

Connecting Communities

Report of outcomes and impacts of the City of London



September 2023

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1. Introduction

Connecting Communities is an £18 million, place-based, voluntary employment support and skills programme funded by the Greater London Council (GLA) and the European Social Fund (ESF) of which the Education Strategic Unit (ESU) received £669,000 to deliver the programme's outcomes and impacts over a 21-month period (18 months for the core programme with a three-month extension).

Emphasising intensive, personalised, and context-specific support, Connecting Communities sought to:

- Build personal resilience and social networks to foster positive behavioural and attitudinal changes towards work
- Increase employment and skills training
- Work with local businesses to boost the recruitment and progression of disadvantaged individuals.

Connecting Communities was a community-based programme designed to help central-London residents to access high quality employment and training opportunities.

Managed by Central London Forward (CLF), Connecting Communities was delivered by local authorities across central London and Ingeus¹ UK. It provided support both for unemployed and inactive residents across the 12 central London boroughs: Camden, the City of London, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth, and Westminster.

Connecting Communities officially began on February 14, 2022, and finished on September 30, 2023. The contract duration was 21 months, with 15 months for delivery and 6 months for the provision of in-work support and collection of evidence (sustained employment etc). Connecting Communities was match funded with the DWP funded JETS contract). Connecting Communities was a free-of-charge employment service that helped Londoners aged 18 and over to upskill, reskill and get into employment. Connecting Communities was an innovative work-focused pathway designed to support the hardest to help members of society to move into sustainable employment after the pandemic. The programme was for unemployed people, economically inactive people, and those hardest to help groups with multiple and complex barriers (e.g., ex-offenders, individuals with drug/alcohol problems, individuals without literacy/numeracy skills, individuals facing homelessness, NEETS, lone parents and individuals with health and disability issues).

2. Aims

The overall goal of Connecting Communities was to improve the lives of participants by working together to ensure they can access the skills, jobs and support required to benefit from Central London's dynamic economy. The ultimate impact of this goal was to make a difference in their lives by moving them into sustainable employment or make progress towards work. This goal was achieved through five main aims, namely to:

- Provide a wide range of services for people of working age
- Promote gender equality and equal opportunities

¹ Ingeus deliver services across employment, health, justice, and youth. Helping people find jobs, improve skills, and support their health and wellbeing. <https://ingeus.co.uk>

- Promote sustainable and equality employment
- Promote social justice by combating poverty and any discrimination
- Provide help for those who find work but need continued support

These aims were implemented through a series of more specific objectives including:

- Ensuring people have greater exposure to, and are better prepared for, the world of work by increasing the number and diversity of businesses prepared to support people's careers journey.
- Improving relationships and understanding of London's employment opportunities
- Generating the connection between London's school, colleges and youth sectors with liveries, and employers, particularly SMEs and micro-businesses.
- Enabling people to develop the fusion skills needed for success in the world of work.
- Identifying, creating, and supporting employment skills and work opportunities for young people.
- Providing a single point of contact for information, both online and in person for liveries, education and training providers and people seeking support.

While the goals, aims and objectives of the programme were clear from the outset of the programme, one of the challenges of Connecting Communities was that both the aims and the 'target groups' were frequently changed by EPMU, and so changed by CLF to reflect this changed focus. For example, initially a key priority group as identified from the Boroughs was to include an intermediate labour market (ILM) element to the programme. Initially £1.2 million was ringfenced against each of the three priority groups for this ILM element. However, EPMU stated that they did not believe that ILM support was necessary for 1.1 participants (closest to the Labour market), and that 1.2 participants (NEETS – 18 to 24yrs) were adequately supported by Kickstart, and so the priority moved to 1.4 participants (those furthest from the Labour market). However, towards the second half of the programme, the focus again shifted back to the 1.2 participants (NEETS – 18 to 24yrs). Given that the whole programme only had a total 'live' period of around 18 months (which was later extended to 21 months – see Section 11) these changing priorities and aims caused significant challenges to the local authority delivery partners including challenges for the Connecting Communities team at the City of London.

3. Context

Connecting Communities was bid for during the time of the Covid pandemic. There was an assumption that the economic impact of Covid would be significant and that particular groups of people might be negatively impacted as the economy recovered. The economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic hit the capital hard, triggering a significant increase in unemployment in central London. The claimant count across the 12 CLF boroughs rose by 162% since March 2020.

During the 18 months of the Connecting Communities programme there was a changeable and largely unpredictable pattern of employment recovery. This meant that targets and aims kept shifting to try to keep pace with the dynamic nature of the situation. There were a number of employment and skills trends that occurred during the period of the programme. At times there were even contradictory trends, such as increased employment but also increases in people 'opting out' of education and employment. The following points summarise the main trends that informed the context in which Connecting Communities operated.

- **More part-time and contractual work** and this is reflected in the job opportunities being offered to our Participants.
- **A decrease in advertised vacancies** but still above pre-pandemic levels.
- **The number of people unemployed for up to 12 months increased**, driven by those aged 16 to 24 years.
- **The number of people unemployed for more than 12 months decreased.**
- The rise in unemployment is being driven by more people leaving economic inactivity. **Economic inactivity** due to long-term ill health, early retirement and education appear to be falling slightly, although economic inactivity continues to remain well above its pre-pandemic levels, including fewer people entering work. Only around a fifth of all of those who are economically inactive state that they would like a job at the moment.
- A record number of people are out of work due to **long-term health conditions**. The number of people off work due to ill health has risen by 440 thousand since the start of the pandemic.
- There have been **large falls in student numbers**.
- **Job vacancies** remain strongest in public services, professional services, and administrative roles.
- There is a slight **weakening in the labour market**, with vacancies continuing to fall with fewer job openings in private sector services, redundancies rising, and short-term unemployment up.
- There are **fewer 'entry level' roles** for those (re)joining the labour market, and potential risks around mismatches in people's skills.
- **Labour demand** remains high especially for more highly skilled roles.
- There are widening employment 'gaps' for disabled people, older people, and young people outside of full-time education, meaning that the more **disadvantaged people** in the labour market are being increasingly left behind. Data on employment rates for disabled people continues to be disappointing, with the employment 'gap' to non-disabled people remaining wider than it was before the pandemic and with disabled people still two-and-a-half times more likely to be out of work than their non-disabled peers.
- **Employment gaps are also wider for older people** and for young people outside of full-time education.
- The rise of **automation and digitisation** means that workers may need to retrain and reskill multiple times in their lifetimes.
- Rising levels of **self-employment** combined with increasing interest from young people in pursuing entrepreneurial careers requires innovative approaches to skills delivery, as individuals have fewer opportunities to access employer-led training.
- The **global skills gap**, driven by population-level trends and changes in technology, means that eighty-seven per cent of CEOs say they are experiencing skills gaps now or expect to soon (McKinsey, 2020).
- There is a **'skills mismatch,'** between employer demands and the skills of potential employees.
- **Inequality is increasing** with more than seventy per cent of children from the richest tenth of families earn five good GCSEs, compared with fewer than thirty per cent in the poorest households (IFS, 2022).
- Those people who are **lacking basic skills** are least likely to participate in formal learning (Demos, 2008).

- The **skills training market is increasingly fragmented** as many actors enter the market.
- London's **youth unemployment** has increased by 55% since the start of the pandemic. A total of 105,000 Londoners aged 16 to 25 (21%) are registered unemployed with almost 1 in 4 London women aged 16 to 24 unemployed.
- **Apprenticeships funding will increase** to £2.7 billion by 2024-25 – the first increase since 2019-20.
- **Robust growth** in nominal pay (of around 6.5%) while real pay continues to fall due to very high inflation.

Specifically, in regard to the London context, there are particular elements that influenced both the implementation of Connecting Communities and the future recommendation for the sustainability of the programme and the learnings that have emerged from the programme. The vast majority of London boroughs (88%) provide a local employment support service. On average, a borough's estimated annual budget for employment services was £1,396,929 – slightly less than their budget in 2021/22 (£1,538,826). However, it varied between £75,000 and £5.4m. Boroughs identified Section 106 (69%), core council spending (48%) and the European Social Fund (ESF - 59%) as key sources of funding for their employment services. In terms of staff, on average boroughs employ 22 people, ranging from a borough employing one and another employing 70 staff members. The number of people using borough employment services annually also ranges significantly between 230 and 3,200, with an average of 1,533. The most common services offered by all, or most boroughs include access to local vacancies (100%), interview preparation/coaching (100%), help with CV and job applications (100%), employment advisors (97%) and support to improve skills (93%). Most London borough officers (85%) said that they changed their employment service in response to local skills and labour market shortages in the last year. All (100%) of the boroughs with an employment service said that their Adult and Community Learning Service (ACL) is linked, and two-thirds (67%) said they provide skills support to residents in addition to the ACL service.

4. Central London Forward

Central London Forward (CLF) is a partnership of the 12 central London local authorities. CLF works together with its member authorities and with other stakeholders to support inclusive and sustainable growth in central London; so that our economy thrives, and our residents benefit from the opportunities this creates. CLF deliver large scale employment and skills programmes across central London.

The City of London Corporation is the lead authority in Central London Forward (CLF), the strategic sub-regional partnership of the 12 Central London Boroughs (Camden, City of London, Haringey, Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Southwark, and Wandsworth). The partnership is legally constituted and has a long and established track record of working in partnership to deliver ESF-funded employment and skills support.

As a strategic partnership, Central London Forward was uniquely placed to ensure that Connecting Communities makes a difference to the residents of the 12 boroughs that require the most support, helping them move into sustainable employment, or to make progress towards work. CLF worked with the member authorities to develop the Connecting Communities programme. CLF submitted the bid to the GLA for European Social Fund to resource Connecting Communities.

5. Finance

A total budget of £18 million had been secured for Connecting Communities of which the City of London's Education Strategy Unit (ESU) received £669,000 to deliver the programme's outcomes and impacts over 18 months. The proposal did not seek additional funds or resources from the City Corporation.

Connecting Communities is a match funded (with the DWP funded JETS contract) ESF project. Staff Costs per Borough including on-costs was £477,241.56. This was based on there being 1 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Business Manager at £60,000 each, 4 FTE Caseworkers at £50,000 each, 1 Employer Engagement Lead at £50,000, and 1 Administrator at £30,000. All roles covered the 15-month duration of the contract. Some roles were extended for the full 21 months.

An additional amount of indirect costs funding was provided to cover staff and participant costs. The additional funding (£190,896.62 per borough) was split across a Flexible Support Fund to help participants with essential costs relating to moving towards or into work, additional project or programme costs, childcare provision for single parents, and ICT equipment for staff. This meant that there was an average participant 'additional' expenditure of £33.50 per participant, some people required zero expenditure while other people may require higher amounts. Any expenditure over £1000 on an individual needed to also have approval from CLF. While initially unspent indirect costs were to be returned to EPMU, it was agreed that this could remain with each borough to continue to be allocated to supporting participants into work. The funds are to be used for client support i.e., travel, interview clothing, CSCS and more, but can also be used for related activity spend such as recruitment or health and wellbeing events. In reality, *"Very few participants bother to claim travel and the average cost of travel across those who have claimed is £209.29."*

The CRM (APTEM – See Section 7.5) was managed centrally by Central London Forward and cost £252,000.

6. Accountability

Connecting Communities was managed through Central London Forward. Central London Forward (CLF) is a partnership of the 12 central London local authorities, hosted by City of London. They collaborate with their member authorities and with other stakeholders to support inclusive and sustainable growth in central London; so that our economy thrives, and residents benefit from the opportunities this creates. CLF delivers large scale employment and skills programmes across central London.

CLF's programme of work – including Connecting Communities – is overseen by the CLF Programmes Board. The Programme Board is made up of the chief executives of the 12 member authorities, and it meets quarterly. The Programmes Board approves applications for any new programmes and oversees performance on existing programmes. CLF reports on performance on Connecting Communities to the European Project Management Unit at the GLA, which is the accountable body for European Social Fund in London.

Within Connecting Communities, each of the 12 partners, including the City of London, reports on programme performance to the programme's Senior Leads group. This group met monthly to review progress, adapt targets to needs and ensure the quality of the delivery. This programme did not employ an independent, external evaluation as it was not required by GLA/EPMU, and the CLF was

not able to cover this cost from the programme budget. There may be in the future a wider evaluation of London’s ESF programmes, which would include Connecting Communities, but the possibility of this evaluation has not been decided.

The Liveries have continued to support skills development through the Livery Skills Initiative (see section 8.3 of this report). The governance of the Livery Skills Initiative is with the Livery Committee. The collaboration partners, including the Livery, are separate legal entities with their own decision-making processes and accountability.

The City of London’s Connecting Communities programme was delivered within the Education Strategy Unit (ESU) and addressed targets outlined in the Skills Strategy 2018-2023. As such, regular, for information reports, were also presented to the Education Board which has oversight of the current Skills Strategy.

7. Processes

a. Marketing and promotion

Connecting Communities used various ways to promote the programme, including leaflets, promotional events, Jobcentre Plus referrals, referrals from other organisations, social media, and word of mouth. Social media recruits tended to have higher levels of skill, digital literacy, and internet connectivity.

“We need to start using a range of social media and other channels”

The limitations of overreliance on ‘online’ promotional methods were evident in the following quote:

“Social media has allowed the programme to reach a larger array of customers, future programmes should not rely on it exclusively. Engagement and marketing strategies need to be informed by the target groups of participants, and considerations of the places they go (and the times they go there), and the social media platforms they use.”

Instead of favouring a single marketing approach, a wide range of different approaches were used. The marketing tactics deployed were generally successful in marketing to and engaging with individuals out of work, as the following quotes indicate:

“Using different promotional methods proved effective. Future programmes should use a combination of marketing collaterals and community events for promotional purposes.”

“Differentiation is key as evidenced by the effectiveness of varied strategies to engage the in-work group and long-term unemployed groups used by providers.”

Awareness raising with marginalised communities extended the network support and reach of Connecting Communities. While there were delays in activating marketing support for Connecting Communities within the City of London, once this began, grassroots advertising and marketing aimed at raising awareness for both internal and external stakeholders was successful and generated interest in the City of London Corporation and within the local community, as these quotes exemplify:

“Leaflet content has been sent to the marketing company and we are awaiting the design. Final artwork should be with us 4th Feb, with printing and distribution scheduled for mid-late February.”

“We have a 5,500-mailing going out from CoL “social services” team helping residents in our Estates (within and without) the City manage the cost-of-living crises. Connecting Communities is mentioned in this mailing, but the distribution date keeps slipping.”

“We’ve also done some stuff like having banners up at Election of Sheriffs and Lord Mayor, promoting Connecting Communities monthly internally in The Buzz. <Connecting Communities> had a feature in City News and City AM. Also, there was joint promotion with wider DCSS on house (City-owned social housing) leaflet drop on the financial crisis.

“We also wrote to all the City's Ward Clubs asking to go into their newsletters.”

The following is an example of the successful Tweets that were sent. On average the Tweets received 2,415 views within each 90-day period.

1 October 2022 – 31 December 2022

Your Tweets earned **5.6K impressions** over this **91 day** period

Tweet activity



Impressions	2,986
Total engagements	44
Detail expands	13
Retweets	10
Likes	8
Profile clicks	7
Link clicks	4
Media engagements	2

Tweet activity



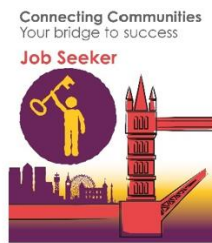
Impressions	153
Total engagements	5
Media engagements	2
Detail expands	2
Retweets	1

Twitter Images

To congratulate Participants on gaining a job



To promote Participants to potential employers



To promote a Job Opportunity (to encourage new Participants to enrol)









Posters were also displayed in nine locations around the City including libraries, community centres, medical practices, churches, housing estates, and job centres. They were also place in GP surgeries beyond the City and used at employer events.



The following shows the ways visual marketing was changed to suit differing audiences.

SAMPLE PROMOTIONAL POSTERS

General Poster – May 2022	Smithfield Market Employers – October 2022
 <p>Connecting Communities Your bridge to success</p> <p>Connecting Communities – Employment with a social purpose Operating across twelve London boroughs, Connecting Communities is an employability programme funded by the European Social Fund. Between now and June 2023 thousands of London's unemployed and economically inactive adults, aged 18 and over, will be supported into training, education and full-time sustainable employment and self-employment.</p> <p>Connecting Communities, City of London Our team of experienced Caseworkers will work closely with each participant, assessing their skills and experience, identifying their needs and taking them step-by-step across the bridge to success. Everyone is supported at all stages, from pre- to post-employment.</p> <p>We can help participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve their basic skills Learn new skills Prepare for a job <p>We can help employers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet their workforce needs by giving them access to work-ready, motivated and skilled people <p>If you'd like to be part of Connecting Communities, City of London, please contact:</p> <p>Gwen Rhyi, Business Manager gwen.rhyi@cityoflondon.gov.uk 07599 102149</p> <p>visit our website </p> <p>Richa Sagar, Administrator richa.sagar@cityoflondon.gov.uk 07599 102144</p> <p><small>Eligibility: Aged 18 or over, not in full time work, training or education and live in Camden, the City of London, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth or Westminster</small></p>	 <p>WANTED JOB VACANCIES</p> <p>We support unemployed people to find jobs in the City of London.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everyone we help wants a job. No-one is made to access our service. It's completely voluntary. We can help with any training costs. <p>If you have a vacancy, let us fill it for you.</p> <p>Gwen Rhyi, Business Manager gwen.rhyi@cityoflondon.gov.uk 07599 102149</p> <p>visit our website </p> <p>Time Rogers, Employer Engagement Officer time.rogers@cityoflondon.gov.uk 07599 102172</p> <p>Contact us NOW</p>

Poster for young people, July 2022	Poster for young people, February 2023
 <p>Looking for a job in the City of London?</p> <p>Connecting Communities is a free service that can support you into training, education, apprenticeships and employment</p> <p>Our experienced Caseworkers can help you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve your basic skills Learn new skills Prepare for a job by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Putting together a CV Gaining work experience Accessing and applying for local jobs and apprenticeships <p>Let us help you take the first step forward</p> <p>Visit our website </p> <p>Email: bridgetosuccess@cityoflondon.gov.uk</p> <p>Phone: 07599 102144</p> <p>Follow us on Twitter </p> <p>@bridgetosuccess5</p> <p><small>Eligibility: You must be aged 18 or over, not in full time work, training or education and live in Camden, the City of London, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth or Westminster</small></p>	 <p>Looking for a job in the City of London?</p> <p>Contact Us NOW</p> <p>Connecting Communities is a free service that can support you into training, education, apprenticeships and employment</p> <p>Our experienced Caseworkers can help you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve your existing skills and learn new ones Prepare for a job by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Putting together a CV Gaining work experience Accessing and applying for local jobs and apprenticeships We can also <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reimburse travel costs when training and during the first and sixth month in work Help towards childcare costs Provide IT equipment to help you job search and train <p>Let us help you take the first step forward</p> <p>Sign up to an Introduction Session </p> <p>Follow us on Twitter </p> <p><small>Eligibility: You must be aged 18 or over, not in full time work, training or education and live in Camden, the City of London, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth or Westminster</small></p>



7.2 Participant recruitment

The programme assumed that each borough would be engaging 600 residents with the programme. In the case of the City of London, it was acknowledged that we have considerably fewer residents but greater access to employers and opportunities. Eligible residents were identified through a range of approaches including local employment services, through partnerships, JETS leavers, and direct and indirect methods. Participants were a mix of unemployed individuals, including people lacking in confidence or individuals overcoming significant barriers to employment (for example, health, disability, and offending backgrounds). The other participant group is the young people aged 18-24 who are NET and further away from the labour market.

Participant Recruitment was undertaken by working with a range of sources including:

- Libraries
- Job centres
- Liveries
- School and college networks
- Adult Education Service
- Youth Service
- Employment sector bodies
- Afghan and Ukrainian resettlement programmes

Cohort or group recruitment seemed to be more effective than recruiting people one at a time. For example, a series of special programmes (see Section 8.9) were put in place in areas such as hospitality, construction, security, finance, and insurance. Direct connections with training providers also appeared to be an effective way to recruit participants. Collaborating with referral agencies also assisted with participant recruitment. For example,

“We are informing referral organisations (e.g., JCs) that we are concentrating on 18–24-year-olds. The number of young people recruited depends on budget available and we’re currently working on that. It would be good to be able to support young people into the apprenticeship opportunities currently available within the City of London, but how much we can achieve depends on (1) recruiting young people and (2) supporting them in time for job closing data.”

7.3 Eligibility

All programmes receiving ESF must comply with the eligibility rules. Failure to meet eligibility criteria can result in financial penalties of up to 100%, including clawback. To be eligible to take part in Connecting Communities participants must meet all of the following criteria:

1. To be aged 18 or over
2. To be living in Camden, the City of London, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth, or Westminster
3. To be unemployed (i.e., out of work and in receipt of Universal Credit, JSA or health related benefits) **or** inactive (i.e., out of work but not in receipt of any benefits or receiving non active benefits such as carers allowance)
4. To **not** be in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) or doing less than 22 hours in Education, Employment and Training.
5. To be **not** currently engaged on other ESF provision²

In addition, participants needed to have the right to reside and work in the United Kingdom.

There was a particular focus on three ESF participant groups, namely:

- Participants closest to the labour market
- Participants between the ages of 18 and 24 years and not in education, training, or employment (NEETS)
- Participants furthest from the labour market

In all instances, participants were required to evidence their eligibility to be included. This posed some challenges either because the participants struggled to secure all the necessary evidence/s or there were difficulties getting the authorities to agree the eligibility documentation, as was the case, for example, with the participants from Afghanistan. There were also challenges in terms of geographical eligibility requirements. The issue was that people often started residing in the 12 Central London Forward Boroughs but later moved to non-eligible geographic regions. Technically Connecting Communities could continue to support these people, but practically it was not always possible. Supporting people living in the north of England, for example, simply was not tenable. The other challenge was where people may fit within multiple characteristics or groups of eligibility. For example, there were difficulties in evidencing specific labour market status, such as when participants could be considered to be 'inactive' participants, but where this inactivity was due to a lack of basic skills and/or carer responsibilities and/or health issues.

In summary, it was complex to ensure eligibility. It was a challenge to explain to the participants, the broader community and the business partners the complexities of the eligibility criteria.

7.4 Quality

To ensure provision of a consistently high-quality service, there is a structured way by which participants progress towards education, training, and/or employment. Following either a self- or an external referral, the participants undergo an initial screening process to check eligibility. The initial process following referral occurs within two working days of receipt, either accepting or providing reasons for rejection to the participant. The eligible participant is then assigned to a case worker. The case worker conducts an Initial Assessment and works with the participant to create Initial Action Plan.

² For example, Job Centre Plus programmes such as Restart, JETS or the Work and Health Programme.

This occurs within 10 working days of the participant's Start Date. The case worker books a meeting with the participant at a minimum level of contact of no more than every 10 working days. Meetings can occur online, via the telephone and/or in-person. The outcomes of all meetings and the progress towards achieving the participant's personal action plan is recorded on APTM. Action Plan reviews are undertaken as a minimum every 20 working days. Once a participant is employed, In-Work Support includes the participant being contacted at a minimum of every 10 working days for those entering employment unless participant requests more or less frequency. Sustainment in employment is also checked for up to six months, to ensure that the participant continues to receive in-work support. All support, including in-work support is entered onto APTM. Case workers liaise with participants who have been in work or education more than six months, or who no longer wish to be part of the programme. An End Form is completed electronically within 15 working days of participant completing or leaving the programme. The End Form is also recorded on APTM.

An underperformance methodology³ was applied at the outset of the contract, but permission was sought and granted to modify targets and so it appears that penalty clauses will not now be applied.

7.5 APTM

APTEM⁴ (Apprentice Management System) is the online information management, reporting and compliance tool used to generate the reports for Connecting Communities. Every participant entering the programme needed to be added into APTM. APTM was also used on a very regular basis to update the records of progress and achievement of all the participants. The official outcomes were derived from APTM. Central London Forward were the main point of contact for APTM and so any queries needed to be channelled through Central London Forward. This contractual structure meant that there was a separation between the frontline staff and the service providers. The intention was that APTM would provide for a single CRM to be used across the programme with the ability to integrate with Borough systems, and it would offer added value through the online skills assessments and job matching. There were however a number of challenges with using APTM, including:

- The incompatibility with many of the local information management systems
- The delay in the opportunity for staff to train in the use of APTM, which meant that the results for the first few months were not always fully captured.
- The initial training was of poor quality, gave little time for learners to practice making the caseworkers reluctant to use the platform.
- The way the programme was managed was driven by APTM and this posed difficulties for ongoing data gathering with APTM-generated data taking precedence over other information provided.
- The high numbers of input errors due to both the complexity of the system and human errors.
- The layered system in order to get support.

³ A penalty fee of 5% to be applied where performance is between 16-25% under target. The fee withheld would be inclusive of staffing and indirect costs. Underperformance between 26-50% would incur a 10% fee and underperformance over 50% would incur a 15% fee. Once performance is back on track, the payment would then be released. If your performance is up to 15% below target the Contract Manager will support, you to put together an improvement action plan. If your performance drops to between 16-25% below target, then there could be a financial penalty of 5% of your funding allocation. If performance drops to between 26-50% below target, then there could be a financial penalty of 10% of your funding allocation. If your performance drops to over 50% below target, then there could be a financial penalty of at least 15% of your funding allocation.

⁴ <https://www.aptem.co.uk/> APTM is a technology platform that supports the delivery of complex, regulated skills and employability programmes.

APTEM used the training method of training a group of super users, who were then be able to support future training rollout. While this ensured that there was more capacity to train members of staff on how to use APTEM. There was challenge if these staff moved onto other roles.

Moreover, as many of the participants had high levels of support needs, many of the participants found the complexity of the APTEM system and the notices its automated systems generated particularly challenging. In some cases, participants even withdrew from support because of the APTEM system. This is effectively captured in this example:

“XX [redacted] highlighted that caseworkers have had clients who were distressed with the APTEM system, and the notifications being sent out, and wanted to clarify if all participants had to use it. XX clarified that invitations can be selectively sent to participants. Relevant boroughs will be starting participants on Hanlon [a more commonly used information system in Central London boroughs] and then exporting data across. They would not be invited to the APTEM platform at initial registration, but invitations can be sent once the data is exported to APTEM. Participants are required to sign the start form but there is also the covid disclaimer so there should not be an issue as long as the form is completed. For those boroughs using Hanlon, it was agreed that CLF will need access to that system to perform audits on the customer journey to ensure quality data is gathered for ESF.”

7.6 Implementation experiences

Connecting Communities adopted a ‘no wrong door’ approach, meaning that gaining participants to the programme was underpinned by community-based outreach activity. As described in Section 7.2, a range of activities and approaches were used to reach out to participants, including City of London residents and those residents in the surrounding boroughs. Once eligibility was determined (and in some cases, especially with the refugees, before eligibility was fully secured) participants we offered a set of induction experiences. These activities were centred on the case worker gaining a thorough understanding of the individual, their current situation, and their barriers to work. At first, these sessions were all individual. Later in the programme, group induction was offered where all participants learnt about the purpose of the Connecting Communities programme and agreeing expectations. During the induction phase, there was an initial employability assessment. This included assessing the individuals needs in terms of fusion skills, literacy, numeracy, and ICT competence. Where appropriate, basic skills courses in each of these areas were offered to participants. There was less take-up of the ASES basic skills courses due to the length of time they took. Other sources of IT training and basic employability skills were also sought to complement the offer from ASES, and the skills training embedded within APTEM. Following induction, participants were guided in the use of APTEM and the ways that the system could provide online support and engagement. As described in Section 7.5, APTEM was not always an accommodating experience, especially to participants with higher learning and support needs.

The smaller caseload within the design of Connecting Communities allowed for greater levels of individualised support. The personalised and integrated service provided to participants enabled them to build confidence, improve their wellbeing and develop employability skills. As can be seen in the evidence in Section 8, the participants greatly appreciated this more personalised and ‘caring’ approach. The personalised and integrated approach meant that the participants developed employment skills and received support that was individually targeted to meet their needs. The individualisation generated trust between the case workers and participants, which encouraged

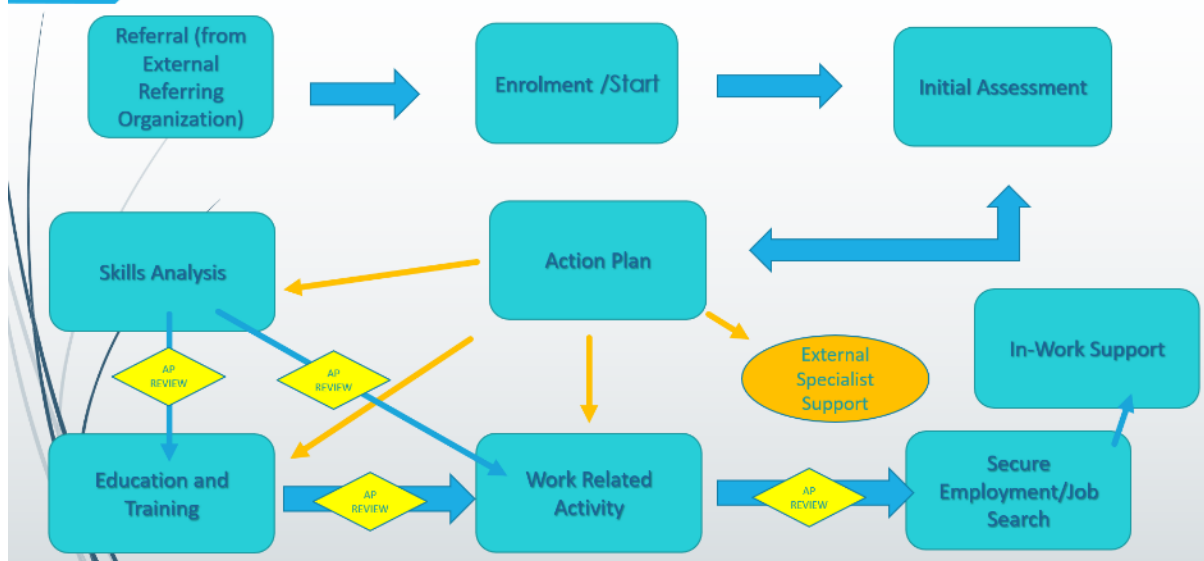
positive behaviour change and perceptions of self-efficacy in terms of orientation towards work. In summary, the person-centredness and flexible delivery was a strength of the programme.



The action plan was developed in collaboration with the participant to ensure that the person-centred needs were matched to SMART actions. For each identified need, practical steps were agreed between the case worker and the participant to improve their employability and ultimately lead to full-time employment and/or education. The case workers and participants tracked the progress against the individual actions identified in the action plans. Participants also worked with their case workers to improve their CV, make job applications, attend mock interview practice, and adjust the action plans in light of development along the journey.

A sizeable proportion of the participants faced barriers to employment. For many, it was struggling with receiving rejections or in adjusting to finding themselves unemployed after prolonged periods of employment. For other participants it was adjusting back to work after Covid or the impact of the pandemic. For some recent graduates, they had not had work experience and had been very isolated studying during a period of only being remote. As a sizeable proportion of the participants were also newly arrived in the UK, in some instances, beyond language learning and housing needs, there were a myriad of cultural norms and employment processes to be understood and navigated. There were also participants with criminal records, erratic work history, health/disability issues, juggling carer responsibilities and other issues effecting their readiness for work. Some participants took trust and time to fully disclose some issues. Also, some issues were never disclosed but become apparent as the employability process occurred. For these reasons, the action plans always remained 'live' and were reviewed at fortnightly meetings to ensure they remained relevant. Also, weekly team meetings among the case workers, enabled action plans to be considered more broadly and at times, participants were moved to another case worker if it was felt that the case worker's expertise was more closely related to the participant's needs.

CLF Connecting Communities Process



Once participants had identified their job goal, a practical plan reaching that goal was implemented. This involved, the employee engagement officer assessing labour market needs and vacancies and ascertaining how these related to the individual’s skills, experience, and interests. Where job matching occurred, participants are not only more likely to find a job, but they were also more likely to stay longer in their job. The other model of support that proved to be successful was to group the participants. This was done by industry type (such as construction, hospitality, accountancy and so on). It also was helpful to group some cohorts of participants to place similar participants together (such as by age group, ethnicity, skills need). The group approach also meant that we could then offer a ‘cohort’ of trained workers to industry partners, and this proved to be successful in getting job outcomes. Providing bespoke pre-employment training programmes with interview training to meet the identified recruitment needs of multiple London employers within sectors, including- health and social care; leisure and hospitality, accountancy, bookkeeping and finance, tech/digital, construction, green/renewable sectors, security, business, and administration. On the basis of the success of the ‘cohort’ approach, Connecting Communities established and co-ordinated employer engagement activities.

Case workers liaised with participants to ensure there was coherence between the labour market opportunities, and realistic, but aspirational paths to get a job. This included exploring the potential of transferable skills. The job search skills of participants were the focus of much of the employability support. This included effectively marketing their skills and experience on paper through a CV or application form and in person at an interview or selection exercise. Participants were supported to tailor their CV and application/s to meet employer’s needs, understanding the interview process, and how to effectively present themselves.

In the period March to September 2022, Connecting Communities, City of London, focused almost exclusively on supporting the City's Afghan guests. When they began to be re-homed and moved out of the City, the programme began to support a wider range of participants. By the end of 2022, it was clear that the individual tailored approach was not always the most efficient or the most effective from the participants' point of view and in January 2023 a "New Year, New Opportunities" approach

was taken. This brought participants together for a weekly Introduction Session. This session included individual enrolment onto the programme and a group Training Workshop. This proved to be a highly successful way of being able to meet contractual targets whilst offering good quality support, guidance and also provided an opportunity for peer-to-peer support. Twelve such sessions were offered from January to Easter and in total nearly 100 registered to attend.

In addition, special Introduction Sessions were offered for participants wishing to gain employment in specific sectors: Hospitality, Accountancy, Construction with over 30 people attending these sessions. Business partners also ran some special sessions for participants following the Accountancy Courses and those wanting to improve their Social Media presence.

Informal, drop-in conversation classes were offered weekly during the 12-month period April 2022 to March 2023. These supplemented the formal ESOL classes attended by many Afghan guests and, later, by the Ukrainian refugees. These courses offered an opportunity to practice discussing broader issues in English. It is worth noting that some cultural issues came to the fore. For example, the Afghan women were inhibited when men started to join the sessions and it was decided to offer separate male and female sessions. These classes also offered an opportunity to meet outside the hotel environment. At least 130 Participants attended one or more of the conversation classes with many being regular attendees.

To help develop, the participants' broader employability skills, between January and April a four-part set of employability workshops were offered to all participants. These included sessions on:

- Selling Yourself - Features and Benefits (17 participants)
- CVs with Impact (21 participants)
- SMART Job Searching and Motivation Booster (24 participants)
- Creating a First Impression (25 participants)

Six Connecting Communities participants attended all four of the sessions. The sessions were not mandatory and not everyone needed every workshop.

A total of 20 training sessions were organised and in total more than 185 participants attended one or more training sessions.

As stated above, a considerable proportion of the participants needed more wrap around care. At times this included accessing wellbeing and mental health support, support with housing issues, support in terms of personal finance and practical 'enabling' support to get them ready for interviews. The participants commented very positively about the way the case workers supported them in their everyday challenges, barriers, or any concerns. ESOL provision at various levels was provided for non-English speakers. This included (where needed) specialist literacy, numeracy, and ICT support for individuals.

Connecting Communities also helped people into self-employment (where applicable). While there was less demand for the self-employment pathway, those participants seeking this could access support in identifying and understanding the marketplace, creating a business plan, and understanding where to go for further specialist support.

The support from Connecting Communities did not cease once the person was in education or employment. The case workers and employer engagement officer continued their contact with the

participants. At one level this was to provide ongoing support and ensure sustained employment. At another level, this provided ongoing care to help individuals to understand workplace culture, behaviours, and processes in order to ensure they thrived in employment or learning and settled-in and made progress in work. It was also a link to encourage people to apply for apprenticeships, further develop their career and apply for promotions or other development opportunities in the workplace.

Connecting Communities also had a discretionary budget which could support participants with additional costs that might accrue while trying to secure employment. Costs that could be reimbursed included, but were not limited to:

- Travelling costs to and from meetings, including job interviews and training will be reimbursed.
- Lone parents may be eligible for help to meet the cost of childcare to attend interviews and training. Work related costs such as tools, uniforms, IT equipment
- Everyone who goes into a full-time job gets their first month's travel costs reimbursed and if they are still in work six months later, they get another month's travel reimbursed.

None of the financial support from Connecting Communities affected anyone's existing benefits.

Less money was claimed for both childcare and travel than had been predicted as many of the participants were already eligible for the Childcare affordability scheme or were able to travel in cost effective ways.

8. Outcomes

At the outset, Connecting Communities (across all the twelve Central London Boroughs) was designed to deliver the following outputs:

- Engage with 15000 unemployed or economically inactive participants (50% male, 50% female).
- Support a minimum of 6000 participants into sustainable employment (with 40% sustaining employment at 6 months)
- Support a minimum of 2000 participants into education or training
- Support 750 programme leavers into supported job search activities on leaving the programme.

These output targets were split equally between the 12 Boroughs with individual Boroughs responsible for 8.35% of the contract targets. These were extremely ambitious targets from the outset and especially ambitious for the City of London given its smaller resident population base and that it did not have any existing employability or skills specific service. As stated in Section 3, the employment context in London changed markedly between when the application was made and when the project started, and over the course of the 18 months of the programme. This meant that both the outcomes and the target populations were revised a number of times during the project⁵. Also, too, the distribution of targets across the 12 boroughs was moved from being equal to becoming more aligned to capacity. See Appendix One for a copy of the original contract performance outputs.

⁵ Central London Forward submitted change requests to the ESF to reduce the targets due to employment condition changes.

Within the absolute target numbers there were also pre-set population types to be covered by the programme. These included:

- Participants closest to the labour market
- Gender split (50% male, 50% female)
- Participants who are 18- to 24-year-olds not in Education, Training or Employment (NEETS)
- Participants classified as unemployed
- Participants classified as economically inactive
- Participants from the BAME community
- Participants aged 50 or more
- Participants will have health or disability needs
- Participants who are lone parents
- Participants who have basic/functional skills needs (can include any or all of English, Maths, and ICT).

The outcomes could include:

- Employment
- Education and/or training
- Sustained employment (employed for longer than six months)
- Supported job search activities on leaving the programme
- Undertake a basic skills programme with a minimum of 25% achieving a qualification

As there were contractual risk implications associated with not meeting the targets outlined by the European Social Fund contract with Central London Forward regarding Connecting Communities., all modifications of targets needed to be agreed. Central London Forward, as the main contract holders, reviewed each borough's progress against targets on a monthly basis. Connecting Communities, like all ESF-funded contracts, required accurate data entry supported by the provision of specific evidence which showed proof of participants reaching certain targets. In recent compliance audits the City of London's programme was deemed to be 100% compliant. The City of London's Connecting Communities programme produces monthly financial claims which were prepared on time and were consistently accepted without need for revision.

During the initial 18 month contract period (to 30 June 2023) the quantitative outcomes for the City of London's Connecting Communities programme, can be summarised as below. (See Appendix 3 for an analysis of Inputs and Outcomes during the contract extension period.)

The City of London's Connecting Communities programme:

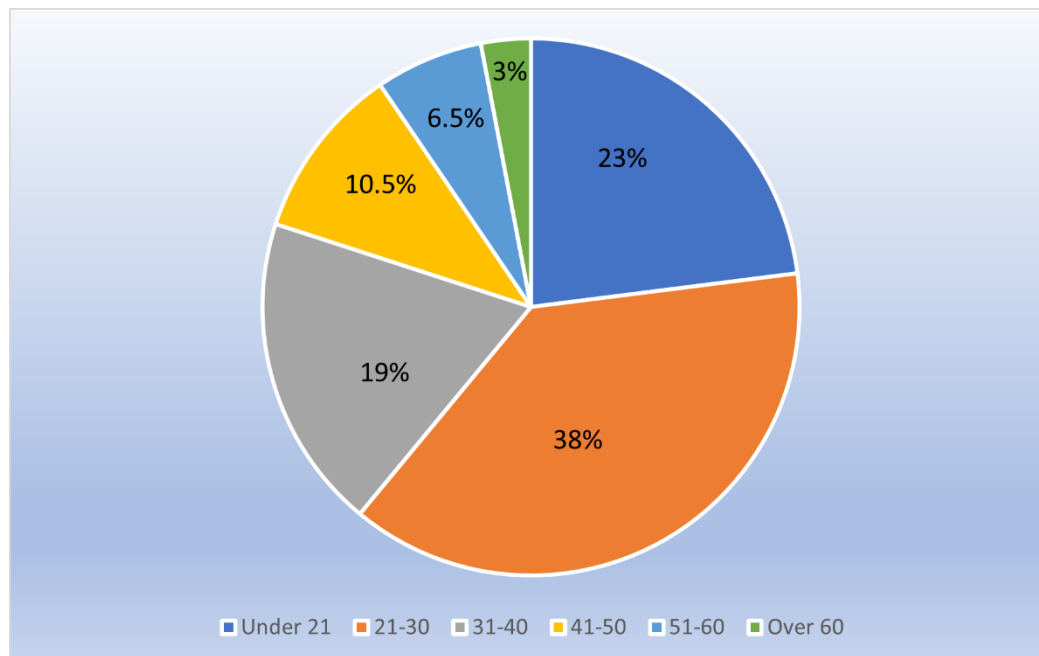
- Engaged with a total of 321 unemployed or economically inactive participants
- Supported 64 participants into employment (20% of participants)
- Supported 21 participants into sustaining employment at 6 months (32% of those who got employed were still in employment at least six months later)
- Supported 217 participants into education and/or training (68% of participants)
- Supported 23 participants who undertook a basic skills programme with 69% of these people achieving a qualification
- Supported 321 participants with job search activities

In the City of London’s Connecting Communities programme⁶:

- 8% of participants were closest to the labour market
- 60% of participants were male, and 40% of participants were female
- 43% of participants were 18- to 24-year-olds including those not in Education, Training or Employment (NEETS)
- 66% of participants were classified as unemployed
- 34% of participants were classified as economically inactive
- 74% of participants were from the ‘Black, Asian and minority ethnic’ BAME⁷ community
- 9.5% of participants were aged 50 or more
- 5% of participants declared health or disability needs
- 3% of participants declared as lone parents
- 14% of participants needed basic/functional skills needs (can include any or all of English, Maths, and ICT).
- 64% of participants had entry level English
- 0.3% of participants reported being an ex-offender
- 0.3% of participants reported being care leavers

The following graphs present in more depth the details of the types of participants who were in the City of London’s Connecting Communities programme. Firstly, by age, 26% of participants were over 50 years of age. The biggest particular group was people aged 21-30 years. A total of 31% of participants were aged 18-24 years of age. Figure 8.1 Shows the breakdown of participants by age groups.

Figure 8.1 Participants by age groups

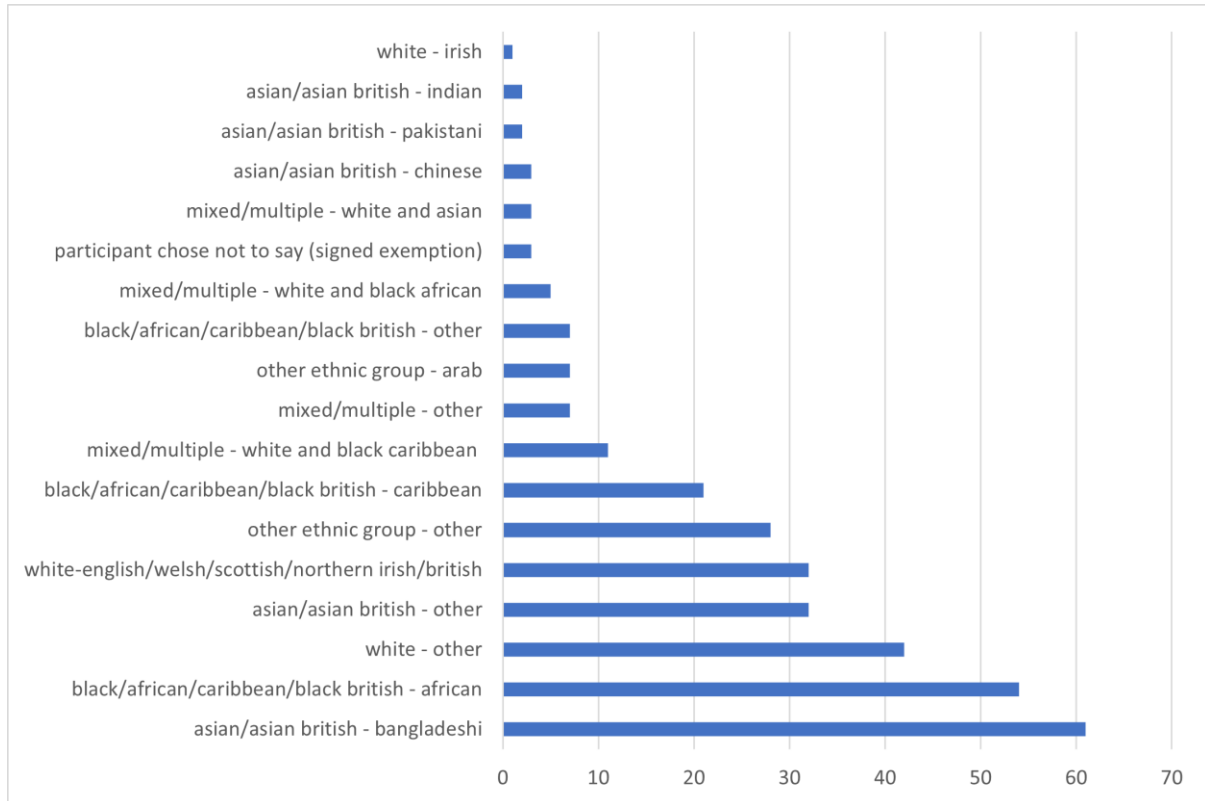


⁶ Note that these are all percentages of the total participants. Note too, that the percentages do not total 100% as people may exist in more than one category. For example, a participant can be male, unemployed, and part of the BAME community. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁷ Note BAME is used here as it is a required reporting category by the funders, not how participants described themselves. The term was not used in the implementation of the programme.

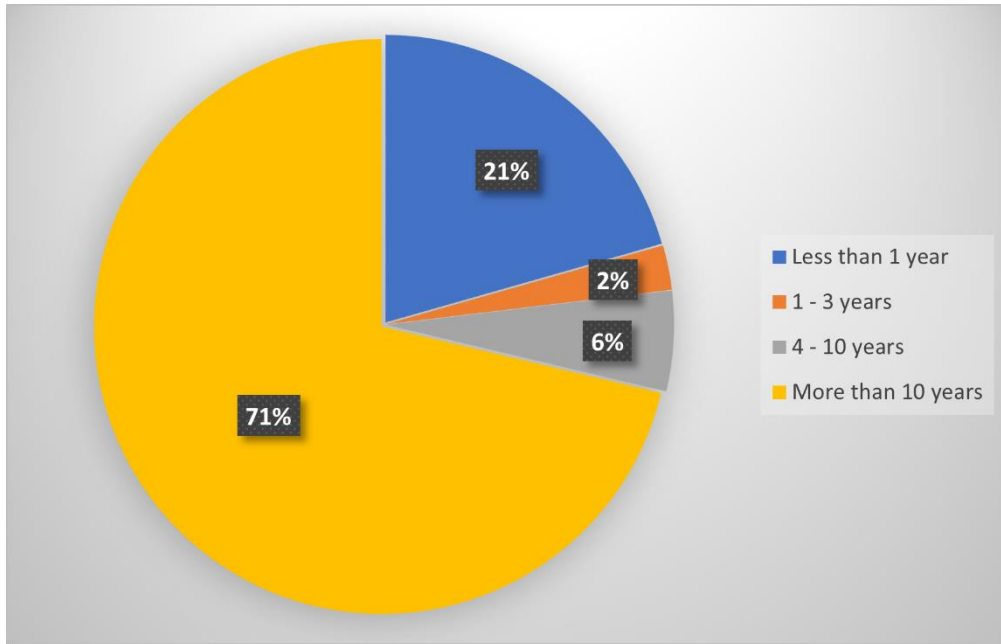
The summary figures showed that 74% of participants were in the BAME grouping. Figure 8.2 shows that largest groups were Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi and black British-African. White other was also a significantly sized group of participants. Figure 8.3 shows the number of years people have been in the United Kingdom. The majority of participants had been living in the UK for more than 10 years (71%). The second largest group had been in the UK less than a year (20%). 13% of participants did not have entry level English.

Figure 8.2 Identified ethnicity of participants



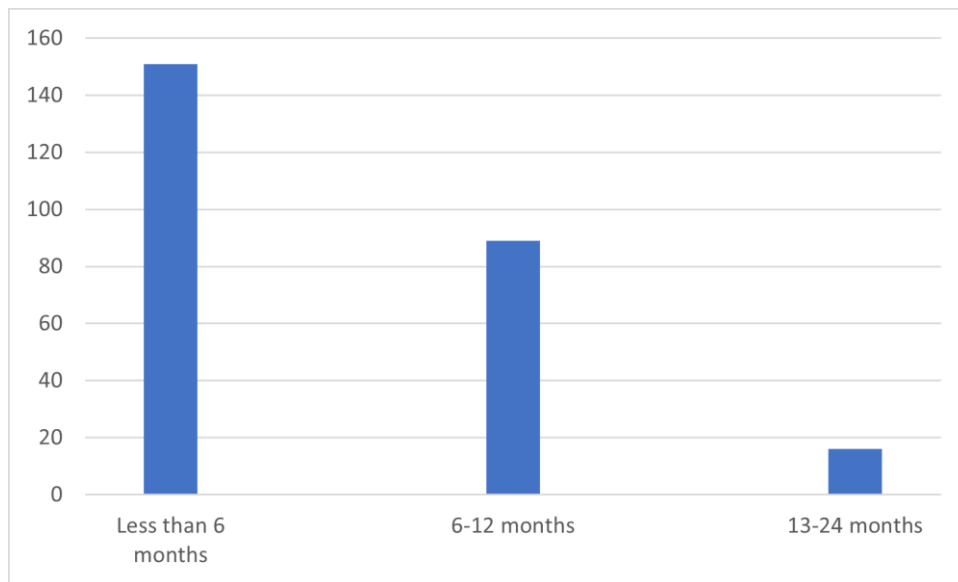
N=321

Figure 8.3 Number of years living in the United Kingdom



The majority of participants (47%) had been unemployed or economically inactive for less than six months, although, as can be seen in Figure 8.4, 5% of participants had been unemployed or economically inactive for more than one year. The longer a person has been out of work, the more challenging it is to reorientate them back into full-time work.

Figure 8.4 Number of months unemployed or economically inactive



N=321

The quantitative data tells one story but given the personalised and individualised nature of Connecting Communities, the qualitative outcomes show the transformation that occurred in people’s lives as a result of the support they received. This is best captured in the words of the participants.

“After being unemployed for a few months I finally set aside my pride and went to the job centre looking for support. Instantly they put me in touch with the City of London Corporation and I just wish I had gotten in touch with them sooner. From my initial conversations with Nisha at the job centre to my introduction call with Dan and emails and messages from Gwen; they were all very supportive. It was great to know I had someone in my corner helping me with the daunting task of looking for a job, reviewing applications and preparing for interviews.”

“I just wish the project <Connecting Communities> could continue as it was a fantastic help for me and I'm sure there are many, many more people who could use this level of support.”

“I'm really happy with you <case worker> and your project <Connecting Communities> I always remember your support and guidance with us. Please accept my deep appreciation, Thank you very much from you and your project management team.”

“I would like to thank Connecting Community Services for giving me great support throughout my Job seeking period. I would love to thank Nisha as my Caseworker who supported me and guided me the entire time. I'm glad to work with you, as you motivated and uplifted me when I felt hopeless and listened to all my concerns and were empathetic to my situation. I have received support with my CV creation and support with applying to the jobs that suit my skills and qualification. And learned about lots of career opportunities including apprenticeships. I'm glad I found this support at this very time of my life. I'll recommend Nisha's services to anyone who needs help with their job-seeking and career achievements.”

“I felt that the structure <of Connecting Communities> was formal enough to engage with whilst also offering empathy to us all in the group- meeting other people in a similar position was helpful, made me feel less isolated and more determined. Being part of Connecting Communities empowered me to be more proactive as well as self-reflective in terms of how I value myself in the job marketplace. Subsequently I am now busier in my vocation than I could have imagined and feel like I am back on track after a tedious and lengthy period of insecurity.”

“The City of London's Connecting Communities programme has enabled a previously – self-employed person to build confidence through encouragement, interview practice and support with filling out applications and navigating the recruitment process.”

“The City of London's Connecting Communities programme has upskilled a young mother who wants to work in childcare by enabling her to access a certified Paediatric First Aid Course.”

This word cloud provides an overview of the responses from participants, showing both how they felt about being unemployed and job-seeking: “stressful”, “precarious”, “isolated” as well as impact of having support: “opportunities”, “empathetic”, “amazing” and “motivated”.



The following case study gives some insight into the complexities of the journey towards employment:

A 23-year-old male currently identified as not in employment, education, or training and with complex barriers to employment. He was referred by Kentish Town jobcentre following outreach activities conducted by case workers. The participant is currently at risk of homelessness and is living in temporary accommodation arranged by the local authority. He is also a care leaver with mental health needs. To support this participant more effectively, the project drew on the experience of more than one case worker. The lead case worker provided advocacy support whilst working with a colleague with previous lived experience and an understanding of navigating the system effectively. This participant was referred to the mental health services. The case worker’s support in dealing with the housing services has already made the participant feel better able to cope with his mental health needs and start focusing on employment for the first time in over a year.

The following acknowledgement also provides insight into the life-changing nature of Connecting Communities and the value of taking a comprehensive approach to supporting people with multiple needs.

I am extremely grateful for your support and help. This has helped me progress so much! I wanted to thank you directly for assigning Simran to work alongside me, together we have been able to achieve the goals set out since the start of the program. She has been a great work coach and has done a lot of research, when linking my career path and choices. This has been a valuable experience and I am grateful for the time and funding you have devoted towards making this happen; not only to me but to my child as well. I have successfully been able to pass my first qualification with the succession of gaining my Green CSCS card. This will open a vast number of opportunities in the next few months going forward. I am proud to be a part of this scheme and that I was available. Simi has been a massive reflection of advocating on my behalf, pointing out why bettering my life is important. Her knack of empathy, fine detail, and confidentiality is what I value and appreciate the most. I appreciate her so much and acknowledge her work efforts when connecting me to the skills centre. I was able to obtain additional qualifications on this scheme and gained additional help and assistance with my learning difficulties, they also covered things such as travel, food and one-to-one. I would say she is a fantastic

support worker who has taken the time out to empathize and mapping out my directive choices best suited and tailored for my future endeavours. Through her help I have obtained 7 additional qualifications in the space of 3 weeks. I scored 100% on my CSCS card with her aided coaching and motivation and will be able to manage my learning difficulties better with the support of the equipment granted through your scheme. I am grateful for the two of you and would like to thank you once again.

These results were achieved through a total of 1,189 meetings with participants. There were 107 visits to job centres. A total of 208 mock interviews were conducted with participants and 153 participants were supported through actual job interview processes. More than 76⁸ participants attended internal training sessions while over 100 participated in external training programmes.

8.1 Inclusion

Not every young person has access to a breadth of developmental relationships and life experiences, which facilitate and broker routes into employment. The least advantaged tend to not have access to networks, mentors, advocates, work experience opportunities, careers advice, and family support in the same way as their more advantaged peers. For example, only 6 per cent of young people from low-income families take part in extracurricular activities, compared with 6 per cent from higher income families and young people who attend private schools are twice as likely to get internships in London compared to state educated children. They are not supported to access potential pathways or understand how to reach their goals. There is a disconnect between what they learn in school and their aspirations and opportunities later in life. For example, in 1997, 42 per cent of 16–17-year-old students were studying and working. By 2014 this figure had declined to 18 per cent.

An equitable society is one where all people have access to meaningful and valued pathways, and opportunities to flourish and achieve success. There should be multiple pathways and routes in and out of learning throughout life, which is of benefit to us all. Inclusion enables people to fully realise their potential. This requires strong networks of support and trust. The Liveries could leverage that trusted network. They could use their connections to boost opportunities for structured work experience, internships, and employment. Young adults who have ‘four or more employer contacts’ are five times more likely to be in employment or training than those who have little or no contact with employers.

⁸ Most participants attended more than one training session.



Connecting Communities succeeded in engaging a diverse cohort. The ethos of individualisation was also reflected in support provision, with action plans indicating different forms of support, in accordance with the wide variety of support needs expressed by participants. This ethos was a core strength of Connecting Communities. Connecting Communities proactively sought opportunities to include people. For example, exploring ways to build on the “Where’s the Eye in Inclusion” event with helping unemployed/economically inactive adults (18+) with sight impairment into work. Working with the City & Guilds Foundation, Connecting Communities also welcomed people with neuro diversity. People with neurodiverse traits can often face more challenges in the workplace and barriers to progressing, as is exemplified in the following case:

“The participant was referred to Connecting Communities by Unity Works. He was under a lot of stress trying to get back into work. His stress impacted on and was amplified by his autism. His case worker identified his people and customer service skills as being transferable and discussed hospitality jobs with him. Although initially reluctant he attended a hospitality recruitment event, was offered a work trial, and began work as a waiter, successfully sustained more than six months in the job and won Employee of the Month. The participant is really enjoying the role and says he feels very supported at work. Unity Works have also reported improvements on his overall mood and wellbeing.”

8.2 Schools and young people

One of the target groups of Connecting Communities is young people aged 18-24 who are not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) or doing less than 22 hours in Education, Employment and Training. As is outlined in Section 11, under the rules and targets of the extension of the programme from July 1 to September 30, 2023, 18–24-year-olds were the main and only focus population. Any young adults who live in eligible boroughs could be supported by Connecting Communities. Connecting Communities could help students as soon as they leave school, college, or university. Connecting Communities were especially keen to help those young people whose lives have been significantly disrupted in the last two years and who need that extra bit of handholding. Budget was available to help young people with travel costs (and even clothes) for job interviews. Any young lone parents could receive support with childcare costs.

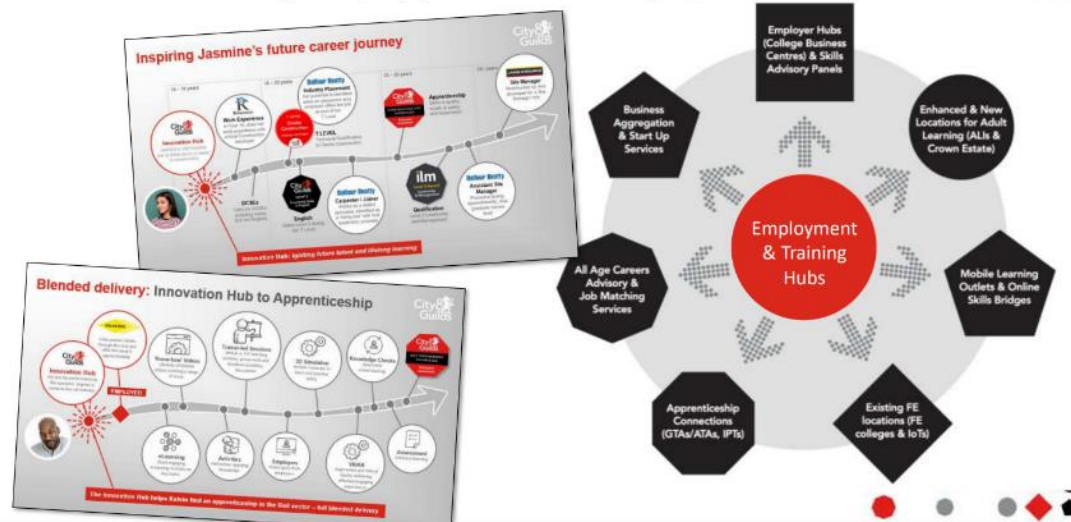
“Last week the Headteacher at Westminster Academy (met him at the Education Conference in Guildhall) said he would put information about CC into his newsletter to PARENTS so we can help them into work.”

The City of London’s programme of Connecting Communities and teams in other boroughs reported that there were fewer people coming forward in this age group in need of support. There are a number of possible explanations for this. One argument is that young people may be continuing to receive family support and so have not yet felt the need to register as needing employability support. This point is evidenced by a cohort of 12 young men who enrolled on a security industry pathway programme in July 2023. Only two were claiming unemployment benefits. The other possible explanation is that those young who are available and “able” are already in work, while those who are not, tend to have significant mental health or other health issues.

Connecting Communities has tried a number of approaches to reach young people who are NEET. These have included:

- Exploring models of Social Prescribing
- Special programmes and academies targeting young people who are Neet (for example, the construction academy – see more details in Section 8.7)
- Working with the City of London Academy Trust to both target students over 18 years of age and also family members. The schools with the highest pupil premium were the most likely to know family members who meet the criteria for support (See Appendix Two for a copy of the letter sent to schools).
- Contacting the Head of the Virtual School for the City of London
- Working with service leads to contact young people in care and care leavers in the City of London and beyond.
- Connections with City and Guilds and City Lit to encourage them to refer all people who meet the criteria who are on their courses.
- Contacting colleges and universities in and around the City of London ensuring that as their graduates become NEET at the end of May/June.
- Informing all the Referral Agencies (Job Centres, Social Prescribing) that that focus was on young people who are NEET.
- Identifying anyone in ASES or looking to enrol in any of the ASES programmes, who met the NEET criteria were also eligible to join the programme.

3. How **Employment & Training Hubs** like Connecting Communities will open up opportunities to employment



8.3 Older people

The growing challenges of the current economic situation are forcing people back into work. People of all ages are trying to cope with rising interest rates, inflation, housing issues, coping with the increasing cost of food and energy as well as physical and mental health problems. Many of these issues have meant that some older workers who had carer responsibilities or had previously opted for semi or full retirement are now needing to return to full or part-time work. Recent research indicated that the majority of 50+ not going back to work because of ill health. Following Covid 19, increased numbers of older people faced redundancy and the need to reskill. Nearly a quarter of Connecting Communities caseload is in 50+ age group. For example:

“We have a participant who until the Pandemic, was a Quantity Surveyor. She has self-funded a Prince 2 course but is having difficult persuading employers that she can do a “project management” role. Perhaps there can be a link between the Green Construction Skills and a 50+ Programme.”

“We have two very well qualified 50+ woman with post-grad qualifications. Maybe you could get together and develop some ideas for supporting these two women. Nisha’s participant may not want to get into work right now as she’s caring for an elderly relative but she’s keen to upskill and potentially look outside her field of expertise (grant making).”

Reaching economically inactive older people is a challenge. The Centre for Ageing Better⁹ is considering innovative ways to reach out to older workers.

“The organisation is shortly going to launch an employer campaign to encourage employers to sign-up to pledge being Age Friendly. I thought this was something that the City of London might well want to be involved with from the outset.”

8.4 Afghan participants

The commencement of the Connecting Communities programme coincided with the arrival in the City of London of more than 800 people from Afghanistan. Immediately, those people under the age of 18

⁹ <https://ageing-better.org.uk/>

years were placed within full-time, formal education provision and for those children under compulsory school age to offer them places in early years provision. For all people over the age of 18 years, Connecting Communities worked with Adult Skills and Education Service (ASES) to place people in education (including higher education), training and/or employment. This immediate need meant that services had to quickly respond and mobilise, even before all the staff had been recruited and before the APTM online system was activated. This posed some challenges, including:

- Delays in securing the recognition around the Afghan refugee's eligibility for Connecting Communities
- The Afghan participants being rapidly moved to new housing in areas that were far away from London, making ongoing support very challenging. There was a delay in ascertaining from the main contract holders whether Connecting Communities could continue to support the Afghan participants (and meet contractual targets) when they were moved outside the eligible boroughs.
- That only a relatively small per cent of the Afghan participants assisted could be formally recognised in the APTM system as they were already being supported before the APTM system could be updated.
- That only a relatively small per cent of the Afghani participants assisted could be formally recognised for the full range of services and support that occurred as the APTM system only allowed one entry for each form of support, so for example, if a participant completed three courses, only the first course 'counted' on the system of reporting for the programme.

Despite these challenges, the impact for the participants was significant. The outcomes included:

- A very comprehensive skills and employability curriculum for the Afghan population.
- The development of especially useful templates for skills and employability that could be used now and in the future with other refugee groups.
- Effective partnership working between charities, community organisations, businesses, and internal and external training providers
- Effective partnerships with schools and vocational provision, especially for 16–19-year-olds and for preparing students for making applications to universities and colleges.
- The opportunity for courses and group training from both Caseworkers and ASES, including in person and online learning.
- A structured plan to give the participants something to do as they are waiting for courses or jobs including supporting participants to develop their employability skills.

The Afghan participants were assisted to get places in university courses and to attend colleges and gain vocational qualifications. They completed qualifications in Food Safety, in English as a Second Language (ESOL) training, in Basic Skills (including functional skills, mathematics and literacy), IELTS qualifications (to enable university entry), book-keeping,

The support provided by Connecting Communities, in partnership with a number of internal and external providers, was very positively received as the following comments exemplify:

"The support enabled them <the Afghan participants> to tell their story. It helped them to adapt to the new culture quickly and prove that they have something to contribute to their new communities."

“I was delighted to see in the Buzz that the Afghan guests have successfully joined in pre apprenticeship schemes, one has gained employment and there are conversational English sessions here in the Guildhall – which I’d love to volunteer for.”

It was also felt that the model of swift intervention and support that could be activated for the Afghan participants could also provide a model of support for other groups in the City of London, such as those people who are care leavers, as the following comment suggests:

“I was wondering how to extend this offer to care leavers in the City, who share some similarities with the <Afghani> guests, in that pre apprenticeship offers in the City would be appropriate, and an actual job being realised in such a short timeframe?”

“The City of London’s Connecting Communities programme has recently supported a married couple from Afghanistan into employment, enabling them to pursue a brighter future and help them settle into British life.”

The following case studies indicate the impact the Connecting Communities programme had on the newly arrived members of the Afghan community.

A 27-year-old woman currently engaged in the Connecting Communities project. As an Afghan refugee, she is highly skilled and experienced in finance. She feels positive about her future and starting a new life in the UK but has found some difficulties adapting to life and British culture. She reported experiencing some difficulties with motivation as well as social anxiety. Having experienced the Taliban’s oppressive regime and a suicide attack she may be suffering from PTSD. It was agreed to prioritise her mental health needs. The case worker dedicated the first appointment to signposting her to Mind in the City and the local IAPT services. She has signed up to workshops delivered by the project to support participants with motivation and confidence building. Having updated her CV with the help of her case worker, she has been able to secure two short work placements as a finance assistant. These have proven incredibly valuable by helping to validate her skills and knowledge and giving her confidence to work in a financial role. As a single woman with no male relatives, she feels she has restricted opportunities to expand her social circle. Having discovered a keen interest in singing, she felt this would provide an excellent opportunity to meet people outside the refugee community and step out of her comfort zone. It was agreed that this would also help with her confidence in general.

A 36-year-old male was a military medical doctor in Afghanistan. When he joined Connecting Communities, he felt unsure of being able to continue practicing medicine outside a military environment. However, he displayed a willingness to explore other options which are realistic though they might take longer to achieve as these will require access to further training. Although he had sufficient knowledge of English to communicate effectively, he lacked fluency and vocabulary. He enrolled in structured conversation workshops developed specifically to support highly skilled individuals with more intermediate to advanced language skills. When exploring employment options, the idea of being a paramedic was suggested to which the participant responded with great enthusiasm and hopes this will provide a solid option for employment. As an alternative he is also exploring apprenticeships in plumbing and electrical repairs. He felt this option would be suitable as he has young children and is attracted by the idea of earning a salary whilst learning a trade with secure prospects of employment. With his high level of engagement, willing to work flexibly and

explore the guidance offered by his case worker, a positive employment outcome within the foreseeable future is anticipated.

8.5 Ukrainian participants

The Welcome Pack for Ukrainians who arrived in the City of London either via the *Homes for Ukraine Community Sponsorship Scheme* or the *Family Visa* route included information about ESOL and education, training, and employment opportunities for adults. When the Ukrainian participants arrived, the immediate need was to get them started on ESOL courses. The Ukrainian participants were all very keen to get into work, so it was important that they could access language support in a way that also allowed them to be employed. For instance,

“We have also investigated online courses so that those who do come through can work and study.”

The Ukrainian participants tended to be highly qualified and ‘work ready.’ For example,

“We have a highly qualified chef <Ukrainian> and although her English isn’t good, hotels/restaurants are desperately short of people, and we are waiting for one of our friendly hotel HR Managers to return from A/L to have a word with him.”

“We have a group of Ukrainian participants who all have tertiary level education. Only one needing ESOL.”

8.6 Apprenticeships

The City of London operates its own Apprenticeship Scheme. Connecting Communities proactively supported this programme. This included:

- Regular scanning of available apprenticeships in the City and ensuring participants applied for these roles.
- Actively promote the City’s apprenticeship scheme particularly for those young people without A-levels and within local Job Centres.
- Supporting young people to complete their application process and prepare for apprenticeship interviews.
- Personalised support for apprenticeship applicants.
- Personalised support for unsuccessful applicants not getting jobs with the Corporation, offering them additional support.
- Enabling participants who meet the Job and Person Specifications to attend an interview.

The City Corporation collaborated directly with Connecting Communities to try to operate in a more holistic and joined-up manner. This is evidenced in the following comments:

“I saw your name in the recent internal circular and would like to set up a meeting to discuss how Connecting Communities can support the Apprenticeship Scheme – particularly those young people who are applying for an apprenticeship and are currently not in employment, education or training.”

“We have participants who might want to apply for apprenticeships. It’s a two-way process.”

The suggestion was also made that the Corporation might offer work experience to some of Connecting Communities’ participants who need some confidence building.

It was pleasing that several participants secured jobs and apprenticeships with the City of London, including one person at Mansion House in the Lord Mayor's office.

8.7 Special Programmes and training

The City of London's Connecting Community programme found that a highly successful method for linking enterprise and education and training and to ultimately secure employment for participants was to operate a series of thematic cohort courses. These were usually run by third party providers who could link aspirant participants into training and employment in targeted fields of interest. These short, certificated courses and employment openings were available in:

- Accountancy
- Construction
- Security

The following case studies give insight into how these programmes operated and their outcomes.

Accountancy Training

The cohort on this programme tended to be aged 30+ with a number of participants who were 40+ seeking a career change or those having worked in finance but with no formal qualification. One participant was in the under 24 years cohort. Over 30 participants applied for the 10 fully funded Accountancy places. In the end, 11 participants were accepted onto Accountancy Training with Osborne¹⁰. Through industry links, Hays Finance ran two workshops for the Accountancy Training cohort. The first workshop focused on job opportunities in the sector and how best to present a strong CV when job-seeking. The second workshop examined how participants could best present themselves on social media (in particular LinkedIn). Following these workshops, a photographer was commissioned to take 'head and shoulder' images so that participants had professional images for their online profiles. From this cohort two people have now secured full time roles and Connecting Communities continued to support the active job-search for the remaining participants.

Construction

Two Participants attended a 2-week training programme offered through The Construction Academy based at Canada Water. They undertook a range of work-related training courses which culminated in their achieving a CITB CSCS Certificate which allows them entry onto construction sites. One participant got into work, and we supported him to obtain a Gas Fitting Certificate. The other, the mother of a pre-school child, has been offered a job, subject to being able to drive. CC have supported her to receiving driving lessons.

The Construction course run by Cultiv8 (an established training provider) was established to address workforce demands in the construction sector and to particularly offer work to young people who are currently NEET. Working closely with construction companies, and in partnership with Cultiv8¹¹, a specialist 'entry-level' construction course was offered. Cultiv8 has good links with young people seeking training opportunities. A total of 16 young people (NEETs) enrolled on the Construction Programme. All the participants followed a programme of activities which culminated in them sitting the CITB CSCS Test. The dropout rate was very low given the 'higher risk' cohort (only 14%). So, 86% of

¹⁰ <https://www.osbornetraining.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.cultiv8.uk/>

participants graduated and achieved CSCS cards, enabling them to work on construction sites. Three participants are already in work, one participant is working in a specialist Demolition Apprenticeship and another started a bricklaying Apprenticeship in September. Six participants are receiving additional training support.

Rigging

Also, following the interest and success around construction, specialist Rigging Training was offered. This included registering young people with agencies specialising in recruitment into the industries which need riggers, including the theatre, film, events, lighting and TV. In the Rigging training, the participants learnt health and safety, cooperation and teamwork, and Specialist Rigging Skills including working at height. The rigging training also provides pathways into scaffolding. Upon completion of the training the participants were offered Registration with the industry body (National Rigging Association) and introductions to specialist recruitment agencies in the field. 14 NEETS, all with significant barriers, were enrolled onto the programme. 13 achieved a Safety Certificate and 10 were put forward for National Rigging Association registration and they, together with the other participants are continuing to receive active job-search and/or training as appropriate.

Security

Security Industry Training was provided to an initial cohort of 20 young people (NEETs). There was a total of 80 hours of training. The course provided three Level 3 Awards, including a Level 3 Award in Emergency First Aid at Work (RQF), the ACT (anti-terrorism) training programme and the Level 3 SIA Certificate. After participants achieved their Level 3 SIA Certificate, they could apply for their SIA Badge. This took at least four weeks as Police Checks must be undertaken. Once they have passed the SIA Test the participants were able to begin actively job searching with a view to accepting work “on condition they receive their SIA badge.” There are many and varied jobs in the security industry. The demand for security training was high and as a result further cohorts of security training were offered. The success rate on the security courses was very high. One participant relocated to Birmingham and did not complete the course. The remaining 19 all received their SIA Badge. As was stated, “The participants on the Security course are all very committed, and disciplined. They spend most of the time in the gym or working part-time or on zero-hours contracts as stewards or delivery drivers. Getting the SIA Badge is a huge incentive for them.” Jobs in Security are widely available and 35% of this first cohort secured full time roles. A further two cohorts totalling 38 Participants were supported during the contract extension period. Of these cohorts, 13% had secured jobs by end August and the remaining continued with training and support from Cultiv8.

8.8 Partnerships

Innovative partnership models allowed Connecting Communities to reach potential participants in ways beyond the traditional referral source for employment support of Jobcentres. Partnerships worked best when time was invested in relationship-building on an ongoing basis. This was particularly the case when Connecting Communities aligned with local partnership structures to build relationships with local groups. In person attendance at job centres, community hubs, libraries, and other community events allowed case workers to build new relationships and strengthen existing ones. Making strong and sustained partnerships is key to achieving programme success, but it can be difficult and time-consuming to forge new partnerships. This was especially the case in terms of the City of the City of London’s Connecting Communities programme. Firstly, time was exceeding tight as

in effect there were less than nine months to establish the partnerships as the latter nine months needed to be focused on getting people into full-time work and having them stay in full time work for at least six months. Moreover, all the other eleven boroughs in Connecting Communities had pre-existing employment and skills services. The City of London did not have this and so partnership and relationship building largely had to begin from an extremely limited base of existing activity. Despite this, strong partnerships were built with internal City of London partners, external training providers, community groups, employers and enterprises, local charities, education (including schools, colleges, and universities), and the Livery companies.

Strong employer engagement was vital to the success of Connecting Communities. In total 300 meetings and events were held with employers (see more details in Section 8.9). While initially, the Employment Engagement Officer was to lead on employer engagement¹², it became clear that the more practical way to work was for all the Connecting Communities team to look for opportunities for partnership working and to support participants into work. This included:

- Leveraging links from existing contacts
- Attending events and job fairs
- Building close relationships with local employers (including looking for local businesses seeking workers)
- Searching online for job vacancies, including vacancies in the City of London
- Cold-calling employers
- Reverse marketing of participants for potential opening
- Working with training providers who had links to employment agencies
- Working with Livery connections into businesses and sectors

While place-based approaches to employment support worked well, the Connecting Communities team needed to take a much wider approach to targeting potential employers. This is because the City of London acts as a hub for attracting workers and people seek employment in the City of London from many boroughs and beyond. Moreover, the businesses have far more vacancies and talent shortages than can ever be met by the small population of residents. Connecting Communities had to navigate these complexities, while simultaneously fully acknowledging the motivation and needs of the participants to deliver context-sensitive interventions, minimise risk, and be flexible and adaptive. Trusted relationships were also needed as the aim was not just to find participants *any* work, but rather to engage work with employers who offered *good* job opportunities with the potential for career progression.

¹² Due to staff shortages, the Employment Engagement Officer undertook some wider administration roles in the final six months of the original contract dates.



While partnerships were established, everyone could have done more to continue to build and sustain these relationships. It is important too, that the partnership building that has occurred to date, does not whither. Building sustainable relationships should become core to the City of London’s Skills Strategy and it should be a responsibility that all members of the City of London business and support community take seriously and see as part of their core remit. If partnership working were more effectively connected and sustained it would greatly enhance relationship-building and ensuring that collectively we are joining up support and targeting harder to reach individuals and groups. In particular, continued, enhanced partnership working needs to occur with:

- Education, including schools, colleges, and London-based universities.
- The City of London and other Housing Associations
- Libraries and community groups
- Youth Groups
- Livery Companies
- Job Centres
- Training Providers, Colleges, Employers
- The charities and other organisations the City of London/City Bridge Trust funds and/or supports.
- Connected with *Heart of the City* in order to inform SMEs about the Connecting Communities offerings
- Industry and Business Sector, including with major corporations, medium sized enterprises, small enterprises and microbusinesses, entrepreneurs, and key individuals.

The wider world of education and training can help to support partnerships by bridging the boundaries between employers, learners, and parents. This is especially crucial to building links that cross the various education transition points, such as between schools and further and higher education, and between being in education to being in work.

The local armed forces cadet corps were also supporters of partnerships with Connecting Communities. The Cadet Corps are active in our schools and attract young people from diverse backgrounds and social classes. For example:

“We would be very much interested in the diversity of more young people you mention – the ATC is looking to move its young folk along the continuum from Cadet Service into early adult life, working up chances to help young folk into really good job-opportunities. We’ve got so much to do to reach that stage yet, though.”

The City of London markets provide another rich source of partnership, both in its current and in its future operations, as shown in the following:

"I'd welcome an opportunity to meet to discuss how Connecting Communities can work with the 3 City Markets – Spitalfields, Billingsgate and Smithfields to support our Participants into sustainable work. I attach an overview of Connecting Communities which is a 12-borough employability programme that supports adults aged 18+ (not in full time work, training, or education) into sustainable jobs. My Team of Connecting Communities Caseworkers is keeping an eye on the City's Jobs website and one of our Participants recently had a job interview for one of the Market Constables. Many people are unaware of the City's markets and the employment and self-employment opportunities they offer. It would be good to be able to change that and give some of our participants a chance to have work experience, visits/tasters, before completing application forms."

"I had an interesting conversation with the Operations & Admin Manager, Markets & Consumer Protection) and have meeting with all three markets next week. She has jobs now and upcoming. I've asked her to alert me to jobs well in advance because we can work with people to be job-ready for her. She asks her staff to put information out on their personal Facebook accounts."

Connecting Communities also resulted in building stronger partnerships between the 12 Central London Boroughs who delivered the programme for Central London Forward. Regular meetings at all levels were held to build these networks and collaborations. For example, the local Business Managers met remotely on a monthly basis to exchange ideas and best practice. Six-weekly meetings were held at a strategic level with policy-level lead managers. Caseworkers met regularly for shared training and development. The Enterprise Officers attended job fairs and enterprise events in each other's local authorities. Training and development opportunities were shared across all the partner boroughs. Different boroughs developed complementary areas of expertise and good practice, and these were exchanged and shared at regular meetings. These partnerships provided great support and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. This close connection should be encouraged for the longer-term development of skills and talent in London.

Of course, the other vital partnership Connecting Communities had was with the local residents. Following a Connecting Communities flyer that went to every City of London social housing household, local residents and their connections became integrated into the Connecting Communities partnerships. With very small numbers of unemployed residents, when partnering with our residents, it was less about volume and more about the impact Connecting Communities could have with a few. Some individuals in the City needed a bit more than signposting to get them over the initial hurdle of seeking the services of Connecting Communities. There are also some of the local residents who are registered to receive Benefits who are not current available for employment, for example:

"It would be interesting to know how many of the 265 residents registered for Benefits are actually able to work (many may have long-term health issues, be carers, etc). I'm going to reach out to Hoxton Job Centre again and suggest that any CoL residents are automatically referred to us for additional support."

Regular articles (monthly) in the Buzz meant that the messages of support from Connecting Communities were ever present. Member briefings provided an opportunity to highlight some of the

good work that Connecting Communities was doing. The briefings and articles in local press, also encouraged Members to reach out to families in their wards and to refer these people to Connecting Communities. The local residents were supportive of Connecting Communities even when they could not directly participate due to eligibility. For example:

“I am a tenant of a flat from the City of London. I am currently a driver. I understand a lot in English, but I still miss school to open up. is it possible for your organization to help me find an English language course so that I can feel more confident in this language? After taking my daughter to school, I am available every day and willing to study, i.e., from 9.30 am -3.30 pm, then I start working. Are you able to help me?”

There is also the following example in regard to Portsoken residents:

“The concept of enabling Latino and Bangladeshi women have a centre where they can “cook and make” is a marvellous idea and I hope that you’ll be able to get that off the ground in the not-too-distant future. Supporting female empowerment and success is close to my heart so the idea chimes with me. In the meantime, I’ll see if there’s a way that between us, we can support 2 x 1-day Courses (one for Latino women, the other for Bangladeshi to be held in the Portsoken Community Centre on a Saturday) that would help them navigate the regulatory requirements.”

8.9 Employers and enterprises

The City of London develops and maintain partnerships with individuals and organisations across a range of industries and sectors. The City of London has the largest concentration of services studio and office spaces. This means that we have access on our doorstep to an exciting range of SME’s, microbusinesses, and solopreneurs. Prior to Connecting Communities, there was not a structured way for engaging with employers and enterprises with schools and government programmes around careers and employment. Connecting Communities developed methodologies and practices that ensure more structural interactions and connections and help to build relationships and networks between different people and organisations. It is important that these structures continue to be used and developed in the future. The structures included:

- 48 Regular engagements with employers
- Attending employer networking events resulting in 102 employer engagements and outcomes.
- 13 employers visited who had employed Connecting Communities participants.
- Distributing leaflets to local employers
- 137 meetings held with partners organisations

Conversely, local employers and enterprises greatly supported Connecting Communities to be more effective by:

- Communicating with Connecting Communities their latest vacancies or planned recruitment drives
- Offering taster days and work experience opportunities
- Speaking to our participants about what employers are looking for
- Assisting with mock interviews to prepare people for their next step

- Keeping Connecting Communities updated on the skills the businesses need young people to have so we could tailor our pre-work training

A core goal of Connecting Communities was to increase the supply of qualified and motivated local talent that London employers need. This was achieved through matching Londoners to the wide variety of employment and apprenticeship opportunities arising from London's vibrant economy. Employers and enterprises who partnered with Connecting Communities had greater access to diverse, qualified, motivated, and productive talent from across Central London. The caseworkers ensured that everyone put forward for a job had the right qualifications and attitudes to meet the business's workforce needs. Employers told us aspects of Connecting Communities that were important to them included:

- Tapping into local London talent
- Having a diverse and inclusive workforce
- Helping to capacity build local communities by offering support where possible to local initiatives like Connecting Communities.

Connecting Communities also provided a number of employer-led routes to support participants into sectors where there were known and identifiable demand. These sectors included health and social care, leisure and hospitality, logistics, tech/digital, construction, green/renewable sectors, horticulture, retail, facilities management, and security. Businesses also received ongoing support will all participants being provided with 26 weeks of in-work support and mentoring. This involved regular contact with the participants to help individuals to manage the transition into work, sustain in employment, and progress in their journey towards their desired career goals. A notable example of the way deep partnership working with enterprises can build long term sustainability both for the participants in employment and for the company looking to develop and expand access to local talent is the partnership working between Canopy¹³ and Connecting Communities.

¹³ Canopy by Hilton brings a modern boutique hotel experience. Enjoy with guest-directed service and thoughtful local choices. <https://www.hilton.com/en/brands/canopy-by-hilton/>



The Canopy partnership

The Canopy partnership involved Connecting Communities working closely with the management of the Canopy Hotel in the City of London. Connecting Communities ran a series of training opportunities for people to work in hospitality. Concurrently, the Canopy’s management identified staffing and talent needs. This close partnership working culminated in events jointly hosted by Canopy and Connecting Communities. These events enabled potential staff and management to meet and practice interview techniques and to understand the roles more deeply at the hotel. The events resulted in immediate success for both the participants and the company. Resulting from the events, Canopy was successfully able to recruit staff who could start immediately and had the skills they were looking for. This included waiting staff (5 people), kitchen porters (2), reception staff (2), back of house office staff (2), concierge staff (2), and housekeeping staff (2). There were also four other participants who wanted part-time work who have joined the register for working in the future. Canopy showed an enthusiasm for employing diverse staff from the local area and then working with them to be fully trained and supported to be successful in the workplace. The results have been truly life changing.





8.10 Livery

The Livery Companies of the City of London form a unique institution and have evolved over centuries as the protectors of quality and promoters of skills and opportunities. They reflect the broadest range of interests and skills and where necessary they have reinvented themselves to address contemporary challenges. They remain as relevant today as at any point in their history. The 30,000 plus members are some of the most influential people in London and beyond and the philanthropy of the Companies is exemplary. Going forward, the Livery Companies could play a crucial role in providing Enterprise Advisers. Through the Livery Skills Initiative, we have direct and long-term connections with over 4200 enterprises covering almost every imaginable industry and based in London and across the UK. With over 42,000 members keen to volunteer and be involved this provides an unmatched level of professional support and expertise. They could be part of the enhanced experience by enabling access to their networks and businesses associated with the Livery (there are currently in excess of 4200 of these). The Livery Education Network and London Careers Fair could also support access to young people and engagement with potential employment opportunities and could enable people to build authentic connections which open new possibilities.

In preparation for establishing the ESF funded Connecting Communities initiatives the Strategic Director of Education and Skills for the City received feedback from 121 Livery Companies and Guilds about their support for skills development. Given their heritage it was no surprise to learn that three quarters contribute at least £10k with one in five investing over £100k in skills development annually. Almost half are involved in formal courses and apprenticeships and one in five liaise with businesses to identify employment opportunities. Over 50 Companies currently contribute to the bursaries administered and match-funded by City & Guilds to help those in financial need attain the skills that offers them a brighter and more secure future.

Of all the Livery Companies surveyed, over two thirds were motivated to support the employment of young people – a key goal and objective of the Connecting Communities initiative. Working in conjunction with 11 inner London boroughs and Central London Forward, the City is spearheading the drive for social mobility and opportunity through skills development. Successfully bidding for £18m of ESF funding, the City has established the Connecting Communities skills hub offering advice and guidance, signposting and support to individuals through outreach and case workers. The project provides re-skilling, up-skilling and transitioning support around employability, education, and fusion skills.



To be completely successful, there needs to be ongoing support from business community of the City. Social mobility is enabled by opening doors and creating sustainable employment opportunities. Given the influence of members of the Livery, Connecting Communities sought support through coaching and mentoring and in identifying employment and education opportunities. Connecting Communities encouraged organisations supported by individual Companies in the Inner London boroughs to refer eligible individuals to the services it provides in their quest for sustainable jobs.

8.11 Awards and staff development

While the main focus of the report of the outcomes highlights the outcomes for the participants, it is also important to recognise the professional development of the case workers and the programme staff as also being an important outcome of Connecting Communities.

One of the exciting outcomes was that one of the Connecting Communities Caseworkers, Nisha Kaushal, was awarded the Programme’s Delivery Partner Awards in the Partnership Category. Nisha made significant professional development over the course of the Connecting Communities programme. She consistently produced innovative ideas and now confidently develops them into action. Her partnership with Osborne Training resulted in a cohort of 11 people undertaking

Accountancy Courses. She also linked with employment agencies to ensure that the participants have the best possible chance of getting into work. She successfully supported both our older (50+) cohorts and younger graduates into employment.



Another colleague in the Connecting Communities staff team undertook additional professional training as outlined below:

"I signed up to do the IEP's Level 2 Employability Practice and completed 38% of the modules over the weekend. There are 17. They each take 30 – 60 mins. I've also signed up for 2 separate modules – Support for Over 50s and Understanding Neurodivergence (both of which are from the Level 3 syllabus). The online training is very well put together. For each module, there's an "academic" background section followed by practical and interactive information, links to online additional resources and a test at the end. The format is standard across all modules which makes learning easier."

9. Impacts

Section 8 outlined all the outcomes in terms of quantitative outcomes and qualitative learning and outcomes. This section aims to capture in summary the main qualitative impacts.

a) People got into employment and stayed in employment

"We are getting people into work. We support their health and wellbeing so that they can get into work. We are helping them towards employment/getting a job."

"I hope the first week in your new role went well. It will be quite a change for you."

"I am so happy to share that I have been offered a full-time permanent position as a Prudential Risk Analyst at BLME (Bank of London & The Middle East) and I have signed and dated my employment contract."

"I have started my job as a Programme Coordinator about a year ago with support of Connecting Communities Project. My case worker Mr. Daniel Estrada helped from A-Z through the process of getting a job; from searching for positions, filling out the job applications, how to write a personal statement, mock interviews and follow up after I got the job. I appreciate his patience, respect, and care. And overall, I appreciate Connecting Communities Project that help people who are really in need of a job. There were no limits in the field of obtaining a job, that they have not helped."

"Many thanks again for your support - it's really nice to have people like you keeping the spirits up at a stressful and lonely job of job searching. It's a bit of a relief, at least for now, to have found a job again."

"The team filled me with confidence, useful insight and a needed boost to get me the job I was really wanting."

b) Sustainable networks around developing skills and employment emerged

"I had full-on days last week at the fair and events, that I was a bit overwhelmed by going from hardly networking to the maximum."

"Being included by 35 people of established people in the industry from all around the world was an incredible experience. Exchanging my business card and the reaction of my website was stupendous."

"This week I've a couple of meetings during Milan Fashion Week (also with people who were at the fair), and I will have meetings with some of the UK based manufacturers as well."

c) People developed their confidence and fusion skills

"The panel talk went incredibly well! I was surprisingly calm and concise in my delivery. The Skills Conference helped me to prepare for this."

"I felt so at ease without having an impostor syndrome popping up."

"Connecting Communities has been a really useful route in gaining self confidence in an otherwise precarious jobscape... just when I needed it."

d) People developed their digital skills and their online skills and experience profiles

"I felt like I didn't have to explain myself much as it is very clear on the website."

e) People re-engaged with actively seeking employment

"I've got my energy back."

f) People developed new approaches

"Being introduced to the STAR method of answering interview questions was a game changer."

In addition to these direct impacts, there were many expressions of gratitude that were received, such as the following examples:

"I want to thank all of you for yesterday's Connecting Communities workshop and organisation. I wish you prosperity and luck in your project."

"Following our conversation dated 9 Jan 2023 I want to express my passion and willingness to be part of Connecting Communities, City of London."

"I am so proud of how much I have pushed myself and can't express enough the support I have received from you."

"Thank you, Gwen for your continued support - I really appreciate it."

"Thank you all so, so much for your amazing support. This service has been just fantastic."

10. Challenges

There were both internal and external challenges that impacted upon the outcomes and impacts of Connecting Communities.

The external challenges that impacted on all the 12 Connecting Communities partners included:

- The **rapid changes** in the employment context and the skills needs (see Section 3) and consequently people failed to secure the changing skills to secure good jobs.
- Local authority **commissioning timescales** limited the extent to which prospective providers could engage with targeted communities and co-design interventions with Connecting Communities.
- **The need to balance taking a localised approach and economies of scale.** Local approaches work well for the individual and provide local and personalised support. This model is popular with participants but more costly to deliver. Localised approaches facilitated the delivery of personalised, context-sensitive interventions, but may not be financially viable in the longer term due to the high set-up and management costs.
- There were delays due to **borough recruitment processes** taking some time (including in the City of London). Due to the elevated level of demand for effective employability and fusion skills case workers there were difficulties in recruiting and retaining highly skilled staff in most boroughs.
- **Staggered contract starting dates** meant that comparisons between boroughs was not straightforward or relevant given various levels of embedded structural support for employment and skills programmes across the boroughs.
- **Senior staff changes at Central London Forward** meant that almost all the original staff at the start of the 18-month programme, changed during the course of the programme. This meant that targets, expectations, compliance requirements and relationships also shifted.

The internal challenges that particularly impacted the City of London's Connecting Communities programme included:

- **Not having a physical presence in the community** to promote the Connecting Communities services to the potential participants and to establish partnerships with community stakeholders. Unlike the other boroughs, the City of London programme did not have access to a dedicated and public-facing space to implement the programme. Efforts were made to be physically present in Job Centres, hotels where the Afghan residents were located, libraries and community facilities but not having a set physical space made recruiting participants more complex. The COL Connecting Communities team tried to have an active and visual presence at community events and other local gatherings. This created networking opportunities, which in turn facilitated the recruitment of participants, yet it is a resource-intensive approach.
- There was some **inconsistent contact with individuals**. The intention was for the minimum of fortnightly contact, but some participants were difficult to contact, would not attend scheduled meetings or appointments, or complete relevant follow-up activities. The reason for not being in regular contact varied for each individual, but in many cases, it was due to a loss of general trust in employability support services, low personal confidence, a lack of motivation and/or will to try to seek full-time work, experiences of rejections (including not being shortlisted or not being successful at interviews) and a lack of skills or qualifications. These were the most common barriers participants faced that could act to reduce their commitment to the programme.
- Personal circumstances, such as a **health conditions or disability**, childcare responsibilities, financial debt, and access to transport were also common constraints preventing people gaining full-time work. Difficulties were experienced in mobilising participants with a health condition or disability.
- **COL have very few local unemployed residents** so had to cast their net more widely to attract participants, despite the demand for, and availability of good jobs in the City of London.
- Some participants had **unrealistic expectations** of the jobs that might be able to secure given their current skills, qualifications, and experiences. At times this was also coupled with a reluctance to consider other employment opportunities beyond their core interest area, even when the participants might have skills to work in similar jobs in related fields.
- The **APTEM compliance processes were onerous**. The requirement to provide detailed “compliant evidence” was extensive and specific. The evidence is not in itself complicated, but for example, it was an imperative to receive confirmation from a training provider that a participant has started a course or that a participant was now in employment. There were frequent delays in getting this evidence as the participants were less motivated to provide this evidence once they had secured their personal outcomes. Financial incentives such as travel subsidies were offered to encourage participants to send the required evidence, but even these were sometimes insufficient to motivate the participant to provide the evidence.

11. Extension

Despite the internal and external challenges outlined in Section 10, the City of London’s Connecting Communities programme applied for and received a three-month extension to the active delivery period. The programme was extended from the original closing date of June 30, 2023, until 30 September 2023. The extension was particularly focused on outcomes for young people aged 18-24 years, especially those people who are NEETs. The only outcome for this cohort during the extension period was to ensure that they were either in work or in training, by September 30, 2023. The focus

of the extension period was to get young people on 4–6-week Technical Skills Courses (and/or ESOL). It was felt that a renewed focus on 18–24-year-olds would ensure greater success with this age group.

The extension of time also meant that there was longer time to ensure that the closure procedures were conducted with due diligence. From the perspective of the programme this meant:

- Ensuring all data and compliance procedures were correctly completed and documented
- That this final report for the City of London’s Connecting Communities programme was written to capture the outcomes, impact and learning from the programme
- That any remaining active participants were ended on APTM and signposted to further support.
- That all staff ceased employment either by the June 30 contract date or the September 30 extension date.

12. Recommendations

The City of London should consider:

- 1) **Creating a permanent skills and employability hub that is physically visible in the community** as:
 - The City of London is the only London borough without a dedicated service.
 - Impact would be enhanced through more joined up programming between skills development, employability programmes and adult learning opportunities to better co-design and community engagement
 - Establishing a joined-up and holistic skills and employment system brings together schools and colleges with partners in business, public and voluntary sector
 - It could provide more support for employers – and higher expectations – around inclusive recruitment, flexibility at work, job design and support
- 2) Further **embedding of inclusive recruitment practices and support existing staff with training**, development, and career support to ensure opportunities within the City of London are available to people who may currently be further from employment.
- 3) Providing **more support for work experience to people of all ages** as a lack of current work experience is a major inhibitor to gaining employment.
- 4) **Reviewing local governance structures and funding allocations around skills and employability** to promote knowledge-sharing between departments (especially between DCCS and IG) and between internal stakeholders including through regular meetings where experiences and practice can be shared both formally and informally, and be delivered consistently over time, including through staff changes.
- 5) **Emphasising the need for English language lessons to be made available to people for a much longer time after they have arrived in the UK.** Particularly, people should be supported who have been in the UK more than 10 years and do not have entry level English.

Funders of future skills and employability programmes should consider:

- 1) **Allowing more time to develop capacity** and acknowledge the amount of time needed for place-based programmes to become fully operational.
- 2) **Commissioning timescales** need to enable local stakeholders and providers to be more integrally involved in programme co-design.



13. Conclusion

Connecting Communities has the potential to make a significant contribution to a flourishing society by giving people an equal opportunity to enrich their lives and reach their full potential. Moreover, people being in decent work supports a thriving economy by enabling industries to access to the skills and talent they need and ensuring that more individuals can reach their potential and secure decent work. It shows that collaborative working can make the core City institutions even better connected and responsive to changed needs. Connecting Communities has contributed to individual and systemic resilience by providing support and enabling structures which can be mobilised in the shorter-term to boost individual's confidence, skills, readiness for work and employment. It is hoped that the partnerships formed, the approaches trialled, and the relationships with the community are able to continue in a sustainable manner for the longer term.

Due to the extension of the project from its original end date, the remaining members of the City of London's Connecting Communities team continue to impact the lives of those it supports into training, education, and work. Over the past 18 months Connecting Communities has supported hundreds of unemployed jobseekers into training, education, and work. This has had considerable impact on the lives of those participants as well as their families.

Appendix One: Original contract performance outcomes

	1.1 - Closest to the labour market	1.2 - 18 to 24yr olds not in employment, training, or education	1.4 – participants furthest from the labour market	Total
Starts	160	160	280	600
Males	80	80	140	300
Females	80	80	140	300
Registered unemployed	64%	64%	50%	
Economically inactive	36%	36%	50%	
BAME participants	34%	42%	25%	
Over 50 years	18%	0%	6%	
Disability	24%	23%	16%	
Lone parents	16%	9%	0%	
Basic skills need	13%	16%	0%	

Appendix Two: Sample of letter sent to schools

Dear Headteacher,

As you may be aware, we have a very special opportunity until June 2023 to help young people, families, and community members to move into employment and education and training. The City of London’s Connecting Communities can provide financial support to help anyone aged 18 and over to upskill, reskill and get into work.

In recent months Connecting Communities has successfully helped a wide range of adults to access training and jobs.

Opportunities include a variety of roles including, for example, in the booming hospitality sector and access to a 2-week Construction Course which enables attendees to get a CSCS card (a passport to working on any construction site). We’ve also helped recent university and college graduates to access IT/Data Programming Courses and older adults to change direction, with one becoming a part-time Social Prescriber.

If you have a newsletter going out to parents in the next few weeks, I’d appreciate your including something about Connecting Communities and how the team of experienced Caseworkers can help get people into work. Also feel free to target particular former pupils or families where this offer might make a huge difference.

I attach some wording and images that you can use.

If you would like to be sent a promotional pull up banner to place in a prominent position in the school, contact the Connecting Communities’ Administrator, Richa Sagar richa.sagar@cityoflondon.gov.uk who will arrange for one (or more if you wish) to be sent to you. Please let her have the recipient’s name and address.

For any other information regarding Connecting Communities, email Gwen Rhys, Business Manager, on gwen.rhys@cityoflondon.gov.uk or call her on 07599 102169.

Appendix Three: The Extension Period – 1 July – 30 September

During this period the Business Manager, Gwen Rhys, with one Caseworker, Nisha Kaushal, actively recruited and worked with participants until the end of August after which CLF asked that no more participants were enrolled and closure processes commenced.

The team was tasked by CLF to work with 18-24 NEETS only. During July and August, 65 participants were enrolled. The majority were Male, Inactive (ie not claiming benefits) and identified as BAME and targets were exceeded for these three measures. All but one, who had recently arrived in the country had Basic Skills.

37 participated in Security Training provided by Cultiv8 and 14 in Rigging Training provided by CM2. The remaining 14, who were referred via the Job Centre, were supported by the remaining two Connecting Communities City of London team members.

In addition to exceeding the targets mentioned above, by the end of the operational extension period the team had exceed targets for a further two measures: (1) the total number of participants leaving in Work or in Training (+33%) and (2) the total number to have received training or education (+24%).

The 14 participants referred through Job Centres received weekly newsletters with “Top Tips” for Job Seeking and dates of Job Fairs. Nishal kept in touch with them regularly and offered support with job applications and interview practice and signposted them to training opportunities.

Additional Outcomes from Initial Contract Participants

Monitoring of Participants supported during the initial contract period to 30 June 2023 continued during the extension period. Two more completed ESOL courses, and four sustained their employment for 6 months. Both of these outcomes contributed towards overall achievement of targets.

One participant was asked by the Corporation’s Library Services to support some work at the Artizan Library in November. Although voluntary, this activity is confidence-boosting and may, in time, give the participant a new career direction.

An Afghan refugee who had already been in employment for over six months secured his “dream job” as a City of London Market Constable. Hopefully this will lead to his being able to apply for training with the City of London Police once his required residency period has been met.

Some final measures

By end August 2023, the City of London Connecting Communities programme had supported 186 participants (56% of target) aged 25 and over, and 139 aged 18-24 (NEET) (87% of target).

89 participants had secured employment