
Evaluation of Pathway to Success Final Report: Executive Summary

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Pathway to Success Infographic

Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) through Durham County Council, Pathway to Success aimed to support out of work residents of County Durham to access employment in key or growth sectors through training, qualifications, vocational licence or pot-employment support.

Delivered through a partnership of local providers, led by New College Durham, with partners including:

- Bishop Auckland College
- Central Recruitment
- Evolution
- Foundation of Light
- Gem Partnership
- Orange Box Training
- SMARTT
- Sports Scape
- East Durham College
- Derwentside College



£1.257m
of UKPSF
funding



11 local
training
partners

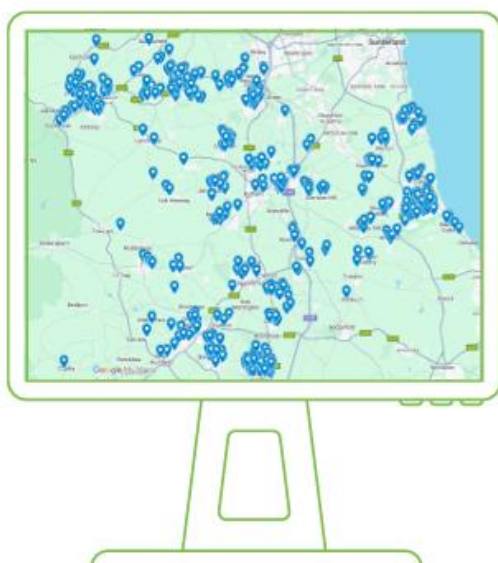


572
learners
supported



22
courses
delivered

Learners reached across County Durham (map showing learners by residential location)



Supporting those most in need:



unemployed



from the 20% most deprived
communities in England

Outcomes:



of learners
achieved their
learning aim



of learners
supported
into positive
destinations
(employment
or additional
education/
training)

82

learners
progressing
into education
or training



336

previously
out of work
residents
supported into
employment
across
175 local
employers



Type of
employment for
those moving
into work

- 63% Permanent full-time employment
- 23% Temporary full-time employment
- 11% Permanent part-time employment
- 3% Temporary part-time employment



Employment
found in a range
of local priority
sectors

- 34% Advanced Manufacturing
- 14% Construction
- 1% Digital & Creative
- 12% Health & Health Science
- 1% Low Carbon Economy
- 29% Other
- 5% Tourism & Leisure
- 5% Transport & Logistics



Executive Summary

This is the Executive Summary of the final evaluation of the Pathway to Success (PTS) project which was funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) through Durham County Council (DCC) and delivered through a partnership of local providers, led by New College Durham¹.

The evaluation has been delivered by Centrifuge Consulting and covers the project to the end of March 2025. It should be noted that the project has been approved for funding through the transition year of UKSPF to the end of March 2026.

What is PTS?

Pathway to Success (PTS) aimed to support out of work residents² of County Durham to access employment in key or growth sectors through training, qualification, vocational licence and post-employment support. It focussed on areas of deprivation and rural communities and aimed to address employers' recruitment challenges and skills shortages while providing access to work for Durham residents that experience disadvantage or barriers to employment.

PTS was developed to focus on the following key growth sectors, which are closely aligned with the High Impact Sectors that form the focus of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for County Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland:

- Low Carbon Economy
- Transport and Logistics
- Digital and Creative
- Tourism and Leisure
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Construction
- Health and Health Science³

The project offered support, including:

- Direct delivery of training, qualifications and vocational licences
- Identifying skills needs and referring participants to other training outside the project, where available
- Added value support such as soft skills development, individual needs analysis and identification of barriers to progression
- Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and support for career progression
- Financial support for travel or childcare

¹ Partners include Bishop Auckland College, Central Recruitment, Evolution, Foundation of Light, Gem Partnership, Orange Box Training, SMARTT, Sports Scape, East Durham College and Derwentside College.

² Support was also available for economically active residents but was limited to those in vulnerable employment, under employed, contracted for very low hrs or on a zero hour contracts.

³ the local lead bidder was able to identify and target support at other key sectors, where labour market intelligence identifies acute demand.



The project delivered a wide range of training with considerable specialism among providers in terms of the type of training and courses delivered. For example, associated legislative training was delivered by only three providers⁴ and accounted for the majority of learning delivered by two of these providers. Analysis of the database provided to the evaluation team suggests that only five providers offered vocational licences of which the majority (78%) were delivered by one provider.

A total of 22 different training courses have been delivered⁵, with the focus of these ranging from health & safety or first aid to climate change or retail or manufacturing skills. Consultation with DCC highlighted a particularly strong focus on health and safety and first aid training in the early stages of the project so partners were challenged to ensure this did not continue to be the primary focus of training; and data presented in the evaluation shows that the training delivered covered a much wider range of themes and areas by the end of the project. However, it is important to stress that a significant proportion of health and safety courses were sector specific, such as Level 1 Award in Health & Safety within a Construction Environment (accounting for 12% of all learners and 42% of all health and safety learners).

Analysis of training by level shows that the majority of training was delivered at Level 2 (79%), with 9% at Level 3 and 12% at Level 1.

Outcomes

The project supported 572 learners (96% of which were unemployed on signing up for support) from across County Durham and performed well at reaching disadvantaged residents and communities with 31% of learners living in areas ranked among the 20% most deprived in England.

Dispersed delivery across County Durham and training outside of usual hours were important to securing the engagement, participation and progression of a significant proportion of supported learners.

Participants interviewed by the evaluation team were asked the reasons for accessing training through PTS, with analysis of these responses showing that the most commonly cited reasons related to needing specific training, qualification or licence to obtain employment in a particular role or in a particular sector or with a particular employer. In some instances, the learner already had employment provided they got the training, whereas in others they had the opportunity to apply for a job and the training was either an essential requirement for the job or would put them in a better position to obtain the job.

Importantly 98% of learners achieved their learning aim and completed their course with 59% moving into employment following support and a further 14% moving into education or training. Additionally, the evaluation found evidence of some learners that had not been supported into employment subsequently moving into work at a later date.

⁴ Orange Box Training; SMARTT; and Evolution.

⁵ Based on our analysis of the data and the removal of duplicates due to inconsistent labelling of providers

Output and Outcome Overview

Output	Achieved
Number of people receiving support to gain a vocational licence	572

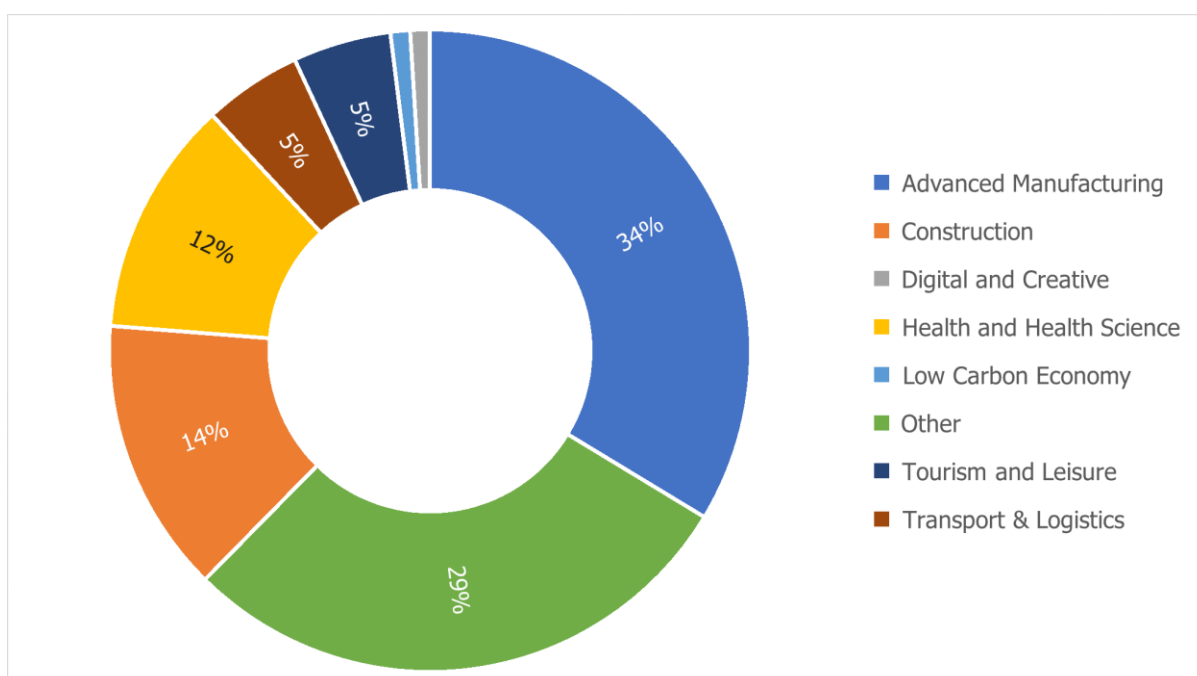
Outcome	Achieved
Number of people in employment, including self-employment, following support	336 (59% of all learners)
Number of people in education/training	82 (14% of all learners)

Of the 336 unemployed residents moving into employment:

- 86% have entered full-time employment, with 63% in permanent full-time employment and 23% in temporary full-time employment;
- 14% have entered part-time employment, with 3% in temporary part-time employment and 11% permanent.

These formerly unemployed residents have moved into a range of different priority sectors across the County, with the diagram showing that advanced manufacturing was the sector which the largest proportion of learners moved into (34%), construction the next largest of the target sectors (14%) and health and health science the third largest (12%). A total of 29% moved into other sectors.

Sector Profile of those Moving into Employment



Interestingly individuals accessing Level 1 training were more likely to move into employment than learners accessing training at any other level, with 87% of learners trained at Level 1 moving into employment compared to 56% at Level 2 and 44% at Level



3. Further analysis shows that all Level 1 learners undertook a very specific course, the Level 1 Award in Health & Safety within a Construction Environment, which is needed for the Green CSCS card which in turn is required to work on a construction site. This demonstrates the importance of the actual training rather than the level of training. It also demonstrates the importance of health and safety training in specific contexts, particularly where it is sector specific and is integral to enable learners to access particular employment opportunities. Indeed, this Level 1 Health & Safety course accounted for around three quarters (74%) of all the learners that progressed to employment in the construction sector.

By contrast those accessing Level 3 training were more likely to move into education or training on leaving (22% compared to 14% of all learners). The majority of Level 3 learners accessed a Level 3 Award in First Aid at Work (88% of Level 3 learners accessed this qualification), of which 48% moved into employment, 26% into training and 26% were just recorded as having gained their qualification.

The type of training accessed did not make a substantive difference to the likelihood of learners moving into employment, with 62% of those accessing associated legislative training moving into work while 58% of those accessing an award, certificate or diploma moved into work.

Providers had differing degrees of success at transitioning or supporting learners into employment, although those providers with lower proportions of learners moving into employment had higher proportions of learners moving into education or training on leaving their course, demonstrating a different form of progression.

Project data also shows that older learners (aged 60+) were notably less likely to progress into employment through the project, with 39% doing so compared with 57% of 19-25 year olds and 62% of 26-59 year olds. This may relate to potential additional support needs for older learners.

Around 175 businesses employed learners from the project⁶. Existing provider-employer relationships proved important in a number of instances although the project did also enable providers to develop relationships with new employers.

Key Learning and Recommendations

Focus on Outcomes

The project brought a strong focus on outcomes and this was highlighted by one provider as what made PTS different from other projects they have been involved in delivering. Importantly providing a clear pathway to employment the project helps to directly address the barriers to employment that are often a consequence of or exacerbated by being out of work, such as wellbeing, confidence and mental health.

Recommendation: Successor projects should sustain a strong focus on outcomes, particularly in terms of employment. This again requires the involvement of partners with strong relationships with local employers

⁶ It should be noted that this is based on cleaning the original database to identify where employers have been labelled in different ways and includes at least 8 recruitment agencies.



Flexibility and Accessibility

Flexibility and making training accessible through localised delivery were key to the success of the project. Such approaches can clearly play a key role in engaging particular communities and tailoring provision to specific local employment opportunities; and embedding and emphasising such approaches should be considered for any future successor projects.

Recommendation: Successor projects must be focussed on flexibility to enable providers to deliver the training needed by local sectors and employment opportunities with a clear requirement for providers to make training accessible through dispersed and community focussed delivery.

Wider or Wrap-around Support

The evaluation found there may be some inconsistencies in the wider support offered by different providers. Consequently, consideration should be given around the minimum support offer made available to participants and how this is evidenced and delivered consistently across the partnership.

Recommendation: Successor projects should ensure there is a minimum standard of additional support offered through each provider and that the offering and take-up of such support is evidenced and delivered consistently.

Exit Pathways and Signposting

Importantly the project secured positive outcomes for a significant proportion of learners with the strong relationships between providers and local employers often key to this. However, while the majority of learners felt the PTS project had made a positive impact on their lives a small proportion felt it had made no difference or had a negative impact. Importantly these learners had accessed support and training as it had been aligned to a specific job opportunity that they had not gone on to secure and in some cases, they felt they had little to no support following this. This highlights potentially important learning on the level of aftercare or signposting to additional support for some learners.

Recommendation: Successor projects should ensure that those not progressing to positive outcomes are clearly signposted to other support projects or activities that are able to provide further support to enable them to progress into employment.

Digital and Creative Sector

The Digital and Creative sector had only 2 learners moving into employment within the sector, with no qualifications delivered which entirely related to roles specific to the sector. Consequently, inclusion of the sector and/or how the sector is targeted should be considered within successor programmes to PTS.

Recommendation: Successor projects should consider how best to target or support the sector and whether a more specialist training provider is necessary to enable such a project to support this important sector; with consideration also required as to whether this is an appropriate sector for a project like PTS to target.



Timescales

The primary challenge identified for PTS was the relatively tight timescale available to deliver the project. This inevitably resulted in a significant amount of backloading of delivery, which in turn restricts the ability of a project to fully support learner progressions.

Recommendation: Where possible successor projects must be funded for longer periods.

Data Capture

Monitoring and evaluation and ultimately future projects could benefit from the collection of additional data from learners and employers, where providers have a close working relationship with them. Examples include pre-conditions, in terms of whether the training is directly linked to a guaranteed interview or guaranteed job and to understand more about the employer's relationship with the provider, where they have one. There is also a potential gap in relation to outcomes, with the project not collecting evidence on the distance travelled by learners, in terms of their progression towards the labour market. Such a measure can help to demonstrate the impact of the project on those learners not progressing to a 'hard' outcome such as employment or further education and training and should be considered for the successor project to PTS.

Recommendation: Successor projects should consider including additional data collection to capture evidence of whether or not training is directly linked to a specific interview or job opportunity; whether or not training or outcomes build on an pre-existing employer relationship; and measure a small number of soft outcomes in terms of distance travelled.

Data Input

The evaluation process has revealed inconsistencies in the way data is captured or inputted within the project database (which is derived from Continuous Learner Logs). These inconsistencies were found across, and even within, different providers in terms of how entries for a number of variables are inputted. This includes the name of qualifications, with examples of multiple different entries for the same qualification from a single provider (one example of a provider labelling the same qualification four different ways in the database); employer entries with the single employers being labelled inconsistently; sectors with some businesses being labelled as 'other' when they could have been classified within one of the target sectors; and missing data with high numbers of missing entries for data fields or variables such as the role of the supported employee.

Recommendation: DCC should consider how best to ensure the quality and consistency of data entry from providers.

Learner Contact

On registration learners are provided with the option to select how they would like to be contacted in the future. While this is good practice in one sense it does create additional challenges for learner follow-up as demonstrated by the experiences of the evaluation team, with those learners opting to be contacted by telephone calls much easier to engage in the evaluation interview process than those who had to be contacted by text message or email.



Recommendation: DCC should consider ensuring providers have telephone contact as a default option for communication that has to be opted out of as such contact can be key, particularly where evaluation feedback is sought.