to Northern and Mid Devon. The specific needs of coachees who were refugees and migrants were different to the needs of other coachees. This meant that the remit of the Coaches expanded

Petroc Outcomes

8.5 Petroc was the key delivery agent, partnering with other organisations in order to access coachees. This worked well, with the Success Coaches attending community events to meet and coach people, as well as coaching people on-site at Petroc and externally when necessary. The contact with community organisations was key to enabling people most in need of coaching and support to gain access.

8.6 The main outcome for Petroc as the delivery partner was seeing the benefits of adult success coaching for the coachees. 13 were enabled into education courses at Petroc, ,.

Learning and Next Steps Recommendations

8.7 The Strand was successful in attracting coachees but less successful in keeping them enrolled for all three sessions. There was only one delivery partner, and it was Petroc, so the coaches were well-integrated into the overall IYC project system. This helped with communication, reporting and delivery of strand activities. It in terms of geographical reach of the Strand activities although the high number of coachees from North Devon and Torridge (which are traditionally under-served) was positive.

8.8 The three Coaches had a range of experience that they were able to draw on in supporting the coachees. This was a strength of the Strand. The needs of the coachees who fully engaged with the sessions were met and the feedback from coachees was very positive. The coachees who had migrated to the UK found the sessions helpful for providing the knowledge that they needed about how to navigate UK employment and education systems, and the coaches were able to draw on their network with Petroc and Exeter College to translate the coachees' education level to what would be appropriate for them to undertake in the UK.

8.9 The Coaches were enthusiastic about their roles and had a genuine desire to help the coachees. They were able to build up some trust with community groups and coachees which helped with the coaching delivery and take-up.

8.10 The Coaches had multiple roles. They signposted coachees to education and employment opportunities. They helped them to craft the CVs and job applications. Crucially though, the Coaches helped to build the confidence of the coachees and worked with them on their mindset. The coachees benefitted from 1:1 or small group time with a Coach who listened to their needs and desires. Feedback from the sample of coachees who were interviewed as part of the evaluation was very positive.

"[Name of Coach] gave me the answers for my future. She motivates you."

"The Coaching made the difference. Before, no one tells you; you think about what you can do but you have no information."

8.11 The Coaches felt that there was a lot of paperwork associated with the strand and there is some of outcome data missing due to coachees disengaging from the programme or leaving the country.

8.12 18 coachees disengaged before they had completed the three sessions. Some reasons for this included health or mental health issues, change of circumstances or motivations. The coaches would decide to close the cases after several unsuccessful attempts of contacting them.

8.13 Overall the Strand provision worked well for the Coaches and coachees who attended all of the sessions. The model of coaching and methods of engagement worked well but more focus on retention was needed. Assessment of the longer-term impact of the Strand would be helpful including through following up with coachees and making any necessary changes to the delivery programme based on the impact assessment.

9 Evaluating Strand 4: User Involvement

Strand 4 Summary

9.1 The key elements of Strand 4 were as follows.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Aim/Purpose | Strand 4 focused on developing end-user involvement in the management of projects and initiatives, concentrating on young people furthest from the labour market, where this has not previously been achieved effectively. |
| Management and Partners | <p>The project partners who conducted the research were: Battling On CIC, Seadream Education CIC, Whiz Kidz UK CIC, Young Devon, and one of Petroc's own projects – Experience Works, part funded by the European Social Fund.</p> <p>This Strand was managed by Devon Communities Together. This included arranging and facilitating partner meetings and writing and editing the Best Practice Model based on input from partners. Petroc kept a regular contact with partners (same as stated above)</p> <p>Some of the partners have a lot of experience in supporting young people into employment and training and helping them overcome challenges to do so. Some organisations had much less experience of supporting young people or actively involving them in their activities at all. The differing levels of experience and activities across the partners was beneficial for learning. The partners also had different approaches to supporting young people depending on their needs, the ways in which the partners funded their services and the scale of the activities they offered.</p> |
| Process | <p>The Strand was based around partners involving young people in giving feedback of projects they were running and then partners coming together to share and discuss their findings and feedback in a series of partner meetings.</p> <p>Young people involved in the projects, gave feedback and insights into what has worked well for them and what could work well in the future. Including young people in projects encouraged their motivation and increased their confidence.</p> <p>The Strand aimed to help partners learn from young people's direct experiences and opinions and incorporate these into service design. The Strand discussion workshops then enabled partners to share their learning with each other, as well as share the ways in which they had engaged young people in feedback processes.</p> <p>The partners worked across Devon.</p> |

| | |
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| Outcome | Best Practice Model is the key outcome from this Strand. |
|----------------|--|

Strand 4 Impact Review

Partner Outcomes

9.2 Partners discussed the feedback and insight that they had gathered from young people in the sessions. Some partners had developed specific feedback forms, a list of questions to ask young people, and particular tools to elicit their views. These discussions led to the production of the BPM for this Strand which is the main output and outcome of this Strand.

9.3 The BPM covers different approaches and activities that organisations can use to engage young people in consultation processes. The complexity of these activities varies, which reflects the experiences of the partners and also what are likely to be the needs of users of the BPM in the future. The partners were hopeful that the BPM would be used widely within their organisations, as well as in other organisations that had not been involved in IYC. The practical examples and step-by-step approach of the BPM means that it is highly marketable and usable for organisations beyond the Project.

9.4 The predominant potential impacts for partners of this Strand will be them putting into practice the learning from the discussions, and then sharing the BPM within their organisation. Bringing together partners with a range of support and delivery experience was very helpful in the discussions and development of the BPM. For example, one partner's projects involved arranging placements that have a commercial aspect for young people. The partners got to learn about this in more detail because of working together on the Strands and were able to discuss their different approaches.

“Projects need commercial aspects so that they don't struggle for funding. Sustainability of projects is really important.”

“We've been talking to [name] about how they do things in their organisation.”

9.5 The impact for young people of being involved in giving feedback about the activities they had been involved in is likely to be helpful for their confidence. In some cases, this may have helped them develop skills, for example in communication.

9.6 By involving young people in feedback and evaluation processes, organisations can enhance the impact of their activities, projects and programmes. Inclusive evaluation, using participatory approaches, is often considered to be best practice.

Learning and Next Steps Recommendations

9.7 The BPM developed through this Strand is very practical, with a lot of examples of activities that organisations can use to involve young people in giving feedback. It also explains some of the theoretical ideas behind involving young people in evaluative processes. This was considered to be very important by the partners but there was also an acknowledgement that it can be difficult to do well. Systematic and comprehensive involvement of young people in project evaluation takes time and the development of expertise. However, the benefits can be wide ranging and had a significant impact on young people and organisations supporting them.

“Feels good to feed into something bigger that hopefully will be useful (the BPM models).”

9.8 Partners reflected on the importance of the Strand in enabling them to reflect on their practices and their feedback mechanisms. What some of them felt was needed was the next step in the process:

“We need to be able to implement the recommendations.”

9.9 Partners reflected on ‘what it would take’ to implement the BPM ideas and activities in their organisations. They do, and plan to do, this in different ways, according to the needs of the young people they support, employers with whom they partner, and the needs of their own organisations. The BPM created in this Strand and the other Strands reflect the diversity of the organisations involved in IYC and hopefully this will increase their reach and uptake with organisations beyond the Project.

9.10 The crucial next step will be marketing the BPMs beyond the IYC partners. The grant recipients in Strand 1 may be a good starting point for this, as well as organisations with whom the partners are already well-networked.

10 Evaluating Strand 5: Improved rural understanding

Strand 5 Summary

10.1 The key elements of Strand 5 were as follows.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Aim/Purpose | The aim of this Strand was to develop a better baseline understanding of geographical hotspots, connectivity of places, the definition of 'rural' and accessibility of urban services, to ensure future services are better designed to meet the needs of rural communities. |
| Management and Partners | This Strand was led by Devon Communities Together and did not involve any other formal partners. |
| Process | The basis of the research for this Strand was two surveys: one aimed at young people and one geared to youth workers. The feedback from these surveys was enhanced by interviews and discussions with a group of young people and two youth workers. The survey was also circulated within Petroc's Learner Engagement Team. |
| outcome | The outcome of this Strand is a report which presents the findings of the research conducted by DCT in two main parts: firstly, the needs and experiences of young people in rural Devon and secondly, the provision of and potential support services meeting these needs. |

Strand 5 Impact Review

10.2 It should be noted that the final draft report, the main product of this Strand, was made available to the evaluators at the very end of the IYC project.

10.3 Overall, the Strand 5 Report is a useful document. It provides a helpful reflection on the needs of young people living in rural Devon from their own perspective and those of a small number of youth workers. The report summarises the quantitative data from the surveys and includes direct quotes from both young people and youth support service providers – all of which will be helpful contributions to generating a greater understanding of the experience of being young in rural Devon and the importance of enabling young people to access appropriate support.

10.4 However, the report does have some limitations. The overall response to the survey of young people was 33, which included feedback from youth support providers (nine people),. We understand that DCT did attempt to engage SPACE in this Strand but without success. The data is mainly presented in the report in the form of percentages which can be misleading with the response received and can suggest a degree of representativeness.

Learning and Next Steps Recommendations

10.5 While the outcome of this Strand clearly has some value it does seem to reflect something of a missed opportunity. DCT have been able to share the survey through Petroc itself and other Strand partners, notably Young Devon, Battling On and Seadream Education.. We understand that the survey was also circulated to Petroc Learner Engagement Team, but as the strand timeline coincided with the period where most of the students had finished for the year, this hadn't enable to reach out to as many young people as expected..

10.6 DCT had a major role in the IYC Project, managing and facilitating partners working together on Strands 2, 4 and 6, supporting the delivery of the Strand 1 Grants Programme and delivering Strand 5 activity. This multi-Strand workload may well have stretched DCT's capacity. In retrospect, it may have been appropriate to jointly commission DCT and an organisation with particular expertise in youth provision (e.g. Young Devon or SPACE) to deliver this Strand.

10.7 It would also have been useful if the suite of data from this Strand had included or referenced examples of good and innovative practice around rural outreach for young people – there is some great practice across the county and in the digital field which could have been flagged. Overall, a Strand Report which put some additional focus on “solutions” to complement the evidence of “problems” identified through the feedback from youth workers and young people would have been valuable.

10.8 The Report, and the research behind it, concentrates on generic youth provision but there is little reference to the challenges or solutions relating to people who face particular barriers to accessing support and/or may feel isolated– for example young people from LGBTQ+, BAME and neurodiverse communities, young carers and those with physical and/or learning disabilities.

11 Evaluating Strand 6: Collaboration and sharing insight

Strand 6 Summary

11.1 The key elements of Strand 6 were as follows.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Aim/Purpose | Strand 6 focused on sharing of insight and undertaking collaborative problem solving regarding identified challenges around accessibility of support services for young people. The aim was to develop systems and resources to help youth workers navigate external support services effectively |
| Management and Partners | Partners operated across Devon. They were Young Devon, Seadream Education CIC, Whiz Kidz UK CIC and Battling On CIC, with conversations and process supported by Devon Communities Together and Petroc. Petroc kept a regular contact with partners (same as stated above) |
| Process | Each partner chose a topic or pertinent issue that they had encountered during their service/activity delivery and which they felt was a primary challenge regarding young people and/or youth support workers accessing support services. These topics/issues were then discussed in Strand meetings, with colleagues in partner's organisations, with statutory organisations and, crucially, with young people themselves. |
| Outcome | The main outcome of this Strand is a suite of data. This document, with two chapters, presents some step-by-step help and points to consider for partners and other organisations working with young people who have additional needs. |

Strand 6 Impact Review

Commentary on Suite of Data outcome and Development Process

The purpose of the main objective of this strand, the suite of data, is to summarise the strand and contains very useful information in the two chapters.

The templates and guidance in the suite of data are provided in digital format and disseminated to all organisations that work with young people in Devon.

"It's important that outputs will be electronic so that people will read them and use them in organisations"

"How do you put complex ideas across? We need browser-based outputs that people can access easily in real time".

11.2 All four partners in this Strand were involved in other Strands of the project which aided conversations as they met on numerous occasions for project workshops. Over the course of the Project they had developed a good understanding of the roles and purposes of each other's organisations. This helped the Evaluation Report Innovation for Youth and Community

collaborative problem-solving aspect of this Strand more broadly than each partner just remaining focused on their own challenges and solutions individually.

11.3 One of the partners had not been involved in these kinds of activities before so was the least experienced partner in the delivery of youth services related to this Strand. Evaluation feedback from them identified that they felt some discomfort at the start of the Strand but that this eased over time, and they really felt that their organisations had benefitted from the learning shared by the more experienced organisations.

“I enjoyed networking with likeminded organisations and made new contacts”.

11.4 The discussions were facilitated by DCT and partners felt that the discussions were focused and provided good opportunities to reflect on their own activities, as well as learn from each other.

11.5 The suite of data concept was supported by partners, and they engaged well. The development of the suite of data was based on collating all of the discussion and shared learning but also providing signposting to other relevant organisations and a glossary of terms..

11.6 The process of developing the contextual content for the suite of data was beneficial to partners.

“We learned how organisations solve their problems through the information that was shared.”

11.7 As trust and rapport increased across the partners, the discussion in the meetings became more in-depth. Partners reflected on this themselves during the evaluation interviews.

“The meetings were more productive as time went on.”

Beneficiary Outcomes

Partner Outcomes

11.8 The main outcome for the partners was the shared learning that took place in this Strand. The longer-term benefits are likely to be changes to their working practices, as they suggested in the evaluation interviews. For example, one partner is digitising their information collection and storage, whilst another one is introducing review processes.

11.9 Partners were not always clear on what the expected benefits were for this Strand. This concern may have been because the timelines in the Strand, and overall project, were considered to be very short, with huge demands for focused delivery. The evaluation interviews did provide some scope for reflections on benefits and impacts which was helpful for the partners.

11.10 The four partners working on Strand 6 were also involved in other Strands. The feedback from them that related to impact from Strand 6 is difficult to tease out from the wider impact that arose from the other Strands. However, these four partners had additional project time together because of this Strand and this helped them to develop collaborations and shared learning.

11.11 The partners commented on the benefits of shared learning with all participants in their projects, including young people and employers. They felt that this increased understanding of actions and processes for all concerned.

11.12 The shared learning in the Strand highlighted the lack of funding for support services for young people entering into and remaining in employment. Some partners felt that some young people's needs could not be met through group programmes but that they needed 1:1 specialist support, which was very difficult to fund in the current climate.

“There are a lack of services for young people, and a need for 1:1 support for young people before they are even ready to access group provision. The Government needs to realise that the preventative phase is really important for young people.”

“Issues around NEETs is a changing landscape.”

11.13 The suite of data is likely to be most helpful to organisations who provide group support to young people, and to those who have complex needs.

11.14 Some partners were keen to share the key parts of the suite of data and the BPMs from other Strands with other organisations with whom they were already connected. It would be ideal if the sharing, dissemination and use of the IYC outcomes was monitored as part of the impact measurement for the project in the longer-term.

“We will share the BPM with other organisations.”

Learning and Next Steps Recommendations

11.15 The sharing of information was an important part of this Strand. Organisations found out more about what each other provided, and crucially the mechanisms for doing so. Partners were enabled to extend their network and explore potential future collaborations on points of common interest.

“I enjoyed networking with likeminded organisations and made new contacts.”

“I learnt what organisations do and how they do it.”

11.16 The learning about organisational processes was particularly helpful to the partner who was least experienced in the Strand area. They had gathered a lot of useful and practical information that they planned to put into practice in the development of their organisation.

“The grant has helped us to focus on a more digitised practice format.”

“We record better and are more systematised about what we do. The meetings helped us with that as we heard what others do to record information.”

“The grant helped us with a review process of everything we do, and also of our procedures.”

11.17 Partners did feel that the suite of data’s content was useful, despite having some concerns about its format, so it may be that they will use the elements that are most relevant to their organisation. Further monitoring on this would be helpful in order to measure the longer-term impact of the Project. But we understand that this won’t be achievable beyond the project.

11.18 Partners who were involved in multiple Strands benefitted from a higher degree of information sharing and learning processes. This may result in a greater impact from the Project for those partners.

12 Evaluating Strand 7: In Work Support

Strand 7 Summary

12.1 The key elements of Strand 7 were as follows.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <p>Aim/Purpose</p> | <p>Strand 7 was designed to develop and pilot innovative in-work support for unemployed/inactive people once they move into employment to improve their ability to sustain employment and prevent repeated instances of unemployment.</p> <p>The partners worked together to share information, ideas and data that were aligned with the aim of the Strand.</p> <p>A best practice model was produced which aimed to 1) share best practice amongst organisations and employers; 2) develop and pilot innovative in-work support for those who have been unemployed or economically inactive; and 3) improve their ability to sustain employment and prevent repeated instances of unemployment. The BPM will be circulated more widely across Project partners and beyond.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the Strand were the individuals who received support but also the organisations who were able to learn from each other during the Strand information-sharing. In the longer-term the beneficiaries will be those who receive support from organisations who put elements of the BPM into practice when delivering in-work support to prevent unemployment.</p> <p>The organisations involved work in different parts of Devon and Cornwall but for this Strand mostly focused on South, East and Mid-Devon.</p> |
| <p>Management and Partners</p> | <p>The Strand 7 partners were Young Devon, Seadream CIC, WKUK and Battling On.</p> <p>Petroc facilitated the partnership working on this Strand.</p> |
| <p>Process</p> | <p>The partners had meetings to share information and discuss the best ways in which to meet the overall aim of the Strand. The partners were also working together in other Strands which made the sharing of information and organic growth of ideas straightforward during the meetings.</p> <p>The partners drew on their own experiences of working with people who had been employed and entered employment, as well as researching with other organisations and statutory services who provide this type of support. They also evaluated their services with the people they support and who meet the characteristics identified in the Strand's aim.</p> |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| | <p>The BPM development was a process that partners were keen to participate in. The discussions produced the key challenges they faced as organisations when providing support and also highlighted common key barriers for people when trying to move from unemployment to employment. These are outlined and explored in the BPM that has been produced.</p> |
| <p>Outcome</p> | <p>The BPM is the key outcome from this Strand. The people supported within the organisations and workplaces through the Strand partners and activities also benefited from the Project.</p> <p>Partners recorded their own findings for the Strand activities and drew their own learning from them. This learning was then discussed at the final Strand meeting and fed into the development of the BPM.</p> <p>Organisations often commented on what they would do differently if they were to participate in a similar Strand again. All of the organisations felt that SMEs were often more supportive of young people's needs when they joined their organisations in comparison to large corporations. They felt that barriers for young people with additional needs gaining or keeping employment was sometimes lacking. This was seen as about a lack of understanding of what they needed and what their specific needs were rather than employers not being willing to implement any changes that they needed.</p> |

Strand 7 Impact Review

Beneficiary outcomes

12.2 Only one beneficiary was available to be interviewed as part of the evaluation for this Strand because of non-response. However, it was clear that the support they had received had been crucial in helping them gain confidence and determination about their career direction. They felt that the support they had received as part of this Project compared very favourably with other support they had received previously from a different organisation. In that organisation they had worked as a volunteer in order to gain experience in their chosen field, but they had been 'left to get on with it' with very little support. In comparison, they said that involvement in this Strand of IYC had given them *'light at the end of the tunnel'*. Prior to their involvement, they had been losing motivation and confidence in their abilities.

"I felt that it [the project] would be above my capacity, but [name of Strand person] was encouraging and excited about what I could do with [name of Strand organisation [...]] Through the connections I have made, I feel like I have a chance of progressing within this industry."

12.3 The evidence collected by the partners suggests that the impact on the beneficiaries has been very positive. The interview with a beneficiary supports this finding. Support with confidence-building, as well as practical employment skills, was positive for beneficiaries.

“I surprised myself with how well I could interact. This has helped me cement my career direction.”

Outcomes for Partners

12.4 There was some key learning for the partner that had far less experience in providing in-work support and support into employment. However, all of the partners were very open to learning from each other and this has enhanced the outcomes of the Strand.

12.5 The partners reflected on their practices and in some cases altered them because of the learning and reflection in the meetings. For example, one of the organisations introduced a collaborative learning questionnaire in order to capture outcomes and impact more tangibly from those involved in their Strand activities. One organisation introduced a ‘Ready for Work’ passport, having recognised that young people needed very practical guidance about payslips, tax, employee rights etc.

12.6 The challenge for all of the partners delivering in this area is lack of funding and lack of capacity to follow-up with beneficiaries. The needs of young people who often are marginalised and unable to access support can be complex and require a range of support interventions. The BPM reflects this and partners’ findings that have helped beneficiaries, that other organisations can learn from, are very helpful but will only go a short way in terms of the wider support needs of young people in challenging circumstances.

“We need more funding to get young people into work.”

“It’s hard to get the funding and we need the support to be in place for young people.”

12.7 The BPM is useful and draws on the key findings of the Strand. It details challenges, interventions and case studies of what has worked for the organisations involved in the Strand.

12.8 The mix of partners was beneficial to exploring best practice in this area, with three having a lot of experience of delivery and one having much less but very keen to learn. Partners were very open to discussing their ideas and actions. Partners appreciated the potential benefit of the BPM, for their own organisations and for others. However, some partners felt that it was in the action that things would change rather than the discussions.

12.9 The barriers that future beneficiaries of this type of support face are not easily overcome. Often, they are structural and significant investment in support would be required to overcome them, which would then increase the impact of the types of activities that partners discussed and implemented in this Strand. However, the drawing together of the best practice model does highlight what organisations are able to achieve for beneficiaries, despite a very difficult post-pandemic climate with big increases in the cost of living and what many felt is a mental health crisis for younger people.

Learning and Next Steps Recommendations

12.10 Partners learned from each other and were very open to doing so. There was a general feeling that the funding landscape for in-work support for young people was very difficult and that funding is often short-term or non-existent. This is frustrating for organisations because the need is increasing, they are seeing some willingness amongst employers with whom they partner but the possible supportive interventions are limited because of lack of funding.

12.11 Partners felt that more could be provided to help employers meet the needs of young people who were entering work for the first time after education and/or those who had experienced quite a longer period of time not in employment, education or training (NEET). They hoped that the BPM would go some way towards assisting employers as well as organisations like them that provide the direct support initiatives to young people.

12.12 A list of services that already exist – at a county level and more widely – to support employers is added to the BPMs and shared with all partners..

12.13 One organisation suggested that a helpful result or benefit from the project would be a list of conditions that young people may have and what the employer could do/provide/change in order to support them. The BPM goes some way to providing this type of information for employers through the use of case studies and lists. However, future projects in this field may find it useful to develop a more comprehensive list or guide for employers on common conditions, perhaps working in partnership with a wider range of charities and social enterprises which specialise in delivering support in these areas.

13 Impact Overview

13.1 This section provides a summary commentary based on the data we have analysed and reviewed through this evaluation on the extent to which the IYC Project has achieved its intended short and medium to longer-term outcomes. These outcomes are set out in *italics*.

Short term outcomes

- ***Individual beneficiaries will be moved closer or into the labour market and will be better equipped to sustain employment through activity that will identify and address barriers, raise aspirations and develop skills.***

13.2 There is good evidence that the activity undertaken as a result of the Employability Grants Devon programme and delivered by partners in the other Strands has assisted a significant number of beneficiaries in achieving this outcome.

- ***Young people will be better connected with and able to support their local communities, equipped with valuable skills for future employment.***

13.3 There is clear evidence that a cohort of young people have developed skills and have enhanced employability as a result of IYC activities and some limited evidence from grant recipients that some young people “are better connected with their local communities”.

- ***Through continual innovation in the use of digital technologies across all Strands of the project, as well as referrals to digital skills provision outside the project, beneficiaries will improve their digital skills and ability to access and participate effectively in a wider range of services and activities.***

13.4 There is no evidence that the IYC Project has had a significant impact on beneficiary’s digital skills although Strand 5 “Rural understanding” provides some useful data around young people’s use of digital technology and access to digitally based services which is worthy of further exploration. However, it is likely that some of the support activities and interventions undertaken by partners and grant recipients did indirectly enhance the confidence of beneficiaries in using digital technologies and in seeking help in this area. Some of the activities provided by grants recipients, partners and the coaches in strand 3 were focused on developing digital skills, these include and are non-exhaustive: online searches, navigating information, accessing support services online, developing marketing tools/social media, etc

- ***Communities, especially those in rural and coastal areas, will benefit from increased sustainability, better connection with local services, access to funding for locally led initiatives including regeneration, improving green spaces, working towards net zero, etc.***

13.5 There is very limited evidence that the IYC Project has explicitly contributed to this outcome although there is evidence from grant recipients that the Project has assisted them in their development, profile and connections with communities and other organisations. However, one Strand partner (Seadream Education CIC) and three grant recipients (Double Elephant Print Workshop, Bright Sky and Natural Art Movement) produced Decarbonisation Plans, exceeding the target of 1.

Medium to long-term outcomes

- ***Levelling up of disadvantaged communities;***
- ***Addressing social and economic inequality for some of the country's most deprived areas.***
- ***Improved visibility and understanding of youth services to enable young people and youth workers to access them more effectively.***
- ***Achievement of net zero within individual communities.***
- ***Access to a better-skilled pool of potential employees for employers, facilitating business growth and improved productivity.***
- ***Sustainable rural communities which are well-connected to services and have access to improved spaces.***
- ***A swifter and more sustainable recovery from the effects of the pandemic.***

13.6 It has not been possible within the scope of this evaluation to measure or provide an informed commentary on the impacts and long-term outcomes that arise beyond the (relatively limited) period of the IYC Project itself. Indeed, elsewhere in this Report we recommend Petroc seeking feedback from partners and beneficiaries engaged in the IYC project to gain an understanding of these longer-term results.

13.7 As previously remarked in this Report, we do recommend that the learning and achievements of the IYC Project are widely shared amongst partners engaged in the Project and (crucially) the wide range of organisations and agencies in Devon that have a role and interest in supporting people, to engage in employment and learning. If this was undertaken, it would contribute to the achievement of some medium to long term outcomes, most notably "*improved visibility and understanding of youth services*".

14 Lessons and Learning Overview

14.1 The IYC project provides a range of very valuable lessons and learning around designing, managing and delivering programmes that support and enable people, especially those living in a rural area, to engage in education, training and employment. The project was intended to test out and pilot new and innovative approaches and it is fundamental to the IYC aims and objectives that the experience of the project is shared with relevant stakeholders including:

- DLUHC
- Devon County Council and other local authorities
- Petroc senior management and individual departments
- IYC Partners and grant recipients
- Other Colleges of Further Education
- Public, private and voluntary agencies working in employability
- Organisations in Devon providing support to people around health, wellbeing and life skills.

14.2 Petroc IYC Team thought that it would be valuable for all organisations and key individuals engaged in the IYC project to come together face to face to share the learning and insights and celebrate the project's achievements. This would be especially beneficial given the lack of opportunities during the course of the project for people to physically meet together to build relationships, learn from each other and potentially build collaborations. However, this wasn't achievable under the tight timeline and the closing down process towards the end of the project.

14.3 The key lessons and learning from the IYC Project fall into the following categories:

- Supporting beneficiaries
- Timing
- Project Design and structure
- Project Management
- Grants Programme
- Partner engagement

Supporting Beneficiaries

14.4 Involving young people in the design and implementation of some of the Strand activities was beneficial for them as individuals, and also in ensuring the activities are more likely to meet the needs of future beneficiaries.

14.5 Some partners developed new areas of practice by learning from each other about how best to support young people.

Timing

14.6 The timescale for projects and programmes in the employability field need to be realistic and reflect the time it takes to promote new services and activities, engage beneficiaries (especially important when working with people who are vulnerable, anxious, lack confidence and may have mental health issues) and deliver meaningful and impactful support. This is especially the case where there is a cascade of agencies involved resulting, inevitably in delay and lag at each stage. In the case of IYC the decision-making process involved DLUCC, Devon County Council, Petroc and finally delivery partners and grant recipients.

14.7 Projects of this type should build in an initial development and set up phase of say three to four months to allow sufficient time for systems to be put in place and partners to be recruited and inducted. Adequate time at this initial stage would allow an open and transparent process for recruiting the most appropriate partners with sufficient capacity to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

14.8 Grant programmes within broader projects, as is the case with IYC, should allow grant recipients a set up period of around two months followed by a minimum of six months for delivery of funded activities and a further month for completion and submission of final reports and data, as a minimum. Whilst Grant Recipients did not have the opportunity to have a longer set up period due to the timescales, they did have a month for completion and submission of final reports and data. This was built into their delivery timescales and Funding Agreement

Project Design and Structure

14.9 The structure of the IYC project, based around a series of seven interlinked Strands of activity, was relatively complicated, administratively demanding, and initially confusing for many of those involved and in practice some work was undertaken across Strands.

14.10 The key lesson here is that those who are developing project proposals and submitting funding bids should engage relevant stakeholders, including in the case of IYC, project management staff, potential partners and ideally, also beneficiaries, in a co-design phase early on in the project development process.

14.11 It is appreciated that the window for submitting funding applications is often very limited, but a good co-design process need not be excessively time consuming and will help to ensure a project is deliverable and effective. Petroc, and other relevant agencies, should consider establishing a system and protocol for embedding co-design in project development – for example by utilising a panel of internal and external stakeholders to provide constructive challenge and input to project ideas and proposals.

14.12 The design of projects in the employability field need to reflect the range and interconnectedness of barriers target beneficiaries experience. The IYC

project supported several organisations working with people in a holistic way – addressing a range of issues and needs including those relating to physical and mental health, wellbeing, anxiety, social and geographical isolation and neurodiversity. Project design and structure need to reflect the experience of target beneficiaries and the nature and breadth of services they require. Relatively tightly defined categories or Strands of activity may not always be appropriate.

14.13 It would be valuable to assess the longer-term impact of the IYC Project as the BPMs are significant outcomes. As provision and policy changes, it would be beneficial if there was a mechanism for updating and revising the BPMs so that they become dynamic reference documents, with impact continuing over time. In this way, the BPMs would become a longer lasting and wider reaching legacy of the IYC Project.

Project Management

14.14 Petroc has substantial experience in managing externally funded projects in the employability field including Experience Works and Empowering Enterprise, part funded by the European Social Fund all of which have informed the design of the IYC Project.

14.15 In our view, the IYC Project Team, managed what was a complex project operating to a very tight and changing timescale, very effectively. Their experience should be drawn upon in the design and the management and delivery of future projects.

14.16 However, the capacity of the IYC Project Team during the final “completion” phase of the Project, which involved chasing final reports from partners and grant recipients, processing invoices, finalising monitoring reports and so on, was insufficient to handle the workload during this period without putting excessive strain on the existing staff. The much shorter and tight timeline for closing down the project was challenging. The delivery continued until the end of October/early November, the models were all completed at the same time during the last quarter, which involved a significant amount of time. The recruitment of an administrator during late October was to some extent beneficial. However, the new post involved induction and training that requested time while managing the closing down process. Having an administrator and/or a coordinator earlier in the project life cycle would have helped ease the workload significantly. In addition to this, there was the departure of the Programme Management Lead end of July. But, the new lead was appointed a month after.

14.17 Resources allocated to project management and administration need to be more carefully aligned with anticipated workload in future projects of this type.

14.18 All the IYC project’s engagement with partners (and the evaluation team) was undertaken online – partly because of continuing caution, at least in early 2022, around face-to-face meetings due to CoVID but also because of the practicalities of bringing people together across a large county. However, we feel the lack of opportunities for face-to-face contact between partners, which Evaluation Report Innovation for Youth and Community

had no previous track record of working together, hindered a shared understanding of what was required and constrained collaboration and joint working. In particular, we feel an initial face to face meeting for all partners, the Petroc Team and the evaluators in the early phase of the project would have been beneficial. Some partners stated that they would have liked some in-person workshops.

14.19 We think it may also have been helpful if the Petroc IYC Team had established at the outset an online platform for sharing appropriate information, data and documentation and communication. We think there would have been value in having all material available “in one place” which was easily accessible by all.

14.20 Petroc faced challenges in receiving some final output and outcome data and other reporting information from partners at the conclusion of the individual Strand programmes. One possible way of overcoming this would be making the final grant instalment dependent on data handover, although we understand final payments were not made until “final submissions” had been made.

Grants Programme

14.21 As noted earlier (in 14.8) there are key lessons from the IYC project around setting appropriate timescales for small grant programmes within larger projects. Allowing sufficient time for grantees to prepare and submit applications, plan and set up new services and activities including engaging staff and partners, recruit beneficiaries, deliver services and formally complete their project is crucial.

14.22 Other key learning points from the IYC grant programme (Strand 1) relate to the application and assessment process, marketing and promotion, capacity building, collaboration and sharing the learning.

14.23 Overall the grant application process, including online forms and guidance and the support from the Employability Grants Devon Project Manager at Petroc, was well regarded by grant recipients and overall should be considered as reflecting good practice.

14.24 However, we do suggest that applications should be assessed by a panel which involves people with experience as beneficiaries of employability support as well as those with experience as a voluntary or private sector provider of employability support. This would bring greater range of insight and challenge into the assessment process. The IYC Grants panel was comprised of 5 Petroc staff members from a variety of job roles across the college. which we consider unnecessarily narrow though we appreciate the timescale constraints may have made arranging consistent external input to the process difficult.

14.25 The desire to turn around grant applications quickly meant that they were assessed on a weekly basis. This is laudable given the tight overall timescale for IYC, but it did mean there was little opportunity to encourage

applicants in the same field of activity to collaborate and/or (re) submit a joint application. A longer overall set up phase for IYC would have allowed for say two submission deadlines enabling batches of applications to be considered together with decisions able to reflect a more strategic approach.

14.26 The IYC Project engaged Devon Communities Together to provide targeted marketing and promotional support for the grants programme and some direct support for individual organisations considering an application, especially in the priority areas. This was valuable but there was a relatively limited take up from certain parts of Devon – notably Torridge, a particular priority for the IYC project as a whole, and North Devon. This suggests that a more proactive approach is needed in these areas to reach organisations which are less well connected into existing networks and may lack the confidence and/or skills to make strong applications. A series of targeted workshops organised and/or promoted with appropriate partners, piggy-backing on existing events may have been effective in engaging such organisations. Again, this requires a longer overall project timescale than CRF and the IYC Project allowed.

14.27 The IYC grant recipients have gained great insight and experience in supporting people to engage in employment education and training and this extensive knowledge is captured in their final reports, innovation plans, feasibility studies, case studies and other supporting documents. This material provides valuable learning for Petroc itself and private, public and voluntary agencies working in the employability field and should be reviewed, collated and made available in an appropriate form to complement the best practice models and other resources developed through other Strands of IYC activity.

Partner engagement

14.28 Partners were key to the delivery of four of the IYC Strands. All partners made a valuable contribution to the IYC project bringing their own particular experience and insight to the development of Best Practice Models. The principle of drawing together organisations with direct front line experience of working in the employability field to share practice and develop resources for others is a sound one and may well be worthy of replication in other projects or fields of activity.

14.29 The capacity to engage in IYC varied across partners and it is clear some struggled to be as actively involved as they wished. This suggests that there may need to be greater clarity at the partner recruitment stage around the level of engagement required.

14.30 The IYC partners represent only a small proportion of social purpose organisations involved in the employability field across Devon with the implication that there is valuable experience and expertise that has not been drawn upon in the development of the best practice models. It may therefore have been appropriate to

build in a feedback and consultation phase once the best practice models had been drafted to gain additional input from a much wider range of organisations and individuals. Again, this would have required more time than the overall CRF and IYC timetable allowed but could have enhanced the value and quality of the resources and encouraged a wider sense of “ownership” and awareness of them.

14.31 One of the difficulties of short-term project like IYC is that it can result in staff-turnover and loss of learning. A Project Officer for one of the partners left the organisation part-way through (but at the endpoint according to the original schedule) and although attempts were made to embed project learning it often is person-led.

Beneficiary Engagement

14.32 Young people who were beneficiaries of the activities within the Strands were enabled to participate in giving feedback that will improve delivery of services in the future. Partners commented on the value of this, and it may not have occurred to such an in-depth extent for some of the partners if it had not been for their participation in the IYC Project, particularly those partners who were newer to engaging with young people. This is likely to increase the impact of their services in the future, and potentially their service design and evaluation processes too.

15 Next steps recommendations

15.1 The previous sections of this report identify a range of lessons and learning from the IYC project that should inform the design and development of future projects and activity in the employability field. All of these are relevant to other organisations, including those operating elsewhere in the country, and are not exclusive to Petroc and the partners engaged in IYC.

15.2 In this section, we summarise potential key next steps that are specifically relevant to developing the legacy of the IYC Project for Petroc and existing and potential partners, and the design of future employability (and other) projects

Impact and Legacy of IYC

We suggest Petroc: organises and facilitates an event for all those engaged in IYC to share the learning, celebrate achievements and explore future collaborative opportunities;

- makes available a summary of achievements, impacts and learning of the IYC project to all those engaged in IYC and other interested parties;
- undertakes or commissions a longer-term evaluation process which seeks to measure the value and use of the Best Practice Models and Data Suites amongst partner organisations and more widely; and
- follows up with partners to assess whether longer term relationships were established and whether changes to delivery and activities that were discussed in Strand meetings were implemented.

Future Projects

15.3 We suggest Petroc:

- holds discussions within the IYC Project team and other managers and leaders in Petroc about how to engage effectively with seldom included groups in future projects in Devon;
- ensures clear communication of expectations with partners is in place right from the start of a project and is reiterated on a very frequent basis;
- ensures partners in a multi-partner and multi-Strand project are aware of the 'bigger picture' and overall strategic aims and objectives of the project;
- is assertive with funders about the need for realistic timescales and tries to reduce the impact of altered timescales on partners' and collaborators' capacity; and
- considers evaluating the feedback mechanisms between individual project management and administration staff with project bid writers to ensure initial project design (developed by bid writers) are informed by the experience of project managers and administrators.

Researched and written by Clarity CIC for Petroc

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January 2023

The evaluation team comprised Stephen Woollett, Naomi Tyrrell, Sarah Taragon and Angela McTiernan.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Changing Timescales

| | |
|--|--|
| Development/Application Phase | |
| Spring 2021 | Project Design/Application preparation |
| 19 May 2021 | Deadline for submission to DCC |
| 18 June 2021 | Deadline for DCC Bids to UK government |
| August 2021 | EoI invited for IYCPartners |
| | |
| Original Delivery Timeline | |
| Jul 21: | successful bids notified |
| Aug 21: | contracts signed |
| Nov 21: | first monitoring activity by UK Government |
| 31 Mar 22: | all activity and spend complete |
| | |
| Revised Delivery Timeline | |
| Nov 21: | successful bids notified |
| Dec 21: | contracts signed (though our contract wasn't issued until just before the Christmas break) |
| Mar 21: | first monitoring activity by UK Government |
| 31 June 22: | all activity and spend complete |
| | |
| Further Revised Completion Timeline | |
| May 22 | Extension verbally notified |
| June 22 | Extension formally notified |
| 30 Nov 22 | Most work completed |
| 31 Dec 22 | Final completion |
| | |

Appendix 2 Breakdown of Target Outputs

| Outputs | | Total |
|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| People | Economically Inactive | 83 |
| | Unemployed | 58 |
| | Employed | 41 |
| | Total | 182 |
| Businesses | Small | 22 |
| | Medium | 6 |
| | Large | 0 |
| | Total | 28 |
| Organizations | Public | 13 |
| | Private | 28 |
| | Voluntary Sector | 41 |
| | Total | 82 |
| Types of Support | | |
| Direct Support | 1 to 1 | 72 |
| | 1 to many | 110 |
| | Total | 182 |
| Financial Support | Grant | 35 |
| | Voucher | 0 |
| | Total | 35 |
| Outcomes | | |
| | People in education/training following support | 36 |
| | People engaged in job-searching following support | 35 |
| | People in employment, including self-employment, following support | 13 |
| | People engaged in life skills support following interventions | 38 |
| | Economically inactive individuals engaging with benefits system following support | 17 |
| | Businesses introducing new products to the firm as a result of support | 4 |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | Employment increase in supported businesses as a result of support | 2 |
| | Jobs safeguarded as a result of support | 9 |

Appendix 3 Employability Grants Devon Summary

This is a summary of information on the IYC Employability Grants Devon, published on the IYC pages of the Petroc web site.

As part of the 'Innovation for Youth and Community UKCRF* project', Petroc has several grants available for organisations or businesses actively supporting and encouraging employment and individual progression; grants can be used to fund activities that support the unemployed to make their next steps towards work or education, or to engage with the benefits system.

What we would like the grant to achieve

Within the grant application form, we will be reviewing your grant proposal including your project idea, budget spend and how your project will lead to positive results with the participants involved. We will be interested in applications that help to achieve any (or all) of the below, following the support you have provided:

- Leading people into education or training
- People actively job-searching
- People going into employment, including self-employment
- People engaging in life skills support following interventions
- People understanding and engaging regularly with the benefits system

Who are the grants for?

The grants available are for organisations who are piloting innovative approaches in moving people towards work, particularly those who have been out of work for over 18 months. As well as traditional employability activities, we are interested in interventions that reflect the link between health and wellbeing and employment services and that create and invest in community. Examples for grant use include digital skills (training a member of staff to teach digital skills through bespoke group sessions with participants) or using the grant to pay for wellbeing activities alongside an employability programme to work with people with mental health challenges.

Grant funding amount

The grants available start from £10,000 up to £30,000 per organisation or business, with a minimum of 10 participants engaging with the activity. Whilst most grants will work with unemployed and economically inactive individuals, we are also open to funding one or two grants, still focused on unemployment support, which have a feasibility study, innovation plan or decarbonisation plan as their primary deliverables. For example, we could fund a feasibility study to explore the use of augmented/virtual reality in preparing young people for the world of work (virtual work experience).

Grant timelines

The deadline for applications to be submitted is 18 July. All activity must be completed by 30 September 2022. Grant recipients will need to submit a report including financial and evaluation data by 31 October 2022. In this application round we are particularly keen to see applications from priority areas Mid Devon, North Devon, Torrington, West Devon though organisations in other parts of the county are also welcome.

Who the grants will work with

The individuals who benefit from the grants must live within Devon County Council Local Authority area. There are no specific eligibility criteria regarding age, or personal characteristics and applicants can specify their own target groups. It is envisaged that a high proportion of people who benefit from this funding will come from communities or groups who are disadvantaged or face barriers in accessing suitable and sustainable employment.

Grants must work with a minimum of 10 participants, though for larger grants we would expect to see larger numbers. Grant recipients will have to submit some simple paperwork for each participant they work with for Petroc to report progress and outcomes to the funders.

Appendix 4 Range of physical and mental health and wellbeing issues reported by beneficiaries

Stamina/fatigue
Mental health
Learning/understanding,,
Social interaction/behaviour
Dexterity
EDS, ASD, ADHD
Bi-polar
Partial problem - frozen shoulder
MS
COPD/fibromyalgia
Depression and stress
Epilepsy
Endometriosis
Asthma
Autism
Skin condition
ASD, ADHD
Diabetic
COPD/allergies
Hearing,