

INNOVATION LAB

European Social Fund Investment (Priorities 1 & 2) Provision post March 2022

Strategic Insight Lab Report

24th & 25th February 2021

BACKGROUND

Researchers state that economic inactivity is an issue that has for too long been overlooked. It is an issue which transcends Departmental boundaries and is interlinked with other issues at the heart of creating a better society in NI such as, among others, underachievement in education and tackling poverty. Failure to break the barriers which prevent people returning to the labour market after a period of sickness, and a relatively low number of disabled people participating in the labour market, has significant personal and overall fiscal consequences. Youth unemployment (16-24) is significantly higher than any other age group, the next highest being among the 25-34 age group, and the % of young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) is 13.2% which is above the UK average.

Northern Ireland had the joint lowest estimated unemployment rate amongst those 16 years and over (NI 3.6%; England 4.8%, Scotland 4.5%; Wales 4.6%); the lowest estimated employment rate amongst those aged 16 to 64 years (NI 70.5%; England 75.7%; Scotland 74%; Wales 72.1%) and the highest estimated economic inactivity rate among those aged 16-64 years of all the UK regions (NI 26.8%; England 20.4%; Scotland 22.4%; Wales 24.4%).

Unemployment and the growth in unemployment is therefore still a concern in Northern Ireland. Unemployment is likely to rise in the coming months and years given the current global pandemic and the effect on the economy and the potential impact of Brexit. This is illustrated clearly by the fact that there were 9,600 redundancies proposed in the 12 months to end October 2020 – the highest annual figure since records began.

In terms of future projections of unemployment, forecasters indicate that there could be a period of 4 to 5 years before the NI economy returns to pre-pandemic levels of output. Within this the possibility of 60,000 people moving into unemployment has been highlighted (which would increase the unemployment to rate to approximately 13%). There are particular concerns around youth unemployment and underemployment.

The strategic aim of the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2014-2020 is to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion. The programme is structured around 4 priority axes. The focus of the Strategic Insight Lab will be on the provision that is currently funded under Priority 1 and Priority 2 of the NI ESF programme (and which is due to end in March 2022):

- Priority 1 – Access to Employment
- Priority 2 – Social Inclusion

Under these priority areas, the programme offers help and support to those furthest from the labour market with significant barriers to entering employment. The main Priority 1 and 2 Groups supported with ESF funding are:

- Unemployed/Long term unemployed;
- Economically inactive;
- Not in employment, education, or training;
- People with a disability;
- Families experiencing intergenerational poverty and joblessness.

A joined up approach will be necessary if we are to support quality, sustainable and inclusive provision, leading to positive outcomes, that transform the lives of those in need, following the end of the ESF programme here.

Officials in the Department for the Economy and the Department for Communities have been working closely together to consider the most appropriate way forward in relation to planning for future provision once the current ESF funding ceases. A key consideration has been accessing the necessary funding. It has been the expectation that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund would provide a suitable funding stream to support this programme

To this end the Department for the Economy and Department for Communities jointly commissioned the Northern Ireland Innovation Lab to deliver strategic insights on the challenge, culminating in a virtual 2-day Strategic Insight Lab, with the aim of providing strategic direction and informing design and implementation of policy in relation to this area.

The challenge question that framed the 2-day workshop was developed in a virtual Challenge Lab process involving a cross-sector of NICS Departments and key stakeholders and is set out below:

‘How might we, by 2027, achieve measurable, positive outcomes for groups at a disadvantage in accessing training and/or employment, delivered through quality, co-designed, sustainable and inclusive programmes that transform lives?’

Challenge Lab discussions identified the need for an effective system of support for those furthest from the labour market with significant barriers to entering employment, which would identify their needs early and address them effectively. The wording of the vision was carefully chosen by the participants to convey this collective aspiration.

The purpose of the 2-day Strategic Insight Lab was to bring together key stakeholders from across a broad range of sectors, including representatives from; Community and Voluntary Groups, statutory partners, including, Education Authority, Belfast City Council, and also a cross-section of Departments including Economy, Communities, Health, Justice and Education; Further Education Colleges and Open College Network; charities who represent people with a disability, including, Disability Action, Mencap and Action Mental Health; also, NI Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders; and others, including, the NI Council for Voluntary Action; and Business in the Community NI.

The objectives of the Strategic Insight Lab were agreed as follows:

- To identify the key challenges, opportunities and gaps relating to the challenge question.
- To develop recommendations relating to the key themes and questions identified by participants for further consideration by the sponsor Departments.
- To produce a summary report capturing the detail of the virtual 2-day event to help inform design and implementation of policy in relation to this area.

In identifying attendees to attend the Strategic Insight Lab, engagement and discussion took place between the sponsor Departments, key stakeholders and the Innovation Lab to ensure there was an optimal mix, spread and balance of participants, representing those furthest from the labour market, with significant barriers to entering employment landscape. It was important to get a cross-sector spread of participant representation to enable collaboration and dialogue on this particular challenge. A full list of participants is set out in **Appendix A**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The virtual Strategic Insight Lab took place on 24th and 25th February 2021 and the interest of all participants in addressing the challenge question was evident throughout the course of the 2-day process, in the collaborative and partnership approach adopted throughout.

By working through the exercises, individuals representing key stakeholder groups were able to consider and understand the challenge from other perspectives. It is this approach, coupled with the energy, enthusiasm and passion of stakeholders at the event that was instrumental in leading to 72 ideas, which have been reframed by the Lab into recommendations, and which have been further considered and endorsed by participants.

A list of these recommendations is recorded below, associated with the 8 questions that were considered by 4 groups. These will be used to support the evidence of need but must be considered within the constraints of budget and strategic priorities. They are not prioritised in any particular order.

Recommendations

Recommendations generated from the following questions:

How do we report and measure on collaboration (project and interdepartmental level) and should we make this a programme KPI?

- We recommend that a system is developed, to inform services and support, that connects all information about the individual. A person-centred approach is required, which focuses on the individuals' progress and development.
- We recommend moving away from a project-based approach, which would provide opportunity to embed collaboration in much more sustainable structures.
- We recommend that in designing a replacement programme that a centralised tracking system of all providers and learners is created that identifies additional needs and progression points.
- We recommend that the replacement programme sets person-centred collaboration at its heart in order to meet the needs as and when, i.e. tailor to individual.
- We recommend the use of cross-cutting themes to develop shared goals and objectives for collaborators.
- We recommend that the replacement programme is structured to collaborate with specialist organisations on delivering broad themes in cohorts.
- We recommend that the replacement programme should incorporate collaboration incentives, such as funding that facilitates collaboration between stakeholders.
- We recommend a replacement system that joins the dots by connecting all information about the individual to inform services and support and notifies other services.
- We recommend that in designing delivery of the replacement programme that measuring collaboration via a programme of progression through different providers and levels is incorporated.

How do we build on the collaborative relationships that have been developed between the department and delivery bodies and employers under the current ESF Programme, to further enhance effectiveness?

- We recommend that Labour Market Partnerships have effective buy-in in all areas. Individual councils progressing at different rates is not effective. Broader synergies are needed.
- We recommend that shared employability pipelines be developed, focusing on emerging /growing sectors.
- We recommend that the replacement programme should include provision for using skills academies more effectively and collaboratively to meet employer needs, as accessible routes for all ESF participants.
- We recommend that establishing joint working between employers, providers and Government would maximise positive outcomes.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that consideration is given to more effectively using local councils as a link between central government and delivery on the ground.
- We recommend that there should be a single point of contact with the employer that brings all the specialisms together.
- We recommend that the replacement programme uses Labour market partnerships to link organisations together in local council areas.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that incentives are incorporated for employers who employ participants who have undertaken training.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that emphasis should be placed on all stakeholders collaborating, focusing on new industries that benefit people with specific needs.
- We recommend that the Model of Supported Employment is considered for endorsement within the new model, as this model worked especially well for learning disabled citizens from a health match funder perspective and with the application of quality standard available around this model, for providers.

How do we build a comprehensive road-map of policy and provision that assists in the design and delivery of complementary and progressive interventions and raises awareness?

- We recommend that the strategic commissioning model takes account of allocation to appropriate sector of funding source, matching need to support solution.
- We recommend that the Information Management System is used to map policy and provision for cohorts, to avoid duplication, taking account of the external environment.
- We recommend that in developing the policy for a replacement programme that the policy should be matched to available funding.
- We recommend that in developing the programme that a comprehensive mapping of policy is carried out to ensure applicability and effectiveness.

How do we use the learning we have to ensure that the needs of end users are at the centre of design thinking and are addressed in the design process at an early stage, that means interventions and measurement tools are fit for purpose and reflect participant needs for the future?

- We recommend that a mechanism is created that captures the voice of the service user and brings their lived experiences into influencing the programme.
- We recommend that a common capture process is implemented that captures agreed soft outcome measurements to demonstrate impact and learning from past experiences.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme, that government should consider all strategic, monitoring and inspections outputs, including aggregating up all ETI inspection outputs and reporting.

How can we ensure security of funding and sufficient time and flexibility to work with people at their own pace, and achieve outcomes?

- We recommend that a replacement programme ensures alignment between the PfG and Skills and employability strategies.
- We recommend that 'flexibility to spend', at pace is incorporated into any replacement, that allows carry forwards into following years.
- We recommend that in determining the potential value of the replacement programme that the cost benefits of achieving social inclusion outcomes and wider impacts should be quantified.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that provider partnerships are established to deliver a holistic programme to meet varied needs and provide VFM.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that a test phase is incorporated with a number of projects testing the approach or model.
- We recommend that replacement programme structures are aligned with potential funding streams from Westminster, promised as replacement for Structural Funds.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement that providers are not penalised for enabling users to work at own pace.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme, that outcomes and the cost per outcome across the programme are developed within thematic areas.
- We recommend that the replacement must meet needs holistically, by bringing in the right services to meet multiplicity of needs locally and strategically.
- We recommend that in considering the required outcomes for users that corresponding PFG outcomes are quantified relating to the positive impact on departments.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures, that a longer timeframe than is currently built into ESF is required, to measure impact and support those in greatest need.
- We recommend that in developing measures of success within a replacement programme that participant progression is the key metric - not time-bound support streams.
- We recommend that funding is aligned with outcomes that demonstrate VFM, recognising the diverse range of users.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that there is cross (political) party support so that Ministers are more likely to co-operate in terms of budget provision.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures, that a persuasive evidence-based approach is required to engender buy in across departments and ministers when competing for resources.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that learning is taken from previous funding experiences relating to the diversity of participants and individual support timeframes.

- We recommend that the Model of Supported Employment is considered for endorsement within the new model, as this model worked especially well for learning disabled citizens from a health match funder perspective and with the application of quality standard available around this model, for providers.

How do we map provision and delivery, in order to identify gaps and track impact and engagement for individuals and stakeholders?

- We recommend that a comprehensive audit of current provision of services is completed in order to promote social and labour market/economic inclusion.
- We recommend that an integrated monitoring and tracking system is developed that will minimise effort on behalf of all stakeholders.
- We recommend that in order to effectively design a replacement programme that a mapping exercise is required of current provision and demand. This should go beyond central government into cross-border (Peace/Interreg) and local government and city deal initiatives. It is important that there is equitable provision for all, especially those with rural needs and access issues.
- We recommend that the data collected by providers is used effectively and collectively to improve participants journeys through keeping the relevance of data under review.
- We recommend that in developing programme structures that an online e-portal that is dynamic and easily updated and capable of quality assurance/checking is incorporated.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that dialogue with signposting organisations is established to determine if there is a demand for services not already offered.
- We recommend that in determining the effectiveness of any replacement programme that it clearly identifies need/demand and ensures resources are focused on it.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that we take steps to identify what the measurable positive outcomes for groups at a disadvantage are.

How do we build a programme that has sufficient flexibility to address the needs of a diverse range of people with complex requirements, but that still achieves tangible results and meets the needs of individual users, taking into consideration regional equity?

- We recommend that a User-centred process is adopted that incorporates flexibility, duration and uses a partnership approach.
- We recommend that there is clear accessibility criteria and clear outcome targets including 'distance travelled' and softer outcomes in any replacement.
- We recommend that a replacement programme be co-designed with end users throughout the design process.
- We recommend that agreed effective current processes from ESF are maintained and improved upon in developing a replacement programme.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme structures, that the Section 75 groups are used as a base list to target people who have been identified.
- We recommend that in designing programme structures that agile funding mechanisms are incorporated that allows for adjustment, mid delivery.

How do we get the public sector bodies to establish a better mechanism for funding of this programme, that provides for a centralised funding and governance regime that simplifies administration?

- We recommend that funding mechanisms are co-designed between funders and providers.
- We recommend that match funding should be dealt with at a programme level and not left to be the providers responsibility and clarify match funding after the EU funding.
- We recommend that in developing the governance structures of the replacement programme that one lead government department should take ownership of awarding the funding, but a programme board should be established with participation from all relevant departments to ensure a joined up approach.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that government must be transparent and continue engaging to build trust and place an emphasis on quality.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme structures that ring fenced funding for a 5 year period is commissioned to maximise certainty and a long-term approach to providing interventions.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that cognisance is taken of what hasn't worked well and how other jurisdictions have addressed these issues.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that the lessons learned from providing during Covid (not over-audit: e.g. retain simplification e.g. 40%) are incorporated into associated procurement and that VFM is realistic to enable individualised inclusion.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that the participant database is incorporated into the system for the submission and verification of claims.
- We recommend that equality is used as a measurement to encourage public bodies to contribute resources to the replacement programme, helping them to meet their equality responsibilities.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that stakeholder groups and government should engagement to ensure there is full awareness and understanding about the complexity of dealing with the targeted cohort.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that we should build on existing ESF data-set governance framework, so funding stakeholders can access outputs.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that funding is treated as grant-in-aid and audited once per year, financially and administratively.
- We recommend that procurement associated with the replacement programme should be flexible in accommodating a combination of regional and local match funding.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that consideration is given to allocating a budget to each department for interventions within their remit or alternatively create a centralised pool of funding, for cross departmental interventions which will be accessed by bid proposals predicated on outcomes.
- We recommend that the replacement programme should allocate funding based on performance against agreed outcomes.

Context

The challenge question that formed the framework for discussion and consideration during the virtual 2-day innovation workshop, was developed and agreed by a cross-sector of NICS Departments and key stakeholders as follows:

‘How might we, by 2027, achieve measurable, positive outcomes for groups at a disadvantage in accessing training and/or employment, delivered through quality, co-designed, sustainable and inclusive programmes that transform lives?’

The question was issued in advance to participants as a means of setting the scene and scope.

Attendees included key stakeholders representing delivery agents and colleges and other associated and interested parties. There were 3 broad groupings identified and represented at the Strategic Insight Lab. These are set out below (in no particular order):

- NICS key Government Department and Statutory Bodies (including ESF delivery agents; Health Trusts and FE Colleges)
- Third Sector (inc. organisations representing people with a disability, family support and youth groups.)
- Business and Other

As part of this cohort the group welcomed two expert speakers, namely Dr Jayne Brady, MBE, Digital Innovation Commissioner, Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership; and Sean Fitzsimons currently on Secondment to DfC Strategic Employment Interventions team and Employment Advocacy Co-ordinator and Face 2 Face Project Manager for Disability Action and activist in the field of disability rights. From the outset participants showed a willingness and eagerness to collaborate together and reach consensus on a pathway for progression for the challenge. Participants had been provided with some background reading in advance of the 2-day Strategic Insight Lab.

THE INNNOVATION LAB PROCESS

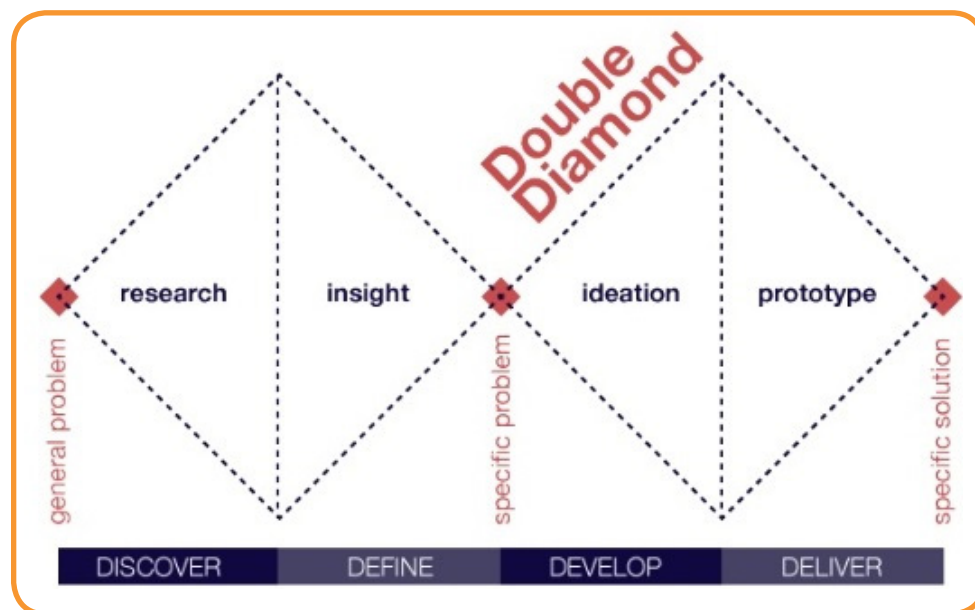
General

The Lab took place virtually over 2 highly intensive, practical and interactive days. The agenda for the 2 day workshop is at [Appendix B](#).

The exercises were designed to ensure people worked in a collaborative and partnership manner, where relationships between different stakeholder sectors could be explored, harnessed and developed. Exercises took place on an individual basis, in stakeholder group settings (in Zoom breakout room settings), and in large group format.

The Double Diamond Design Model was used as the framework for the workshop. It has 4 distinct phases: Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver. While normally used in service design projects, it provided a disciplined, logical process that participants were progressed through together to ensure the event had a productive output. The 2 days focused on the first 3 stages of the double diamond – Discovery, Define and Develop.

Figure 1: The Double Diamond Design Model



The double diamond approach encourages people to diverge and converge their thinking at different parts of the process and the exercises were designed to achieve this approach. Additionally each exercise was carefully planned to build on the previous one to ensure that any learning or understanding was constant and focused, and anchored in outputs from the earlier parts of the process.

Day 1 - Stage 1: Discover and Define

Day One commenced with presentations from the following speakers:

- Graeme Wilkinson – Director of Skills Strategy and Policy, DfE.
- Dr Jayne Brady, MBE – Digital Innovation Commissioner, Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership.
- Sean Fitzsimons – Employment Advocacy Co-ordinator and Face 2 Face Project Manager for Disability Action and activist in the field of disability rights.

The speaker sessions were designed to provide attendees with an overview of the event, to put the challenge in context and open up minds with examples of different perspectives on groups at a disadvantage accessing training and/or employment. This was to encourage participants to move into a more creative space in terms of addressing the challenge.

Following the speaker sessions all participants were given time to consider what they had heard, identify any key questions for the speakers, and write down any key insights they had identified from the sessions in relation to the challenge question. These early insights were populated on the Art of the Possible insights board in Miro, an electronic whiteboard tool used for this virtual Lab, and were considered as part of the theming phase of the Strategic Insight Lab.

Some of the insights identified are included below – the list in full can be found at **Appendix C**:

- The need for a programme with sufficient flexibility to meet the changing economic and societal landscape and the complexity of need.
- Underlines the need for a collaborative and non-competitive approach to solving complex issues.
- Remove the digital divide.
- What will be classed as positive outcomes apart from employment?
- How will success be measured?
- Delivery of programmes needs to build in flexibility so that we can focus on what works and adjust things that don't work as well.
- Real local collaboration.
- Measuring transferable skills progression not just hard outcomes.

The afternoon exercises encouraged participant groups to:

- Focus on looking at the challenges, opportunities and gaps in terms of their understanding of the issue; what they had heard in the speaker sessions and within the scope of the challenge question. The process applied allowed all participants to input their individual views in relation to each of these areas. Insights from this exercise have been captured and are listed at **Appendix D**.

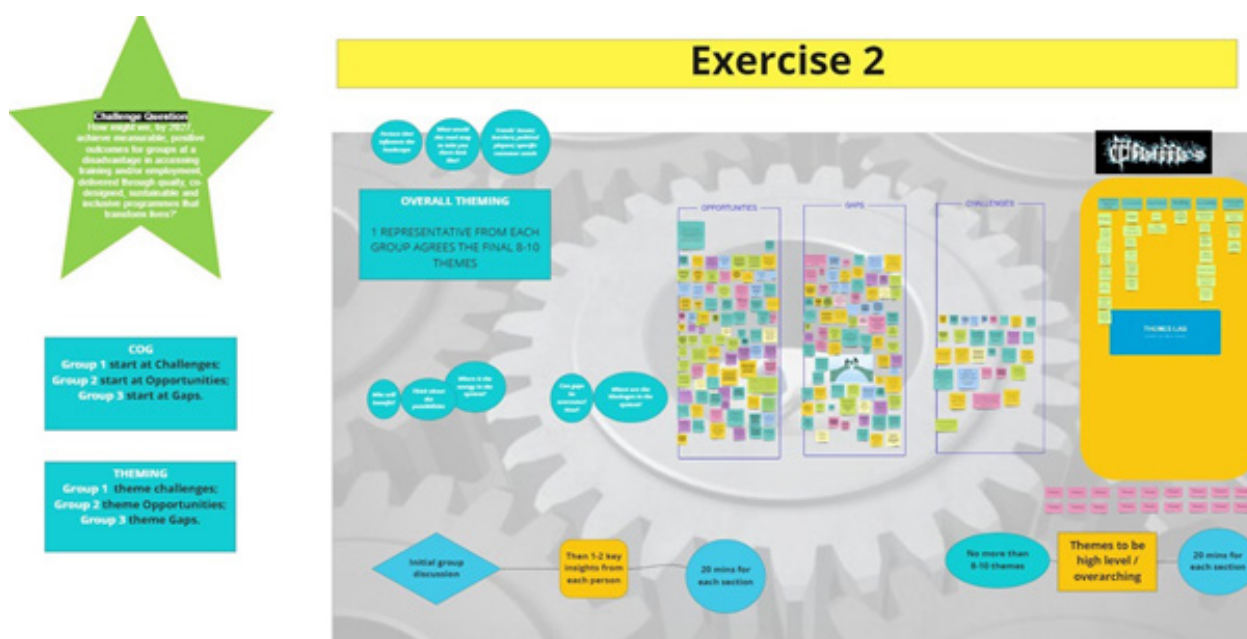
Following the above exercises the participants were asked to consider all the information generated from the day (insights boards, sector priorities and the information populated by groups on the challenges, opportunities and gaps) and identify the key themes emerging from the information, based on what had been populated on the Miro Board.

Participants were split into 3 groups, with each group considering one of the following and identifying the key themes arising from the information on the specific frames.

- The information on the Gaps frame.
- The information on the Challenges frame.
- The information on the Opportunities frame.

Figure 2 below highlights insights and emerging themes from the Challenges, Opportunities and Gaps exercise.

Figure 2: Emerging themes from the Challenges, Opportunities and Gaps exercise



Once the groups had identified the themes from the information they were looking at, one person from each group came forward with their group’s emerging themes and assisted in developing a master copy from all the information generated.

In total 6 overarching themes were identified to be taken forward for progression to the next stage – question generation.

The themes are set out below but are not in any particular order of significance:

- User-Centred Programme Design
- Collaboration
- Awareness
- Funding
- Accessibility
- Evidence-Based Decisions

Day 2 - Stage 2: Develop (Ideation)

The focus of Day 2 was on the development phase of the Double Diamond where the group continued to build on the great work from the previous day through developing key questions, generating ideas and pulling the rich input together for development of recommendations.

Day 2 commenced with the participants developing the key questions that they collectively thought needed to be asked in relation to each of the themes developed at the end of Day 1.

A World Café style session was held in Zoom breakout rooms with each group having a period of time to discuss the themes and develop up to 3 key strategic questions per theme that the group felt related to the individual themes. This process ensured everyone had the opportunity to input their views, ideas and opinions on the development of a set of strategic questions relating to each theme.

The participants were asked to develop the questions in the form of 'How can we...' as they moved around each set of themes. Participants were advised not to duplicate questions they had populated / or observed elsewhere. In total 95 questions were developed.

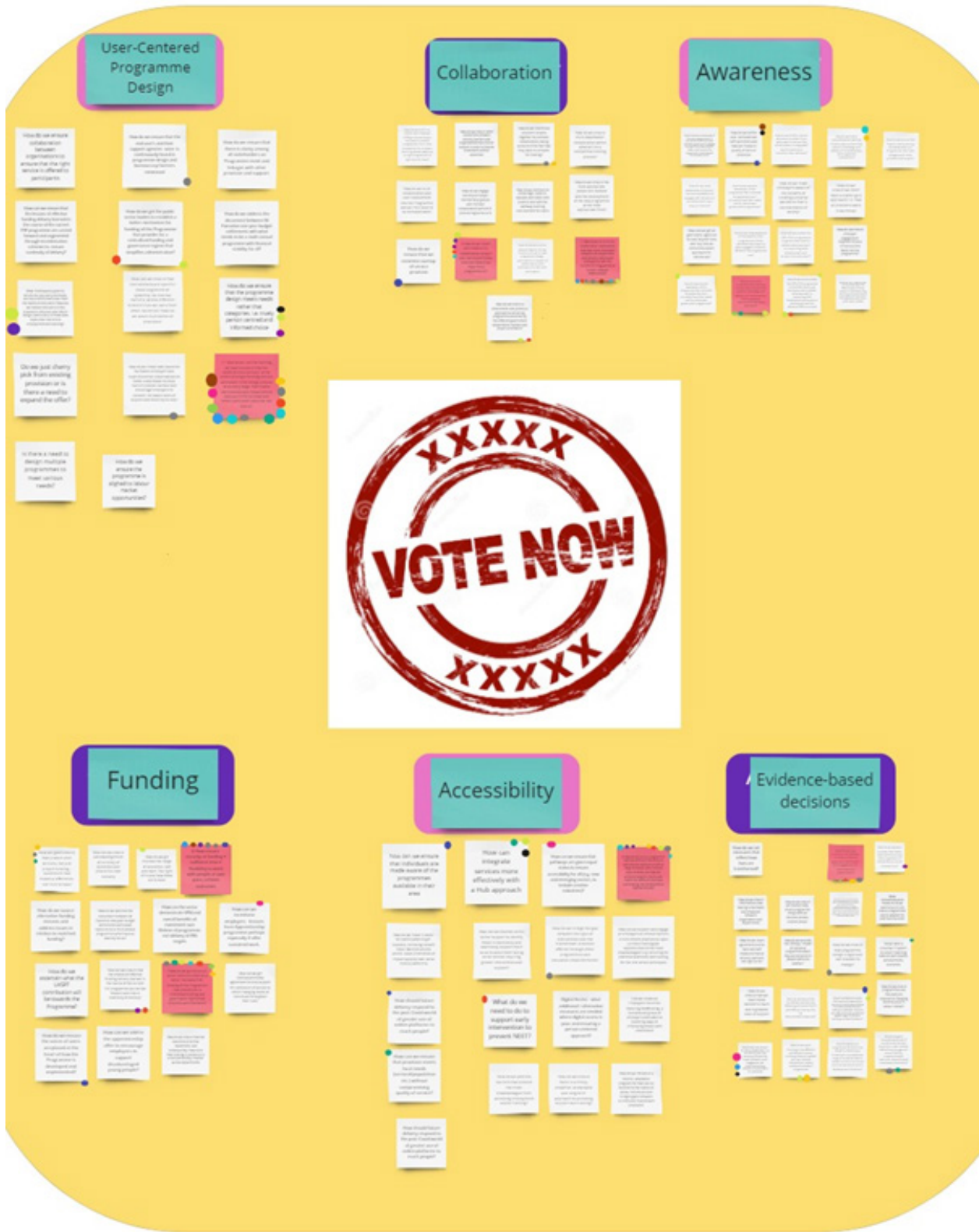
Following the identification of the questions, a dot voting process was taken forward with each participant being given a number of dots (4) to place against the questions they individually would like to see taken forward for further exploration. In total there were 95 questions to vote on.

It was not possible to deliberate on each individual question due to time constraints, but in the interests of providing a complete overview of the process a full list of those questions that were voted on is provided in **Appendix E**.

The questions with the most dots beside them were selected. A total of 8 questions were selected as follows, however, these are not in any specific order:

1. How do we report and measure on collaboration (project and interdepartmental level) and should we make this a programme KPI?
2. How do we build on the collaborative relationships that have been developed between the department and delivery bodies and employers under the current ESF Programme, to further enhance effectiveness?
3. How do we build a comprehensive road-map of policy and provision that assists in the design and delivery of complementary and progressive interventions and raises awareness?
4. How do we use the learning we have to ensure that the needs of end users are at the centre of design thinking and are addressed in the design process at an early stage, that means interventions and measurement tools are fit for purpose and reflect participant needs for the future?
5. How can we ensure security of funding and sufficient time and flexibility to work with people at their own pace, and achieve outcomes?
6. How do we map provision and delivery, in order to identify gaps and track impact and engagement for individuals and stakeholders?
7. How do we build a programme that has sufficient flexibility to address the needs of a diverse range of people with complex requirements, but that still achieves tangible results and meets the needs of individual users, taking into consideration regional equity?
8. How do we get the public sector bodies to establish a better mechanism for funding of this programme, that provides for a centralised funding and governance regime that simplifies administration?

Figure 3: Themes and associated questions from Exercise 3 – Question Development



Ideation – idea generation and selection

The questions were split into 4 clusters and were considered by 4 groups as follows:

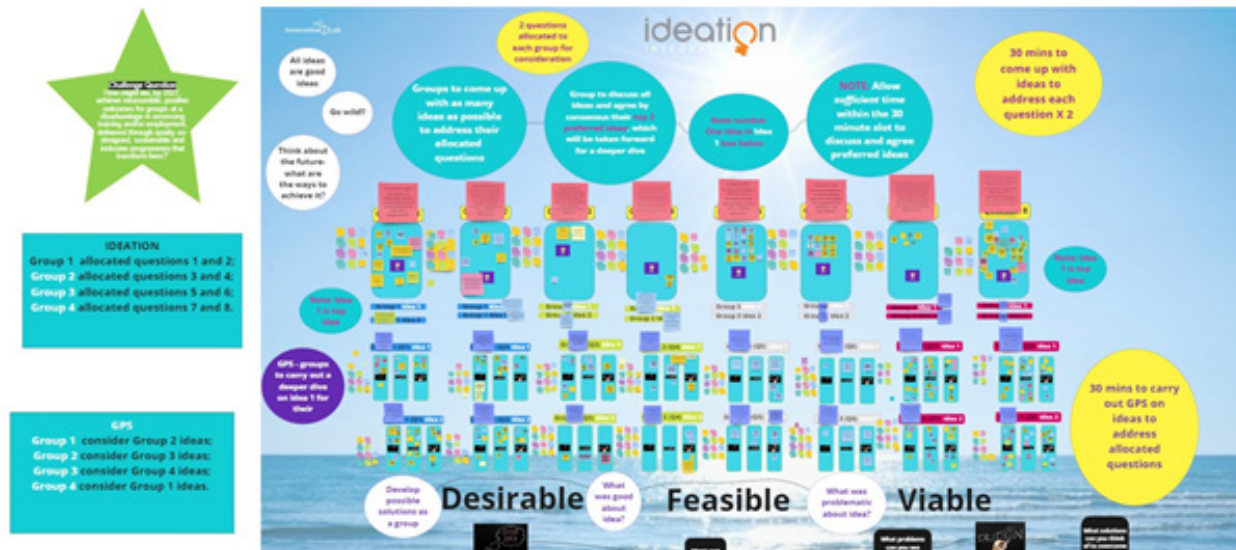
- 1 and 2 were considered together
- 3 and 4 were considered together
- 5 and 6 were considered together
- 7 and 8 were considered together

Each of the 4 groups were assigned a cluster to take forward and consider further as part of a deep dive session for idea generation.

The groups were then asked to ‘go wild’ for idea generation purposes on each of the questions to think about what ideas could exist in a world where there were no barriers, restrictions, assumptions to be made in relation to each question they were considering.

Groups were then asked to look at the ideas generated by a different group in relation to that group’s cluster questions and to consider what was good about the ideas identified at the ‘go wild’ phase, what was problematic and, taking account of both of these factors, what were the possible solutions to the questions.

Figure 4: The Ideas and Critical Analysis exercise in Miro



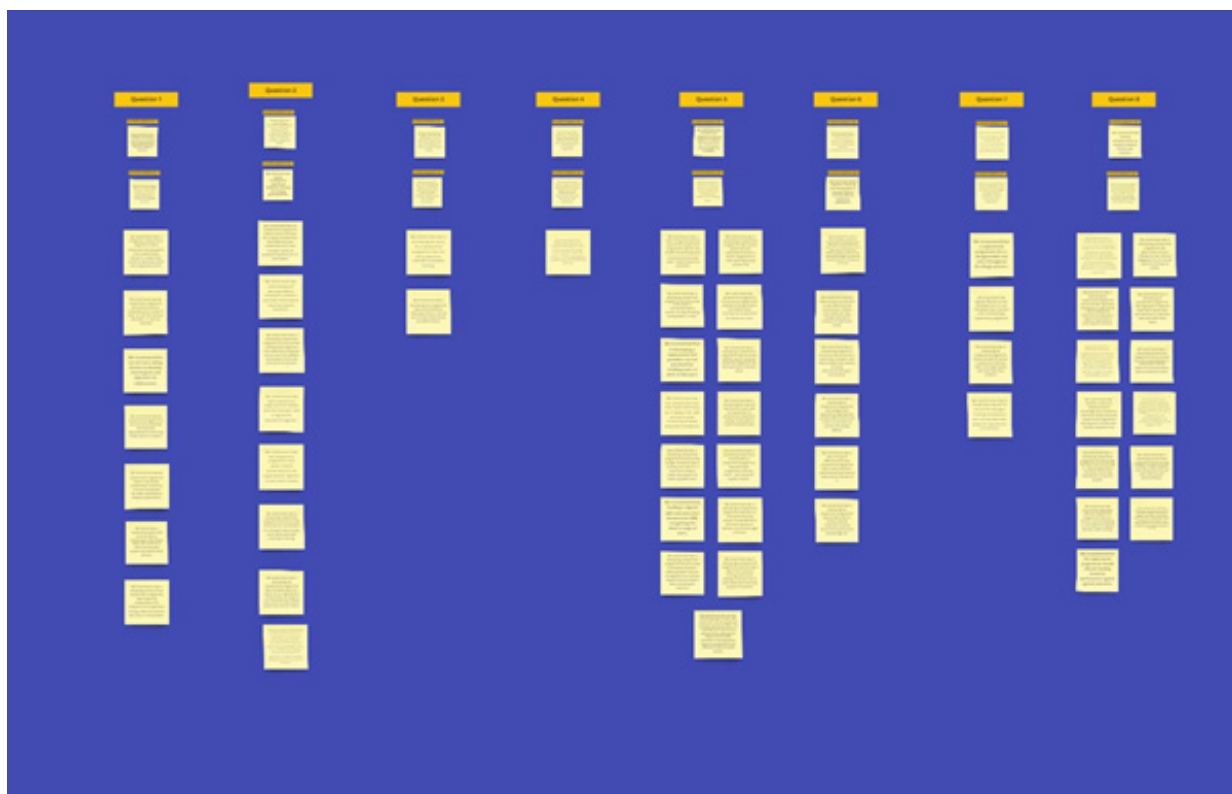
All ideas generated from the 2-day Strategic Insight Lab were then reframed into recommendations by the Lab, in the context of the overarching challenge question and the questions that had been explored further. The Miro Board was then shared with all participants, offering the opportunity for further feedback, comments, reflections and endorsement on ideas generated.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In total the participant group developed 72 ideas for consideration, which were then reframed into recommendations by the Lab. In the first instance these will be considered by the Department for the Economy and the Department for Communities.

Figure 5: The Recommendations frame in Miro



A list of the recommendations is recorded below that emanated from the particular questions that were considered in the lab. They were not prioritised in any particular order.

Question 1: How do we report and measure on collaboration (project and interdepartmental level) and should we make this a programme KPI?

- We recommend that a system is developed, to inform services and supports, that connects all information about the individual. A person-centred approach is required, which focuses on the individuals' progress and development.
- We recommend moving away from a project based approach, which would provide opportunity to embed collaboration in much more sustainable structures.
- We recommend that in designing a replacement programme that a centralised tracking system of all providers and learners is created that identifies additional needs and progression points.
- We recommend that the replacement programme sets person-centred collaboration at its heart in order to meet the needs as and when, i.e. tailor to individual.
- We recommend the use of cross cutting themes to develop shared goals and objectives for collaborators.
- We recommend that the replacement programme is structured to collaborate with specialist organisations on delivering broad themes in cohorts.
- We recommend that the replacement programme should incorporate collaboration incentives, such as funding that facilitates collaboration between stakeholders.

- We recommend a replacement system that joins the dots by connecting all information about the individual to inform services and support and notifies other services.
- We recommend that in designing delivery of the replacement programme that measuring collaboration via a programme of progression through different providers and levels is incorporated.

Question 2: How do we build on the collaborative relationships that have been developed between the department and delivery bodies and employers under the current ESF Programme, to further enhance effectiveness?

- We recommend that Labour Market Partnerships have effective buy-in in all areas. Individual councils progressing at different rates is not effective. Broader synergies are needed.
- We recommend that shared employability pipelines be developed, focusing on emerging /growing sectors.
- We recommend that the replacement programme should include provision for using skills academies more effectively and collaboratively to meet employer needs, as accessible routes for all ESF participants.
- We recommend that establishing joint working between employers, providers and Government would maximise positive outcomes.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that consideration is given to more effectively using local councils as a link between central government and delivery on the ground.
- We recommend that there should be a single point of contact with the employer that brings all the specialisms together.
- We recommend that the replacement programme uses Labour market partnerships to link organisations together in local council areas.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that incentives are incorporated for employers who employ participants who have undertaken training.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that emphasis should be placed on all stakeholders collaborating, focusing on new industries that benefit people with specific needs.
- We recommend that the Model of Supported Employment is considered for endorsement within the new model, as this model worked especially well for learning disabled citizens from a health match funder perspective and with the application of quality standard available around this model, for providers.

Question 3: How do we build a comprehensive road-map of policy and provision that assists in the design and delivery of complementary and progressive interventions and raises awareness?

- We recommend that the strategic commissioning model takes account of allocation to appropriate sector of funding source, matching need to support solution.
- We recommend that the Information Management System is used to map policy and provision for cohorts, to avoid duplication, taking account of the external environment.
- We recommend that in developing the policy for a replacement programme that the policy should be matched to available funding.
- We recommend that in developing the programme that a comprehensive mapping of policy is carried out to ensure applicability and effectiveness.

Question 4: How do we use the learning we have to ensure that the needs of end users are at the centre of design thinking and are addressed in the design process at an early stage, that means interventions and measurement tools are fit for purpose and reflect participant needs for the future?

- We recommend that a mechanism is created that captures the voice of the service user and brings their lived experiences into influencing the programme.
- We recommend that a common capture process is implemented that captures agreed soft outcome measurements to demonstrate impact and learning from past experiences.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme, that government should consider all strategic, monitoring and inspections outputs, including aggregating up all ETI inspection outputs and reporting.

Question 5: How can we ensure security of funding and sufficient time and flexibility to work with people at their own pace, and achieve outcomes?

- We recommend that a replacement programme ensures alignment between the PfG and Skills and employability strategies.
- We recommend that 'flexibility to spend', at pace is incorporated into any replacement, that allows carry forwards into following years.
- We recommend that in determining the potential value of the replacement programme that the cost benefits of achieving social inclusion outcomes and wider impacts should be quantified.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that provider partnerships are established to deliver a holistic programme to meet varied needs and provide VFM.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that a test phase is incorporated with a number of projects testing the approach or model.
- We recommend that replacement programme structures are aligned with potential funding streams from Westminster, promised as replacement for Structural Funds.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement that providers are not penalised for enabling users to work at own pace.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme, that outcomes and the cost per outcome across the programme are developed within thematic areas.
- We recommend that the replacement must meet needs holistically, by bringing in the right services to meet multiplicity of needs locally and strategically.
- We recommend that in considering the required outcomes for users that corresponding PFG outcomes are quantified relating to the positive impact on departments.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures, that a longer timeframe than is currently built into ESF is required, to measure impact and support those in greatest need.
- We recommend that in developing measures of success within a replacement programme that participant progression is the key metric - not time-bound support streams.
- We recommend that funding is aligned with outcomes that demonstrate VFM, recognising the diverse range of users.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that there is cross (political) party support so that Ministers are more likely to co-operate in terms of budget provision.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures, that a persuasive evidence-based approach is required to engender buy in across departments and ministers when competing for resources.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that learning is taken from previous funding experiences relating to the diversity of participants and individual support timeframes.

- We recommend that the Model of Supported Employment is considered for endorsement within the new model, as this model worked especially well for learning disabled citizens from a health match funder perspective and with the application of quality standard available around this model, for providers.

Question 6: How do we map provision and delivery, in order to identify gaps and track impact and engagement for individuals and stakeholders?

- We recommend that a comprehensive audit of current provision of services is completed in order to promote social and labour market/economic inclusion.
- We recommend that an integrated monitoring and tracking system is developed that will minimise effort on behalf of all stakeholders.
- We recommend that in order to effectively design a replacement programme that a mapping exercise is required of current provision and demand. This should go beyond central government into cross-border (Peace/Interreg) and local government and city deal initiatives. It is important that there is equitable provision for all, especially those with rural needs and access issues.
- We recommend that the data collected by providers is used effectively and collectively to improve participants journeys through keeping the relevance of data under review.
- We recommend that in developing programme structures that an online e-portal that is dynamic and easily updated and capable of quality assurance/checking is incorporated.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that dialogue with signposting organisations is established to determine if there is a demand for services not already offered.
- We recommend that in determining the effectiveness of any replacement programme that it clearly identifies need/demand and ensures resources are focused on it.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that we take steps to identify what the measurable positive outcomes for groups at a disadvantage are.

Question 7: How do we build a programme that has sufficient flexibility to address the needs of a diverse range of people with complex requirements, but that still achieves tangible results and meets the needs of individual users, taking into consideration regional equity?

- We recommend that a User-centred process is adopted that incorporates flexibility, duration and uses a partnership approach.
- We recommend that there is clear accessibility criteria and clear outcome targets including 'distance travelled' and softer outcomes in any replacement.
- We recommend that a replacement programme be co-designed with end users throughout the design process.
- We recommend that agreed effective current processes from ESF are maintained and improved upon in developing a replacement programme.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme structures, that the Section 75 groups are used as a base list to target people who have been identified.
- We recommend that in designing programme structures that agile funding mechanisms are incorporated that allows for adjustment, mid delivery.

Question 8: How do we get the public sector bodies to establish a better mechanism for funding of this programme, that provides for a centralised funding and governance regime that simplifies administration?

- We recommend that funding mechanisms are co-designed between funders and providers.
- We recommend that match funding should be dealt with at a programme level and not left to be the providers responsibility and clarify match funding after the EU funding.
- We recommend that in developing the governance structures of the replacement programme that one lead government department should take ownership of awarding the funding, but a programme board should be established with participation from all relevant departments to ensure a joined up approach.
- We recommend that in developing a replacement programme that government must be transparent and continue engaging to build trust and place an emphasis on quality.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme structures that ring fenced funding for a 5 year period is commissioned to maximise certainty and a long term approach to providing interventions.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that cognisance is taken of what hasn't worked well and how other jurisdictions have addressed these issues.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that the lessons learned from providing during Covid (not over-audit: e.g. retain simplification e.g. 40%) are incorporated into associated procurement and that VFM is realistic to enable individualised inclusion.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that the participant database is incorporated into the system for the submission and verification of claims.
- We recommend that equality is used as a measurement to encourage public bodies to contribute resources to the replacement programme, helping them to meet their equality responsibilities.
- We recommend that in developing the replacement programme that stakeholder groups and government should engagement to ensure there is full awareness and understanding about the complexity of dealing with the targeted cohort.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that we should build on existing ESF data-set governance framework, so funding stakeholders can access outputs.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that funding is treated as grant-in-aid and audited once per year financially and administratively.
- We recommend that procurement associated with the replacement programme should be flexible in accommodating a combination of regional and local match funding.
- We recommend that in developing replacement programme structures that consideration is given to allocating a budget to each Department for interventions within their remit or alternatively create a centralised pool of funding, for cross-departmental interventions which will be accessed by bid proposals predicated on outcomes.
- We recommend that the replacement programme should allocate funding based on performance against agreed outcomes.

Next Steps

The Department for the Economy and Department for Communities, in the first instance, will consider this report and the out-workings of the 2 day virtual Strategic Insight Lab.

This report provides a factual account of the 2-day workshop and summarises all the key information gained from the work of the group.

Due to time restraints only a selection of questions were able to be progressed through idea generation and development.

There is scope to further develop thinking and ideas around this issue by taking forward further questions that could be achieved through further one-day facilitated workshops.

APPENDICES

European Social Fund Investment (Priorities 1 & 2) Provision post March 2022 Strategic Insight Lab 24th and 25th February 2021

Name	Organisation
Graeme Wilkinson	Department for the Economy
Maeve Hamilton	Department for the Economy
Claire Thompson	Department for the Economy
Deirdre Ward	Department for Communities
Tracy Johnston	Department for Communities
Shauna Robinson	Department for Communities
	Department for Education 14 - 19 Strategy
Dale Heaney	Department for Education
Shirley Jones	Education Training Inspectorate
Jerome Dawson	Department of Health
Stephen McCourt	Department of Justice
Lisa Toland	Belfast City Council (BCC)
Averil Morrow	Education Authority
Garth Anderson	Northern Health & Social Care Trust
Pat O'Neill	Strategic Investment Board
Karen Smith	Disability Action
Liam Burns	Mencap
David Babington	Action Mental Health
	Open College Network NI
Ciaran McManus	South West Further Education College
Olwen Lyner	NIACRO
Gareth Dillon	ESF Managing Authority
Paula Jennings	Stepping Stones
Kieran Molloy	Cedar Foundation
Susan Russam	GEMS NI
Claire Gordon	BITC
	NIUSE - Triangle Housing
Clare Conlon	Youth Action
Geoff Nuttall	NICVA
	Clanrye Group
Margaret Logue	Women's Centre, Derry
	NOW Group
Dr Jayne Brady (Speaker)	SIB, BCC Digital Innovation Commissioner
Sean Fitzsimons (Speaker)	Seconded to Dept for Communities (from Disability Action)
Helen Gartley (observer)	Department for the Economy
Paul Lyons (observer)	Department for the Economy

**European Social Fund Investment (Priorities 1 & 2)
Provision post March 2022
Strategic Insight Lab Agenda - 24th & 25th February 2021**

‘How might we, by 2027, achieve measurable, positive outcomes for groups at a disadvantage in accessing training and/or employment, delivered through quality, co-designed, sustainable and inclusive programmes that transform lives?’

DAY 1 - SESSION 1: Start @ 9.30 AM
Lab – Introductions. What to expect over the 2 day. Ground Rules
Senior Sponsors - Scene Setting
Expert speakers & Brief Questions
BREAK
Miro Introduction
Insight gathering and population
LUNCH 11.30 AM – 2.00 PM
DAY 1 - SESSION 2: Start @ 2.00 PM
Challenges – Opportunities – Gaps (COG) Model
BREAK
COG continued
Theming Model

DAY2 - SESSION 1: Start @ 9.30 AM
Reflection on DAY 1
Question Development
BREAK
Question selection
LUNCH 11.30 AM – 1.30 PM
DAY 2 - SESSION 2: Start @ 1.30 PM
Dot voting
Idea generation on selected questions
Idea Selection and development
BREAK
Development of ideas – Good-Problem-Solution (GPS) model
Consideration of recommendation to challenge question
Wrap up, next steps and close

Full list of insights captured from the 'Art of the Possible' session in exercise 1

- Great to hear about 1 year extension - when will this be made public?
- The need for a programme with sufficient flexibility to meet the changing economic and societal landscape and the complexity of need.
- Deliver qualifications and skills up to at least level 2.
- I am also really keen to ensure we have a whole of Government approach, including local government. We are a small place and can work in partnership.
- Underlines the need for a collaborative and non-competitive approach to solving complex issues.
- Estimated it will take at least 5 years for economy to return to pre-Covid levels (almost 2027) - need to ensure employers don't take cream of the crop - but recognise value and benefits of diverse workforce and offer entry levels opportunities with progression.
- What gap in provision is the programme seeking to fill?
- How do we avoid duplication and saturation?
- The 1 year extension will give some breathing space to properly design succession programme.
- Remove the digital divide.
- What will be classed as positive outcomes apart from employment?
- The disability sector provides an embedded intervention that is strategically aligned to PfG, not simply Department for the Economy goals (unemployment) or Department of Communities (economically inactive). We have a much broader impact with a cross-departmental reach, including Department of Health (rehabilitation, health and well-being) and Department of Justice (engagement of offenders). Our holistic approach builds the capacity of individuals with disability across a complex range of barriers and builds the capacity of communities to remove barriers.
- The opportunity to learn from the successes of ESF and develop a fit for the future programme that builds on this and ensures customised assistance for those not currently ready for mainstream programmes.
- Holistic nature - not just about skills or employability.
- How will success be measured?
- Delivery of programmes needs to build in flexibility so that we can focus on what works and adjust things that don't work as well.
- Real local collaboration.
- Measuring transferable skills progression not just hard outcomes.
- This is a delivery that needs to address multiple challenges that people have. This requires a wrap-around service.
- How should provision be structured? Vocational, education focussed/employability support/blended?
- How to help different cohorts of people with different challenges and pay using the one model.
- Highlighting social economy jobs and innovation.
- Moving beyond single employer/one org relationships - collaborative approach to ensure we pool opportunities and find best fit for individuals and employers.
- Specialist Provision by experienced organisations & staff.
- How do we match supply and demand between people who want help and employers needs?
- How do we ensure that programmes are co-designed with the voices of service users at the centre? Need for both departments and providers to embed co-design in production and delivery of programmes.
- Should the same programme apply for all 'cohorts' or do we need different programmes based on age, disability etc?

- How should provision be shaped? Vocational, educational, employment support or other or some form of hybrid?
- Need to ensure all regions are offered access to programmes.
- Preparing people for jobs in emerging growth sectors is key.
- How do we ensure in work progression?
- Localised and agility to respond to needs and include sectors of employment growth in the area.
- How will current programme transition into new programme?
- Innovative models that bring results.
- This is also about progression, how do we measure this? Important to be included in the Programme for Government process to achieve that whole of Government approach at a grass roots level. Community impact.
- How to provide real breadth of opportunity across all sectors.
- Pre-determined match requirement from other departments and local government employability partnerships.
- Interesting demand side info but reaching into the long term is another issue.
- Support for the development of collaborative approaches including employer engagement.
- Need to identify growth sectors and engage with those companies to focus on their skills requirements so we can leverage opportunities for the programmes to capitalise on those areas.
- What gap in provision is the new programme seeking to fill?
- Need to look at a collective C@V approach working alongside public and private sectors in a real and collaborative partnership.
- Collaboration with FE and other education / skills providers.
- What form should provision take? Vocational/educational/employment support
- Need for the programmes to focus on and adapt to providing long term outcomes and results.
- How do we move away from one career pathway for working life?
- No one left behind means those furthest from the labour market in particular.
- If we are genuine about innovation can we accept that some things need to evolve? As a sector we need to move with the times and be honest about where we duplicate. The big question is how to we reach more people with any future resource as the need will be greater.
- Need for the types of support provided to participants to be agile and adaptable, so that there is scope for support to change as they get used to the labour market. This would support true inclusion and build their confidence.
- What cohorts of people should we target? Should there be specific cohorts like the current Programme or should it have a broader remit?
- I think that this is a very interesting point. I totally agree that honesty around duplication will provide best value for public money and also mean a much more likelihood of developing a successful programme.
- I have been thinking a lot about how we use any future fund to develop a flexible programme that meets participants' needs but that adapts to changes in industry need.
- Need to look to growth sectors to give equality of opportunities.
- Accommodating digital inclusion and new / emerging sectors will be a key challenge.
- We need recognition and acknowledgement of the true high level strategic impact of the current and successor programmes. It is more than an employment service. It is employability and inclusion for the most disadvantaged.
- How do we get everyone to see themselves in this digital world?
- Many very important jobs will not need high level digital skills. We should identify these as well.
- Better engagement with business community.
- Should we gather information about the skills needed for employment throughout the Island of Ireland?
- Remove all age barriers.

- How do we create an employment pipeline for people with convictions?
- Concerned that the digital & Innovation Commissioner's presentation is targeting those individuals who are already close to the labour market and not those who the ESF succession programme focuses on.
- Value in community volunteering - gap in current programme is an opportunity going forward.
- Increased emphasis on entrepreneurial skills.
- Training allowance for NEET YP engaged in non TFS programmes.
- Skills routes focus essential into all sectors.
- Take the good from current programme, build on it with the help of the funders/provider and the user.
- Inclusion costs more in money, time, and resources. Need to allow for this: no shortcuts!
- COVID - driving innovation for online delivery. Helps deliver at scale and allow more people employer access.
- Recognise the value of volunteering as a positive outcome for young people.
- Health and Work linked to economic inactivity challenge.
- Opportunity to remove any deadweight from the current programme and focus on unique aspects - like tailored provision, addressing multiple barriers etc.
- Aligning careers guidance.
- Opportunity to recognise the important role a youth work approach plays in tackling youth employability.
- Education and increased awareness of wrap around support.
- Systems need to talk to each other to understand what the individual needs rather than other way round.
- Blockage is seeing FE and mainstream as only pathway.
- Frustrating amount of time spent on admin and audit. Resource should focus on impact.
- Covid has opened up new conversations with business about inclusion.
- Keeping our focus on the groups' farthest from the labour market will be difficult as the unemployed and EI numbers increase.
- Unwillingness to adopt supported employment as a valid methodology.
- Perception that once a job is found that support is no longer required. Keeping and progressing jobs is where much of the work is.
- UKSPF the lag and the centralised structure.
- To build a real-time monitoring system that will show the achievements not only outputs.
- To influence employers to change to a more flexible jobs model balancing life and work.
- Importance of holistic approach. Employment, poverty, mental health, confidence etc are all intrinsically linked.
- Holistic approach including all stakeholders.
- If providers need to innovate (and we do) what can departments do to help develop a supportive programme where we are valued for our experience and ability to deliver.
- Succession funding should be at least for 4 years if not 5 as short term funding will only lead to short term solutions.
- Young people need to continue to be a priority. Most affected by pandemic in terms of job losses and mental health. New data yesterday of the 36,000 who lost their jobs 26,000 were young people.
- You can change career at 45 55 65 and beyond.
- The importance of a level playing field and le progress at different paces.
- I think we have learned so much about the value of collaboration. This will enable organisations to meet the challenges. Those furthest from the labour market will be even further marginalised post pandemic.

- Whilst we should aim to improve on aspects of the previous ESF programme where we can, we should also not be afraid to replicate and continue what has been successful and in particular its clear focus on targeting those facing multiple barriers to employment.
- Large skills gap between entry level, L1, L2 and higher education graduates - Progression opportunities needs to be addressed to ensure inclusion and employment for all in NI.
- Graduate routes for all at all levels and no age barriers, also past graduate focus - many graduates not able to get into first choice careers.
- There is a lot of very good practice as ETI found. Important to build on this going forward.
- Tackling emerging barriers as well as existing ones.
- I agree about wraparound service. That has also been highlighted as a strength of ESF projects by ETI especially for young people.
- Sean's presentation excellent. Need to also consider ensuring we deliver for all and take on board what we learnt from Covid. Also need to have achievable targets. Some thoughts.
- Those furthest from labour market especially learning disability agree a systematic approach for entrance and to ensure outcomes are long term with services to maintain employment supports for LD.
- Presentations were a good starting point but we do need to remember that the Programme will need to reach a very broad spectrum of people. Needs to meet barriers that could be very different.
- The ESF programme has been highly effective in targeting those furthest from the labour market and overcoming barriers and there is even more need for this to continue given that the challenges brought about by Covid could push those furthest from the labour market even further behind the large numbers of new job seekers.
- There's a real opportunity to link Jayne's work into any future programme but we need to progress from big project thinking to how we can engage participants who struggle to see opportunities for them.
- Pathway crosses many departments, providers and employers to achieve objective.
- Raise expectations and aspiration.
- "Innovation kept in a toolbox - need to make it mainstream" - How do we ensure we do this for 'Inclusive' Employment & Growth too across all sectors?
- The additional impact of COVID on emotional health and wellbeing as well as the economy.
- The pandemic has made us all more understanding need to harness that.
- Development of new skills strategy, new Entry Level/Level 1, trainee-ships, apprenticeships Programmes and employability programmes offers a real opportunity to identify a niche offering that adds real value and gets best possible value.
- Time to consider what is currently provided that could be mainstreamed – i.e. focus on employability and allow the new programme to concentrate on health and wellbeing and emerging new needs.
- Digital opportunities.
- Enjoyed the presentations. Sean's presentation challenges us all to be more collaborative.
- No one left behind is a clear policy intent.
- Key point from Sean about our longer term objectives - we need to focus on provision of clear pathways for the provision of sustainable, meaningful employment opportunities.
- Digital jobs will suit some disabled people but the higher end jobs will not. Need to have entry routes to growth sectors for all.
- Helping those most removed must be an inherent focus in all City Deal/Growth plans and wider employability work.
- Agree with Sean, we need to address exciting and emerging barriers for disabled people.

Full list of insights captured from the challenges, opportunities and gaps session in Exercise 2

Challenges

- Perception that once a job is found that they no longer support is required. Keeping and progressing jobs is where much of the work is.
- New WFH initiatives mean work might be more accessible for people with disabilities, but investment needed in infrastructure.
- Being able to align with challenges at a city level.
- How do we ensure that SPF targets those most at risk/in need of support - differentiated from those who need light-touch job brokerage etc.
- An integrated approach to wellbeing.
- Linkage with Labour Market Partnerships to create a cohesive 'offer' that matches job demand with supply pipeline.
- GDPR does not always allow sharing of information for tracking.
- I had an afterthought on the Challenge: How do we ensure that the new programme is viewed as being equally important in terms of priority and resource allocation to other programmes e.g. Steps to Success, TFS Assured skills etc and is linked to inclusive growth based on helping those most in need to level up to be able to avail of labour market opportunities?
- Build in evaluation of new programme to ensure bad habits don't develop.
- Recognise the importance of soft outcomes building confidence, wellbeing as well as building skills.
- Lack of digital equipment skills and confidence - disadvantaged communities hardest hit.
- How can we plan for innovation when we only have a 1 year extension?
- Employers inundated with requests from range of employability providers - silo projects. Can we move to a more strategic approach and pool resources?
- How can we be honest about duplication?
- We need to get a system to integrate individuals' needs to that all providers can assist and support. People have complex needs and it needs to be more efficient in capturing this data. We ask the same questions of individuals multiple times. Record it once and act as a team to meet these needs. Could be so powerful at a local level. Needs to be about confidence, social inclusion and health. I also think we need a big up lift in investment!
- Providing an adequate childcare infrastructure to support women to work and flexible decent jobs to support work / life balance.
- New WFH initiatives mean work might be more accessible for people with disabilities, but investment needed in infrastructure.
- Current initiatives do not connect economic recovery to wellbeing and this must change.
- Lack of in job support for people.
- Given budgetary pressures we need to acknowledge a potential tension between resourcing mainstream skills development of the already well skilled with the need to prioritise resources for those requiring support to overcome barriers and develop skills from a lower level. The first should not displace the former.
- How do we be honest about what's not working? Some things will need to be stopped so we can meet new challenges.
- Collaboration of providers to meet needs of citizens.
- How we engage with those furthest from labour market.
- • Getting employers on board to take chance on those who have barriers.

- Thank you Sean. Sets the scene well, especially for those with a learning disability who have the same aspirations for a vocational meaningful life as endorsed in current draft progression of “We Matter” the LD Service Model for NI.
- There is a massive challenge for post primary education if we are to address these issues.
- There is a key challenge to give people opportunities.
- Employers need to be involved.
- The challenge of ensuring that the digital explosion meets the needs of all the target groups.
- Intersect between social inclusion and employment.

Opportunities

- Opportunity to review systems for longer term tracking of participants and perhaps get more integration of public and government IT systems.
- Opportunity for increased automation to cut some costs and focus resources on longer term support for people with complex issues.
- Agree systematic currency to measure success including soft outcomes.
- Devise a bespoke quality framework that identified and measures quality measures of service delivery. Supported Employment Quality Framework provides the opportunity to grade providers according to their fidelity to the service delivery model.
- Adopt the tried and tested supported employment model where the place-train-maintain-progress approach places the job to the fore of interventions thus shortcutting the traditional employability pipeline model of the past.
- Energy: VCSE, ‘lived experience’, government and some employers committed to Responsible Business.
- Clear skills framework and career pathways in all sectors at entry level up.
- Young people tell us they need flexible personalised programmes with wraparound support and which involve them in the process of designing their own programmes to meet their needs.
- Create Match funding requirements for health to align to Health and disability strategies.
- A programme to develop place based solutions that meet the needs of people where they are. A one size fits all programme doesn’t work and needs are different for different Council areas.
- Time to review programme. What’s working well and what’s not. Developing a flexible programme that links our most vulnerable communities with emerging job opportunities.
- Lots of discussion with business and Councils about inclusion - opportunity is to link this programme to make it real inclusion that people feel and will change their circumstances.
- Opportunity to recognise range of positive outcomes.
- Expertise in the System with VC Providers for collaborative approaches.
- Opportunity not to focus everything on digital as the next big thing. It is important and we need to make sure our participants are included in any new career opportunities but there are other growth sectors and opportunities due to development in environmental sector.
- Build on agile and remote working to reach more people.
- No age restrictions!
- Opportunity to set new objectives that show the outcomes to the person.
- Collaboration in the C & V sector to deliver excellence in partnership with public and private sector.
- Strategic engagement with employers - beyond provision of placements: educational multi-stakeholder piece around barriers, inclusive employment, cultural change etc.
- Flexibility in education pathways.
- Recognition of importance of soft skills employers in all sectors/industries value - adaptability/resilience etc.
- Remove barrier of level 1.
- Cross Departmental and sectoral working.

- More cross council joint working re City Deals/employability - many employers transcend council geographical boundaries.
- Clear pathways for all.
- Don't assume that everyone going through a programme is moving along at the same speed. Many individuals with LD need to remain on programmes for a significant period of time to achieve positive outcomes.
- Prevention approach.
- Timely Current LD Regional Model post significant consultation with stakeholders under draft with "Key Ambitions" including "Meaningful Life and Citizenship".
- Supported Employment model Place Train Maintain works best for LD especially maintenance and progression (Sean earlier referred to "Gain; Train; Progress").
- Focus on building back better during COVID recovery - most excluded at the heart.
- Need a responsive programme - a reactive programme. Not one size fits all. Need to have flex and adaptability. Need to respond to need. Protecting and maintaining good practice. How do we build on good practice which allows scope for innovation?
- Don't just focus on a training target or employment target.
- One size does not fit all. Need flex. Need to be responsive to the individuals that come into the programme.
- Ensure that partnership working between voluntary & statutory sector is equal and not voluntary sector being merely the delivery agency and the stat sector the commissioner.
- Early intervention is key - as early as nursery level to address disadvantage - post primary is too late!
- Opportunity to build on best practice and skills and expertise developed over the past 30 years of ESF.
- Recognise that people progress at different rates. Focus on the individual.
- Clear links and cooperation with mainstream programmes and not seen as poor relation.
- Opportunity to link economic recovery with wellbeing. We cannot afford to keep these in silos. Economic success must be connected to the wellbeing of our most vulnerable people. We must take them with us.
- Make it easier for people to joining programme, review entry criteria.
- Change now to collaborate more.
- Opportunity to be creative around collaboration, e.g. one foot in formal education within a school setting with one foot on other programmes. Continuum.
- Reduce bureaucracy and focus on quality of provision and impact.
- Gaps and barriers for women who have small children will be greater in the years ahead.
- Effective partnership between schools and other partners to meet the needs of the young people.
- Recognise that projects in organisations are core services.
- Opportunity to take stock and also be aspirational and visionary.
- Opportunity for collaboration not competition.
- Ability for projects to work with those below 18 years of age thus ensuring that there is early intervention.
- Opportunity - look beyond level 1 qualifications. Much better wrap around, health and linkage with schools. Input from local council and business leaders. Improve life outcomes, including health.
- Opportunity to address inequalities and balances, especially in relation to EMA for all young people including those in ESF.
- Young people who have dropped out of school or are not attending should be able to join ESF programmes if it is better suited to their needs.
- Create genuine partnership working - with employers, training providers and across government departments to meet individual need better and promote progression.

- Localised drilldown required. Value of Employability NI and labour market partnerships required. Look at specific groups and current interventions. Look at in context of new skills strategy.
- Does outcome based approach in PfG give framework for measure soft outcomes, overcome silos?
- Collaboration and connections across departments and sector.
- Preventative systematic policy to enable adults with LD to access supported employment services to prevent pressures on building-based regulated day care services in health.
- Opportunity to consolidate services in organisations that have developed a track record and move away from rounds of funding and the significant resources required to complete applications.
- Revisit the transition model already developed linking schools to disability organisations. Identifying and supporting young people and their families to career plan early.
- Opportunity to give everyone better life chances.
- Opportunity to address duplication in service delivery. It is happening and we know it. We can take this time to make sure investment reaches as many people as possible and includes emerging vulnerable groups not already supported. The make-up of our communities is changing and any programme must be future proofed.
- Opportunity to think of providers as partners not as organisations that need to be controlled and checked up on. The real innovation would be to develop trusted partnerships that deliver flexible solutions to meet changing needs
- Multi-faceted approach is needed.
- Stop calling young people NEETS. Stop labelling.
- We recognise that employment on release is a key component of a prisoner's rehabilitation and a key aspect of reducing reoffending. Many have multiple and complex problems, but finding and keeping a job can be the foundation for a different kind of life. Work provides not just an income but also structure, direction and self-worth.
- Opportunity to stop labelling young people as the NEETS.
- Pandemic has enabled new and different "conversations" with LD carers and service beneficiaries' ref reliance on traditional day services.
- These are core services. Is this an opportunity to change the language?
- Much better focus on individuals and linkage with schools. Don't wait until 16!
- Potential opportunity to mainstream previous EU programme/policies into domestic economic and skills policy and link more closely to wider domestic policy. Possibly also great financial flexibility to mix with other domestic budgets.
- Enhanced opportunity to digitise administrative processes and also training and participant support.
- Area based planning with consortia led by a lead contractor ensuring duplication is avoided and planning for local labour market is maximised this approach would facilitate progression planning to FE, HE and Training.
- To align the Outputs of individual interventions with the overall outcome for the individual.
- Online platform for career interests linked to labour market opportunities.
- Collect appropriate and relevant data to facilitate an agile delivery model.
- To better connect and collaborate using data AI and other technology.
- Focus on the needs of the person not their benefits in relation to accessing services.
- Addressing duplication across and within programmes and churn.
- Inter-generational approaches to tackling barriers to the labour market.
- Expand opportunities to tap into Apprenticeship model for those most removed from labour market.

- Opportunity to explore a payment on results or outcomes model that rewards outcomes i.e. independent living holding down a well-paid job and not depending on benefits as opposed to outputs i.e. qualifications achieved. This is an opportunity for piloting innovative delivery models to inform future programmes.
- Participant actively involved in designing their personal employability plan.
- Career pathway.
- Prison service spend over £3m per annum on learning and skills provision. Huge potential for collaborative design on supporting people with convictions into employment.
- There will always be a degree of bureaucracy in spending public money. Much work has been done in recent years in addressing this. This good work offers a really good opportunity to build on this and not re-invent the wheel!
- Opportunity to improve linkages with departments' strategic policies to avoid conflict of interest at Ministerial level.
- Transitions management from customised support to mainstream.
- People leaving prison who find a job are between 6 and 9% less likely to re-offend than those who do not. Opportunity to break intergenerational crime.

Gaps

- Gaps created by cap in level of educational attainment that can be delivered.
- How do we incentivise employers to recruit people with convictions?
- Collaboration should be measured as a KPI for projects.
- Building on the success of ESF against a changing backdrop in relation to the labour market, the skills demand and the way we work.
- It would be good if the process included sufficient agility to allow people to make tangible ongoing progress towards employment - be that via qualifications, building confidence, or skills development - but this would be a potential measure of success.
- Level 1 qualifications are restrictive.
- Can we use the public sector to lead the way in recruiting the economically inactive?
- Recognising that not all people can transition to FE/HE without longer term support delivered by CVSE sector.
- Duplication of service provision locally in some areas.
- Increased emphasis needed on transferable/soft skills and the employability pathway.
- Maybe some scope for provision across cohorts - not silos of 'disability', 'NEETs' etc.
- Comprehensive assessment that can travel with the participant.
- Collaboration with Jobs and benefits offices in relation to client journey.
- The issue where participants are moved into mandatory programmes when they are progressing on non-mandated.
- 90K non mandated participants - recognition of the offer how can we build on this?
- Agreed this is important.
- I think we need to remember that the current ESF programme is not going to be automatically rolled forward so anything that it previously targeted will become a gap unless included in the new programme.
- Determining how social value is created.
- Need clear pathways to move participants into permanent, sustainable employment positions.
- Greater engagement with Match Funders.
- Provision for all age groups.
- Real time monitoring of progression and softer outcomes.
- Breaking down employers' perceptions about disability (costs of reasonable accommodation; productivity levels etc).

- An agreed, flexible approach to initial assessment and the measurement of the development of soft skills and distance travelled.
- The Prison Service are working closely with our Learning & Skills providers, together with voluntary and statutory partners, to develop a more coordinated approach between learning and skills and sentence planning to improve the employability outcomes for people in custody. Collaborative working is key.
- There remains a disconnect between ESF and some mainstream provision. Need clearer and more innovative pathways.
- Access to government databases to be able to monitor the longer term impacts of the support provided and give real time information on participant progression.
- More explicit focus on developing digital skills of those furthest from the labour market to outweigh disadvantage? Retention of staff with digital skills in voluntary organisations a major issue so tying to work placements and opportunities in these organisations could be valuable for all.
- Can we make greater use of social clauses in government procurement contracts to include the employment of the economically inactive e.g. people with convictions; Exploring the use of social enterprise as a vehicle for employment for ex-offenders.
- Is the focus of ESF and its replacement on social inclusion as a precursor to labour market inclusion being fully incorporated into the new DfE skills strategy? If not will there be a policy gap between the new ESF replacement programme and Departmental priorities? With limited resources, what is not a Departmental priority, may get less priority and end up not being funded/ funded adequately to address need.
- Match Funding can be a challenge can consideration be given to 100% funding.
- Greater collaborative working between projects at local level.
- Need to embed movement towards employment once the programmes conclude (e.g. if childcare is your barrier, what steps can be taken to provide access to affordable childcare after you finish the programme?)
- Need to clearly articulate and outline the business benefits of recruiting disadvantaged groups - and there are many! Education piece. Employers have barriers/challenges too - help to overcome these.
- Special Educational transitioning to vocational opportunities post school to be streamlined.
- Need for greater awareness raising of the high quality work, and recognition of the expertise and passion, of ESF providers.
- Digital divide a very big issue particularly in respect of those with LD. Extensive support required to even get them on the ladder.
- Need to establish collaborative working across sectors (Health/ education/ justice etc).
- Barriers in recruitment processes- qualification/skills asked for high even for basic roles.
- Counting participants in and out as a measurement misses the long term need of participants and their often slow progression journeys.
- ESF Results are excellent. How do we ensure the momentum to deliver a replacement programme is maintained?
- Inter-Departmental policy expectation to deliver key outcomes.
- Ability of participants to work with more than one project at the same time.
- Competitive nature of bidding process does not lend itself to collaborative working.
- How we engage with those so removed from any provision.
- Postcode lottery with Health provision ref accessing vocational supports for people with a disability.
- Blockages are seeing young people from deficit base rather than as assets to be supported and invested in.

- Include volunteering a real life progression.
- Need for greater awareness raising of the high quality work, and recognition of the expertise of ESF providers.
- Recognising that standing still in skills develop is ok.
- No sectoral approach with industry/business to support holistic 'Inclusive Employment' agenda. Need to move beyond support org/single business link.
- Collaboration rather than competition. A symptom of the competitive nature of the funding.
- Challenges in accessing supports across providers coming in and out of system in the progression towards employment.
- Lack of transport.
- More education on disability for match funders.
- Cultural expectation that learning disabled citizens have a right to a productive, meaningful working life.
- Digital training and support at all levels.
- Determination of what currency of hours constitutes a "job" for labour market stats
- We need to recognise value and importance of pre job and post job support.
- Programmes not designed for people with significant disabilities and doesn't recognise a job under 16 hours. We must focus on good jobs and how it benefits the individual.
- Belfast-centric focus on job creation and neglect of places like Derry and other disadvantaged areas in NI.
- The community sector is an invaluable tool in reengaging communities post pandemic.
- Must start to think of this as intelligent commissioning rather than another funding programme. Funds must be used to target the real need and focused on social value.
- A big question about how this links with any Employability NI programme.
- Gaps in equality of provision in some geographical areas and significant duplication in others.
- Gaps in support for women to reskill or enter work.
- Need to realise the value of the C & V sector in holistic approach to people development.
- Support for people in danger of losing their jobs.
- Big gap in strategic focus to tackling poverty.
- Self-employment support.
- Gap in really mapping out the link between economic recovery and wellbeing/inclusion. Any future programme needs to address that both are needed to make progress.
- Gap in additional support required for individuals who have multiple challenges i.e. cultural and disability.
- The more we ape the FE sector by giving out certs as opposed to dealing with presenting and developing issues. Tailored, wraparound approach is needed.
- We need to be able to support and count participants who get a job and lose it within programme. Currently they can't come back onto programme and this is an issue with levels of redundancy likely to be coming back down the line.
- Need to reengage people in communities again.
- I think current programme works well for our cohort but there is a gap in our ability to share participants across programmes.
- Unit price limits ability to deliver quality.
- Still gaps in programmes to address prejudice.
- Q: Is there a need for ESF type projects with so much mainstream? A: evaluations e.g. GT show the additionality of ESF projects and their need - otherwise how do mainstream provision bring those furthest removed closer to workplace?
- Big gaps in opportunities and access for people who live in deprived communities.

Full list of questions generated on themes (selected questions in bold)

User-centred Programme Design

- How do we ensure collaboration between organisations to ensure that the right service is offered to participants?
- How can we ensure that the lessons of effective funding delivery learned in the course of the current ESF programme are carried forward and augmented through incentivisation schemes to ensure continuity of delivery?
- How can we ensure that interventions are specific? (needs alignment of systems), no internal barriers, across different funders? Can we learn from other countries? How do we avoid duplication of provision?
- How do we ensure that the programme design meets needs rather than categories, i.e. truly person centred and informed choice?
- What (framework) systems, structures, key policy decisions are required to ensure we meet the needs of end users? How can we involve end users in this process to influence and inform design, particularly re those who experience barriers to employment and learning?
- Do we just cherry pick from existing provision or is there a need to expand the offer?
- How do we create safe places for facilitated employer/lived experience/end conversations to better understand multiple barriers people can face and encourage employers to consider increased levels of support and flexibility to help?
- **How do we use the learning we have to ensure that the needs of end users are at the centre of design thinking and are addressed in the design process at an early stage, that means interventions and measurement tools are fit for purpose and reflect participant needs for the future?**
- Is there a need to design multiple programmes to meet various needs?
- How do we ensure the programme is aligned to labour market opportunities?
- How do we ensure that the end users and their support agencies voice is continuously heard on programme design and bureaucracy/barriers minimised?
- How do we ensure that there is clarity among all stakeholders on Programme remit and linkages with other provision and support?
- How do we get the public sector bodies to establish a better mechanism for funding of this Programme that provides for a centralised funding and governance regime that simplifies administration?
- How do we address the disconnect between NI Executive one-year budget settlements with what needs to be a multi-annual programme with financial stability for all?

Collaboration

- How can we ensure better connections between delivery partners and organisations that provide support in order to provide sustainable positive outcomes?
- How do we incentivise providers to work together to promote collaboration, taking account of the fact that they have to compete for funding?
- How do we ensure multi-stakeholder collaboration within what will be a competitive bidding process?
- How do we build true collaboration between VCSE groups working in this space to reduce programme 'churn' and competition for numbers ensuring people really are on right programme at right time for them?

- How do we ensure the most appropriate people are involved with the development of the new programme at the most appropriate times?
- How do we build collaboration and user involvement into the Programme and will this need to be demonstrated?
- How do we continue to encourage, capture, cascade and share best practice and optimal pathway learning environment for users?
- How do we engage industry/employer membership groups and improve collaboration with VCSE providers/Govt/councils?
- **How do we build on the collaborative relationships that have been developed between the department and delivery bodies and employers under the current ESF Programme to further enhance effectiveness?**
- **How do we report and measure on collaboration, (project and interdepartmental level) and should we make this a programme KPI?**
- How do we ensure the lessons learned during Covid are not lost in new programme design, particularity in respect of collaborations with employers but also with participants?
- How do we ensure that we minimise overlap of service provision?
- How can we ensure a collaborative and joined-up approach to delivering programme outcomes by the different government departments involved and project promoters?

Awareness

- How do we build in various education providers from early years to ensure that whole system is integrated? How do we ensure transition/clear pathways?
- How do we define and demonstrate soft outcomes and how we measure quality of service provision?
- How do we ensure awareness of the new programme and its contribution to PfG outcomes, and wider government strategies amongst those responsible for these, so as to ensure the programme is mainstreamed into domestic policy?
- How do we build a comprehensive road-map of policy and provision that assists in the design and delivery of complementary and progressive interventions?
- How do we ensure that there is clarity among all stakeholders on Programme remit and linkages with other provision and support?
- How do we promote awareness of this programme that is directed at people who don't (currently) have their needs met by mainstream government programmes?
- How do we make employers aware of the benefits of creating a diverse workforce that is representative of society?
- How do we raise awareness of support services available and engage with all sectors/ providers/ end-users (e.g. pr/comms)?
- How do we ensure we don't have a scatter-gun approach? i.e. that all providers work in harmony?
- How do we raise awareness of the benefits of the programme to those individuals who have not been engaged to date but fall within the programmes remit?
- How will we ensure employer engagement beyond CSR as a critical success factor for the programme?
- How can we get all government departments, agencies to look beyond silos and buy into an outcomes-based approach for individuals?
- How will we market the USP of this programme to government and its added-value approach to supporting skills development and access to employment?
- How do we promote awareness of this programme that is directed at people who don't (currently) have their needs met by mainstream government programmes?

- **How do we build a comprehensive road-map of policy and provision that assists in the design and delivery of complementary and progressive interventions and raises awareness?**
- How do we communicate the USP of this programme to the Public Sector and employers and its added-value approach to supporting skills development and access to employment and the delivery of PfG outcomes?
- How can we create a map of the causes and the effect/impact of those causes to individuals using the programme and share that awareness with other public sector bodies?

Funding

- **How do we get the public sector bodies to establish a better mechanism for funding of this Programme that provides for a centralised funding and governance regime that simplifies administration?**
- How do we address the disconnect between NI Executive one-year budget settlements with what needs to be a multi-annual programme with financial stability for all?
- **How do we ensure security of funding and sufficient time and flexibility to work with people at own pace, achieve outcomes?**
- How can we ensure acknowledgement of currency of outcomes and ensure full cost recovery?
- How will government ensure that protect core services, not just project funding - investment that makes a difference, not 'nice to have'?
- How do we get improve the range of outcomes. Soft and hard. The right KPI's and how these are funded?
- How can the sector demonstrate VFM and overall benefits of investment over lifetime of programme, including delivery of PfG targets?
- How do we source alternative funding streams and address issues in relation to matched funding?
- How can we incentivise employers - lessons from Apprenticeship programme perhaps especially if offer sustained work?
- How can we ensure that the lessons of effective funding delivery learned in the course of the current ESF programme are carried forward and ensure continuity of delivery?
- How do we ascertain what the UKSPF contribution will be towards the Programme?
- How can we get interdepartmental agreement to fund support for continuum of service to reflect changing needs of individuals throughout their lives?
- How can we add to the apprenticeship offer to encourage employers to support disadvantaged young people?
- How do we ensure that the executive prioritise investment and subsequently make sure that funding is joined up in a complementary manner across departments?
- How do we ensure the voices of users are placed at the heart of how the Programme is developed and implemented?

Accessibility

- How can integrate services more effectively with a Hub approach?
- How can we ensure that individuals are made aware of the programmes available in their area?
- How can we ensure that pathways are given equal status to ensure accessibility for all (e.g. new and emerging sectors, to include creative industries)?
- **How do we build a programme that has sufficient flexibility to address the needs of a diverse range of people with complex requirements, but that still achieves tangible results and meets the needs of individual users taking into consideration regional equity?**

- How can we dovetail public sector support to identify those in need early and seamlessly support them so as to avoid them falling so far behind requiring greater intervention and support?
- How can we support and engage all employers to remove barriers in recruitment practices to open up more training/job opportunities to the most disadvantaged? e.g. recruiting for potential and attitude and training for the rest versus skills/qualifications?
- How do we make it easier for participants to get involved, removing benefit traps. Multiple access points. Good promotion of impact (appropriate social media platforms)?
- How should future delivery respond to the post-Covid world of greater use of online platforms to reach people?
- Digital Access - what additional / alternative measures are needed where digital access is poor and ensuring a person centred approach?
- Can we create an Employers Forum for Reducing Reoffending, a business-led group of employers dedicated to exploring ways of employing people with convictions?
- What do we need to do to support early intervention to prevent NEET?
- How can we ensure that provision meets local needs (sectoral/population etc.) without compromising quality of service?
- How do we address barriers that prevent the most disadvantaged from accessing employment and/or training?
- How do we ensure there is a timely, proactive, sustainable and long-term approach to accessing support and training?
- How do we introduce a flexible, adaptable programme that can be tailored to the needs of areas, individuals and bridges gaps between current and mainstream provision?
- How should future delivery respond to the post-Covid world of greater use of online platforms to reach people?
- How do we bridge the gap between this type of intervention and the mainstream provision offered through other programmes and education establishments?

Evidence-based Decisions

- How do we develop a system that better captures the journey and progression of individuals across all interventions?
- How do we set measures that reflect how lives are transformed?
- **How do we map provision and delivery in order to identify gaps and track impact and engagement for individuals and stakeholders?**
- What review/evaluation measures do we need to build in to ensure programmes can be adapted for continued success?
- How do we capture impact employing from disadvantaged groups has on the labour market/economy? Overall impact of this new programme on employers/economy. E.G. benefits usually stay within employer offering the opportunity, story of positive impact not always shared. Need to measure impacts on employers and how this helps support the economy/wider society?
- How do we ensure information/ data sharing is facilitated and enhanced between organisation and departments?
- How do we ensure we balance data-driven programme design with an inclusive person-centred ethos?
- How do we reach agreement on the hard and soft measures that all delivery partners can sign up to?
- How do we decipher the efficacy / impact of individual programmes when they are delivered in parallel within on another?
- How do we ensure that programme design is agile and can respond to change?

- Do we need a universal IT system to collect matching data on participants, achievements, outcomes?
- How do we ensure programmes can flex easily to respond to changing needs and opportunities in labour market?
- How do we ensure that we reach those hardest to reach and in greatest need of support?
- How can we ensure that our delivery partners are delivering outcomes that fit with PfG (i.e. how can this be demonstrated/measured)?
- How do we develop a system that tracks and measures the journey of individuals and allows for evidence-based decision-making on pathways, to ensure we measure the appropriate and agreed range of indicators, ensuring non-bias of evidence?
- How do we get a comprehensive map of provision and services across NI order to better define the policy gap and ensure that the programme adds maximum value and avoid unnecessary duplication?
- How do we ensure programme decisions are based on delivering a broad and comprehensive range of social and labour market inclusion outcomes (not just narrow economic development indicators)?
- How do we report outcomes in an effective and efficient manner including distance travelled journey, multiple interventions tracked inside and outside of programmes?
- How do we track impacts for all key stakeholders, not just service users, e.g. employers? Evidencing impact will lead to more engagement and opportunities being opened up by employers for individuals?

Contact

Innovation Lab
Public Sector Reform Division
Department of Finance
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Belfast
BT3 9ED

e-mail: ilab@finance-ni.gov.uk



follow us: [@iLab_NI](https://twitter.com/iLab_NI)



search for: [Innovation Lab NI](#)

Cover Photograph by [Nick Fewings](#) on [Unsplash](#)