**COVID19 Provider Survey Summary**

The COVID19 Provider Survey was sent to all employability providers funded through City of Edinburgh Council and contract managed by Capital City Partnership. A total of 12 providers completed the survey, which covers a total of 18 funded projects. Below is a summary of: the impact lockdown had on providers; changes made by providers as lockdown eased; plans for a phased return to work; and examples of good practice adapting delivery to ensure clients remained engaged.

**Impact on providers since lockdown**

* Organisations have been home/remote working since March, with the delivery switching from employability to the health and wellbeing of clients, especially mental health given the vulnerability of a large percentage of clients.
* The aim has been to support all clients, whether they are actively seeking support or whether caseworkers reach out to those more isolated and checking on their wellbeing.
* As the lockdown progressed, some organisations moved quickly to reintroduce employability support and encourage clients to continue to progress where possible, including partner organisations providing talks, hosting employability groups etc.
* Support for clients has included food parcels/vouchers, provision of home items, support with bills and utilities and much more, often with problems being heard from the younger members of the family.
* Providers have been innovative in their ways of communicating with clients – Facebook, Zoom, Teams, Twitter, WhatsApp and even gaming apps such as Discord have been used alongside the traditional phone calls/texts. This has also helped providers deliver across multiple areas and break geographical boundaries among young people.
* However not all clients engaged have the digital skills or access to equipment to be supported virtually, which many have found challenging.
* Providers have also had to ensure staff are safe and comfortable working from home, with regular virtual meetings taking place across the board as well as social activities.
* Staff have also been using the time to upskill and introduce new policies and procedures for home working.
* Volunteering to support the COVID19 crisis has also been a massive part of providers delivery.

**Changes as Lockdown eased**

* Meetings with clients in public and at home (where appropriate) is on the agenda for some organisations, however for others the vulnerability of their clients from a health perspective makes this impossible.
* Any meetings with clients face to face will be risk assessed on an individual basis.
* Providers are working on Health and Safety for return to work, with concerns over the limited space many have in their premises.
* Work has begun with employers who offer placements to clients about supporting them with the reintroduction of placements and the changed required.
* Work has also begun with supporting organisations who rely on volunteers, again with the changes which will take place.
* The relaxation of lockdown will also see data collected on how the employment landscape has changed – jobs will be easier to find in some areas (nursing, care homes etc) however it is anticipated that there will be many redundancies and the focus of support may need to change.
* Staff are also concerned about many people’s ability to adapt to things moving back to any kind of normality, especially those with anxiety issues.
* Although there is a change, all organisations are keen to delivery virtually regardless of lockdown easing due to some of the successes it has brought.

**Plans for phased return to work**

* Risk assessment of premises and Health and Safety audits are high on all providers agendas prior to returning to work.
* PPE is also a high priority where required, with all premises having sanitiser and increased cleaning, with other providers installing protective screes at desks and workstations.
* The limited space is raised as an issue regularly – all providers will be limiting the number of service users/staff in premises at any one time.
* There will still be a phased return with many planning to have a blend of home and office working.
* Some larger organisations are considering leasing more space at least on a temporary basis.
* More face to face meetings will be possible, which is a benefit to more vulnerable clients unable to talk in groups or make use of technology.
* Most providers are looking to ensure that meetings will require an appointment and no drop ins will be conducted as it is unmanageable when looking to control numbers.
* Delivery of programmes is also being adapted – numbers will be reduced in groups; days will be altered and new activities planned where the impact of COVID19 means the previously stated activity is no longer possible.

**Examples of good practice**

**Example 1: Action for Children (Youthbuild)**

Action for Children’s (AFC) Youthbuild programme is aimed at young people aged 16-24 years old living in Edinburgh who are facing barriers to employment. The programme includes several sector-based qualifications, Level 4 SQA Health & Safety in a Construction Environment, five-year CSCS card (Green card), employability skills and practical workshops. On completion of the training, participants are supported into a two-week work trial. If successful, the participant will be offered employment and receive in-work support for up to six months.

Lockdown has meant that the training was all but impossible. Social distancing meant it was difficult to run practical elements or have clients in the AFC training centre, while testing centres for CSCS were closed and construction-based employers could not offer work trials or placements.

As a result, AFC have reassessed the programme and its structure to ensure that as many young people can be supported as possible with the easing of lockdown. This new model sees the training element run over a longer period (10 weeks), meaning clients can be split in to smaller groups to allow all participants to gain access to the training centre as required. This will also allow:

* link with employers/partners to introduce new ways of working E.g. virtual site visits/community challenges
* ensure YP can access the training centre weekly therefore a diluted model of attendance is required to accommodate large groups across the working week to ensure this is inline with government guidelines (we also know that YP prefer to attend the centre for training therefore we want to encourage this as much as possible considering all safety measures)
* Source adequate IT for service users to access training remotely if/when required.
* meet the needs of those who are facing considerable poverty and challenges with health & wellbeing which has increased during lockdown. This model allows more flexibility for staff to respond on a needs basis and provide extra support should YP and their families require this.
* respond immediately to further lockdown restrictions and continue to provide training online to eliminate any need to stop delivery.

The new model will be in place effective immediately and will run until March, with the aim to move back to the traditional delivery model after this. If restrictions ease, the original model will be reverted to sooner.

**Example 2: WorkingRite (Leith Pioneers)**

WorkingRite’s Leith Pioneers project is aimed at helping young people aged 15-18, who have stopped attending school regularly. Targeting three schools – Leith Academy, Trinity Academy and Drummond Community High School – it engages those young people with poor attendance looking for a new approach.

The project sees young people work in groups within an office setting, so lockdown has again meant it was originally difficult to delivery anything to clients. However, the reliance on an office space has been mitigated by WorkingRite’s development of a remote programme.

In a practical sense, Working Rite have adapted well to online, remote learning and engagement. They have developed a suite of 42 online courses and workshops that can be offered to young people anywhere in the country. The online courses are through both The Digital College and Atlas (Citation platform), as well as working closely with partners in Edinburgh to bring online workshops/courses to the table for young people around Scotland. WorkingRite were able to take part in the development of eight online workshops with FastForward and continue working with Conflict Resolution through Cyrenians. Since then these workshops have been delivered to young people elsewhere in Scotland. Through the partnership with FastForward, they were also able to be a part of an online workshop with Young Scot called Money & Me.

WorkingRite have also brought young people from different local authorities together on remote workshops. YP in Argyll & Bute were recently attending a course alongside young people from Edinburgh and Kilmarnock. This is a step forward for many young people, who are often very territorial and will not travel to other areas of Edinburgh, never mind elsewhere in the country. The use of online courses has opened them up to being involved with people outside their own communities and when lockdown eases, may mean they are easier to engage with outside of a local setting.

The intention is to get back face to face with young people as soon as it becomes safe to do so, however the success of online delivery has meant a blended model may become the new normal.