

# Appendix 1

## Bridges to Progression Scoping Paper

June 2022



Belfast City Council

### OVERVIEW

Bridges to Progression has been agreed within the LMP action plan: improving transitions and preventing young people leaving education/training with no positive destination with a specific focus on mainstream youth training provision in response to Department for the Economy published outcomes for Training for Success/Skills for Life and Work (TfS/SfL&W) outlined below which show extremely poor outcomes for young people.

Table 1  
Funding and Outcomes of Skills and Education in NI, DfE, December 2020



A number of officers within the E&S Team were tasked with undertaking a scoping exercise to identify what the key challenges are operationally and to work with providers to identify potential solutions and delivery options:

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### OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the challenges TfS/SfL&W experience in achieving positive outcomes.

2. Establish ways that the Labour Market Partnership could support activity to Turn the Curve on the outcomes above.
3. Identify if a TfS/SfL&W providers forum that feeds into the Labour Market Partnership would be useful in terms of identifying key issues and challenges that are impacting on outcomes for young people.

## **APPROACH**

Belfast City Council (BCC) consulted with all TfS/SfL&W providers in Belfast which included a series of focus group involving all providers in the city, 1-1 meetings with seven delivery agents and a follow up survey which was completed by four delivery agents.

Together we discussed the main challenges within the programme and agreed a number of potential solutions to support young people to improve positive outcomes.

## **CHALLENGES**

1. Throughout the consultation and investigative stages of this proposal, it came to light that there are differences in how DfE and the delivery agents (contract holders for TfS/SfL&W) interpret programme data including the trigger points for certain outcomes and how outcomes are derived. BCC received various reports that seemed to contradict the data and outcomes for the TfS/SfL&W programme which have been quoted in table.

In particular delivery agents only count the outcomes for those that have completed the programme whereas DfE appear to count all those registered and completed or left early. This has meant the BCC have received conflicting information about the effectiveness of these programme. Our consultation suggests that those that complete TfS/SfL&W actually move onto positive destinations at a rates between 75-85%. However, young people who leave early or do not complete the programme struggle to move to positive destinations. ***This would point to the actual challenge being retention on the programme.***

2. Delivery agents highlighted that there some barriers in the programme which impair their ability to support those furthest removed from the labour market. Delivery agents have reported on the stringent rules on the TfS programme around attendance, for example the operational requirements state,

*“Where it is known from the outset that the period of unpaid leave will exceed five training days, providers must inform the Department in writing in advance. Payment of the weekly training fee, EMA and all other costs associated with that participant will cease from the last day of training.”*

Given the complexity of participants’ needs on the programme, rules such as this have created a fairly significant structural barrier to retaining vulnerable young people on the programme. In an attempt to overcome such barriers, staff from a range of providers would visit homes and phone participants regularly in an attempt to avoid these circumstances and minimise disruption to the young people and their lives. With participants on the programme facing multiple barriers such as addiction, relationship problems, lack of support at home, homelessness amongst other complex issues, this particular rule has become problematic for many. Whilst the rules were designed to develop participants and provide a realistic work-like experience, attendance can be difficult to achieve given the target group and therefore often results in suspension despite the efforts of the young person. Flexibility in the operational requirements and authority for delivery agents to apply some discretion with participants facing challenges would facilitate a more supportive environment for the target group in question.

3. The current definition of “progression” does not allow for any time lag between the end of the programme and starting education, training or employment. Progressions are currently described by DfE as:

*“Progressed: includes those participants who move to the next option within TfS, those who move to Further Education and those who move into employment immediately on finishing the programme, which is sustained for 13 weeks for which output related*

funding is paid. The Department is currently in the process of carrying out a leavers' survey."

The definition is aimed to ensure sustained outcomes however it was reported to BCC that this definition is difficult for delivery agents to hit because if a young person completes on a Friday and starts work a week later, they do not qualify as 'progressed'. Therefore, the progression data does not reflect the positive outcomes and progressions achieved by participants in the weeks and months following programme completion. Delivery Agents feel this is leading to an under-reporting of progression from the programme. This again may account for the variation in figures received by BCC during this consultation. Delivery agents reported that some flexibility in the reporting of 'progressions' would provide a more accurate report on the effectiveness of the programme.

4. Another challenge faced by delivery agents and participants is the timescale. Participants have 2 years on the programme (3 for those with disabilities). Many participants run out of time to complete their qualifications. This is a structural barrier and results in participants being unable to progress or complete qualifications voiding all efforts at that level to that point. This is particularly the case for young people who experience additional barriers or are furthest removed from the labour market. The lack of flexibility regarding time prohibits participants on the programme from achieving and reaching their full potential.
5. TfS/SfW&L provides a level 3 pathway with minimal uptake from participants. The reasons reported by delivery agents were because:
  - a. The L3 was beyond the capabilities of a high number of participants, given the number that face learning difficulties, lack of education prior to TfS/SfW&L and the lack of funding available for the extra support required it is not feasible nor expected that the target group can reach this level.

- b. Participants have two years on the programme and the majority run out of time to achieve L3. Most need that time to complete L1 with a percentage able to achieve L2 within the timeframe. Those that do move to L3 have generally moved on to this phase in order to fill the rest of their 2 year timescale to ensure they keep receiving their EMA and once the 2 years is complete they will move on to another 'positive destination' or claim benefits.
- c. Once participants reach the age of 18 years, it is more financially viable to receive benefits of £61 per week as opposed to the £40 per week EMA payment.

## THE DATA

As mentioned above and supported by our consultation: those that complete the programme move onto positive destinations at a rate of 75-85%. This was supported by respective ETI reports. There was a consensus that the single largest impact on outcomes as reported in Table 1 was identified as those leaving the programme early (see table 2) where the sample survey indicated this is 48%, which is exceptionally high.

Table 2

*(NB: figures are from a sample of providers who responded to our survey and while they and do not include all KPIs across the city, does provide a pattern for consideration)*

OVERALL STATS	OVERALL
Recruitment	451
Early Leavers	218
Completers with qualification	141
Leavers without qualification	53
Progression Breakdown	
Progression according to DfE definition	6
Overall into positive destination	154
Into Employment	54
Into further education	12
Into Apprenticeship	66

Given the high number of ‘early leavers’ within the programme we decided to explore this further and found the following reasons were identified as issues for early leavers:

Table 3

EARLY LEAVER REASONS	OVERALL	
ESOL	10	
Care leaver	10	
Troubled Homelife/Relationships	81	
Mental Health	103	
Lone Parents	27	
Caring Responsibilities	5	
Youth Justice/Crime	8	
No trends identified	5	
Absence/prog guidelines	24	
Other reasons	6	Maternity
	27	Inability to engage due to lockdown
	4	Homelessness
	12	Addiction
	27	Short term employment
	2	Travellers

The highest reasons for disengagement are mental health and home circumstances/relationships.

### CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the key findings of our engagement as outlined above is that, while the positive outcome rate for those who complete the programme is relatively high, there is a high drop-out rate accounts for the poor performance in the overall outcomes. Having identified this challenge, Bridges to Progression should be designed 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.

The consultation 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 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.

Having explored a range of potential approaches, it is proposed that an allocation of up to £90,000 from the Labour Market Partnership budget will be ringfenced for Belfast-based TfS/SfL&W providers. 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 with an average unit cost of £750 per person being utilized to ‘purchase’ services and supports for the young person using a person-centred and needs-led approach. It is therefore recommended that Bridges to Progression will therefore primarily work with the participants of all TfS/SfL&W providers in Belfast:

Dairyfarm/People 1 <sup>st</sup>	Impact Training
Springvale Training	Springboard Opportunities
Workforce Training Services	Academy Hair & Beauty Training School
Bryson FutureSkills	Belfast Metropolitan College
Rutledge Training	Belfast Central Training

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. Below are some examples of what Bridges to Progression is likely to cover:

- Mental health support and counselling
- One-to-one coaching
- Housing support and advice
- Team building
- 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 services – gambling, alcohol, drug use etc.

This is not an exhaustive list and actual activity and interventions will be agreed using a person-centred approach. Officers will manage this in partnership with providers through an agreed application process on behalf of those young people identified. 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.

Given the complexity of participants needs and the operational requirements within the programme we feel that the most effective approach would be to ensure this intervention facilitates flexibility so that TfS/SfL&W providers are able to co design and implement bespoke solutions, best suited to their participants needs and barriers.

To demonstrate the range in delivery across the city each delivery agent has varying programme sizes where KPI's can range from 14 participants to 100+ participants per annum. In addition to this delivery agents work with various capacity levels including staffing and mentors available to participants on the programme, with one delivery agent specifically targeting people with

disabilities meaning they face their own set of challenges. We do not feel a one size fits all approach would facilitate the impact we are looking for.

With this mind we are proposing that delivery agents are given the opportunity to submit proposals to address retention rates. Proposals would be aligned to a framework developed to guide and assess the effectiveness of each proposal to ensure they are meeting the outputs and outcomes required.

Reporting and monitoring processes and requirements will be delivered and agreed prior to implementation.

### **Duplication/Existing Provisions**

Whilst there exists a range of mental health services across the city and the provision for employability and skills mentoring already exists within these programmes, we feel the additional support provided on a person-centred approach will be an invaluable resource for delivery agents and participants.

For example, delivery agents have reported that waiting lists for counselling and other mental health services are very long, with even emergency/crisis interventions taking 6+ weeks. We propose that these interventions will provide a 'bridge' to maintain engagement and support participants on the programme until more formal interventions can be applied and will not act as a replacement of other professional services. These interventions will be tailored to support continued engagement in TfS/SfW&L minimizing the impact on attendance and/or suspensions.

Some of the findings here are not what was anticipated from the outset of this consultation and whilst some of the interventions themselves traditionally fall outside the realm of employability and skills, the delivery agents have agreed that these are the main barriers to 'progressing' for participants on the and that the interventions proposed are necessary to provide an equal opportunity for those that have already fallen far behind their peers. If participants on TfS/SfW&L are to strive and compete in the world of work we must also support them as they navigate their way into young adulthood and the life changes that this presents. DfE have provided the opportunity to learn and gain qualifications through the TfS/SfW&L programme

however the beneficiaries of this programme have complex needs and additional support is required if they are to fully utilise this opportunity.

Existing provisions and funding will be considered and included within the framework for allocation of funds to ensure there is no duplication or double funding.

## **DELIVERY MODEL**

Delivery agents will identify those most at risk of leaving the programme early and can apply a range of interventions on a person-centred basis up to a maximum of £750 (if it is more than this, the provider can extend the cost with agreement of BCC). Resources would be allocated on a pro rata basis to ensure allocation of funds are in proportion to the programme size within each provider. The resources provided will be to 'purchase' services and supports for young people.

A number of different options were considered in terms of how the resources would be allocated, being mindful that we are required to procure all E&S services:

### **Option A**

Managed by BCC and a supplier identified through the existing DPS, which would not require any additional approvals to action (given the DPS has been approved as well and the LMP Action Plan). While this is the default option for procuring E&S services, we are recommending that this is not a preferred option for a number of reasons:

- We wish to develop partnership working with TfS/SfL&W providers to co-design joint solutions. If one of the current TfS/SfL&W providers – or another youth service provider - is awarded this contract, there is the risk that the other providers will be reticent (at best) with regards to providing details of their participants.
- GDPR regulations may make it difficult to share personal data of those participants at risk of disengagement.

### **Option B**

Provide resources to DfE as an extension of existing contracts, which would ensure resources are allocated to providers selected through an open procurement exercise. However, this approach would rely on the cooperation of DfE and their capacity to manage this budget which would not likely to be gained within the timescale required. There would also be a concern that monitoring and verifying Bridges to Progression expenditure would become unmanageable for officers.

**Option C (preferred option)**

Ringfence resources to DfE TfS/SfL&W providers who will complete a proposal to BCC (with officers agreeing criteria and undertaking a formal selection exercise). While this is divergent from open procurement; assurance that open procurement has happened is gained through the respective DfE contracting processes. This therefore ensures that resources are allocated to providers selected through an open procurement exercise.

To then ensure the appropriate and proportionate allocation to participants who are at risk of disengaging, as outlined above, we are proposing that delivery agents are given the opportunity to submit proposals to address retention rates, aligned to an agreed framework to guide and assess the effectiveness of each proposal to ensure they are meeting the outputs and outcomes required and proportionate to their engagement numbers. Reporting and monitoring processes and requirements will be agreed prior to implementation and in line with existing ED Procedures.

**TIMELINE**

Activities	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Engage DfE/approvals													
Proposal & payments													
Delivery													

