An evaluation of the Transform your Future programme (2023 – 2025)

Developing holistic employability programmes designed to equip economically inactive people to overcome barriers to employment

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Executive summary

- This report presents an independent evaluation of the Transform your Future programme which operated across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire over the period of November 2023 – April 2025.
- The programme was part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and was specifically designed to help economically inactive participants to overcome barriers to work by providing holistic, locally tailored support including access to basic skills.
- The programme employed locally based teams of Careers Advisors who provided advice and support to help participants remove barriers to their employability to help move them closer to the labour market with the ultimate aim of securing paid employment.
- An assessment of the demographic profile of participants revealed that the average age of participants accessing the programme equated to 26.4 years. The programme attracted a gender split of 54.8% male, 42.4% female, 2.8% other. 45.7% participants were white British with a diverse range of ethnic groups making up 54.3% of the total participants. Further details of this ethnicity can be found on page 6 of the report.
- The quantitative evaluation process revealed a programme that typically performed very well against its operational targets.
- Over the duration of the programme a total of 1,030 participants engaged with their Careers Advisor. The programme was able to support the progression of significant volumes of participants to develop their employability, wellbeing and ultimately secure employment outcomes. For example, 590 participants were supported to access basic skills support, 476 were supported to access physical and mental wellbeing resources and 1015 participants were supported to gain employment* (*Readers should note that in this context the term 'supported to gain employment means support to commence the journey to find work, not employment per se. This measure is an output not an outcome). These figures represent over-attainment vs programme targets.
- By comparison targets around into employment and sustained employment outcomes over 6 months were harder to consistently achieve. The available evidence suggests that with a longer duration of programme that more of participants would have entered employment and passed the 6-month milestone.
- The qualitative evaluation process involved a series of semi-structured interviews with Careers Advisors supporting participants on the programme. This dialogue revealed the key strengths of the programme in terms of its person centred, flexible, mentor-based interventions. All the Career Advisors consulted recognised the value of this approach.
- The evaluation also presents two economic impact case studies which illustrate the gains and savings to HM treasury in the event that previously economically inactive participants secure employment over a 12-month period.
- The report concludes, making a series of recommendations on how provision targeted at economically inactive cohorts could be further enhanced. These recommendations include the creation of distance from labour market metrics, data sharing and partnerships to support referrals, extending the lifespan of the programme to support sustained employment outcomes, balancing the relative merits of employment and volunteering, increasing the personal budget allowance and the understanding the importance of digital inclusion for the target group.

- The evaluation processes associated with the Transform your Future programme confirms its ability to help economically inactive participants to access employment, education, training and volunteering opportunities.

Transform your Future evaluation

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1.An evaluation of the Transform your Future programme

Introduction

This report has been designed to present the findings from an impact evaluation of the UKSPF E33 (Transform your Future) programme which operated across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire over the period of November 2023 – April 2025.

The programme was funded through several contracts. Futures were awarded the UKSPF "Community Development" E33/E34 employment contract by Nottingham City Council in January 2023 and subsequently awarded the UKSPF E33 (Employment Support for the Economically) framework, via Nottinghamshire County Council, contracting with Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, and Rushcliffe councils, in November 2023.

These contracts were amalgamated under the single "Transform your Future" banner for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The total funding for the 17-month programme was £1.676 million.

The E33 intervention supports economically inactive people to overcome barriers to work by providing holistic, locally tailored support including access to basic skills.

Each authority outlined specifics around their interventions, include targeted cohorts and demographics, specific ward and neighbourhood geography, as well as their minimum mandatory numbers for their outputs and outcomes. Councils identified priority groups in their areas which include, but are not limited to people aged over 50, people with a disability and/or health condition, people not in education, employment or training and people with multiple complex needs.

Programme delivery in Nottingham City, Broxtowe, and Rushcliffe was 100% delivered by Futures. Programme delivery in Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Gedling and Mansfield, included two elements: 70% direct delivery by Futures staff with 30% delivery undertaken by a community grants programme delivered in partnership with local CVS organisations.

Service delivery against contractual profiles commenced in January 2024 with exception of Rushcliffe which commenced in April 2024. Service delivery of the programme concluded in March 2025.

The subsequent evaluation process for the Transform your Future programme has been designed to assess its impact and key learning working with E33 economically inactive groups to help them access employment, education or training (EET) opportunities

2.Evaluation aims & methodology

The evaluation process was designed to fulfil the following objectives

- Conduct an impact evaluation of the Transform your Future programme
- Utilise available quantitative and qualitative resources to identify best practice when working with economically inactive participants
- Make an assessment of the most effective referral routes to help identify and engage economically inactive participants across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.
- Identify best practice case studies where economically inactive participants have been supported to access employment, education or training opportunities (EET)
- Canvass the opinions of Futures Careers Advisors to make a qualitative assessment of 'what works' when supporting economically inactive participants to access employment, education or training opportunities (EET)
- Engage partner organisations delivering the Community Grants element of the programme to assess 'what works' and in 'what circumstances' when engaging economically inactive participants to access employment, education or training opportunities (EET)
- Identify potential savings and income generation for HM treasury embedded with individual case studies where employment outcomes have been secured.
- Make an assessment of the impact of personal budget spending designed to alleviate or reduce participant barriers.

Evaluation methodology

- Utilise available quantitative datasets and available monitoring reports to make an assessment of the impact of the programme.
- Undertake analysis of available demographic datasets, referral route datasets and personal budget datasets to make an assessment of the accessibility of the programme.
- Utilise available quantitative data to inform the basis of semi structured interview questions with personnel delivering front line support services under the banner of Transform your Future.
- Engage up to 6 Futures Careers Advisors and up to 4 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) delivery partners.

3.Quantitative analysis of programme demographics and performance

The following section of the evaluation is designed to provide readers with complementary insights on the following aspects of the programme:

- The demographic profile of participants
- Review of programme performance vs targets

Demographic profile of participants accessing the programme

Headline trends

- The average age of participants accessing the programme was 26.4 years old
- Gender make-up of participants 54.8% male, 42.4% female and 2.8% other
- Ethnicity: 45.7% white, 8.7% Asian – Indian, 7.4% Black African, 3.9% Asian other, 3.3% Asian Pakistan, 2.4% dual/multiple – Black Caribbean & white, 2% Black Caribbean, 1.8% Black – Other, 0.8% Asian Bangladesh, 0.8% Dual/Multiple Other, 0.7% Dual/Multiple – Black African & White, 0.5% Asian Chinese, 0.5% Dual/Multiple Asian & White, 0.3% Black Somali, 5.1% Other ethnic group, 16% Not known and prefer not to say

Quantitative performance - Overview

A review of the quantitative performance of the programme reveals a picture of over-achievement vs profiled contractual targets.

The evaluator is aware that the profiled targets were decided by each local authority area in response to a variety of factors including resourcing, local priorities and perceived local needs. Whilst this makes it somewhat challenging to undertake a comparative analysis of different geographic areas within the available aggregated data does reveal a programme that has been able to deliver a range of positive outcomes.

On 26 of the 33 profiled targets, it is evident that the programme over-achieved. A closer inspection of this performance reveals the large numbers of participants engaging with their key worker for support (1030). This has translated into wider support for participants to access basic skills (590 participants) and support to engage in job searching (920). Another encouraging statistic is that 1015 participants were receiving support to gain employment*, having previously been economically inactive and for whatever reason not actively preparing to access the labour market. This is 134% above target. (*readers of this evaluation should note the 'receiving support to gain employment' refers to an on-going dialogue between Careers Advisors and participants to get closer to the labour market and not an employment outcome per se)

The available evidence on programme performance also indicates that the programme has empowered participants to secure additional qualifications and undertake upskilling to help improve their proximity to the labour market. Measures around gaining a qualification following support (156), people in education or training (295) suggest that the programme has also been effective at getting participants to upskill.

Perhaps crucially for a programme engaging with economically inactive groups the available data also reveals that the programme has been able to build some of the softer skills and experience to support longer term progression. Measures around supporting people to engage in life skills courses (892) familiarisation with employers' expectations (405) and access to physical and mental health support leading to employment (476) all reveal the ability of the programme to support the progression of participants who might not be completely 'work ready' at the point of access onto the programme.

On this topic it is also valid to note that 167 participants were supported to volunteer. For those participants that are not immediately work ready volunteering represents a potentially valuable capacity building option to help build confidence and a range of employability skills on the journey towards the labour market.

The available quantitative data presents a programme that has had a very positive impact on the participants that have engaged with it.

Although this is the case it is also evident that the programme has found several outcome measures, particularly those around employment outcomes, much more challenging to achieve. In this respect the programme has struggled to meet its expected profiling targets in five outcome areas which fell significantly short of target. A closer inspection of this trend reveals an affinity between the themes of supported employment, self-employment and vocational licenses.

As part of the evaluation process it is important to reflect on the limited timescales to deliver the programme, with the Nov 23 – Apr 25 timescale simply not being long enough to accumulate the necessary outputs particularly around securing sustained employment outcomes. If we were to review the data in another six months' time it is probable that a significant proportion of 1015 individuals (receiving support to gain employment) may have found employment. This said it is important to recognise the fact that a significant amount of energy has been expended to engage 1015 participants to prepare to start their journey towards the labour market. This a substantial number for a programme working with economically inactive participants that may have numerous barriers surrounding confidence, self-esteem and underutilised employability skills. The topic of appropriate timescales to deliver programme targeted at economically inactive cohorts is an issue that will be considered in greater detail in the recommendations section of this report.

Readers interested in the specific attainment of outputs vs each profiled target can find further information in the data tables below.

People & Skills Mandatory Outputs achieved	No. achieved to date	Profiled to end of Contract	**%**
Eco inactive engaging with keyworker support	1030	905	114%
Eco inactive supported to engage benefits system	662	542	122%
Socially excluded accessing support	1037	692	150%
Supported to access basic skills	590	280	211%

Accessing mental and physical health support leading to employment	476	134	355%
Supported to engage in job-searching	920	939	98%
Receiving support to gain employment	1015	758	134%
Receiving support to sustain employment	122	211	58%
Effective working between keyworkers and additional services (no. of engagements)	681	304	224%
Totals	6533	4766	

People & Skills Mandatory Outcomes achieved	No. achieved to date	Profiled to end of Contract	%
Eco inactive in receipt of benefits	209	230	91%
Active or sustained in community groups	309	218	142%
Increased employability through development of interpersonal skills	799	658	121%
Beneficiaries with basic skills (English, Maths, Digital, and ESOL)	195	114	171%
In supported employment	65	100	65%
Engaging with mainstream healthcare services	527	216	244%
Sustaining engagement with keyworker support and additional services	475	411	116%
Engaged in job-searching	609	530	115%
Employment, including self-employment, following support	163	324	50%
Sustaining employment for 6 months	47	100	47%
Totals	3398	2902	

People & Skills Added Value Outputs achieved	No. achieved to date	Profiled to end of Contract	%
People supported to engage in life skills	892	859	104%
Supported onto a course through financial support	124	49	253%
Supported to participate in education	472	111	425%
Taking part in work experience programmes	98	29	338%
Number of volunteering opportunities supported	167	91	184%
Number of people retraining	74	11	679%
Number of people in employment engaging with the skills system	48	11	440%
Support to gain a vocational licence	49	62	79%
Totals	1924	1223	

People & Skills Added Value Outcomes achieved	No. achieved to date	Profiled to end of Contract	
Familiarised with employers expectations	405	206	197%
Fewer people facing structural barriers into employment or skills	628	370	170%
Gaining a qualification following support	156	107	146%
Gaining a qualification, licences, and skills following support	106	54	196%
People in education and training	295	148	199%
Economically Inactive engaged in mainstream skills education and training	150	11	1327%
Totals	1740	896	

Personal budget (hardship fund) spending over the duration of the programme

Over the duration of the programme participants also had the potential opportunity to access a notional £50 personal budget to resolve specific financial barriers that might otherwise hamper progression. The following table details the usage of this budget over the duration of the programme.

Spend category	Total spend	No of claims
IT equipment	£432.71	10
Interview attire	£239.36	10
Travel	£723.86	27
Obtaining documentation	£527.99	15
Course	£55.00	1
Food	£105.50	3

Totals	£2,084.42	66

All the Careers Advisors and partner organisations that were consulted about the use of the personal budget facility recognised the value of this resource.

The evaluator is aware that due to budgeting decisions not all Voluntary Sector partners were providing a personal budget facility.

4. Qualitative analysis – Semi-structured interview feedback with Careers Advisors involved in service delivery

To complement the quantitative evaluation of the programme a series of semi structured interviews were conducted with a range of Careers Advisors providing front line support to economically inactive participants engaging with the programme. A total of 6 Careers Advisors from Futures were consulted with a further 3 representatives consulted from voluntary sector partner organisations. These interviews provided the following insights into the delivery of the programme:

- All respondents had enjoyed working on the programme and appreciated its flexibility to engage with the variety of situations that Economically Inactive people find themselves in.

- The respondents felt that the initial administration requirements of the programme were a little cumbersome and unnecessarily complicated. There was a collective appreciation of the fact that the administration of the programme had since been adjusted.

- There was some sense that at the start of the project the term 'Economically Inactive' meant different things to different people. This challenge was perceived to have affected Careers Advisors, Commissioners and also participants.

- The available evidence suggests that the economically inactive client group is highly nuanced and that individuals who are economically inactive don't necessarily recognise this term but instead class themselves as unemployed.

- At Commissioning level there appears to be some different interpretations of the needs of economically inactive cohorts particularly around confidence building and becoming work ready. In this respect the emerging evidence suggests that value of employment and volunteering outcomes are interpreted differently in some areas. This is something that is explored in greater detail in the recommendations section of this report.

- All Career Advisors made reference to the challenges of finding economically inactive referrals. As might be expected with a programme of this nature there is no single referral route which will consistently provide a steady stream of referrals. Instead, Careers Advisors spoke of the need to get out into the community and attend a variety of events to raise the profile of the support on offer.

- All the Futures Careers Advisors appreciated the presence of a personal budget. The £50 allowance was felt to be too low, however, all Advisors recognised that when a sensible business case had been compiled in excess of £50 this was usually approved. Advisors reported back that the administration process to secure personal budget monies was appropriate and efficient for the monetary values concerned.

- All individuals that we spoke to recognised the value of volunteering to help participants to develop their employability. Some concerns were raised that at a Commissioning level there was an overt focus on employment outcomes. Whilst employment outcomes were upheld as a highly desirable outcome there was a clear recognition that for some the necessary process to build soft skills and confidence for employment it would be necessary to explore volunteering opportunities. Some advisors were concerned that this reality was not widely understood or accepted when assessing contracting priorities.

- All respondents felt that the length of the programme was not conducive to the attainment of sustained employment outcomes over a six-month period. They felt that sustained employment outcomes could have been attained on a longer programme.

- Overall, there was a sense that the programme had been effective and successful. There was a clear appetite from respondents to deliver future employability programmes against a largely similar ethos to the Transform your Future programme. In particular the flexible, person centred, and non-mandated aspects of provision were felt to be very valuable.

- Voluntary sector partners involved in programme delivery had found the project particularly helpful to forge deeper networks with a range of providers working around the employability and mental health agenda.

5.Participant case studies on economic impact

To help readers understand the wider economic impact of the Transform your Future programme two case studies were identified and anonymised during the evaluation process.

Case study one – Preparing to access employment opportunities as a Cycling Instructor

The participant was a male in his 50's who had fell out of employment contracting a rare bacterial infection which had led to a four-month hospital admission. After discharge from hospital the participant enrolled on a social prescribing project who in turn recognised the employability support needs of the gentleman and referred him onwards to Futures for careers advice and support. During an early session the participant expresses an interest in training to become a cycling instructor. His Careers Advisor supports him to access necessary vocational training via the Bike ability programme and successfully complete a cycling instructor qualification. At the end of the programme the participant is actively exploring employment opportunities as a qualified instructor.

At the end of the programme the participant provided the following feedback:

'Working with my Careers Advisor on the Transform Your Future programme has given me the opportunity to do something I have always wanted to do. Not many people can say they will be able to earn a living from something that they enjoy and Futures has enabled me to do this. I believe lots of people could benefit from the scheme'.

Assessing the economic impact of the support provided

Undertaking wider analysis into the future potential economic impact of the participants journey provides the following insights:

Salary (Source@ Glassdoor)	£27,493
Take home pay	£23,316
Personal allowance	£12570
Taxable income	£14,923
Income tax at 20% (A)	£2,982
National Insurance (B)	£1,193
*Universal Credit – weekly allowance	£92.05 (JSA, equivalent over 25's)
Annual Universal Credit saving (C)	£4,786

Notional annual financial contribution to HM treasury (A, B, C)	£8,961

*This analysis assumes the participant would proceed to claim JSA at the point of commencing job search.

Case study two – Resuming employment as a golf course greenkeeper

The programme supported a man in his 20's who had been out a work for two years following a relationship breakdown and a problematic debt issue which had affected his mental health and wellbeing. Intensive support was offered to the individual concerned to enhance his CV, rebuild his confidence and aspirations to recommence work to utilise his existing expertise as a green keeper, with a previous employment history on a local golf course.

Following a period of job searching a potential opportunity was located in the South East of England. Given the distance from his home the personal budget fund was successfully utilised to help cover transport costs for the interview. This results in a job offer which was duly accepted.

'At the end of the programme the participant provided the following feedback on the support received from their Careers Advisor:

I was lost, where I had been successful in my early years and then lost my career because I was fighting to see my daughter in court which led me to being in and out of work, then completely out of work.

For me, I found you easy to talk to. You gave me that push, that focus, and we found that actually the best career for me was the one I was successful in and that was green keeping, you gave me that guidance to get back on track.

Especially when it came to my CV, you toned it down, you allowed me to sell myself, and I wouldn't be where I am today without this help. You helped me to attend the interview financially, which was a massive help.

This has now led me to work on a European tour golf course, which is bidding for the Ryder Cup in 8 years-12 years' time.

I can't thank Futures enough and what they have done for me. Sometimes you need that bit of guidance and support and make a plan with someone who has your best interest at heart!!'

Assessing the economic impact of the support provided

Undertaking wider analysis into the future potential economic impact of the participants journey provides the following insights:

Starting salary (Source: Indeed)	£26,815
Take home pay	£22,828.
Personal allowance	£12,570

Taxable income	£14,245
Income tax at 20% (A)	£2847
National Insurance (B)	£1139
*Universal credit under 25's weekly allowance	£72.90
Annual universal credit saving (C)	£3,790
Notional annual financial contribution to HM treasury (A, B, C)	£8,146

*this analysis assumes the participant would proceed to claim JSA at the point of commencing job search.

6.Programme key learning, recommendations & conclusion

Through the process of evaluating a range of quantitative and qualitative resources it is evident that the Transform your Future programme has had a positive impact on economically inactive participants who have decided to commit to the programme.

Supporting economically inactive cohorts to access employment, education, training or volunteering opportunities is not necessarily an easy endeavour given that there can be a myriad of compounding factors which to have led into an economically inactive status.

Across the UK the Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimated that 21.5% of the UK working aged population aged 16-64 was economically inactive across the time period November 2024 – January 2025. This represents the scale of the challenge in terms of the significant number of people that will require innovative and dynamic interventions to move them closer to the labour market. Programmes like Transform your Future therefore have a key role to play to help more economically inactive people back into employment.

In the interests of the future development of programmes designed to support economically inactive participants the following key learning points and recommendations have been devised for further discussion in response to analysis of the available resources

Key learning & recommendations to enhance future programme impact

Key learning – The target economically inactive cohorts contain a significant amount of 'scarring'. Scarring relates to the debilitating effects of long periods of time without employment, particularly when job applications in the past have continually been unsuccessful. In these instances, individuals underpinning confidence and sense of wellbeing can be eroded. The Careers Advisors consulted as part of the process recognised that in many cases a lack of confidence alongside, anxiety, agoraphobia or depression represented significant challenges to overcome on the journey to close the distance to labour market. This evidence endorses the requirement for person centred mentoring and advice approach to help participants build the necessary self-esteem and confidence to address underpinning wellbeing issues.

KEY LEARNING POINT – Mentoring and advice sessions are effective to help participants overcome 'scarring' and building the confidence and wellbeing of economically inactive participants to help them reengage in typical recruitment practices.

Recommendation One – The development of distance from labour market metrics – To help further evidence progression and impact of the programme and make a baseline assessment of distance from labour market. These measures could include:

- Past employment history – has the participant ever worked?
- Year of last employment
- Number of GCSEs at higher level
- Number of vocational qualifications
- Volunteering experience
- Year of last volunteering experience
- Presence of long-term conditions or ill health

A participant who has worked in the past year, has some GCSEs at higher level and had been willing and able to volunteer would be assessed as having a closer proximity to labour market than an individual with no recent experience of work or volunteering and no higher-level GCSE's or vocational qualification.

Collation of this type of dataset would allow a more detailed assessment of the impact of the support packages required in response to the presenting circumstances of participants. This has important implications for building future business cases to secure funding and onward innovation.

Recommendation two - Building a pipeline of economically inactive referrals through partnership working and data sharing agreements to help embrace the potential of service integration – All Careers Advisors engaged in the programme universally acknowledged the challenge of finding and locating referrals. By definition economically inactive participants will not necessarily be claiming any form of welfare state assistance. Whilst DWP/JCP organisations can provide consistent referrals of unemployed job seekers this is more problematic for economically inactive cohorts. Careers Advisors engaged on the programme did benefit from some referrals some wider partners eg social prescribing projects or through attendance at community events. In any given area there are likely to be a range of organisations with grass roots intelligence to help pinpoint economically inactive participants this could include advice sector agencies, NHS partners including GP surgeries, housing associations and social housing providers, churches and local colleges, adult education centres etc

To help improve the efficiency of the referral process data sharing or partnership agreements would therefore be beneficial with key partners. To harness the true potential of this approach however often requires a deeper commitment to explore service integration, co-location and formalised referral processes.

Recommendation three - The current programme lifespan constrains its impact. The duration of programmes helping economically inactive participants to secure employment outcomes should be a minimum of 2-3 years

Given the extent of economically inactivity across the UK it would be desirable to have a series of medium-term programmes established which last 3-5 years. The constraining nature of the 18-month duration of the programme can be most notably seen in the limited attainment of sustained employment outcomes. The Careers Advisors surveyed as part of the evaluation process acknowledged that the programme length was one of their biggest challenges. Whilst most participants arguably need up to 12 months of support when you consider the time required to establish appropriate referrals partners and the 6 months required to claim a sustained job outcome it is clear that commissioning 12-18 month employability support contracts for economically inactive participants has significant drawbacks.

Recommendation four - Further developmental work is required to help 'segment' and 'define' the possible array of participants that could be classified as economically inactive. Worked examples would be helpful.

Throughout the process of evaluating the programme it has become apparent that both professionals, commissioners and participants are not necessarily always familiar with the concept of economic inactivity. The term can be different things to different people and contains some nuances. Although the evaluator is aware that some induction type activity was undertaken at the inception of the programme to help explain the concept of being

economically inactive this is not necessarily a mainstream concept that many people readily identify with.

In the interests of developing future programmes, inducting staff, building referrals and supporting innovation it is likely to be beneficial to collate and interpret data to further understand the circumstances leading to economic inactivity. Segmented and worked examples of the contexts facing economically inactive participants would be valuable e.g. carers. This information could be utilised in turn to help evidence and evaluate the impact of programmes.

Recommendation five - Rethinking the creation of profile targets across Nottingham & Nottinghamshire that enable further best practice assessment and performance management to take place

The evaluator is aware that the profiled targets that have been compiled at the discretion of a variety of local authority commissioners for each area – linked to a funding formula. Similarly, each area has engaged a variety of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and Part Time Equivalent (PTE) roles. This makes it challenging to undertake meaningful comparative analysis exercises to tease out good practice in local areas.

In future it would be potentially beneficial to think about the creation of targets that allow for operational comparison and benchmarking of performance across different areas. Similarly, the massive over-performance against some contractual targets suggests that there is a wider opportunity to rethink profiling of targets based on the latest data. e.g. 11 participants were targeted to engage in mainstream education against an actual attainment rate of 150 resulting in over performance of 1327%

Recommendation six - Balancing the relative merits of employment and volunteering to help participants sustain and enhance their wellbeing and employability.

During the course of the evaluation, it is clear that some participants are closer to the labour market than others. For those who are close to the labour market they have the potential to boost their wellbeing through the positive benefits of employment and the associated renewed routine and sense of purpose. For other individuals the potential to commence employment might initially feel overwhelming and represent a step too far. In summary they are further away from labour market and not ready. A significant number may have agoraphobia or anxiety and may need careful nurturing to make progress. In these instances, a course of volunteering can be extremely beneficial to boost confidence, wellbeing and purpose as a pre-cursor to employment. Within the ethos of supported employment pathways there is the potential to innovate volunteering pathways that actively empower participants to develop new skills and confidence which ultimately provide stepping stones toward employment. This approach needs careful management with systems designed to help participants understand how to communicate the value of their volunteering experiences to potential employers. To allow employment and volunteering possibilities to flourish it is therefore imperative that programmes targeted at the economically inactive provide opportunities for both pathways to emerge and create monitoring and evaluation metrics to evidence the value of both**.**

As a result, it is imperative that commissioning systems recognise the value of volunteering to develop employability as a complementary approach to direct employment. This is something the Careers Advisors felt strongly about as part of any future endeavours to support the economically inactive group. Having voluntary sector organisations involved in the delivery partnership is therefore helpful to strengthen the potential develop volunteering

opportunities for some individuals as a necessary stepping stone on the journey into employment.

Recommendation seven - Increasing the personal budget allowance and accessibility to boost progression

All advisors consulted confirmed the value of the £50 personal budget allowance to help alleviate barriers. This was deemed to be a helpful resource to help individuals access employment, education or training opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach. Although the evaluator is not aware of any instances where personal budget applications were declined a number of Careers Advisors felt that the £50 budget was rather limited in its application. Although Advisors had been able to secure funding for amounts in excess of £50 it was felt that a higher amount would be appropriate given inflationary pressures in recent years. Similarly, the evaluator became aware that a partner organisation did not offer a personal budget facility. Although the precise reasons for this require further investigation it is suggested that in the interests of programme consistency and uniformity all Careers Advisors and partner organisations should be able to access the personal budget facility on behalf their participants as and when required.

Recommendation 8 - Programmes targeted Economically Inactive cohorts should remain mindful of digital inclusion issues when designing service provision. Whilst some economically inactive participants may possess the necessary skills and competencies to operate within a digital world the delivery of the programme reveals that significant numbers of participants struggle to engage with digital technology. For these reasons it is important that programmes do not make assumptions about the ability of participants to initially engage solely via digital means. For example, QR codes utilised within the programme proved to be a barrier to entry for some participants. For these reasons a range of engagement opportunities should be provided at the outset that are not all reliant on digital skills. As participants begin to engage with programmes this obviously provides a natural opportunity to offer upskilling opportunities on digital skills.

Recommendation 9 – Workforce development and regional variation factors affecting employability service provision for economically inactive cohorts. Throughout the duration of the evaluation process it has become apparent that economically inactive participants do not necessarily have a similar demographic profile to young people who may be Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET). This can be problematic when organisations engage Careers Advisors who have perhaps not worked extensively with economically inactive cohorts. For example, on NEET contract delivery a substantial number of outcomes may, quite rightly, be focussed on education and training outcomes, whereas for economically inactive programme delivery a greater emphasis usually exists on employment outcomes. NEET prevention programmes can also benefit from captive audience contact points e.g. schools, colleges or job centre. No such opportunity exists to locate economically inactive cohorts. Similarly, across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire the emerging evidence suggests regional variation exists for economically inactive participants. For example, in Nottingham City there are greater concentrations of newly arrived communities requiring ESOL provision (English for Speakers of Other languages) to help underpin progression. This trend is not as prevalent in Nottinghamshire, however, different issues surrounding economic inactivity are likely to present themselves e.g. the need for retraining programmes in former Coalfield areas. For these reasons the nuances of economically inactive cohorts present key challenges for commissioners and providers to consider when devising service models that are both ‘efficient’ and ‘effective’. From a

workforce development perspective, it would be ideal if hybrid Careers Advice professionals can be developed with the capacity to work with different NEET and Economically Inactive cohorts.

Conclusion

The evaluation processes associated with the Transform your Future programme confirms its ability to help economically inactive participants to access employment, education, training and volunteering opportunities.

Although the programme operated against very tight timescales the available quantitative and qualitative data reveals the significant impact that it had on participants.

The strengths of the programme included the capacity of Careers Advisors and partner organisation to actively support participants facing a range of circumstances to get closer to the labour market and ultimately secure employment, education, training or volunteering outcomes.

Throughout the course of the programme several potential development points were also discovered which could be implemented to help further strengthen the delivery and impact of future programmes. These development points are documented within the recommendations section of this evaluation for further discussion with Commissioners, Funders and Employability professionals operating initiatives designed to support more economically inactive find their way back in the labour market.

Richard Hazledine, Independent Evaluator

ConnectMore Solutions, September 2025

7.Acknowledgements

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Futures Managers

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