



Subject:	Improving employability outcomes: focus on young people at risk
Date:	12 th October 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Sinéad O'Regan, Employability and Skills Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Update Members on development work and activity to date in improving the employability outcomes of young people at risk and the review of delivery currently underwaySet out the proposal to develop a new intervention – “Bridges to Progression” – through the Belfast Labour Market Partnership and secure agreement to progress with the development and delivery of this intervention.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to:

- Note the development work and activity to date in improving the employability outcomes of young people at risk and the review of delivery currently underway
- Note the proposal to manage the Bridges to Progression funding distribution in partnership with Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work providers through an agreed application process on behalf of those young people identified.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Research has consistently shown that young people have been disproportionately negatively impacted by the recent series of economic shocks. While there has been significant investment in labour market support measures to support those young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), the provision can be difficult to locate and navigate and, in some instances, there is competition for clients. Taking account of this situation, the Council's employability and skills support in this area has focused on developing a continuum of support and testing potential solutions for those young people who would otherwise fall through the cracks of existing provision – or for whom the provision is not meeting their specific needs or addressing relevant challenges and barriers to engagement. A number of examples of specific areas of intervention are set out below.

3.2 GCSE Support Programme

While the Department for Education (DE) currently resources GCSE support activity for those young people identified as being unlikely to achieve a pass grade at English and/or Maths, its investment is focused on the west of the city only. In recognition of this – and taking account of the positive outcomes of this work – the City Growth and Regeneration Committee previously agreed to enable this work to be extended across the city through the GCSE Support Programme. While the implementation of this contract was severely impeded by the successive school closures and cancellation of exams due to COVID-19, we have been able to build a picture of the impact from the first full clear year of delivery. In total, 517 young people have benefitted from access to support to help with their GCSE English and GCSE Maths over the last year. This support has taken the form of both schools-based and community-based classes, revision and exam preparation.

Area	No of students receiving support
North	113
South	133
East	145
West (including Shankill)	126
TOTAL	517

3.3 The outcomes of this programme - i.e. actual grades compared with predicted grades - are expected to be confirmed by November 2022. This contract is currently in its last year of

delivery and will be reviewed alongside the other interventions detailed below. This is important given recent changes in the policy environment (including A Fair Start and Reducing Educational Disadvantage) and the disproportionate impact on those young people at risk.

3.4 Youth Support Programme

This programme supports young people (14-24 years old) who are disengaged and likely to end up in the 'NEET' category. The aim of the intervention is to create a progression pathway in Belfast for young people at risk, thereby reducing the number that are disengaging at an early age. This is based on an understanding that, once an individual disengages, it is more difficult – and more costly – to re-engage them.

3.5 Across the 2021/22 academic year, the Youth Support Programme has supported 170 young people between the ages of 14 and 24 years. 72 of those young people are still in the school system but were referred by Education Welfare officers as being at highest risk of falling out of the system or had temporarily disengaged. 60 young people were referred through community youth workers across the city and 38 were engaged directly through open recruitment. Outcomes into training, education or employment are:

- 14-16yr olds: 54 out of the 72 young people who had disengaged from the education system remained within or moved back into education or training, representing a positive outcome rate of 75%
- 16-18yr olds: 50 out of the 87 young people who were not engaged on any education or training supports moved into education or training, representing an outcome rate of 57%
- 18-24yr olds: 9 out of the 11 young people who were not engaged on any education/training or working moved into employment representing an outcome rate of 82%.

3.6 This programme is scheduled to run until September 2023. By that stage, we are likely to engage a further 160 young people with the ambition of ensuring positive destinations for at least 50% of those participants.

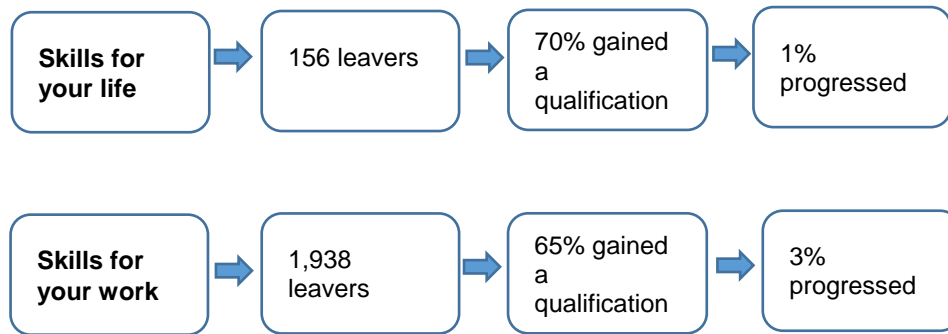
3.7 Summer Work Experience Programme

Piloted in summer 2022, this intervention was aligned with the Youth Support Programme and targeted young people aged 14-16 years at highest risk or who had already disengaged from the formal education system. The programme offered six weeks paid work experience at £40

	per week (equivalent to EMA) and was designed to expose participants to a range of employment opportunities and pathways into various sectors.
3.8	Officers targeted recruitment through school networks and Education Welfare Teams to identify those young people who were 'undecided' on their pathway or those thinking about vocational training but not quite sure if it was right for them. The programme was co-designed with participants where they had the choice of four out of nine vocational areas to explore along with a range of team building activities. 34 young people were engaged and 30 completed the programme. Employers engaged included JP McManus (painting & decorating, joinery and construction), Kensington Medical Centre (customer service and business administration), Andrew Mulvenna (hairdressing and barbering) and Charles Hurst Motors (customer service and motor vehicle). All 30 young people who completed received Level 1 City & Guilds employability and personal development qualifications with 28 young people moving into positive outcomes (14 continued in formal education at year 13 and the remainder moved into vocational training). All those completing reported that their employability skills and mental health/wellbeing had improved as a result of their experience.
3.9	Work is currently underway to evaluate and review all of our activity within this space to ensure that we are doing the right things, in the right way that is effective in 'turning the curve' on poor employability and attainment outcomes for young people in the city. When this is complete, members will be asked to consider recommendations going forward, which will focus on a continuum of supports at critical stages for young people and/or where there is no existing provision or barriers to entry and engagement.
3.10	<p><u>Bridges to Progression</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that the Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) represent a cross-governmental approach to co-designing a sustainable future strategic employment offer. Belfast LMP is focused on four main strategic and cross-cutting themes: Quickly Back to Work; Increasing opportunities; No-one left Behind; and Catching-up. Under the theme No-one Left Behind, the Belfast LMP's agreed action plan includes a proposed intervention to 'turn the curve' on the poor outcomes for young people on Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work programme (TfS/SfL&W) programmes in Belfast which DfE have reported below.</p>
3.11	The research indicates that less than 1 in 30 of the young people engaging on those interventions are entering a positive destination (employment/further training) at the end of the programme. In order to understand the reasons behind this performance, officers have

been engaging with providers across the city and have co-designed a bridging intervention that aims to increase the positive outcomes for young people and maximise the impact of the mainstream programme.

Funding and Outcomes of Training for Success, DfE, December 2020



3.12 Skills for Life and Work is a training programme for young people who want to develop their skills and get ready for work. The programme is aimed at 16-17 year olds who have left school (extended up to 22 years for those with disability and 24 years for those who qualify under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) (2002)). As of January 2022, 1178 young people had signed up to Skills for Life and Work regionally with almost half (44%) within the Belfast area. Engagement rates consistently show a disproportionately higher level of participants coming from North and West Belfast which together account for 70% of all Belfast participants.

3.13 One of the key findings of our engagement – as highlighted the scoping paper in Appendix 1 – was that, while the positive outcome rate for those who complete the programme is relatively high, there is a high drop-out rate within Training for Success/Skills for Life & Work and this accounts for the poor performance in the overall outcomes. Having identified this challenge, Bridges to Progression has been developed to work alongside the existing provision by providing extra support for those participants at risk of early exit from the programme in order to retain their engagement and enhance their prospects of a positive outcome.

3.14 The consultation with all Skills for Life and Work providers in the city identified that the young people on the programme are those already furthest removed from labour market and experiencing multiple barriers such as addiction, homelessness, familial problems and young parenthood. These are significant contributory factors to the high attrition levels. Our engagement work also identified the fact that these young people have been disproportionately negatively impacted during Covid-19 pandemic and are now exposed to

	<p>the cost of living crisis which is placing additional pressures day to day pressures on them and potentially impacting their ability to positively engage in these and other employability interventions.</p>
3.15	<p>Having explored a range of potential approaches, it is proposed that the most expedient methodology for managing this intervention is to set aside an allocation of up to £90,000 from the Labour Market Partnership budget that will be ringfenced for the Belfast-based Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work providers. Should the providers identify that a participant is facing a specific area of challenge that is not related to the core programme content but that risks them falling out of provision, they can make the case to access funding to pull in the relevant support services or refer the individual towards the support. Officers will work with providers to identify those young people at highest risk of falling out of provision and will use the resources to provide the support that they need to encourage retention. This pilot programme will target at least 120 young people at risk.</p>
3.16	<p>Based on our understanding of the challenges at present, it is likely that the investment will be used for referrals to a range of support services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health support and counselling • One-to-one coaching • Housing support and advice • Self-esteem and confidence building • Childcare and parenting support • Travel and living costs where appropriate • Learning support to complete (e.g. where a participant has ‘run out of time’ and cannot complete the accreditation) • Addiction support services – gambling, alcohol, drug use etc.
3.17	<p>This is not an exhaustive list and actual activity and interventions will be agreed using a person-centred approach. While some of this provision may come from existing statutory services, it is likely that – given the need for timely interventions – there will be a need to engage with the range of community-based and independent provision across the city.</p>
3.18	<p>The providers that hold Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work contracts with DfE within Belfast and that this support will specifically work with are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Training • Springvale Training

- Dairyfarm/People 1st
- Impact Training
- Academy Hair & Beauty Training School
- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Belfast Central Training
- Bryson FutureSkills
- Rutledge Training
- Springboard Opportunities

3.19 Given the complexity of participants' needs, flexibility is key to be able to provide an authentic person-centred approach. So, while the average cost is £750 per person, given the level of resources available and the KPIs expected, in-built agility to pivot towards the needs of each young person may mean that more resources are required for one person and less for another. To ensure added value, Bridges to Progression funds will not be used for any delivery expected within the contracts that providers hold with DfE. Additionally, providers will only access Bridges to Progression funds for activities that cannot otherwise be sourced.

3.20 Effectively, Bridges to Progression resources will be utilised to 'purchase' services and supports for the young person identified as being at risk of dropping out of Training for Success/Skills for Life & Work provision. Officers will ensure that delivery does not duplicate, but rather adds value to, this provision in order to improve employability outcomes for participants of Training for Success/Skills for Life & Work.

3.21 Subject to council endorsement, officers will undertake assessment of the applications from Training for Success/Skills for Life & Work providers for funding for participants in line with the approach detailed in this report. A report will be presented at a future meeting of this committee outlining the outcomes and learning from this approach. Going forward, Bridges to Progression will be factored into the recommendations that the review of all youth-focused employability and skills interventions underway.

Equality and Good Relations Implication/Rural Impact Assessment

3.22 The Department for Communities will undertake equality screening of LMP interventions. LMPs have been established in all 11 council areas.

3.23 **Financial and Resource Implications**

	It is proposed that a total of £90,000 funded through Labour Market Partnership is allocated to Training for Success/Skills for Life & Work providers as outlined in this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1: Bridges to Progression Scoping Paper