

# Towards Work Programme

## Year Four Evaluation Impact Report: 2020 and Q1 2021



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



### KEY FINDINGS:

- **2,909** participants have been supported.
- **640** participants have progressed into employment, including self-employment, on leaving.
- **307** participants have progressed into education or training on leaving.



**89%** of participants now feel that a range of career options are available to them

**86%** of participants are more confident to look for training and employment opportunities

**80%** of participants felt more confident at having a go at new things.

**73%** of participants are better able to bounce back after disappointment

**51%** of participants feel more optimistic about the future

**56%** of participants who have yet to find work expect to do so within 3 months



**The majority of participants indicated that the support had an impact on their understanding of:**

- Employment opportunities available (95%).
- The skills required for the job roles they were looking for (87%).
- Learning opportunities available (85%).

*“You can ask your Work Coach any question, they’ll get back to you. Any advice you need, they’ll get back to you, not even just to do with the job search. Very nice people. Can’t praise them enough.”*

*“Towards Work allowed me to assess my own situation and reflect. Sometimes you need the kick and that motivation to say you’ve got all these – it’s just the confidence boost of someone saying you are capable of doing it.”*

## ***About this Report***

- 1 In March 2021, ERS was commissioned to deliver the evaluation of the Towards Work Programme. The programme is funded via the national Building Better Opportunities (BBO) Programme and delivered across the D2N2 area by Groundwork Greater Nottingham.
- 2 This fourth programme evaluation report provides an evidence-based picture of progress made during the 2020 calendar year and the initial three months of 2021. It covers the impact of the activity generated to participants. A separate report has been produced that focussed upon the operational delivery across the same period.
- 3 This was a period of significant social and economic disruption with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions. It also provides an assessment of how the programme has been delivered, covering those elements directly funded alongside the wider landscape of support.

## ***The BBO Programme***

- 4 BBO is jointly funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), the latter via the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The programme aims to combat the root causes of poverty, promote social inclusion, challenge long-term unemployment, and empower socially excluded people. In so doing, it seeks to contribute to ESF objectives to improve local growth and create jobs.
- 5 The programme aims to support those who are disengaged and furthest away from employment, augmenting mainstream provision to unemployed people from the Department for Work & Pensions across the D2N2 area. Activity supports unemployed or economically inactive people experiencing social exclusion and poverty who need help to overcome barriers, take control, learn new skills and move into employment (or education and training).

## ***The People First Alliance***

- 6 The D2N2 People First Alliance (PFA) is a consortium of three organisations; Framework Housing, Groundwork Greater Nottingham and St Ann's Advice Centre (on behalf of Advice Nottingham). In 2016 PFA secured contracts to deliver the BBO Programme across the D2N2 area. As part of this Alliance, Framework Housing is leading on the Multiple & Complex Needs Pathway (Opportunity & Change), St Ann's Advice is leading on the Financial Inclusion Pathway (Money Sorted) and Groundwork Greater Nottingham is leading on the Towards Work Programme.
- 7 It was agreed in 2019 that the Towards Work Programme, and both other BBO strands, would continue to be resourced to 2022. In spring 2021, a further extension to 2023 was agreed.

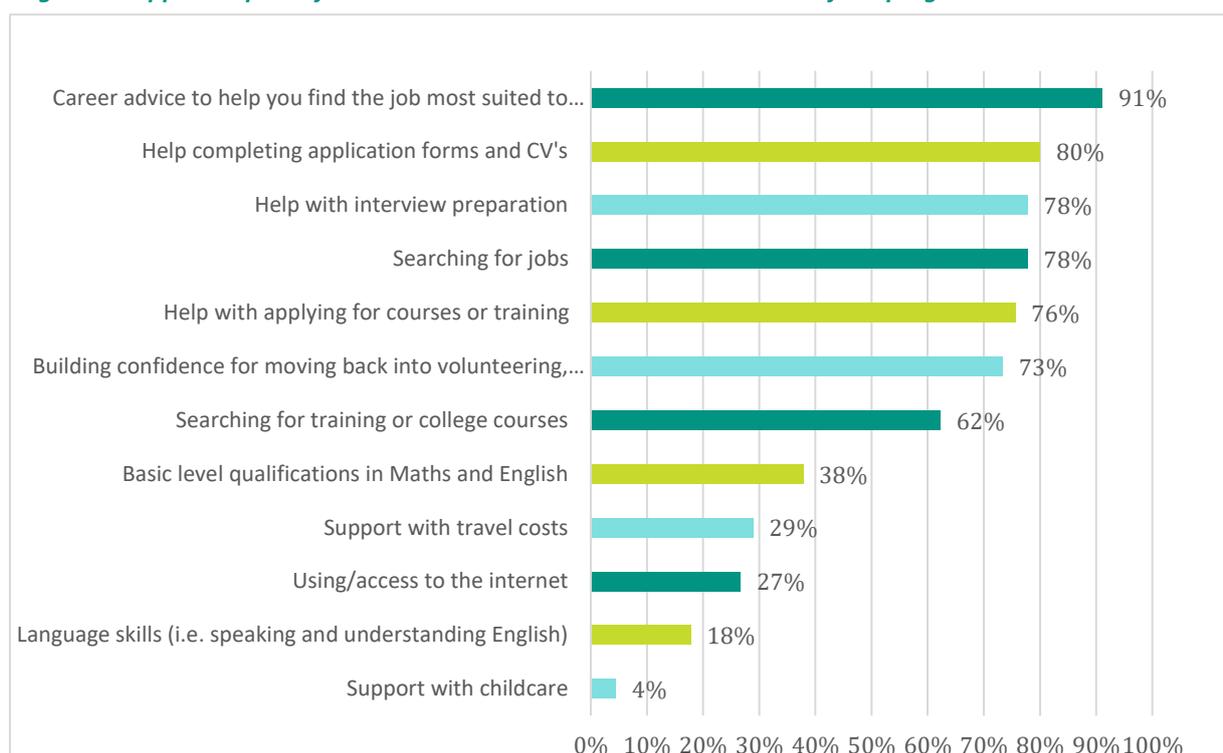
## ***Towards Work Participants Interviews***

- 8 Between May and July 2021, ERS interviewed 83 participants to gather such data, 38 of which ERS had previously interviewed between 2017 and 2019 to inform earlier evaluation reports. Another 45 participants were interviewed for the first time, and these interviews included an extended list of questions to understand the appropriateness and impact of programme activity.

## Support Required

- 9 Participants were asked what type of support they required when they first joined the programme (Figure 1). The most frequent response was the need for careers advice to help them find a job that they would be most suited to (91 per cent). This was followed by help completing application forms and CVs (80 per cent), help with interview preparation (78 per cent), help with searching for jobs (78 per cent), and help with applying for courses or training (76 per cent). Other popular requirements were building confidence for moving back into volunteering, training, or work (73 per cent) and searching for training or college courses (62 per cent).

Figure 1: Support required from the Work Coach at the commencement of the programme



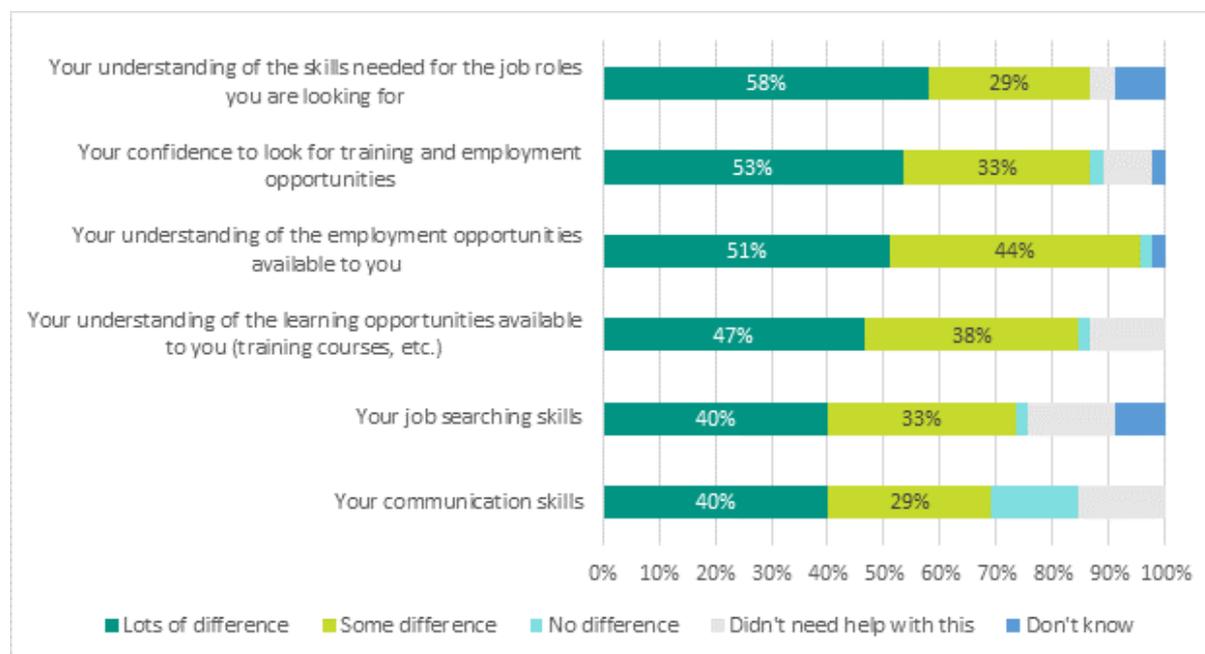
- 10 Figure 1 further shows fewer than half of those interviewed wanted support to achieve basic level qualifications in Maths and English (38 per cent). This is a significant minority. 29 per cent needed support with travel costs, 27 per cent needed help accessing or using the internet, and 18 per cent needed assistance with language skills.
- 11 Only 4 per cent required support with childcare when they first began working with their Work Coach. Whilst a smaller percentage of participants were interested in receiving support in these areas, it is important to note that, overall, a wide range of support was required by programme participants.

## Impact of the Support

- 12 Participants were asked a series of questions to understand the difference the support received had on a number of key areas (Figure 2). The survey asked participants what difference meeting with their Work Coach had made to their understanding of the steps they needed to take to move towards work.

13 On a scale of one (none at all) to five (a great deal), the majority of participants (96 per cent) 'top rated' the impact. This indicates the Work Coaches have been successful in supporting the participants to better understand their journey to employment and the opportunities available to them.

*Figure 2: What difference has the support you received from the Work Coach had on...*



14 We asked participants about their understanding of the employment opportunities available to them. 95 per cent of the participants interviewed stated the support they had received made 'lots of difference' or 'some difference' to their understanding. This suggests the Work Coaches are providing participants with appropriate information and increasing their awareness of employment options they may not have considered before.

15 Participants were asked about their understanding of the learning opportunities available to them. 85 per cent of those interviewed stated the support they had received made 'lots of difference' or 'some difference' to their understanding of available learning opportunities. This further emphasises the variety of support and training options provided by the Work Coaches.

16 Participants were asked if the programme had made much of a difference to their confidence to look for training and employment opportunities. 86 per cent stated the support has made 'lots of difference' or 'some difference' to their confidence in this area. This highlights the positive impact the programme is having on participants' certainty and determination in moving towards work.

17 Participants were asked if the support they had received had made a difference to their job searching skills. 73 per cent stated that the support had made 'lots of difference' or 'some difference' to their abilities to look for employment opportunities.

18 We asked participants how the support has helped their understanding of the skills needed for the job roles they are looking for. In total, 87 per cent of the participants stated that the programme has helped, suggesting the Work Coaches are providing suitable information about the skills needed for individuals pursuing specific roles.

19 We also asked participants what difference the programme has had on their communication skills. 69 per cent stated that the support had 'lots of difference' or 'some difference' on their communication.

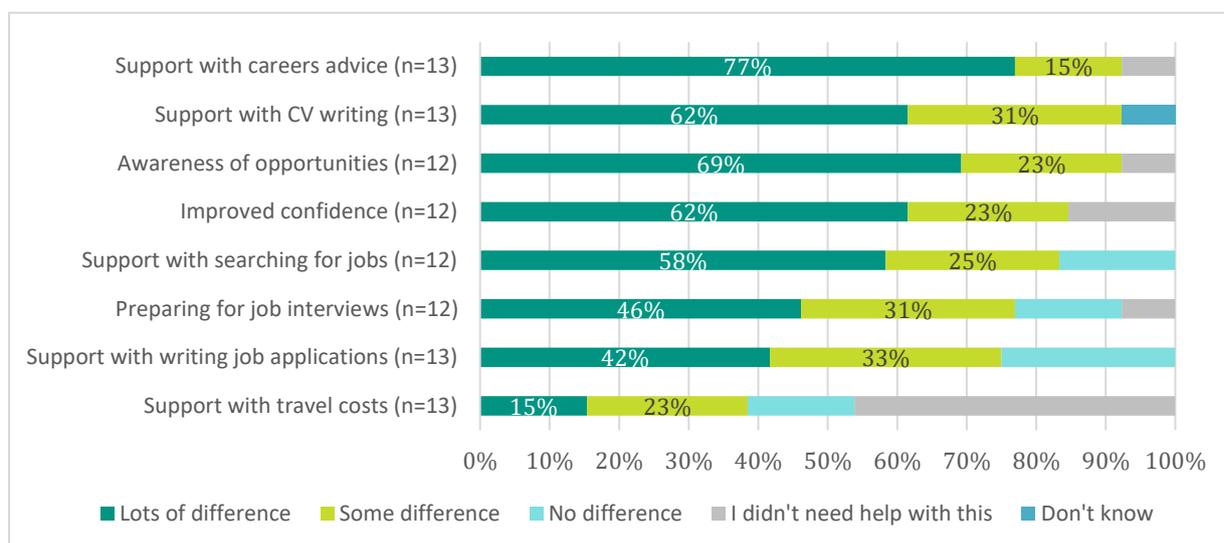
20 As a result of the support received from the Towards Work programme, a number of participants have either progressed into employment or moved towards the labour market. In total, 24 per cent of those interviewed had moved into employment, 38 per cent had completed a training course, 27 per cent had completed a qualification, 31 per cent had undertaken volunteering, 20 per cent had become more active in their local community, and 47 per cent had been supported by their Work Coach but were not in employment or training.

21 Overall, these figures show that the programme is having a positive impact on people's lives by helping them understand what they need to move towards employment. It's also helping participants with their general skills and increasing their confidence to find employment suitable for them.

22 Of those in employment, 67 per cent found the support received 'very useful', indicating that without the programme, they would have been less successful in securing their employment. Jobs secured include: Office Supporter; Lecturer in Animal Sciences; Administrator; Core Cleaner; Autism Support Worker; Domestic at the NHS; Housekeeper; Self-employed dog walker/sitter; Assistant Manager; Executive Officer/Work Coach at DWP; and Carer.

23 Those participants who had secured employment were asked what support they had found the most useful in helping them achieve this outcome. Figure 3 below shows the areas of support identified by survey respondents as having made a difference to their ability to secure employment.

**Figure 3: What difference have the following made to help you move into work?**



24 Participants were asked to provide more insight into their experiences of the support. These open-ended responses were varied but several recurring themes have been noted. They include: Work Coaches focusing on improving confidence, motivating participants, and supporting with mental health problems. Below are some quotes from participants about their experience on the programme and the impact the support they have received from their Work Coach has had on them.

*“I think she helped me realise that even though I suffered from low confidence at the time, I was a bubbly person. She brought me back out of my shell and talking to her made me realise I still have a life. There are still things out there after everything I’ve been through.”*

*“Having that background support which takes away the severe anxiety and isolation of thinking about and facing the prospect of looking for work. Also, it’s the first time I’ve said ‘I’m disabled’ to another person as I’ve always tried to hide it and it makes it very difficult as there are times when it’s obvious. So, it’s the first time I’ve admitted the limitations.”*

*“The thing is, with getting this job at the job centre - if I have any problems, I can just ask, and she made me realise this. I thought I was useless because I was old and had no chance with anything - but now she and the job have given me my buzz back. I went on a course to learn how to send an email - I hadn’t a clue! It’s helped me learn.”*

*“He’s put me in touch with a few things like healthy living support to help with my diabetes diagnosis. It’s helpful as it helps beyond work and into my everyday life.”*

*“When I was looking for the training, they helped me go through all the information and come up with the most appropriate things to apply for. And then they helped me get a list of agencies and organisations, so I know who to apply for when I’m ready and done all my training. They also were able to get work boots for me.”*

*“Mental health support has made a big difference. Grievance counselling because of losses in family. It’s put me in the right direction.”*

*“[Helped me] by finding the information, being encouraging, being very supportive. Been absolutely outstanding. I couldn’t wish for a better Work Coach.”*

*“The programme allowed me to assess my own situation and reflect. Sometimes you need the kick up the bum and that motivation to say you’ve got all these things – it’s just the confidence boost of someone saying you are capable of doing it.”*

25 The above examples are a real testament to the programme and the effort the Work Coaches put into each individual they work with. Positive relationships are being developed between the participants and their Work Coach, with long term, positive impacts on the individuals supported.

26 Included below are a number of case studies of participants who exited the programme in 2019. Names have been replaced to provide anonymity.

Diane needed help with confidence-building, careers advice and awareness of opportunities. Gaps in her employment history was a barrier. With support from the programme, she is now working as an Executive Officer for the DWP.

*“Confidence is the main thing and regaining the skills I already had. The social interaction also helped because I was isolated for quite a while. My Work Coach just encouraged me in such a kind way that just brought the best out of me. She believed in me. Without her wouldn’t have this job.”*

John was supported to better understand the learning and employment opportunities available, to explore different career paths with his Work Coach. Access to bereavement counselling coordinated through his Work Coach was valuable in getting him in a better frame of mind.

He completed a Level 3 qualification in Education and Training qualification and gained employment as a lecturer in Animal Sciences at a college.

*“The best thing was signposting me to a new career path in education and guiding me in the right direction. They talked me through different career paths, and I explored these. It helped me find a route into work.”*

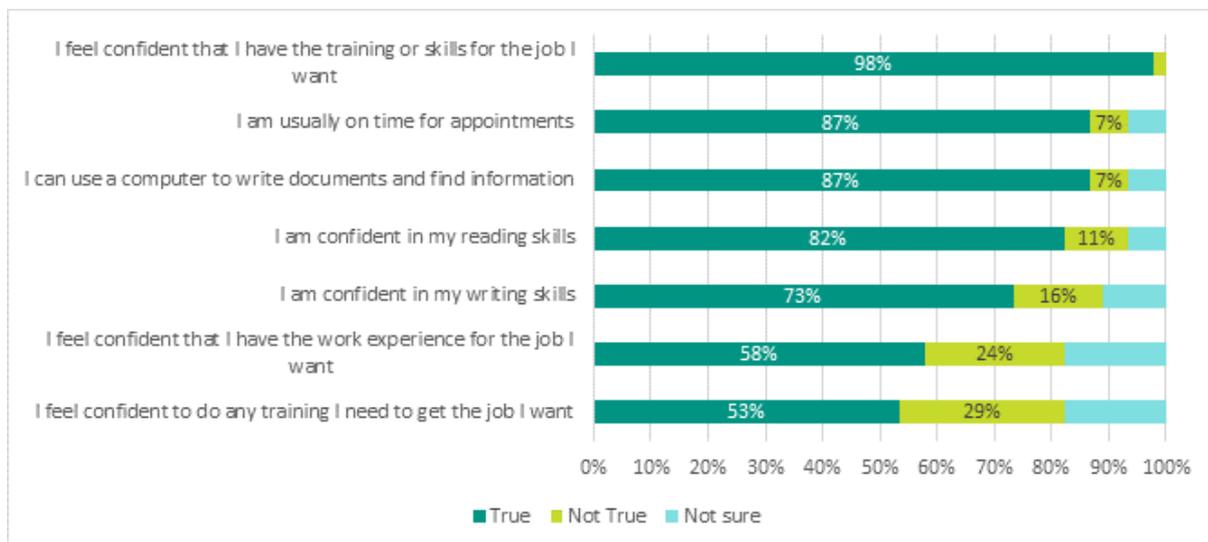
Anita had experienced difficulties in finding work as her children have health problems and finding a job with flexible hours had been a challenge. This consistent and personable support was enough to boost their confidence to job search. She has recently been offered a job and is in the process of having DBS background checks. The Work Coach recognised that the transition into work was overwhelming, so will offer support for a period of time. On the basis of her positive experience, she recommended a friend who is currently receiving support.

*“It’s just having the support there. It’s just little things. It was quite hard for me to not give up at the first hurdle and they gave me the confidence to keep going. They gave me time to do what I needed to do, they weren’t pushy. I did it at my own pace which meant a lot to me. I’d never looked at my qualifications before but my Work Coach explained how valuable they could be in applying for jobs.”*

### Participant Confidence Levels

27 Participants were asked about their confidence levels now that they had been on the Towards Work Programme. The responses in Figure 4 below show that participant confidence levels are high.

Figure 4: Participant Confidence Levels



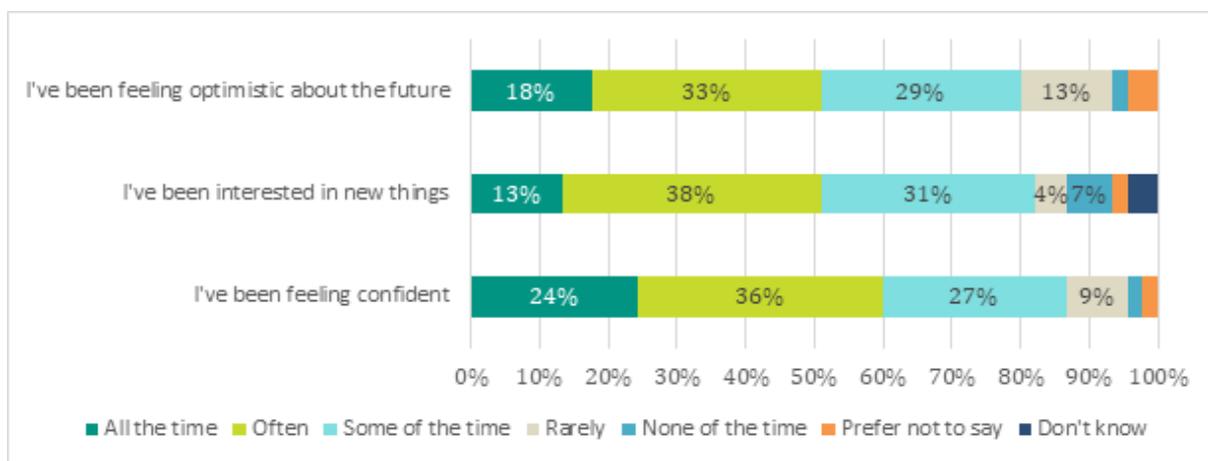
28 The areas where participants felt less confident related to the training required to get the job they wanted (29 per cent) and a lack of work experience (24 per cent). This is understandable with many participants having a lack of qualifications or not having worked previously. Covid-19 will also have impacted on participants’ willingness and confidence to do any training they need to secure the job they want, especially if this means being in an unfamiliar environment after a long time. As individuals progress on the programme, it is anticipated that they will have opportunities (post-Covid) to gain work experience through volunteering or placements.

29 A number of softer outcomes for participants have also been achieved. In total, 89 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt a range of career options are open to them. This suggests the Work Coaches have been successful in highlight the range of employment opportunities and potential career paths available to participants.

30 The survey responses also identified that 80 per cent of participants felt more confident at having a go at new things. This highlights the programme not only supporting participants into employment, but also helping participants to improve their mentality, self-belief, and aspirations. 73 per cent felt they were better able to bounce back after disappointment, an important outcome showing an increase in resilience among the majority of participants on the programme.

31 Participants were also asked how they had been feeling over the two weeks leading up to their interview. The findings are displayed in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: How would you describe your feelings over each of the last two weeks?**



32 Over half stated they had been: feeling optimistic about the future all of the time or often (51 per cent); interested in new things all of the time or often (51 per cent); and feeling confident all of the time or often (50 per cent).

33 Feedback from participants highlighted that several experience mental health problems, with some benefitting from their Work Coaches signposting them to services that could help them i.e., support with housing issues, debt worries, drug and alcohol problems and a lack of opportunities.

### Skills and Training

34 New qualifications were achieved across a range of areas including: Customer Service; Business Admin Level 2; Maths Level 1, 2 & 3; English Level 1, 2 & 3; Confidence; Health and Social Care Level 1 & 2; Accountancy; IT skills Level 2; CSCS; Plumbing; Security Level 2; Retail Level 1; Diet and Nutrition Level 2; and First Aid Level 3. It is important to recognise that qualification levels ranged from Level 1 to Level 3, demonstrating that support was for relatively advanced level training and career aspirations.

## *Support from Work Coaches*

35 Participants were asked about their experiences with their Work Coaches. The responses were very positive and covered a range of topics including: providing information and resources; exploring different career paths; providing motivation and general support and advice; being understanding and reassuring; and providing emotional support i.e., with confidence, anxiety and depression.

36 When questioned, the vast majority of participants either agreed or strongly agreed to the following statements:

- The Work Coach has been responsive to my needs (100 per cent).
- The Work Coach has been flexible to suit my needs (98 per cent).
- The Work Coach understands the support I need (98 per cent).
- The Work Coach has increased my confidence (93 per cent).
- The Work Coach arranges to meet in places that are accessible to me (89 per cent).
- The Work Coach has supported to take more responsibility of my own career progression (87 per cent).

37 This indicates the Work Coaches have a detailed understanding of participant requirements and aim to provide tailored support to maximise benefits and participant progress.

## *Covid-19 and Digital Exclusion*

38 Participants were asked how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted upon the support they had received from their Work Coach. Some participants did not believe the pandemic had much of an effect on the support they received due to regular contact via email and phone. Other participants stated that the online video calls and phone calls were not ideal, and that they would rather have face-to-face meetings. However, a few participants did not have any contact with their Work Coach at times and this made them feel isolated. Recently a few participants have been able to meet with their Work Coach in person as restrictions have lessened, some for the first time. A number of participants also praised their Work Coach for doing the best they could in the situation.

39 Participants were also asked how Covid-19 had impacted upon their progress in terms of moving into employment or undertaking training. Most agreed that the pandemic has slowed down their progress, especially in terms of courses having to be postponed or completed online. Some individuals also mentioned their lack of confidence during this time and thought there were fewer job opportunities available to them. One participant thought that the situation benefited them as they were able to do more online training courses having been directed these opportunities by their Work Coach.

40 The survey also asked participants if they had access to support via a computer at home and if they have Wi-Fi at home. Since the onset of Covid-19, access to the internet and a computer has become essential to access support, whilst the majority of participants were able to access support when needed, there remains a small proportion of participants who lack access to Wi-Fi or the required technology. Digital exclusion thus remains a barrier to accessing support for some participants.

41 Our research found that:

- 82 per cent stated that they had access to a computer and an internet connection at home;
- 13 per cent of which had been given laptops with help from their Work Coaches;
- 9 per cent used their phone to access support and communicate with their Work Coach, using either Wi-Fi or mobile data;
- 4 per cent had either no internet connection but a computer, or internet connection but no computer;
- 4 per cent had no access to a computer and no internet access.

### *Looking to the Future*

42 Those participants who were not yet in employment we asked what they would like to achieve in the future. The responses show that:

- 56 per cent were hoping to find employment in the next three months;
- 22 per cent were hoping to find employment in the next six months;
- 11 per cent were hoping to find employment in the next twelve months;
- 11 per cent were hoping to start/complete a training course; and
- 11 per cent were hoping to start/complete a qualification.

43 It is positive that almost nine in ten participants we interviewed were hoping to be in work over the next 12 months. Over half of all participants hope to achieve this within three months.

### *Findings of Interviewing Previous Participant Cohort*

44 This evaluation has been informed by interviews with 38 participants who had been previously interviewed to inform earlier programme evaluation reports. We recontacted this cohort of participants to understand their progression since exiting the programme between 2017 and 2019. On exiting the programme, 45 per cent were looking for employment, 26 per cent had found employment, with the remaining neither looking for employment or in employment due to ill health, going back to study, or looking to start self-employment.

45 In total, 70 percent of participants who exited the Towards Work Programme into employment are still in employment. This is a positive finding.

46 Participants who were looking for employment when exited from the programme were asked if they were still job searching. In total, 47 per cent of those looking for employment when they exited, stated that they were currently looking for employment in 2021. In total, 12 per cent of whom were searching for a job because they felt their current job was not secure. The remaining had either found employment (47 per cent), stopped looking because of ill health (18 per cent), halted their job search because of Covid-19 (12 per cent), retired (6 per cent) or due to maternity (6 per cent). 12 per cent did not provide a reason as to why they are no longer searching for employment.

- 47 Those not currently working were asked if they had ever worked since leaving the programme. 37 per cent out of all participants had not worked since leaving the programme. However, 29 per cent of which stated that they had done some volunteering.
- 48 Participants currently working were asked if they thought their job was secure. 18 per cent of those working at time of interview stated that they did not feel like their current job was secure. Some participants stated that this was because of Covid-19 and that their job was at risk due to the sector they were working in being negatively affected during this time. Others stated that their contract was fixed term and nearing its end or temporary so they were aware they would soon need to actively start searching for job.
- 49 All previous participants were asked what they thought was most valuable about the Towards Work Programme. Common themes included support with interview preparation and CVs, confidence building, meeting other people in similar situations, polishing skills previously learnt, taking control of career paths by reflecting on personal actions, and the Work Coaches' helpful attitude.
- 50 Included below are a number of case studies.

Mark exited the programme in November 2017 and has had several different roles. For the previous two years he has been working for the civil service in a call centre. Despite participating on the Towards Work programme more than three years ago, Mark outlined how the advice offered on interview preparation, and the courses undertaken were useful in supporting his transition into employment.

*"They gave good advice on interview preparation which helped a lot as it's practical advice. Some of the courses were quite useful as well in terms of preparation and move towards work. I did find it quite beneficial."*

Charles exited the programme in 2017. He has since established a CIC company that employs a team of five employees, and an apprentice approaching the end of a Level 2 coaching qualification.

*"It was supportive. They helped me out with funding for a laptop which was key for kickstarting my own business, and also helped with my minibus licence and training which was an integral part of my work with young people."*

- 51 Below are quotes from past participants about the most valuable aspects of Towards Work.

*"Towards Work allowed me to assess my own situation and reflect. Sometimes you need the kick and that motivation to say you've got all these – it's just the confidence boost of someone saying you are capable of doing it."*

*"You can ask your Work Coach any question, they'll get back to you. Not even just to do with the job search. Very nice people. Can't praise them enough."*

*"It's just little things like with [my Work Coach], I'd never looked at my qualifications. She actually explained to me what the value of all of them were... If you can give them a pat on the back from me that would be amazing. A friend of mine has started getting help from my recommendation"*

*"It was to me like I was walking in the dark for so long, and suddenly there was an open door and opportunities. It was a proper, genuine interest in my welfare. I felt there was some way forward."*

*And I hadn't felt that way in so long. Going into Towards Work enabled me to put things into perspective."*

*"Probably the great support, great advice, and good community. Made real good friends – staff and peers. It's well missed."*

*"Being able to get hands on and gain experience and work alongside staff members. With my dyslexia, I'm more of a hands-on person so it was good getting on the ward and getting stuck in. Towards Work understood these needs."*

*"It was quite easy going and supportive. Helped me out with funding for a laptop – key to kickstarting my own business. Also helped with funding my minibus licence and training which was an integral part of my work with young people."*

*"Motivation and confidence. Being on the programme with other people so you're together."*

*"The main point was meeting people in the same situation. I live in a small village, there's not many friends around me and meeting people in the same situation really helped."*

- 52 A number of participants highlighted that communication could be improved, and Work Coaches could have greater knowledge of more employment niches, including higher skill level jobs for people with different qualifications, such as undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. It was also noted by a few participants that more tailored support for older individuals (60+) could improve the experiences of people in this age bracket on the programme.
- 53 Participants were also asked if they were receiving support from any other organisations when they were interviewed. 71 per cent were not receiving any support, with some not needing it and others not knowing where to access the support they needed. 8 per cent stated they were on training courses (i.e., IT, Business Admin, NVQ Level 3, Maths Level 2), receiving help with interview preparation and CV writing, accessing wellbeing support, or back at the job centre.
- 54 Participants were asked what more support they needed. 58 per cent did not require any support, however, 16 per cent stated they would like some support similar to the Towards Work Programme, in the form of help with qualifications, IT, CV writing, motivation and confidence building. Whilst participants were appreciative of the finite time that the support is provided for, some participants were keen to receive further support from the programme. Follow-up calls six months after leaving the programme could be an effective way to show participants the programme is thinking of the long-term impacts of the support and making sure past participants are making progress.
- 55 Finally, previous participants were asked how the Covid-19 situation has affected their job opportunities.
- 32 percent stated that the pandemic had no effect on their job or further employment opportunities.
  - 45 per cent stated that the situation has affected employment opportunities. Restrictions had been put in place at their workplaces, courses had to move online, or there was no access to libraries so they could not continue their employment search or professional development.

- 8 per cent stated that the situation had a positive impact on their job opportunities, with some stating that it helped them learn more during the time via online courses they now had the time to do.
- The remaining respondents explained it was beneficial for their business e.g., a self-employed yoga instructor said they received more clients during the pandemic as more people were interested in exercise.