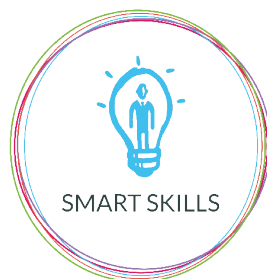


# SMART SKILLS Final Report

DECEMBER 2023

Prepared by Devon  
Communities Together



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## FOREWORD FROM CSW MANAGING DIRECTOR, CHRIS SAXBY

### SMART SKILLS – DEVON’S MOST IMPACTFUL & SUCCESSFUL ESF-SUPPORTED PROJECT

SMART SKILLS, a European Social Fund supported project, was launched in April 2021 to enable businesses in Devon access fully funded training and help individuals enhance their workplace skills encouraging them to progress in their chosen careers. The project also focussed on helping those who are economically inactive to gain the skills that are required to enter the jobs market.

Noting Devon’s geography, it was a priority to ensure support to those working and living in our rural and coastal communities and to engage with those who may have not benefited from fully funded training in the past. **80% of the engagement by SMART SKILLS has been with Devon’s smaller businesses** (SMEs with less than 250 employees). This has provided a great boost to local workforce capability and productivity.

**Over 2700 individuals have undertaken training, from nearly 500 Devon businesses.** Almost 1000 of the participants have achieved an accredited qualification, the majority receiving a Level 3 certificate qualification. A legacy of SMART SKILLS is the introduction of individuals and businesses to our training delivery partners. All partners are now nurturing new relationships further enabling those who have returned to adult education build upon the knowledge acquired.

Reflection on the achievements that the SMART SKILLS project, delivered by CSW Group and its Devon partners, has made enables the following observations:

- Considerable personal achievement derived through qualification for almost 1000 people in Devon with over 2700 individuals actively engaged in adult education.
- Significant positive impacts to local communities across Devon through both individual and business growth.
- All key project targets achieved.
- One of the most successful European Social Funded projects in England receiving recognition and interest on a national stage.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SMART SKILLS was funded by the European Social Fund and managed by CSW Group between October 2020 and December 2023. SMART SKILLS was delivered through a range of quality SMART Partners; City College Plymouth, Focus Training, Petroc, South Devon College, On Course South West and the University of Exeter. SMART SKILLS was an opportunity for Devon based businesses, employees and individuals to benefit from a wide range of fully funded training and skill development solutions. The developed courses have been designed to meet the needs of businesses in Devon with the aim of supporting and enhancing economic growth in the region.

The key objectives of the programme were:

- 1. To have provided an inclusive service and reach out to people who had not traditionally gone down the skills learning route.**
- 2. To allow businesses to have access to training they might not have had in the past.**
- 3. To enable individuals to gain skills to enter the labour market and for business to upskill.**
- 4. To further develop the platform to ensure that the Skills Hub is meeting the needs for business, individuals and communities.**

SMART SKILLS has achieved the following:

- 1. To have provided an inclusive service and reach out to people who had not traditionally gone down the skills learning route.**
  - The service has been inclusive as courses have been customised to suit participants and businesses which has ensured that participants are able to upskill themselves even though they may not have traditionally gone down the skills learning route in the past.
- 2. To allow businesses to have access to training they might not have had in the past.**
  - Feedback provided has evidenced that without the fully funded offer of SMART SKILLS many businesses would not have access to the training on offer.
- 3. To enable individuals to gain skills to enter the labour market and for business to upskill.**
  - The SMART SKILLS project has upskilled 490 businesses and 2767 participants out of the overall target of 2750.
- 4. To further develop the platform to ensure that the Skills Hub is meeting the needs for business, individuals and communities.**
  - A total number of 1035 employed individuals and 253 businesses have been referred to training providers via Skills Hub which equals 37% of the participants supported by the SMART SKILLS project.

## Key Achievements



**490**

**businesses supported**



**2767**

**individuals helped**



**80%**

**of business supported  
have been SME's**

# INTRODUCTION TO SMART SKILLS

SMART SKILLS offered fully funded training to businesses in Devon to help them upskill their workforce. The training offered had no-strings attached and was completely free of charge to those taking part, thanks to £3.5million of funding from the European Social Fund (ESF). ESF funding was available until the Autumn of 2023.



The project started during the Covid-19 pandemic and for this reason it was important to create an online offer which allowed people to upskill at a time when social distancing and travel was being restricted. The project focused on individuals and businesses in Devon and had an extensive range of online courses which enabled the project to reach a wider audience and at the same time providing environmental benefits as individuals did not have to travel to receive training.

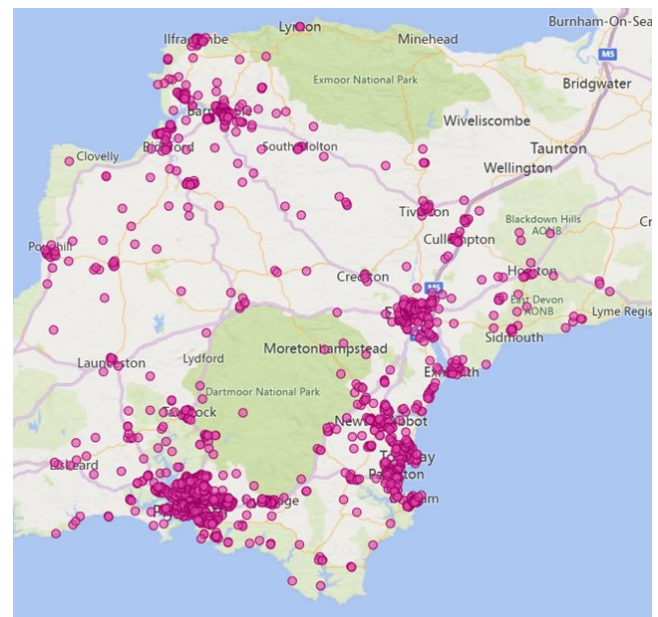
“

*“This [L3 Project Management] has improved the skills that I personally hold and will help me to gain future roles that involved greater project management responsibilities.”*

Participant feedback

## Geographical Reach

Devon is one of the largest counties in the country by area. With many rural and coastal communities the project was determined to ensure that all areas were covered. SMART SKILLS was really focussed on supporting SME's and helping businesses where the greatest skills gaps were and who may not have accessed EU funding in the past. To ensure that the SMART SKILLS project were visible to as many people and businesses as possible CSW Group attended business shows and networking events, promoting the offer on social media and via newsletters as well as via advertisement in different publications across the whole county. The heatmap showcases where participants live, mainly around the main cities however many are also in coastal and rural areas. There are 3 dominant postcode areas across the county. Statistics demonstrate that the project has had an impact across the breadth of Devon and the heat map clearly shows that the rural and coastal communities have benefitted from the SMART SKILLS project.



# DELIVERY PARTNERS





## City College Plymouth (CCP) - reflection and feedback

The SMART SKILLS programme has enabled CCP, as an educational establishment, not only to expand their reach but also to provide essential Continued Professional Development opportunities for employees at City College. Throughout the duration of this project, we have expanded our reach to work closely with companies that we would not normally work with, including a PPE company in the retail sector. Colleges often focus on working with specific sectors. Therefore, SMART SKILLS provided a unique opportunity to: develop their understanding of the training needs of wider businesses; develop new relationships with local companies; and helped to promote and raise the profile of the College even further. The main challenge that occurred within the project was due to significant personnel changes in the project team at the start.

*“The approach CSW took in managing this with CCP was a supportive one – working with the incoming team to look at the SMART SKILLS offer and be a critical friend in re-designing programmes that met the needs of local employers. Accordingly there was a significant advertising campaign for employers focussing on delivery of Excel training which CCP was able to successfully deliver in the latter half of the project.”*

The ESF SMART SKILLS programme has provided many benefits to City College Plymouth as a delivery partner. The employer-focused approach, starting with rich consultations with employers to identify specific training needs has enabled us, as the service provider, to develop more personalised programmes. City College feel that by tailoring courses more accurately to business needs, as opposed to selling pre-planned courses, we have delivered training that is pitched more accurately (and is more responsive to training needs); we have fostered successful outcomes for individual participants; and we have developed and maintained positive relationships with local businesses. This was particularly evident when working with Plymouth Argyle and Protective Wear Supplies.

## OnCourse South West - reflection and feedback

The SMART SKILLS programme has impacted us as one of the delivery partners in that we have been able to upskill our staff. “For example, we are able to deliver menopause awareness in the workplace which has helped us to identify challenges in the workplace and prevent stigmas: improved health and wellbeing, happier workforce, improved confidence, a greater community impact, improved leadership.”

*“CSW have been very active in providing referrals for individuals and businesses. The support has been plentiful especially with the completion of paperwork and compliance guidance during multiple staff changes. Paperwork has been challenging, especially with collection of evidence from learners for eligibility. However, the team have always been very approachable and have helped us to iron out challenges in a supportive partnership.”*

## Petroc - reflection and feedback

Due to the scope of the project, Petroc has been able to work with businesses outside of North Devon as well as generating new relationships in the local area which have led to business opportunities for the college. We were able to refer participants to other projects in Petroc and onto paid courses generating income and opportunities. We predominantly used internal staff to deliver our training, providing employment within our curriculum teams outside of the projects team.

*“CSW were always on hand if we had any questions or queries. Any comments regarding paperwork were done in a timely manner and resolved. The referral system was a great addition to the project as it helped Petroc work with businesses outside of our local area. Receiving weekly reports enabled us to ensure our starts and exits were recorded successfully. The partner meetings provided cohesion and shared learning to ensure that the project was a success overall.”*

## South Devon College - reflection and feedback

Through Smart Skills we have engaged with over 440 participants who have been supported with a comprehensive individual learning plan to identify funded training through the programme and with progression opportunities available upon completion of training. Learners were supported on programme with teaching and assessment by industry experienced lecturers.

The impact of SMART SKILLS for South Devon College is that many learners who had not engaged in education or training for a period have now gone on to progress onto further education or apprenticeships. The College has also broadened its employer network through the Skills Hub. Previously we would have had difficulty reaching out to those businesses in new sectors. The majority of teaching had moved to blended Ms Teams delivery which allowed more inclusive access to learning and reducing carbon emissions through travel to college campuses.

*“CSW Group team have been a very supportive and have provided help and guidance on ensuring that we remain compliant with the complexities of the funding paperwork and supporting the claims process. The overall management of the contract has been robust with regular project monitoring meetings to monitor performance, targets and outputs has been very beneficial and has allowed the College to concentrate and focus on delivery. CSW Group Ltd is an exemplar lead partner in which it is a pleasure to be able to work with and has to be commended in how they have brought the partnership of delivery partners together.”*

## The Focus Training Group - reflection and feedback

The flexibility and scope of the project aims was extremely beneficial to us as a training provider as it allowed us to incorporate training to upskill our current apprentices, enhancing their apprenticeship training and broadening their skills beyond the Apprenticeship Standard, in particular in relation to new green skills technology such as solar photovoltaic systems, electrical vehicle charging and battery storage. This has given them greater knowledge and scope in terms of the career pathways open to them upon successful completion of their Apprenticeship.

Through employer engagement we identified a demand for Mental Health First Aid training which had not initially been part of our delivery plan. However, CSW agreed for us to add this to our provision which enabled us to reach out to employers and sectors we had not previously been able to engage. This included charitable organisations, hairdressers, legal firms etc. In total, over 380 people undertook this training which enhanced our profile as a training provider and has led to increased engagement onto our commercial training provision. Being able to offer fully-funded courses encouraged employers to invest the time to release their staff for training and has opened the door for them to engage with us for further training once they have seen the benefit to their staff and organisation as a whole.

*“CSW were responsive to our requirements and challenges as a training provider and enabled us to change our training delivery from what had originally been planned at the beginning of the project. This allowed us to be responsive to our customer needs, incorporating new courses into our planned delivery as required. The employer engagement and subsequent referrals carried out by CSW were helpful in broadening our scope and reach with new employers that we had not previously worked with. CSW was effective in bringing together the organisations in the project as a partnership, which worked well together as a cohesive and supportive team.”*

## University of Exeter - reflection and feedback

The University of Exeter (UoE) contributed 510 participants, circa 20% of all SMART SKILLS participants, delivering Data Analytics courses, an employment skill set in high demand in all business sectors within Devon, the UK and worldwide. In addition, circa 300 additional learners expressed interest in the Data Analytics courses.

*“This interest in courses, demonstrates the significance placed by participants in obtaining Data Analytics skills and the importance for their employment prospects. The participants were drawn from broad curriculum areas, including Medical Sciences, Geographers, Business, Education and Politics and demonstrate universal disciplinary and employment appeal.”*

To meet DWP (The Department for Work and Pensions) criteria of delivering Ofqual accredited courses, the University created a custom-made Level 4 qualification, ‘Critically Interpreting Data’ (link via QR code), through the Open College Network. This tailor made qualification satisfied DWP requirements and created a legacy with the added benefit of contributing to the skills gap as it is ready made for other providers to deliver in their institutions. Approx 40% of University participants chose this option as their entry point into the field of Data Analytics.

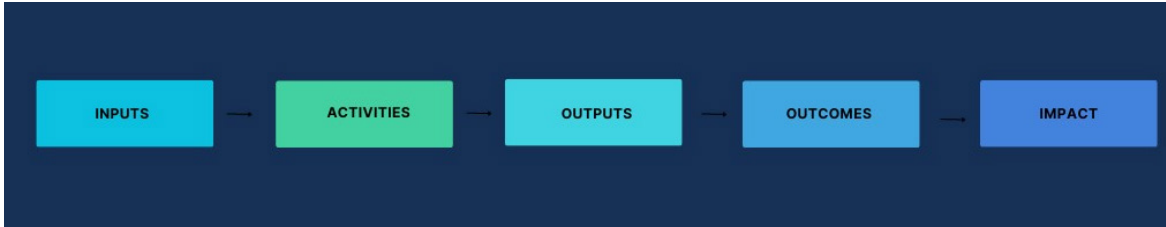


Additional feedback was given and although, this was not part of the evaluation and the ToC it stated that “CSW staff were pleasant, generous with their time and helpful in their responses”. There were further learnings taken into account around communication styles and organisational cultures between the delivery partner and the managing partner. CSW and UoE are reflecting on the learning on these elements and will take this forward.

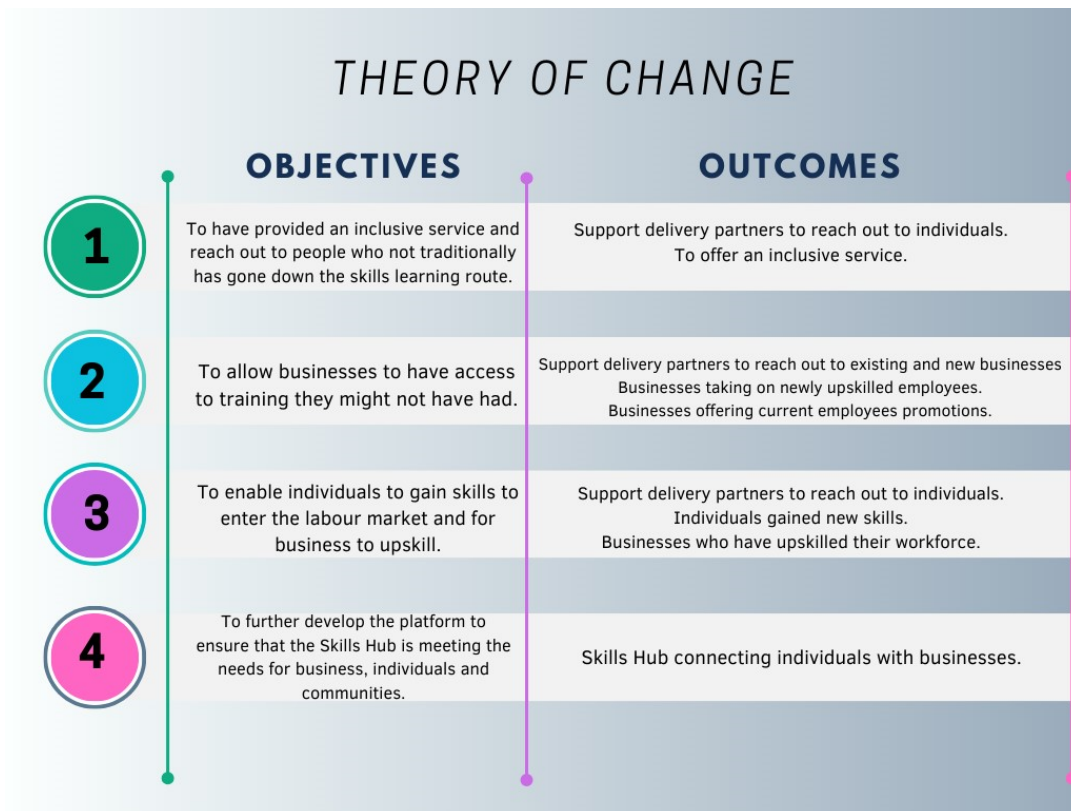


# THEORY OF CHANGE

A ‘theory of change’ explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. There are different ways to present a theory of change. A results chain (or pipeline model) represents the theory of change in terms of a series of boxes, as below.



The Theory of Change (see image below) for the SMART SKILLS project was both a monitoring and tracking device, as well as an impact demonstration tool for the project. It was developed by the independent evaluator Devon Communities Together in collaboration with the six training providers and CSW Group. The Theory of Change (ToC) development process started in June 2022 where DCT held a ToC workshop on “What difference and what happened because of this project?”. During the session the delivery partners added their reflections and based on those DCT created a draft ToC with objectives and outcomes. All partners agreed on the final version at a partner meeting in July 2022. To meet the impact and to make a difference within the project lifetime, the following four objectives and nine outcomes were agreed on.



# THEORY OF CHANGE

In evaluating these Theory of Change outcomes, it is evidenced that the SMART SKILLS project has achieved these objectives and outcomes. The outcomes for objective 1 have been measured and the evidence showcases that **an inclusive service has been provided**. Examples are; delivery of courses have been both a mix of practical and theory, a mix between own study weeks and tutor lead sessions, with courses being delivered digitally. One of the delivery partners has offered a solution of flexible start time of the course to suit participants' childcare commitment. These examples all showcase an inclusive service.

According to delivery partners, **CSW Group have been supportive** to ensure that delivery partners have reached a wider range of individuals and businesses in Devon, which are the outcomes of objective 1 and 2. Referrals which have come through the Skills Hub have been participants that have been wanting to upskill themselves, including employed individuals who have been wanting an educational qualification, however they have not had the opportunity for several years. Directly, the individuals have been upskilled. However, indirectly the whole organisation has benefitted, as the knowledge and skills the participants have gained from completing the course are being used within the organisation as a whole. Evidence points to the fact that businesses have been upskilling their employees which has resulted in employees being more confident in their current job role, or a job role they recently stepped into before undertaking the upskilling course or, whilst being on the project, the participant has been promoted to a more senior role.

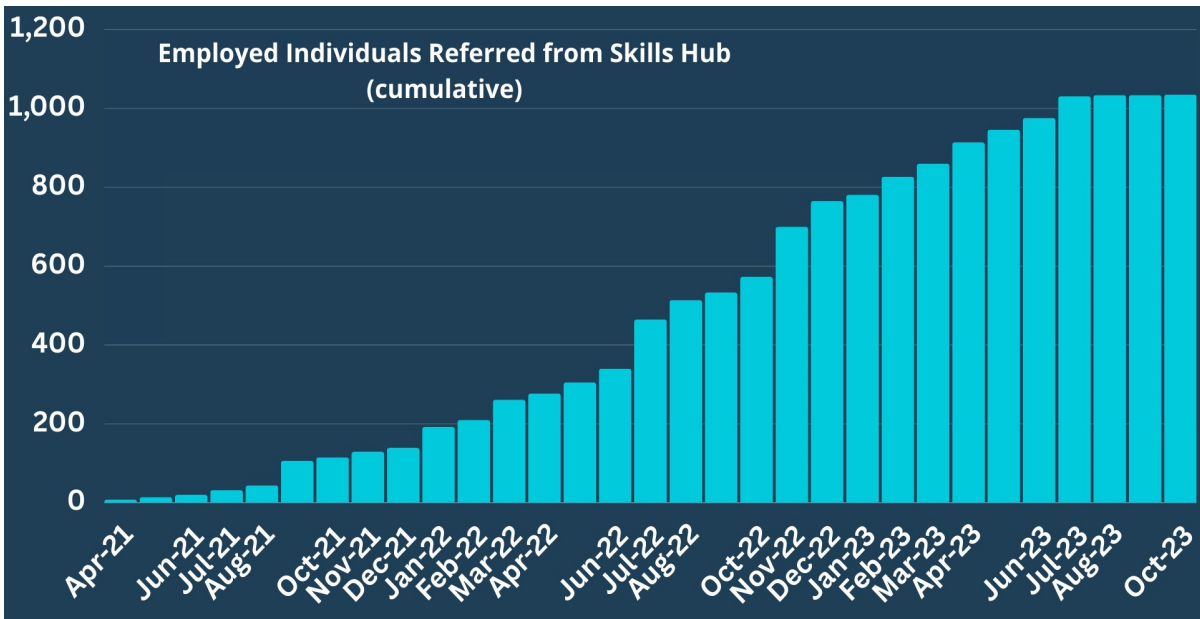
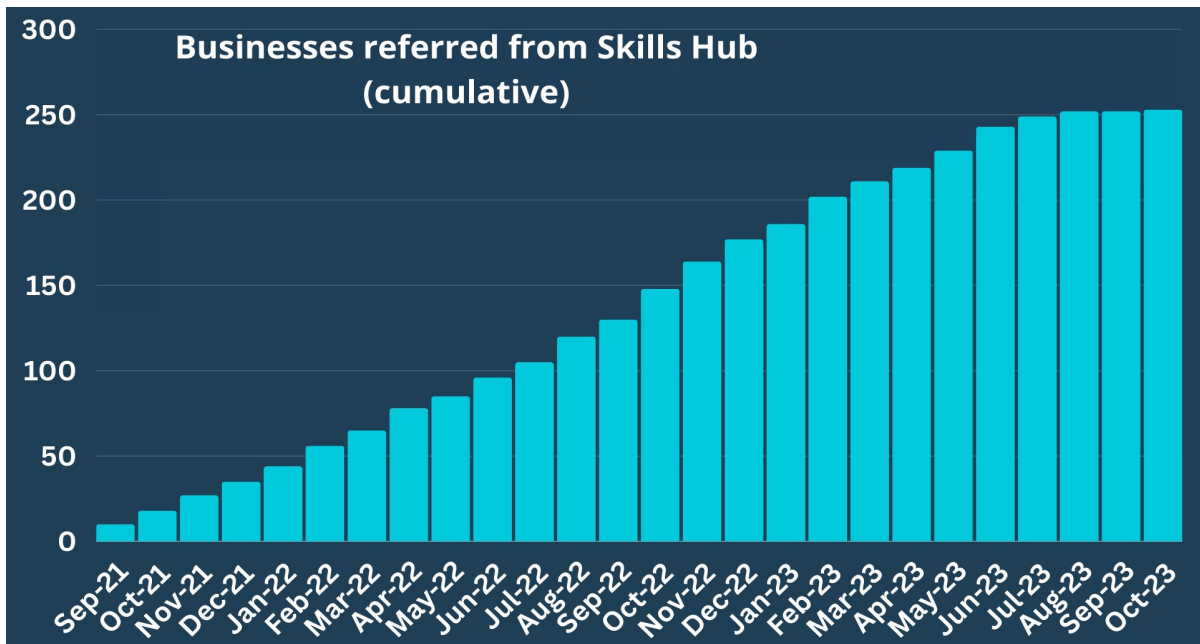
It has been evidenced that the project has achieved objective 3 as the delivery partners combined have upskilled **490 businesses** and **2767 participants** out of the overall target of 2750. The project has reached individuals who, without the project, would not have been upskilled. These individuals and businesses have gained skills from a range of courses, and this will enable them to enter the labour market as well as to enhance the labour market. The courses have upskilled them to support a new role they have been promoted to, or helped them transition into a new role.

The outcome for the platform Skills Hub has been achieved as a total number of **1035 employed individuals** and **253 businesses** have been referred to training providers via Skills Hub. This equals **37% of the participants supported by the SMART SKILLS project**. By understanding the needs of individuals and businesses, the SMART SKILLS platform has been further developed and courses on demand have been extended to ensure the needs of individuals and businesses are being met. Several businesses have established relationships with the delivery partners, in most cases for the first time.



# THE SKILLS HUB

The Skills Hub operated within the realms of the SMART SKILLS project and businesses were able to reach out to the Hub to find out more about the range of fully funded courses available. A total number of 1035 employed individuals and 253 businesses have been referred by the Skills Hub, **51.6% of the total businesses supported**. There have been occasions where the Skills Advisers working in the Skills Hub assessed the needs of the business and decided that there may have been a better training solution to meet the identified need. In such circumstances referrals were often made outside of our project to initiatives like: Apprenticeships, Regional bootcamps, Heart of the South West Growth Hub, Other European funded initiatives as well as Devon & Cornwall Training Provider Network.

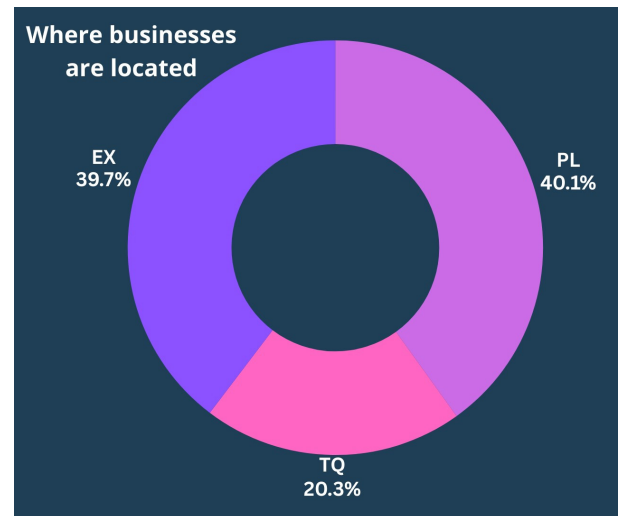


As SMART SKILLS was a new initiative in the county it was important to establish relationships with businesses through existing membership networks. Over the term of the project CSW has shared information and attended events with; Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, Paignton Chamber of Commerce, Exeter Chamber of Commerce, Torbay Business Forum, Federation of Small Businesses, North Devon Networking Group, Tavistock Chamber of Commerce, Recruitment and Retention events in North Devon, G12 Business Networking and Plympton Chamber of Commerce.

# BUSINESSES SUPPORTED BY SMART SKILLS

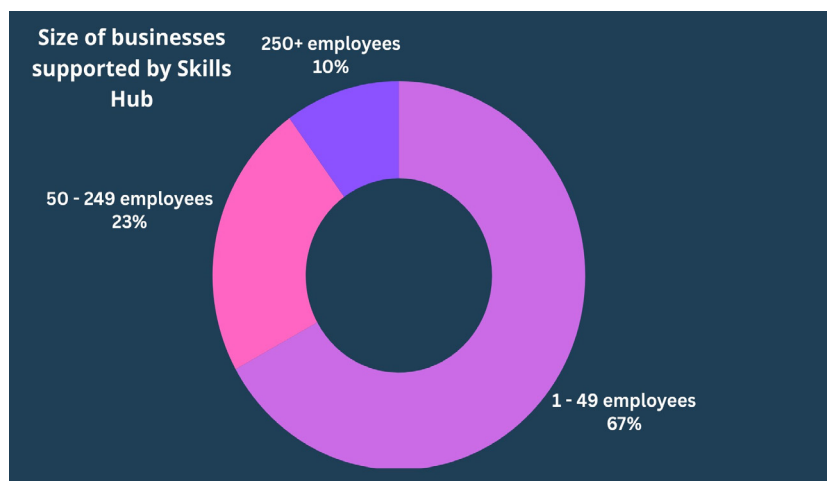
The Skills Hub team were responsible for identifying business skills and training needs.

This project has enabled employers and training providers across Devon to work together for the first time and that the intention is for these newfound relationships to continue in the future. Adult education being a journey, the delivery partners have expressed hope that the individuals have been inspired to continue with their learning in the future. There are 3 main postcode areas across the county; EX, TQ and PL. Statistics demonstrate that the project has had an impact across all these postcodes and the heat map (page 4) clearly shows that the rural and coastal communities have benefitted from the SMART SKILLS project.



By completing an organisational diagnostic it was possible for the delivery partners to identify additional business training requirements of participants. All of the fully funded courses offered through SMART SKILLS had a clearly defined progression route onto full and higher qualifications and courses. All efforts have been made to offer individuals a clear progression on to more substantial education pathways in the future. The Skills Hub team has been the sales focus for the project and has been instrumental in fostering trusted relationships with Devon based employers. One of the most successful elements of this project in reaching smaller employers has been the formation of the Skills Hub. It has been clear that employers across Devon crave a single-point of contact who can be trusted to help them with their future skills and training requirements. The Skills Hub has filled this void well over the past 3 years. The question remains; what will be the impact once this project ends and what will fill this void once the Skills Hub is disbanded? With 80% of the business supported by the Skills hub falling into the SME category, it is evident that the smaller enterprises in Devon have found a place to help them with their future training and skills needs.

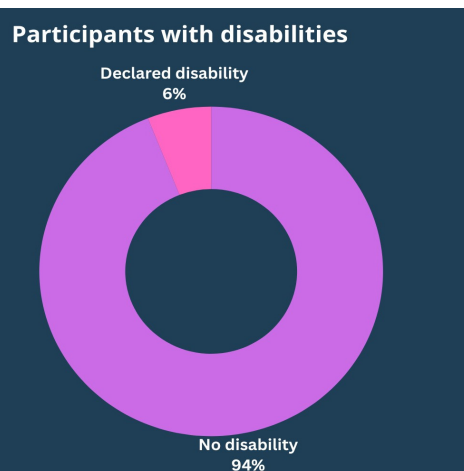
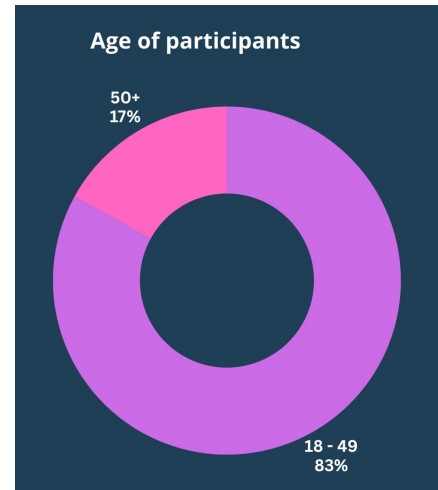
The majority of the businesses helped by the Skills Hub have not accessed funding for their staff training needs in the past. CSW hopes that a legacy of this project is to inspire individuals and businesses to continue with their educational journeys in the future and that the SMART SKILLS project has been the spark to ignite an interest in further adult education to be pursued beyond the lifetime of this project.



# SMART SKILLS PARTICIPANTS

There have been **2767 participants** who have been upskilled by the SMART SKILLS project.

Out of these **17% were over the age of 50**, Significantly less over 50s used the SMART SKILLS project than anticipated. This could be down to the post pandemic scenario which the region and the country is facing where a large number of over 50's have decided to leave the jobs market. To ensure that the skills and knowledge of this generation are not lost there is a national focus on encouraging those aged 50+ who may have left employment to return in the future. This project would have been at the heart of this initiative if it was designed to extend beyond 2023. The expectation was for more males to access the partners' fully-funded courses and workshops. However, more **females (53%)** than **males (47%)** used the funding for their educational development.



SMART SKILLS has **supported a higher percentage (6%) of individuals with disabilities** than originally planned. This could be attributed to the bite-sized courses that were being offered or the numerous opportunities for individuals to complete their learning either face to face or online. Many of the delivery partners ensured that their courses were delivered at a time when minority groups preferred to attend.

**1049 participants achieved a formal qualification.** This number is in line with the project expectations. It was expected that the majority of these qualifications would be at Level 2. However, many individuals achieved a Level 3 qualification. As the project has supported a larger number of employed individuals it is evident that employees desire these higher level qualifications to support their future career aspirations. **194 individuals achieved a L4 and L5 qualification.** The SMART SKILLS project was not designed to deliver at these levels but through the demand of individuals and employers the project has ventured into these areas.



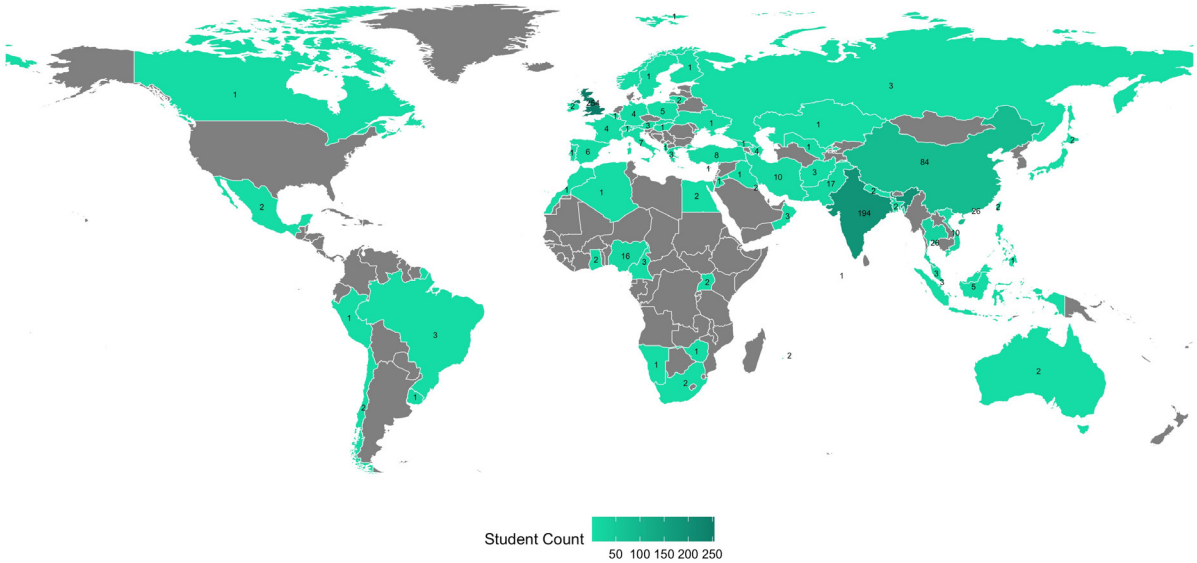
“Really enjoyed it and think it’s good to be mindful of mental health in the workplace to support your colleagues and keep everyone well informed and safe.”

Participant feedback



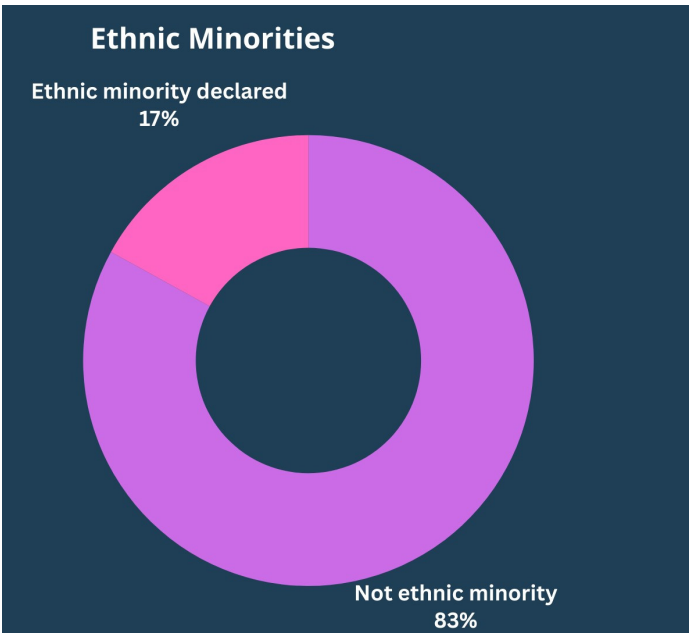
The SMART SKILLS project has reached individuals from all around the world. Participants at the University of Exeter came from **over 70 different countries** and were studying a range of Higher Education qualifications where, on occasion, Data Analytics has not been traditionally taught. The level of interest received from University students underpins the importance and need for data studies to be taught as part of all courses in the future.

Participant Distribution by Country  
71 different countries



Source: University of Exeter participant data

**17% of participants declared that they were from an ethnic minority.** The SMART SKILLS project has supported almost 300% more learners who are classified as an ethnic minority than first expected. The majority of these come from the participants supported by the University of Exeter and is representative of the diverse student base that are attracted to studying in the South West.



# MARKETING

In November 2021, the new SMART SKILLS dedicated microsite (see snapshot and link below) went live and has since received over 280 enquiries from businesses and individuals across Devon.

The CSW Group's social media channels, with an audience of over 6,000, have been utilised to regularly promote SMART SKILLS.

We also send out a monthly update to 500+ businesses which we have had engagement with.

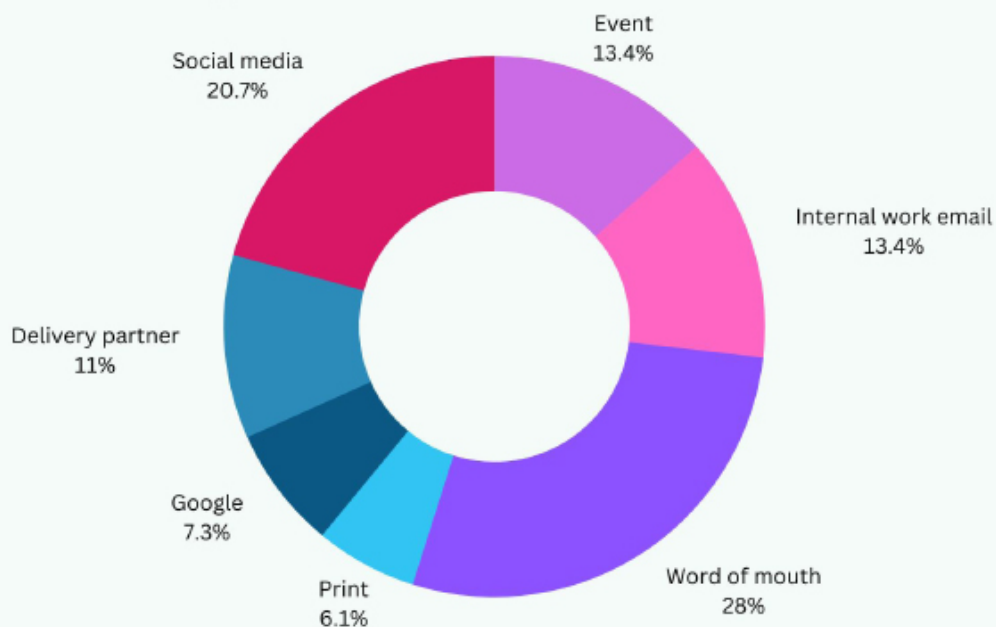
CSW also introduced a quarterly Stakeholder Newsletter to help them keep people across Devon informed on the positive impact that SMART SKILLS was having throughout our county.

SMART SKILLS was featured in stakeholder e-newsletters, including the Heart of the South West Growth Hub, local Chambers of Commerce, and Local Authorities, which has helped extend the reach and reputation of the project.

SMART SKILLS has targeted rural communities through advertising in Links Magazine, reaching 25,500 homes across Tavistock, Okehampton, and Dartmoor.

Furthermore, SMART SKILLS has had ad placements in the Devon County Show Programme for two years running, with a print run of 12,000 each year, and has featured in six issues of GROW Magazine, a publication for businesses in Exeter with a print run of 5,000. Lastly, SMART SKILLS has been featured in the Plymouth Chronicle, reaching 92,000 homes

## Where did you hear about SMART SKILLS?









For more information visit <https://cswgroup.co.uk/smart-skills-home/> or use the following QR code:



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

## Key Achievements

 <b>490</b> businesses supported	 <b>78</b> different courses available
 <b>2767</b> individuals helped	 <b>117,500</b> total number of households informed about SMART SKILLS
 <b>80%</b> of business supported have been SME's	 <b>£3.5M</b> of EU funding to support skills in Devon

## SUSTAINABILITY

### Making a Green Impact

**The SMART SKILLS team were proud and thrilled to be Green Impact double award winners!** Green Impact is a United Nations award-winning programme designed to support environmentally and socially sustainable practices in organisations. During the project, the team enjoyed introducing new ways to live and work more sustainably.

The team were awarded Silver for Green Impact and received a Special Award for Community Action. The team won the Community Action award for initiating and nurturing a partnership between Anglo Krempel and the Composites Centre at South Devon College. The new partnership makes use of expired composite materials destined for landfill to enhance the educational experience of students.

“

“... Our work is predominately in the aerospace and defence sector and high spec materials that would normally go to landfill due to expiry dates can instead be utilised at South Devon College for our future engineers to gain valuable hands-on know-how of composite materials and processes.”

Darren Tompkins, Anglo Krempel



# SUCCESSSES

## Successes



Support meetings – online and in-person.



Online flexibility – flexibility of project – having an online offer has enabled individuals to attend courses without the need to travel.



Enhanced relationships with businesses where Colleges and Training Providers have been introduced to businesses that they would not have previously worked with.



An ethos which has encouraged collaborative working, a passion for the project and where corrections and learning points have been implemented quickly and communicated effectively.



Diversification of offer has been required when we found that demand for courses was falling. Resulted in the project delivering a broad spectrum of courses



Progression opportunities in individuals continue their educational journeys following the completion of a SMART SKILLS course taking up apprenticeships and obtaining Adult Learner Loans.

# CHALLENGES

## Challenges



COVID-19 delayed the start of the project.



Electronic sign-ups – no physical paperwork would streamline the processing of paperwork and having an electronic depository for the submission of paperwork would have been advantageous.



Staff issues where there are too much reliance on fixed term contracts within industry which does not always attract people to want to work at the organisation.



Expectations issues in regards to the communication of monetary value of the fully funded courses offered.



Lack of future funding has resulted in the legacy of this project being uncertain, especially when we have just started to get brand recognition).



ESF rules are rigid and not always consistent across projects.



# CONCLUSION

SMART SKILLS has been a successful project, which has offered a wide range of fully funded training solutions to meet the needs of businesses across Devon, helping to support economic growth in the region. **The project has successfully supported 2767 individuals and 490 businesses, where 80% of businesses are SMEs.** SMART SKILLS has achieved the four Theory of Change objectives and the nine outcomes developed by the delivery partners.

- 1. To have provided an inclusive service and reach out to people who who had not traditionally gone down the skills learning route.** The impact has been that more participants have been able to study a fully funded course as the delivery partners have offered a flexible and inclusive training programme from one day workshops through to full qualifications, delivered face-to-face or online including offering twilight sessions to enable participants to study alongside other commitments.
- 2. To allow businesses to have access to training they might not have had in the past.** The impact has been that more businesses have been able to access training and upskilling their workforce, not only directly but also indirectly which has improved the skillset of the organisation as a whole. Newly-gained skills will enable businesses to boost their productivity, to build skills for the future and to improve staff retention with this further investment in their workforce.
- 3. To enable individuals to gain skills to enter the labour market and for business to upskill.** The impact has been that individuals across Devon have improved their confidence and gained skills to enter the labour market and for businesses to upskill. Feedback has showed that some participants have also been promoted into new positions after completing a course. Individuals have also said that they feel more confident as whole teams have been further upskilled by taking the same course.
- 4. To further develop the platform to ensure that the Skills Hub is meeting the needs for business, individuals and communities.** The impact has been that more businesses and individuals have been aware of the SMART SKILLS project and more participants and businesses have been signed up due to the Skills Hub platform. The Skills Hub platform has met the needs for businesses, individuals and communities, by actively promoting and signing up new participants and businesses, not only to the SMART SKILLS project but to alternative routes which support the economic growth and increased skills of the labour market in Devon.

Each of the above objectives was assessed from a quantity and a quality point of view. The Theory of Change impact measurement collated recorded feedback from individuals and businesses including case studies, testimonials and number of businesses and participants who have taken up the service and have also gained new skills, been offered inclusive activities, been offered a promotion opportunity and businesses which have increased number of employees.



*“Relevant training is a key element to business growth and this Skills Support programme does just that – gives staff and management the skills training they need to develop and ultimately, grow the business.”*

Nicola Bailey, Development Manager, Federation of Small Businesses



# PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

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*“Great knowledge in a short amount of time to help me deal with mental health in the workplace.”*

*“Really good training, it was helpful in identifying how to support young people with their mental health.”*

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*“The last 4 weeks has been a really good experience. I have learnt some interesting theory that is definitely supporting me in my current role. Although I can relate to some practices I am already using, the learning has given me further confidence in my ability and strengthened my belief in what I am doing with my staff, as well as shaping me into a better manager/team leader in understanding my staff.”*

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*“Scott feels that he has achieved all he set out to by completing the Solar PV Course, Scott has stated that ‘I have learnt new valuable skills along with gaining a recognised qualification, I would not have considered completing this course had I not had access to the funding from Devon Smart Skills, due to the high cost of this particular course’.”*





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*“David feels he has achieved a lot through completing both of the 1 Day courses, and is looking forward to using his new skills especially the Electric Vehicle Charging, where David is looking to incorporate this service to his clients in the near future, David has stated that ‘without these two courses being offered fully funded he would not have considered attending these courses at this time’.”*

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*“The participant gained sufficient knowledge from the course to be able to feel more confident in the use of Excel, and this has improved their efficiency when creating reports, using formulas and tracking programmes etc.”*

*“The participant gained sufficient knowledge from the course to feel more confident in the use of Excel, and this has improved their efficiency when being asked to complete performance trackers and financial spreadsheets.”*

*“The participant stated they have achieved their original goal, which was to gain more confidence when using Excel, and they will continue to improve their knowledge with everyday tasks such as creating tables and charts, etc. With their improved knowledge of Excel, the participant has now automated some of the tasks which were previously done manually.”*

## CASE STUDY - INDIVIDUAL

Scott has been with The Focus Training Group for nearly 3 years completing his Electrical Apprenticeship, whilst working for PF Electrical in Plymouth, where he has been employed for the past 4 years. He learnt about the opportunity to attend the Solar PV Course through a marketing email sent from Focus to Scott's employer. At the time Scott was looking to gain more useable skills and qualifications as he is approaching the end of his Apprenticeship. Scott felt that it would be a fantastic opportunity to complete the Solar PV course to enable his employer the opportunity to offer the installation of Solar PV to his customers, whilst he also gaining extra skills and a recognised qualification.

Scott felt that during the Solar PV course he gained new knowledge regarding the installation side of Solar PV. After the completion of the course Scott felt he had gained confidence in the installation of modules, by learning new skills whilst also achieving a new recognised qualification. The completion of the course means that Scott is now able to branch out in the field of Solar PV Panels.

Scott feels that he has achieved all he set out to by completing the Solar PV Course, he has stated that:

*"I have learnt new valuable skills along with gaining a recognised qualification, I would not have considered completing this course had I not had access to the funding from Devon Smart Skills, due to the high cost of this particular course".*



## CASE STUDY - BUSINESS

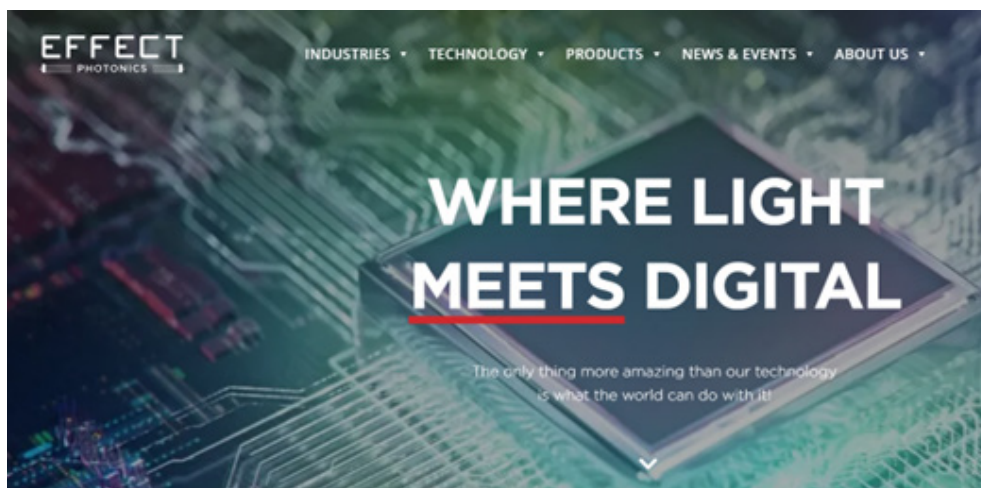
One of the businesses who have taken part in SMART SKILLS was **EFFECT Photonics Ltd**. They are a high-tech telecom company in the growth phase from product development towards volume manufacture. The market offering is initially for 5G modules associated with the upgrade to the mobile networks. There are product developments for generations beyond this.

EFFECT Photonics is facing a unique challenge as they are growing quite rapidly and much faster than anticipated. Employing 220 colleagues the expectation is that all employees have the relevant technical, vocational qualifications and soft skills training.

Training identified under SMART SKILLS included Team Leading, Project Management, Coaching and Mentoring, Award in Education and Training and Train the Trainer. Training has been part of the growth of the business, upskilling the workforce, career development and success planning. The funding has enabled EFFECT Photonics to provide training to the workforce and use their training budget to support those staff accessing training to develop their skills further through higher level qualifications. The project has currently supported 27 colleagues through various training and qualifications.

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*“The funding is greatly appreciated and is helping to support progression within the organisation. Feedback has been very positive throughout. Where the certificate was not appropriate for some colleagues, we were able to work with South Devon College to look at bespoke provision that was non-accredited but provided the skills and knowledge for the workforce.”*





## CASE STUDY - BUSINESS

The SMART SKILLS project has directly and indirectly benefited **Mid Devon District Council** as employees have been upskilled via the Level 2 Team Leader course which is an introduction to those that are thinking about or have recently become a team leader or supervisor. The course looked at organisational structure and responsibilities, culture and team motivation, leadership styles, leadership models and theories and how they can be adapted to different situations.

Mid Devon District Council is a progressive council committed to creating an environment where people can flourish and to providing quality services to those who live and work in the district. The council is dedicated to the development of approximately 450 employees working across the different service areas.

Many employees are wanting management qualifications to be able to progress but it may have been several years since they have been in an education environment. Using the funding has enabled them to settle back in to this environment and used as a stepping stone to help them prepare for a higher level qualification in the future.

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*“7 employees attended a Level 2 Team Leader short course in March to help them develop in their roles and as a stepping stone to the Level 3 CMI Principles in Management and Leadership. The feedback received from the delegates was good and several managers came forward to ask if there was the potential of another Level 2 Team Leader course. 13 employees have/are taking part in the funded sessions.”*

Helen Duke, Learning and Development Specialist  
Mid Devon District Council





# CASE STUDY - BUSINESS

The SMART SKILLS project has delivered an advanced Excel course which included; formulas and functions, create and use techniques such as: Pivot Tables, Subtotals, Advanced Filters, and creating and using spreadsheet and workbooks.

## China Fleet Country Club

China Fleet Country Club is a health club which sits within the hospitality/tourism/leisure sector and has a variety of leisure facilities, including golf, spa, accommodation and hosts various events. The Company currently employs 230 people in various roles including front of house staff, reception staff, chefs and caterers, leisure assistants plus business and admin teams. Excel training was identified for office staff following appraisals. The employer noted that Excel has many functions and often, staff are not trained with using this effectively. The Managing Director discovered details of the SMART SKILLS Project and the ability to deliver free training to employees to help benefit and support the business.

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*“10 employees attended Excel training at an intermediate level. The trainer delivered the session over Teams, which the employer stated was great for them as the training was much more accessible. They stated that they enjoyed this course and they thought it was really useful to be delivered online where participants were then able to view the training and access Excel at the same time.”*

## Protective Wear Supplies

The provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) and specialist company workwear to industry. The Company currently employs 61 people in various roles including sales, finance and warehouse staff etc.

The employer approached City College Plymouth, CSW and South Devon College to consider the best package for their business. PWS was provided with details of the SMART SKILLS Project and the facility to deliver free training to employees to help benefit and support the business. PWS felt this would be the right fit for them. Excel training was identified due to the increased need for the production of reports and tracking sales trends. 14 employees attended Excel training either at basic/intermediate or advanced level. The employer stated the course was enjoyable and interactive for participants and improved confidence, skills and knowledge of the participants.