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# The Impact of COVID 19 on Employability Services in Edinburgh and Beyond.

## Executive Summary

This paper looks at the data held on Caselink, the management information system used in Edinburgh, East Lothian and, for a time, Midlothian to look at the impact of the lockdown on services and support. To achieve this, data for the same time period (quarter 1 April-June) in 2018, 2019 and 2020 has been downloaded from the system and analysed. The data was downloaded from Caselink on the 7th July. In addition to analysing the Caselink data Capital City Partnership also carried out a survey of organisations in late May early June to look at how they were changing services over the course of the pandemic. The data that follows in this summary are based simply on the Edinburgh clients.

* Number of new client engagements has fallen by 59% if we compare Q1 2019 with Q1 2020.

Whilst the overall numbers of new starts have fallen, the data indicates that many of these are either job ready or are young and at the early stage of the employability pipeline.

* In terms of the initial pipeline stage of these new engagements in Q1 2019 24% of new starts were assessed as being at pipeline stage 4 or 5 and in 2020 it was 29%.
* In 2019 32% of new starts were under 20 years of age. In 2020 this had increased so that 38% were under the age of 20.

Each client who is assessed has barriers identified and recorded on Caselink. These can range from being low skilled, through to issues with drug addiction.

* Low Skilled remains the most frequently recorded barrier although as a proportion it has fallen slightly in 2020 when compared to the previous quarters.
* Poor interview skills and CV presentation has been recorded by 42% of new engagements in Q1 2020 – in 2019 it was 25%.
* The barrier that stands out is *“Migrants / people with a foreign background / minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)”*. In 2018 and 2019 9% of new engagements had this barrier ticked. In 2020 28% -109 clients in total- had this barrier ticked.

Support has continued to be provided throughout the pandemic, although it has been delivered differently often using technology or phone calls.

* In Q1 2019 there were 12,554 support sessions recorded. In Q1 2020 this had increased so 21,891 support sessions were logged on the system.

Outcomes and progressions have fallen considerably as opportunities for everything from employment to volunteering have reduced through lockdown and beyond.

* In Q1 2019 there were 650 outcomes or progressions recorded on Caselink for Edinburgh residents. In Q1 2020 this had fallen to 191.
* Full Time job outcomes have been affected less than some other progressions- a fall of 37% comparing 2020 with 2019.

The service providers survey approached the 18 organisations delivering services through contracts for City of Edinburgh Council. From the 12 that responded we can see that;

* As lockdown started the focus of support delivered changed from employability to the health and wellbeing of clients, especially mental health given the vulnerability of a large percentage of those that are supported.
* The caseworkers did tend to be more proactive looking to engage with all clients, whether they are actively seeking support or not.
* 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.
* Whilst this has also helped providers deliver across multiple areas and for those that work with young people it has meant that they have been able to break geographical boundaries, not all clients engaged have the digital skills or access to equipment to be supported virtually, which many have found challenging.
* Going forward service delivery methods will have to change; meetings will require an appointment and no drop ins will be delivered; numbers will be reduced in groups; days altered and new activities planned where the impact of COVID19 means the previously stated activity is no longer possible.
* The limited space in offices was raised as an issue and 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.
* Providers have also had to ensure staff are safe and comfortable working from home, with regular virtual meetings taking place as well as social activities to ensure staff remain connected. Staff have also been using the time to upskill and as well as volunteering to support the COVID19 crisis in their localities.

## Introduction

Employability services that are being delivered both in the City Region and in Edinburgh tend to focus on interaction, 1:1 meetings and face to face support dominate in the methods that agencies choose to deliver services. As the country entered lockdown at the end of March and continued to be guided by the health experts to avoid all unnecessary contact into July there was clearly going to be an impact on the way in which people received support.

This paper looks at the data held on Caselink, the management information system used in Edinburgh, East Lothian and, for a time, Midlothian to look at the impact of the lockdown on services and support. To achieve this, data for the same time period (quarter 1 April-June) in 2018, 2019 and 2020 has been downloaded from the system and analysed. This demonstrates how the pandemic and the measures put in place to reduce infection has impacted on service take up.

The discussion also includes the results of a survey of Caselink users as to how they were changing services over the course of the pandemic. Whilst this is more anecdotal it is useful as it illustrates how staff at the organisations delivering the services have been impacted by COVID 19 and what innovative approaches they have taken to try and ensure that they continue to provide support to those most in need.

## Methodology

The data was downloaded from Caselink on the 7th July so there is a possibility that additional data has been added to the 2020 set since then. The data is split into 2 groups. The first group looks at all Caselink records regardless of where the service is being delivered or where the funding comes from. This group includes all the East Lothian and Midlothian records but will also include records that organisations add for services delivered elsewhere. For example, RUTS have recorded work in Falkirk, Fife and West Lothian whilst Access to Industry have in the past added details of a project based in Lanarkshire. The second group looks simply at the Edinburgh situation, focusing on projects funded by the Council and or delivering in the City. Keeping both of these groups as wide as possible ensures that the sample is large and also reduces year to year changes simply based on differences in funding removing (or adding) records to the data set.

## Overall Engagements

Engagements are the way in which new starts are recorded on the system. It’s important for projects to have new starts engaging, as they will form the foundation for future outcomes. If engagements are lower, then going forward all things being equal there will be a proportional reduction in the number of outcomes and progressions recorded.

### Table 1 Caselink Engagements Quarter 1 (April-June)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2019-2020 |
| All Records | 1276 | 1238 | 496 | -60% |
| Edinburgh | 1027 | 959 | 394 | -59% |
| Edinburgh Claimant Count (May) | 4,940 | 5,890 | 17,885 | +204% |

Source: Caselink and NOMIS

Generally a fall in engagement numbers may be a reflection in a fall in the number of people needing support and could be seen as a positive reflection of the fact that the labour market is stimulating demand for labour without the need for additional support. However, the situation in 2020 does not follow these norms and it can be seen that whilst the claimant count increased year on year the number of new engagements has fallen. This isn’t surprising given the fact that the measures taken to tackle the virus have focused on reducing social interaction, temporarily closing many sectors of the economy and calling on people to stay at home to help the health professionals fight the pandemic.

So overall numbers are down on previous years, the next area to look at is if there are any changes to the profile of the group engaging in 2020 compared to previous quarters. Table 2 looks at the gender split of the new engagements and focuses on Edinburgh.

### Table 2 Gender Split of New Engagements Quarter 1 (April-June)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Male | Female |
|  | Count | % of total  | Count | % of total |
| 2018 | 632 | 61.5 | 395 | 38.5 |
| 2019 | 662 | 69.0 | 297 | 31.0 |
| 2020 | 238 | 60.4 | 156 | 39.6 |

Source: Caselink

What we can see from this is that the split is similar to that recorded in 2018, whilst in 2019 there was a far higher proportion of males engaging than females. Overall, we can see that well over half of all new engagements are males, this broadly reflects the gender split of the claimant count- May 2020 claimant count indicated that 62% of claimants were male and 38% female. Table 3 breaks down the new engagements in terms of broad age categories.

### Table 3 Age Profile of New Engagements Quarter 1 (April -June)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Age | Count | Proportion | Count | Proportion | Count | Proportion |
| under 20 | 254 | 25% | 306 | 32% | 151 | 38% |
| 20-29 | 172 | 17% | 184 | 19% | 96 | 24% |
| 30-39 | 202 | 20% | 141 | 15% | 61 | 15% |
| 40-49 | 175 | 17% | 129 | 13% | 50 | 13% |
| 50-59 | 152 | 15% | 153 | 16% | 25 | 6% |
| 60 and over | 72 | 7% | 46 | 5% | 11 | 3% |
|  | 1027 | 1 | 959 | 1 | 394 | 100% |

Source: Caselink

In 2018 25% of new starts were under 20 years of age and 17% were 20-29. In 2020 this had changed so that 38% were under the age of 20 and 24% were 20-29. This could indicate that demand is high amongst the younger age group, reflecting the worry that young people will be most adversely affected by the economic consequences of the lock down. Alternatively, it could be that projects that work with younger people are better able to facilitate an engagement due to connections with schools for example.

In terms of the initial pipeline stage of these new engagements one would anticipate that there would be an increased number of new starts from pipeline stages 4 and 5, if the services are being used more by individuals who had been in work prior to the lock down. Table 4 indicates that this is the case. In 2018 12% of new engagements were at pipeline stage 4, in 2019 it was 24% and in 2020 it was 29%. If employment opportunities arise it should be easier to find jobs for those that are at stage 4 than for those who have been assessed as being at an earlier stage of the employability pipeline.

### Table 3 Initial Pipeline Stage of New Engagements Quarter 1 (April -June)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|  | Count | Proportion | Count | Proportion | Count | Proportion |
| Pipeline Stage 1 | 101 | 10% | 125 | 13% | 89 | 23% |
| Pipeline Stage 2 | 295 | 29% | 164 | 17% | 84 | 21% |
| Pipeline Stage 3 | 298 | 29% | 214 | 22% | 48 | 12% |
| Pipeline Stage 4 | 124 | 12% | 229 | 24% | 113 | 29% |
| Pipeline Stage 5 | 200 | 19% | 224 | 23% | 57 | 14% |
| Blank | 9 | 1% | 3 | 0% | 3 | 1% |
|  | 1027 | 1 | 959 | 1 | 394 | 100% |

Source: Caselink

Table 3 also indicates that as well as a higher proportion being at Stage 4 the proportion of new engagements where the client was at stage 1 has also increased from 10% in 2018 to 23% in 2020. This is likely to be linked to the higher number of young people who started with projects in 2020 and we can see that 82 of the 89 assessed as being at stage 1 were under the age of 20. What this suggest is that the young people engaging with the services are not young people who had a job and have lost it due to the pandemic, rather they are young people who hadn’t had a job to start with. They will still face the difficulty of getting a job in a economic downturn, often where they will be competing against people with more experience.

### Table 4 Barriers Recorded for New Engagements Quarter 1 (April -June)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Low skilled | 697 | 68% | 633 | 66% | 229 | 58% |
| Poor interview skills; CV presentation | 327 | 32% | 240 | 25% | 166 | 42% |
| Migrants people with a foreign background minorities  | 97 | 9% | 89 | 9% | 109 | 28% |
| No qualifications | 396 | 39% | 308 | 32% | 108 | 27% |
| In full-time or part-time education | 120 | 12% | 154 | 16% | 107 | 27% |
| Living in a jobless household | 173 | 17% | 181 | 19% | 95 | 24% |
| Mental health issues | 239 | 23% | 247 | 26% | 95 | 24% |
| Economically Inactive | 92 | 9% | 53 | 6% | 89 | 23% |
| Lack of confidence | 246 | 24% | 243 | 25% | 81 | 21% |
| Workforce Returner | 82 | 8% | 70 | 7% | 77 | 20% |

Source: Caselink

Each client who is assessed has barriers identified and recorded on Caselink. These can range from being low skilled, through to issues with drug addiction. Table 4 looks at the 10 most frequently cited barriers in 2020 and compares this with the position in 2018 and 2019.

From this we can see that Low Skilled remains the most frequently recorded barrier although as a proportion it has fallen slightly in 2020 when compared to the previous quarters. Poor interview skills and CV presentation has been recorded by 42% of new engagements in quarter 1 2020 – in 2019 it was 25% and in 2018 it was 32%.

In full and part time education has increased from 16% in quarter 1 2019 to 27% in quarter 1 2020. This is likely related to the high number of new engagements from those under the age of 20 and the fact that projects who work with schools may well have added more new engagements relative to other projects, simply because of the easier referral/transition process.

The rise in the number of clients who had marked that they were economically inactive could also be linked into the number of young people coming onto the system as this is usually linked to individuals who are not working but aren’t claiming one of the out of work benefits. This can often be due to the conditions relating to the benefit (its rare for under 18 years olds to be able to claim JSA or UC) or it could be due to the person having just left a job and isn’t yet claiming.

The barrier that stands out is *“Migrants / people with a foreign background / minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)”*. In 2018 and 2019 9% of new engagements had this barrier ticked. In 2020 28% -109 clients in total- had this barrier ticked. Clearly, over lockdown a far higher proportion of new engagements were from people with a migrant background. Table 5 below breaks this down in terms of ethnicity.

### Table 5 Ethnicity Recorded for New Engagements where the barrier *“Migrants / people with a foreign background / minorities (including marginalised communities such as the Roma)”* had been ticked Quarter 1 (April -June)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Count** |
| **African, African Scottish or African British** | **13** |
| **African, Caribbean or Black any other (Please specify)** | **6** |
| South African | 1 |
| Spanish/Nigerian | 1 |
| (blank) | 4 |
| **Arab** | **6** |
| **Asian Bangladeshi** | **1** |
| **Asian Chinese** | **2** |
| **Asian Indian** | **12** |
| **Asian other (Please specify)** | **5** |
| Vietnamese | 4 |
| (blank) | 1 |
| **Asian Pakistani** | **4** |
| **Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (Please specify)** | **1** |
| White Asian | 1 |
| **Not Known** | **1** |
| **Other ethnic group (Please specify)** | **5** |
| Algerian | 1 |
| British Chinese | 1 |
| European | 1 |
| Kurdish | 1 |
| (blank) | 1 |
| **White any other (Please specify)** | **33** |
| German | 1 |
| Greek | 1 |
| Romanian | 1 |
| (blank) | 30 |
| **White British** | **1** |
| **White Irish** | **2** |
| **White Polish** | **17** |
| **Grand Total** | **109** |

## Services

The manner in which services have been delivered have altered dramatically. Figure 1 presents the total number of sessions delivered in quarter 1 2018, 2019 and 2020. Traditionally 1:1 face to face meetings between a client and caseworker whilst correspondence has been used more to reflect phone calls, emails, etc. Over lock down social distancing has precluded face to face meetings and caseworkers have carried out much of the support virtually. The increase in this support can be seen in the graphic below.

We can also see that there is still some group work delivered and looking at the notes this is using technology such as Zoom and Discord to provide support in a more collective manner. What is clear from all of this is that the service support, whilst not being the same as the past has continued to be delivered.

## Employment

Although not a mandatory field, Caselink does allow for the clients to record the sectors of work that they would be interested in. Table 5 below highlights the results of this as recorded for the new engagements in 2020. What we can see from this is that the sectors that people would like to work in tend to be those that have been some of the worst affected by lockdown.

### Table 5 Sector Client Interested in Working

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All | Pipeline Stage 4 | Proportion ‘Job Ready’ |
| Administration | 38 | 18 | 47% |
| Customer Service | 36 | 21 | 58% |
| Retail | 31 | 22 | 71% |
| Hospitality | 29 | 16 | 55% |
| Cleaning | 27 | 14 | 52% |
| Social Care | 25 | 16 | 64% |
| Construction | 23 | 13 | 57% |
| Catering | 16 | 7 | 44% |
| Creative | 14 | 7 | 50% |

Source: Caselink

It can be seen from Table 5 that whilst 38 clients had said they would be interested in an administration type of job only 18 of them, 47%, were immediately job ready as they had been assessed as being at Stage 4. The highest proportion who were job ready were those who were considering retail careers. This may link to former retail workers who had been laid off due to closures and wished to return to that sector. In terms of the sectors in demand- health, social care and cleaning, we can see that 64% of those that had identified social care as a profession that they would wish to enter were job ready, 52% of those that would consider a cleaning based job were at stage 4. As for health, there weren’t enough clients who identified health as a chosen profession.

Table 6 below looks at the outcomes recorded each quarter. The first point to make is that this table is based on all outcomes *regardless* of whether or not it has been verified. This is to make sure that quarter to quarter changes are comparable as it can often take some time to achieve verification evidence for an outcome a situation that will only have worsened with the current restrictions.

What is clear from Table 6 is that the number of outcomes being recorded on the system has fallen. For Work Placements where in Edinburgh there would have been 54 in 2018 and 11 in 2019 there were none recorded in 2020. Vocational training has fallen by 95% when 2020 is compared to 2019, part time jobs by 78% and full time jobs by 37%

### Table 6 Outcomes Recorded on Caselink

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | Change |
| Row Labels | All | Edinburgh | All | Edinburgh | All | Edinburgh | All | Edinburgh |
| Employability Training | 147 | 131 | 65 | 59 | 15 | 8 | -77% | -86% |
| In Work Progression | 16 | 16 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 0% | 0% |
| Job Entry Full Time | 200 | 184 | 95 | 89 | 57 | 56 | -40% | -37% |
| Job Entry Part Time | 65 | 51 | 43 | 40 | 12 | 9 | -72% | -78% |
| Activity Agreement | 45 | 40 | 19 | 11 | 12 | 12 | -37% | 9% |
| Education Full-Time | 16 | 16 | 24 | 19 | 20 | 20 | -17% | 5% |
| Education Part-Time | 6 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 2 | -60% | -60% |
| Progression: Other | 18 | 7 | 19 | 19 | 2 | 2 | -89% | -89% |
| Vocational Training | 212 | 210 | 128 | 96 | 5 | 5 | -96% | -95% |
| Volunteering | 46 | 38 | 30 | 28 | 2 | 2 | -93% | -93% |
| Work Placement | 57 | 54 | 23 | 11 | 0 | 0 | -100% | -100% |
| Qualification | 311 | 180 | 265 | 188 | 62 | 44 | -77% | -77% |
| Re-Engage with Education | 257 | 112 | 111 | 58 | 3 | 3 | -97% | -95% |
| Retained Employment | 10 | 10 | 15 | 14 | 14 | 14 | -7% | 0% |
| Self-Employed Outcome | 6 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0% | 50% |
| Supported Employment | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grand Total | 1413 | 1058 | 856 | 650 | 220 | 191 | -74% | -71% |

In terms of the sectors Table 7 looks at the sectors for the 65 Edinburgh jobs and compares it to the 129 recorded in the same quarter last year.

### Table 7 Full and Part Time Jobs by Sector

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2019 | 2020 |
|  | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage |
| Administrative and secretarial | 12 | 9% | 3 | 5% |
| Associate professional and technical | 4 | 3% | 3 | 5% |
| Childcare | 9 | 7% | 0 | 0% |
| Don't know | 2 | 2% | 3 | 5% |
| Elementary services | 24 | 19% | 9 | 14% |
| Managers and senior officials | 0 | 0% | 1 | 2% |
| Other personal services | 33 | 26% | 18 | 28% |
| Process, plant, machine operatives | 3 | 2% | 9 | 14% |
| Professional Occupations | 5 | 4% | 2 | 3% |
| Sales and customer service | 21 | 16% | 14 | 22% |
| Skilled trades | 16 | 12% | 3 | 5% |
|  | 129 |  | 65 |  |

Source: Caselink

From this we can see that there were far fewer jobs in Skilled Trades, Childcare and Administration and Secretarial. The reverse is the case for Process, Plant, Machine Operatives and Sales and Customer Services.

## COVID 19 Provider Response Survey

Towards the end of May and into the start of June CCP looked to get a provider’s perspective on lockdown working and how the “new normal” was impacting on the way organisations were operating. Primarily this was achieved through a survey that was sent to Edinburgh providers in early June. Twelve providers completed the survey, which covers a total of 18 funded projects. Three questions were asked, and the responses are pulled together and summarised below.

*Service Focus*

As lockdown started the focus of support delivered changed from employability to the health and wellbeing of clients, especially mental health given the vulnerability of a large percentage of those that are supported. The caseworkers did tend to be more proactive looking to engage with all clients, whether they are actively seeking support or not. Caseworkers have tended to reach out to those more isolated checking on their wellbeing. Support for clients has included food parcels/vouchers, provision of home items, support with bills and utilities.

As the lockdown progressed, some organisations moved to reintroduce employability support and encourage clients to continue to progress where possible. This included signposting partner organisations providing talks, hosting employability groups etc.

Looking more specifically at how projects might return to ‘Face to Face’ work, the survey asked about how services will instigate the new COVID related Health and Safety protocols. Some mentioned that work has begun with employers who offer placements to clients about supporting them with the reintroduction of placements and looking at what changes may be required. Similarly, they have begun with supporting organisations who rely on volunteers, again considering the changes which will take place.

Some of those that responded said that the relaxation of lockdown will allow providers to see if the employment landscape has changed. For example, jobs will be easier to find in some areas (nursing, care homes, etc.) and less available in others. Those that responded anticipated that there will be redundancies and the focus of support may need to change.

*Service Delivery*

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 for those that work with young people it has meant that they have been able to break geographical boundaries. However not all clients engaged have the digital skills or access to equipment to be supported virtually, which many have found challenging.

As lockdown has 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. 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. The responses indicated that any meetings with client’s face to face will be risk assessed on an individual basis.

Although there may be moves back to a similar service to that which existed previously, all organisations are keen to continue to deliver virtually, regardless of lockdown easing.

Most providers are looking to ensure that meetings will require an appointment and no drop ins will be conducted as this would be unmanageable when looking to control numbers. Delivery of programmes is also being adapted – numbers will be reduced in groups; days altered and new activities planned where the impact of COVID19 means the previously stated activity is no longer possible.

*Staff Safety and Well Being*

Providers have also had to ensure staff are safe and comfortable working from home, with regular virtual meetings taking place as well as social activities to ensure staff remain connected. Staff have also been using the time to upskill and as well as volunteering to support the COVID19 crisis in their localities.

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. Some providers installing protective screens at desks and workstations.

The limited space is raised as an issue regularly and 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.

## Conclusion

The COVID19 outbreak in general and the lockdown approaches that followed to tackle the health pandemic have had a significant impact on the economy in general and on the services to support employability in Edinburgh and beyond. We can see from the data in this paper that compared to the same period last year new Engagements in Edinburgh have fallen by 59% and outcomes have fallen by 71%.

From the data on the support offered and from the survey of Caselink providers, it is clear that the organisations delivering assistance have continued to support clients. Often this support has been around mental health and isolation as well as practical issues around food and bills. The organisations are in the process of examining what they will need to do to be able to return to something close to the type of service that they would have been able to offer in 2019. It will be interesting to see how this develops over the coming months.