



ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Item: 12

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 12 November 2025.

Local Employability Partnership Annual Report.

Report by Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

1. Overview

- 1.1. In 2020 the Community Learning, Development and Employability Service took responsibility for delivering employability services under No One Left Behind (NOLB). This saw the amalgamation of various strategic groups and the creation of the Local Employability Partnership (LEP).
- 1.2. Orkney Islands Council, as the Lead Accountable Body is allocated employability funding from Scottish Government to administer, as decided by the Local Employability Partnership, to meet local priorities and agreed outcomes.
- 1.3. In March 2022 the Local Employability Partnership published the No One Left Behind 3 Year Operational Plan, outlining its collective efforts to deliver on the national policy content and provide employability services that meet local community and economic needs.
- 1.4. In 2024 the Local Employability Partnership published an Annual Investment Plan, detailing intended outcomes for 2024-25, which sits within the overall No One Left Behind 3 Year Operational Plan.
- 1.5. The draft Local Employability Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, details progress made across the partnership to work towards and meet the collective vision and outcomes set out in the Annual Investment Plan and No One Left Behind 3 Year Operational Plan.
- 1.6. Despite having to have a 3 Year Operational Plan, funding is currently allocated on a yearly basis. This brings with it challenges as highlighted in the Annual Report 2024-25.

- 1.7. There was a significant reduction in NOLB funding in 2024-25, going from £406,000 in 2023-24 to £330,000 in 2024-25. This equates to a 19% decrease in funding. Despite reductions in funding and staffing capacity The Orkney Local Employability Partnership continues to make good progress against the intended outcomes of the local No One Left Behind 3 Year Operational Plan, with collective achievements detailed within the attached report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:
- i. Note the Local Employability Partnership Annual Report 2024-25, in so far as it relates to the Council.

3. Background

- 3.1. [No One Left Behind](#) is Scottish Government's approach to transforming employment support in Scotland, with the vision for economic transformation and tackling child poverty. No One Left Behind aims to deliver a system that is more tailored and responsive to the needs of people of all ages who want help and support on their journey towards, into and in work - particularly people with health conditions, disabled people and others who are disadvantaged in the labour market.
- 3.2. The [No One Left Behind](#) strategy places people at the centre of the design and delivery of employability services. It promotes a strengthened partnership approach where the Scottish and Local Governments (Partnership Agreement for Employability) work together with public, third and private sector partners to identify local needs and make informed, evidence-based decisions, flexing these to meet emerging labour market demands.
- 3.3. Orkney Islands Council is the Lead Accountable Body for No One Left Behind with allocated funding coming into the local authority. Every local authority area has a Local Employability Partnership. These partnerships are responsible for the planning, provision and delivery of employability support to meet local needs. The Local Employability Partnership also have responsibility for monitoring and evaluating progress against the local 3 Year No One Left Behind Operational Plan.
- 3.4. The Orkney Local Employability Partnership membership is large and includes a variety of public and third sector services that all contribute not only to employability directly but also indirectly including housing, community justice and health services.

- 3.5. The Orkney Local Employability Partnership has robust governance measures, part of which is preparing a partnership Annual Report which is presented to the Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee and to the Sustainable Development Delivery Group of the Community Planning Partnership for scrutiny.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. The Local Employability Partnership will continue to work collaboratively to meet the intended outcomes of the 2025 -26 Annual Investment Plan and embed and develop local employability support and provision in line No One Left Behind policy intent. The Local Employability Partnership will continue to work collectively to develop the NOLB delivery plan to meet local need.

For Further Information please contact:

Lindsey Johnson, CLD Employability Team Manager, extension 2437, Email: lindsey.johnson@orkney.gov.uk

Implications of Report

1. **Financial** - None directly relating to the recommendations in this report.
2. **Legal** – None directly relating to the recommendations in this report.
3. **Corporate Governance** – Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** – None directly relating to the recommendations in this report.
5. **Equalities** – An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for performance monitoring.
6. **Island Communities Impact** – An Island Communities Impact Assessment is not required for performance monitoring.
7. **Links to Council Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
 - ☒ Growing our economy.
 - ☒ Strengthening our Communities.
 - ☐ Developing our Infrastructure.
 - ☐ Transforming our Council.
8. **Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
 - ☒ Cost of Living.
 - ☒ Sustainable Development.
 - ☒ Local Equality.
 - ☐ Improving Population Health.

- 9. Environmental and Climate Risk** – Not applicable.
- 10. Risk** – Not applicable.
- 11. Procurement** – Not applicable.
- 12. Health and Safety** – Not applicable.
- 13. Property and Assets** – Not applicable.
- 14. Information Technology** – Not applicable.
- 15. Cost of Living** – The Annual Report includes information on how the Local Employability Partnership has sought to mitigate the impact of the cost of living through holistic employability support and through positive progression opportunities.

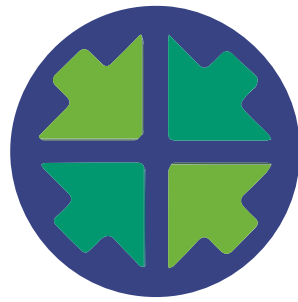
List of Background Papers

No One Left Behind 3 Year Operational Plan 2022-25

[LEP Delivery Plan](#)

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Draft Local Employability Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025



**Orkney
Local
Employability
Partnership**



**Orkney Local
Employability Partnership
Annual Report
2024-25**

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Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Local Employability Partnership's Annual Report for 2024-25, which outlines just some of the great work and achievements across the Local Employability Partnership over the past year.

Since its formation in 2020 the Local Employability Partnership has been focused on ensuring a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to meet employability needs in Orkney. In doing this, the partnership is focused on supporting the implementation of the national, No One Left Behind agenda. Using holistic and inclusive approaches, especially for those facing barriers and challenging circumstances, No One Left Behind (NOLB) is focused on ensuring everyone can access positive progression routes, including sustained volunteering and fair and sustainable work. By ensuring we are responsive to local need, the Local Employability Partnership are committed to providing the right holistic, flexible and bespoke support and opportunities to enable people to achieve positive outcomes.

Orkney's Local Employability Partnership has established robust governance procedures, effective planning, monitoring and review systems and has developed clear and effective links to many other local strategic plans, including the Community Learning and Development Plan, the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, the Orkney Children Services Plan 2022-2026, and the Council Plan 2023-2028. To ensure effective scrutiny and governance, the partnership reports up through Orkney Islands Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee and through Orkney Partnership's Sustainable Development Delivery Group annually.

This report demonstrates not only the volume of successful work undertaken to support positive outcomes for the people we work with, but it also highlights the effectiveness of collaborative approaches and partnership working to improve delivery, achieve positive outcomes and progress' key actions in the Local Employability Partnership Delivery Plan.

Kerry Spence, Service Manager Community Learning, Development and Employability, Orkney Islands Council.

Chair of Orkney Local Employability Partnership

The Local Employability Partnership

Our Vision

- Build on and embed the strengths and effectiveness of the Local Employability Partnership and existing local and national services, to better align funding and improve integration of employability services with wider support services to ensure that services are designed and delivered around the needs and aspirations of the individuals we work with and our local communities.
- Establish, promote and increase awareness of the local employability services/provision and co-ordinated information sharing and action between strategic and delivery partners to meet the needs of the individuals we work with and local communities.
- Improve employment/career opportunities and outcomes for individuals we work with, challenging work-based inequalities, through equal access to education, training, learning and fair work, reducing unemployment and inactivity rates and increasing the skills of the workforce within the Orkney Islands Council area.
- Increase income from employment for (low income) parents. This is one of the three key drivers of Child Poverty and one that the Orkney Local Employability Partnership will lead on.

Aims and Objectives

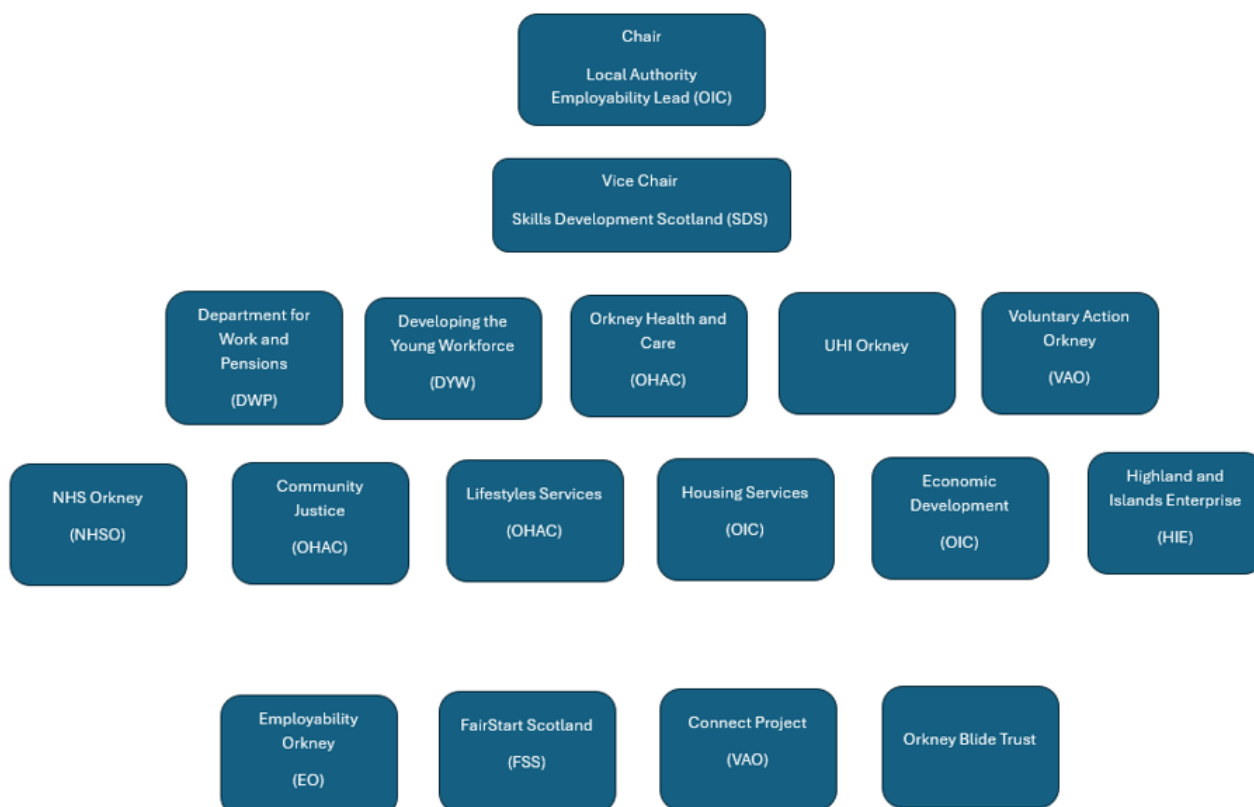
The Orkney Local Employability Partnership plan, co-ordinate, and deliver employability provision which supports individuals to progress towards fair and sustainable employment that suits their needs and that of the local community. Employability services are pivotal to avoiding the widening of social and economic inequalities. As such, the Local Employability Partnership work collaboratively by supporting those who are most vulnerable, ensuring the right support is put into place at the right time for those who rely on these services.

The partnership builds on the strengths of existing national and local services to better align funding and improve the integration of employability services. The partnership works together to ensure that provision is designed and delivered around the needs and aspirations of those using our services.

Objectives

- To drive forward and implement the shared ambitions and actions of No One Left Behind whilst responding to challenges faced by the community, to ensure the right support is available in the right way at the right time.
- To use the [Scottish Approach to Service Design](#) to co-produce an all-age employability support service that is person-centred, more joined up, flexible and responsive to individual needs.
- To involve service users throughout the process.
- To co-ordinate information-sharing and action between strategic and delivery partners.
- To utilise labour market statistics and available data to inform decisions, identify priorities and support an effective partnership response.
- To co-ordinate resources to improve opportunities and outcomes.
- To align with regional and national approaches as appropriate.
- To align the delivery of various No One Left Behind workstreams.
- To support and engage employers in the development of employment provision and support.

Structure



Background

In 2022 the Local Employability Partnership produced and published the Local Employability Partnership, No One Left Behind Operational Delivery Plan 2022-2025. This plan set out our ambitious targets to fulfil the vision, aims and objectives of the partnership. The full plan can be accessed by clicking on the following link [LEP Delivery Plan](#)

The Orkney Local Employability Partnership meets monthly. These meetings allow strategic partners to analyse national and local data sets and discuss current local issues, challenges, areas of development and also areas of good practice. The meetings also provide an opportunity to monitor and evaluate progress against the Council Delivery Plan 2023-2028, the CLD Partners Plan, and a quality assurance structure for the work being undertaken across the partnership.

Budget 2024-25

The amount allocated through NOLB in 2024-25 was £330,000, this was £76,000 less than the 2023-24 allocation. This equates to a 19% reduction in funding. In addition, the Grant Offer Letter was not received until May 2024 which once again compromised the lead in and implementation time for delivery and resulted in recruitment, provision and commissioning activity being delayed. With a hard stop of March 2025, the Local Employability Partnership has to spend the funding effectively in 10 months, which is challenging.

Investment	Orkney Allocation 2023-24	Orkney Allocation 2024-25
No One Left Behind	£122,000	£134,000
Parent Employability Support	£165,000	£143,000
Long Term Unemployed	£0	0
Young Persons Guarantee	£0	0
General Revenue Funding	£119,00	£53,000
Total	£406,000	£330,000

Progress

The Community Learning, Development and Employability Service (CLDE) employed 4.06 Full Time Equivalent (fte) staff through No One Left Behind external funding, to deliver the Council's Employability Service. However, it must be recognised that for most of the year the team have worked with significantly less staffing resource. This is due to vacancies within the team and associated recruitment challenges with annualised funding.

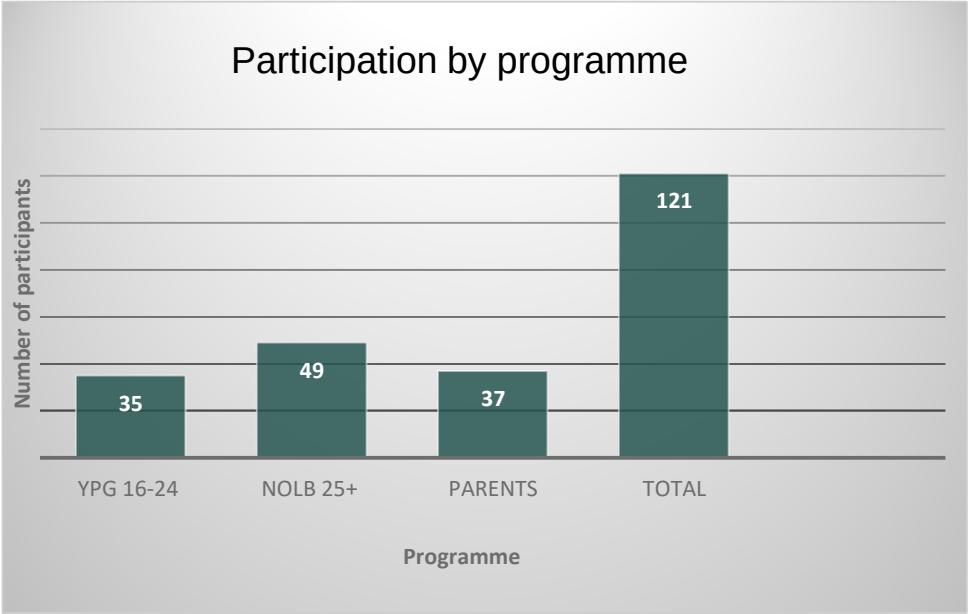
- CLDE Team Manager Employability – 1.0fte (April 2024- March 2025)
- Employability Key Worker – 1.0fte (November 2024 – February 2025)
- Employability Keyworker – 0.68fte (April 2024 – October 2024)
- General Youth Worker – 0.7fte (April 2024 – March 2025)
- Administrative Assistant – 0.7fte (April 2024- March 2025)

The Employability Service has supported 121 individuals during this reporting period, through a range of one to one and group work support.

Each person was supported to co-produce a holistic individual development plan detailing personal goals, aspirations and targets. Individuals were then supported to achieve these and make positive steps towards training, education and sustainable and fair work.

Regular review sessions with a designated Employability Keyworker ensure effective monitoring and reviewing of progress and the opportunity to reflect on future support requirements. It also allows Employability Keyworkers to gather feedback, explore good practice and identify areas for improvement for future service delivery.

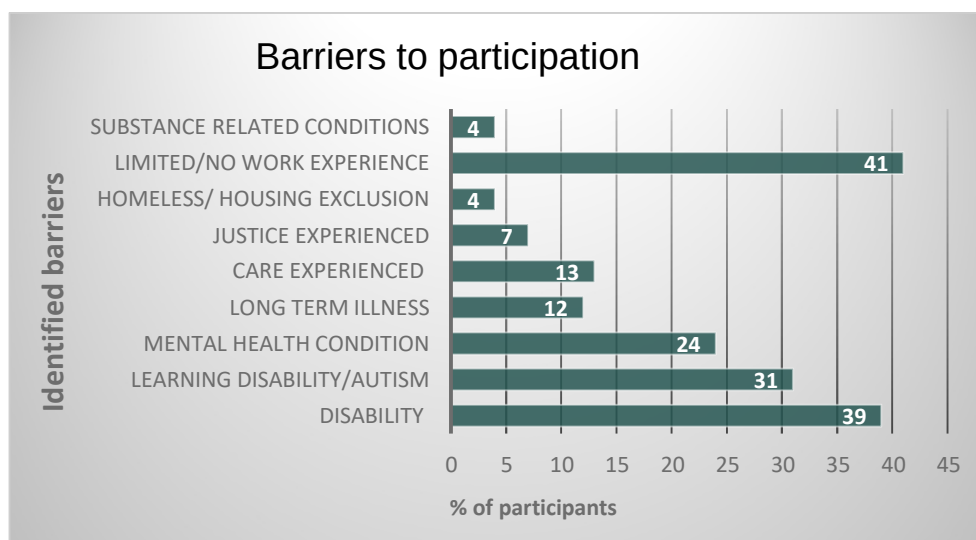
Participation by programme can be seen below



Participation by gender can be seen below



Barriers to engaging that participants have identified can be seen below



During 2024–25, **53 individuals** progressed from the CLDE Employability Service and **68 continue to access support**. Of those who progressed, **19 individuals moved on to employment/self-employment, 14 people advanced to Further/Higher Education and six individuals progressed to sustained volunteering**.

This equates to an 74% positive progression rate.

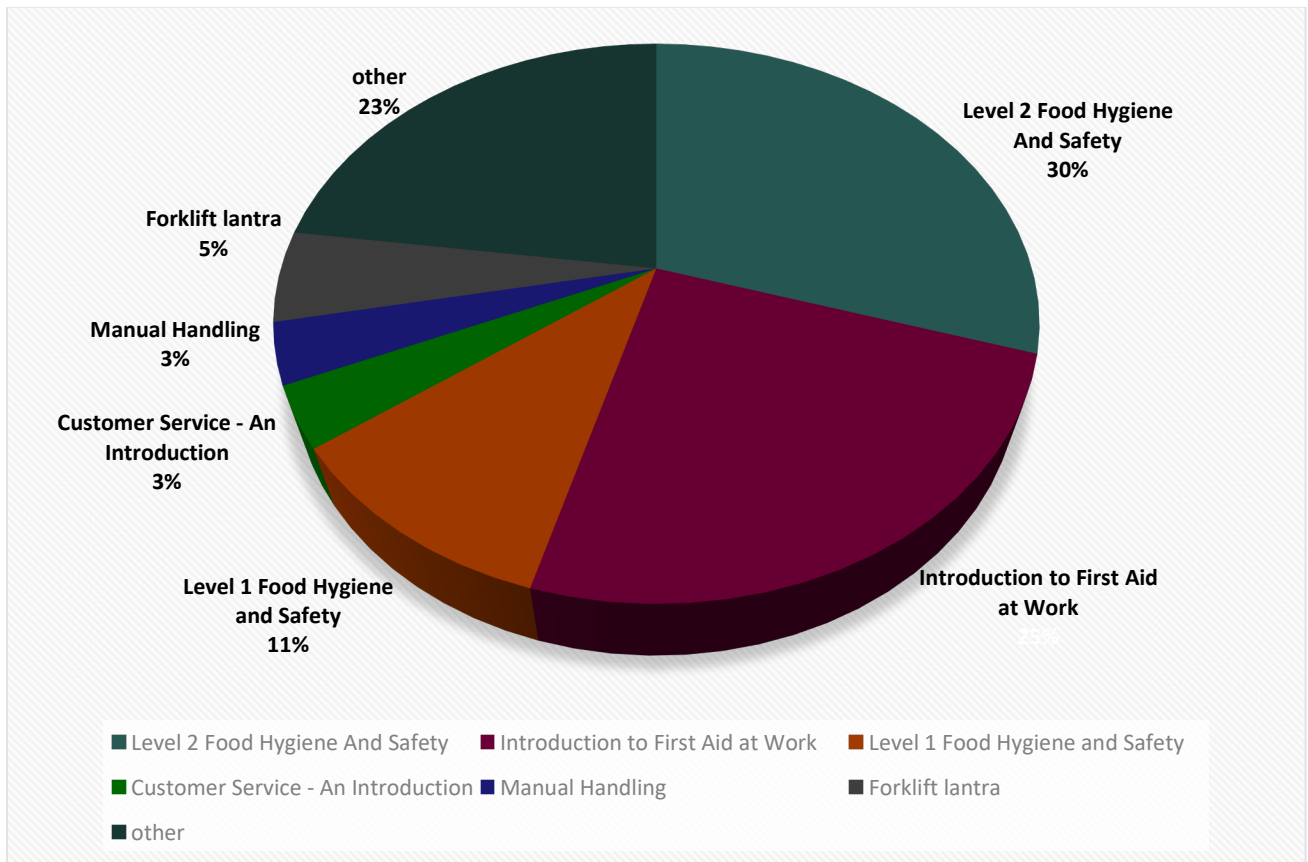
Although this is an impressive positive progression rate, it is lower than the 83% positive progression rate in the previous year. It should be noted that the individuals we are working with are presenting with more complex needs than in previous years. This, combined with reduced staffing capacity to deliver the intense one-to-one support required, is an ongoing challenge for the team.

Qualifications and Accredited Awards

Qualifications and Accredited Awards gained

In 2024-25, **52 individuals** were supported by the CLDE Employability team to work towards and gain a variety of accredited qualifications, resulting in a total of **60 accredited courses being achieved**. Topics included: LANTRA Forklift Truck Licence, First Aid at Work, Level 2 Food Hygiene, National 3 Numeracy, Health and Safety at Work, Level 2 Customer Service, PRINCE2 Project Management and SCQF Personal Development Awards at level 3, 4 and 5.

Courses Completed 2024–25



In addition to one-to-one support, the CLDE Employability Service planned, resourced and delivered a variety of group work sessions to meet the needs of the individuals and communities we work with.

Partnership Work

In addition to the independent work of the CLDE Employability team, there has been a variety of innovative partnership projects throughout the year to support both the strategic direction of the Local Employability Partnership and provision planning and delivery for individuals identified under No One Left Behind initiative.

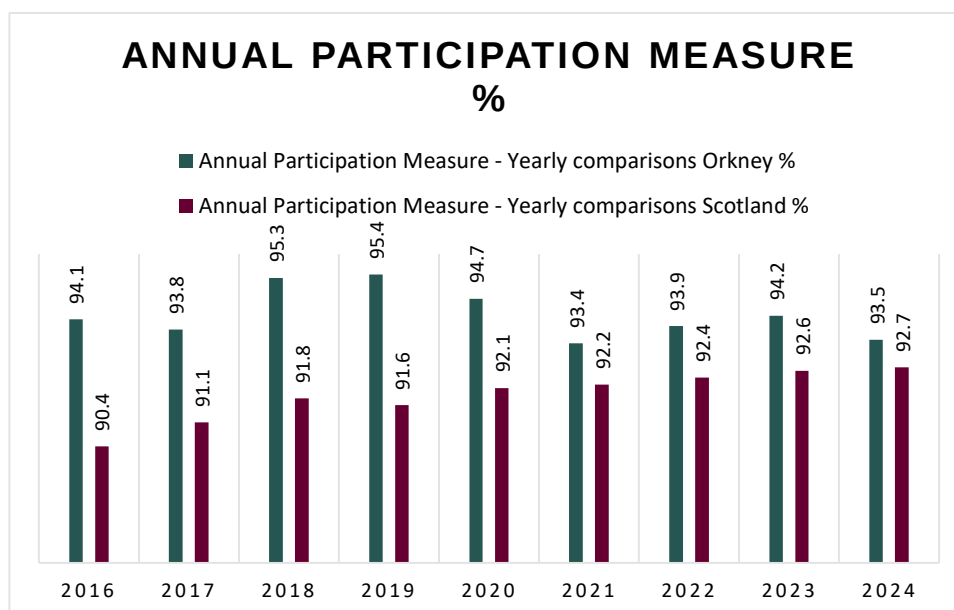
Pathway Planning Meetings and Co-ordination

Pathway planning, implemented in 2020-21, continues to provide an opportunity to identify those young people who need more support through their transitions to post-school destinations. In addition to this, it continues to provide an important opportunity to ensure employability provision aligns to the requirements of the local community.

Objective:

- To identify those most at risk of not entering a positive destination and ensure that they have the support to make the right decisions for themselves.
- To ensure that partners work together in a planned and responsive way to ensure that no one is left behind.
- To ensure that the employability provision in Orkney meets the needs of the young people who face difficulty in securing and sustaining a positive destination.

Pathway Planning partners have reviewed meeting structures, resulting in refreshed guidance and a revised minute template that improves clarity and accountability. These meetings play a vital role in identifying young people needing additional support in their transition from school, particularly those at risk of not reaching a positive destination. In addition, these meetings help ensure employability provision is consistently aligned with local needs, enabling all young people to access meaningful opportunities that support their development and contribute to the wider community.



The value of partnership working is clearly evidenced through the Scottish Government's Annual Participation Measure (APM). While Orkney experienced a slight decrease in the proportion of 16–19-year-olds participating—from 96.4% in 2023 to 93.5% in 2024, the area continues to perform relatively well, ranking 14 out of 32 local authorities. Encouragingly, Orkney continues to remain above the national average of 92.7%. Progress has been made when reporting destinations locally with a decrease of unconfirmed destinations from 3.6% in 2023-24 to 3.0% in 2024-25. It is also worth noting the cohort of 920 has steadily increased in recent years and is the largest cohort since 2016.

In addition to taking the lead on Pathway Planning in Orkney, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) continues to provide an all-age Career Information, Advice and Guidance service to individuals across the county including the ferry linked isles. Below is some key delivery data from 2024-25.

- SDS has delivered 430 Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements for 146 post-school customers through a mix of group and one-to-one sessions, including employability sessions such as CV writing workshops which were delivered in partnership with CLDE. Further to this they supported 53 individuals dealing with redundancy.
- There were 95 Modern Apprenticeship starts. 53.7% of the starts in the local area were aged 16-24 years. As of 31 March 2025, there were 162 Modern Apprentices in training. The Modern Apprenticeship achievement rate in Orkney is 81.5%.

The Blide Trust Group

In 2024, the CLDE Employability Service continued to work in partnership with the Blide Trust to co-ordinate, plan and deliver a weekly informal learning group for care experienced young people and their friends. This group continues to be well attended with 12 young people actively involved on a regular basis over the year, and an average attendance at each session of eight individuals.

Staff work with the young people to design and develop sessions, activities and opportunities to meet the group's needs. These sessions support young people to develop knowledge, skills and networks that will support them in future transitions and actively contribute to their health and wellbeing. The sessions also allow CLDE staff to build positive reciprocal relationships with young people which enable more focused one-to-one support to be offered outwith the group setting if required. Sessions during 2024-25 have included visits to local heritage sites, health and wellbeing sessions at Picky, budgeting and cooking sessions, traditional crafts, Japanese culture, drug and alcohol awareness sessions, St Andrews First Aid, Species on the Edge sessions and team building challenges.



Of the 12 young people who engaged with the group during 2024-25, two have gained employment, two gained places at UHI Orkney and four are now actively volunteering in the local community.

"This is a safe space where I know I can come for help, and we always get fed which is a bonus."

"I like coming to this group as I get to be with likeminded people and can try new things and learn new stuff."

Shapinsay Training Programme

Working with Shapinsay Development Trust and UHI Orkney, the CLDE team planned and co-ordinated two accredited courses to meet local need. The CLDE team delivered a Level 2 Food Hygiene course through the Digital College and UHI delivered a full day Emergency First Aid at Work course.

In total 10 individuals completed their Level 2 Food Hygiene course, and nine individuals completed their Emergency First Aid at Work course.



"The course was relaxed, fun and informative."

Parents Group

A weekly parents' group has continued, delivered in partnership with CLDE Youth Services, CLDE Employability Service, Orkney Health and Care and NHS Orkney. Over 2024-25, three parents and five children have regularly attended. Sessions are co-designed with parents and cover a range of topics to promote health and wellbeing, getting involved with the local community and developing knowledge, skills and networks to make informed future choices and progress towards employment. **One parent has progressed to employment** with two continuing to attend the group and access support.

Promotional Films

Working with Shetland film producer Stephen Mercer and individuals who have accessed the CLDE Employability service, the CLDE Employability team planned, co-ordinated and produced a promotional film for the Local Employability Partnership and three visual case studies. Each case study details an individual's account of their journey and how CLD approaches have supported them to identify individual goals and targets and make positive steps towards their future.

The films can be accessed by following the links below.

LEP Promotion - https://youtu.be/MjSmW0v_Kz4

Amber - https://youtu.be/_x5EOYpcBrE

Asparuh - <https://youtu.be/co6mAKgOB5Y>

Shaun - <https://youtu.be/YLggv9rsL30>

School Leavers Programme

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Orkney held their annual school leavers programme, 'Planning for the Future' in February. The programme is aimed at pupils who plan to leave at the end of the academic year and need support to take the next step into employment, training or further education.

Planning for the Future is delivered as a two-day, intensive programme out of school with two sessions held, one in Stromness and one in Kirkwall. **This year 25 pupils attended the programme.**

The programme helps young people to plan what they want to do when they leave school and develop the skills they need to write a CV, apply for a job, complete an application form and prepare for a job or college interview. They also meet with people from partner organisations to learn about the support that is available to help them access employment, training or further education.

The programme concludes with mock interviews, where pupils are given the chance to speak to local employers about their skills and answer questions that may come up in an interview. Where possible, pupils are matched to be interviewed by an employer from a business or sector they are interested in working in.

Following the programme, several pupils undertook work placements which have led to apprenticeships or jobs.

Next Steps Programme

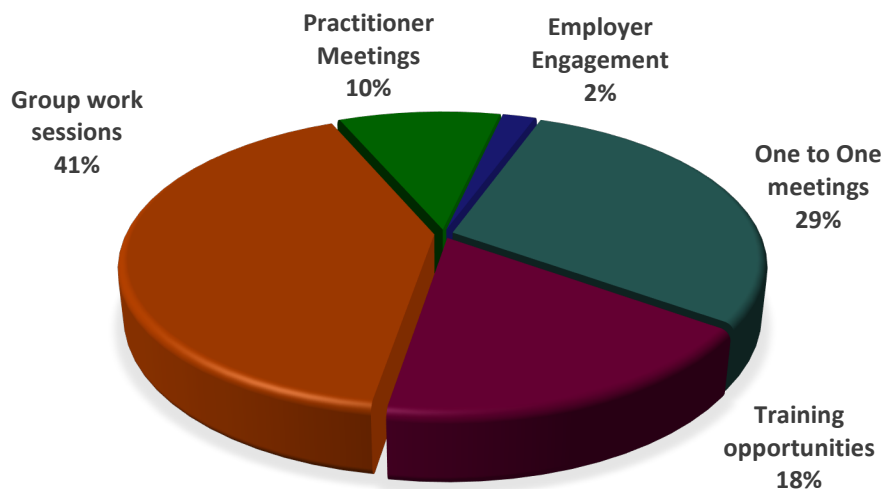
Working together the CLDE Employability Team, SDS and DYW designed a 10-week transition programme, designed to meet the needs of young people who intended to leave school and had been identified as potentially requiring some additional support to make or sustain a positive destination. The first five weeks of the programme explored transferable skills such as teambuilding, confidence and self-esteem, following instructions, communication skills, future planning and practical skills development. The second five weeks were designed to develop/increase/embed specific job search skills and gain practical work-based experience. Sessions also covered visits to UHI Orkney and employer engagement sessions. Unfortunately, only two individuals consistently engaged with the initial five weeks of the programme. The feedback from these individuals was positive and they decided to remain at school to increase their learning and qualifications. The young people were also supported to engage with and extended work experience placement as part of their school timetable which will embed vocational skills in their chosen area.

The Hub for Learning, Skills and Work

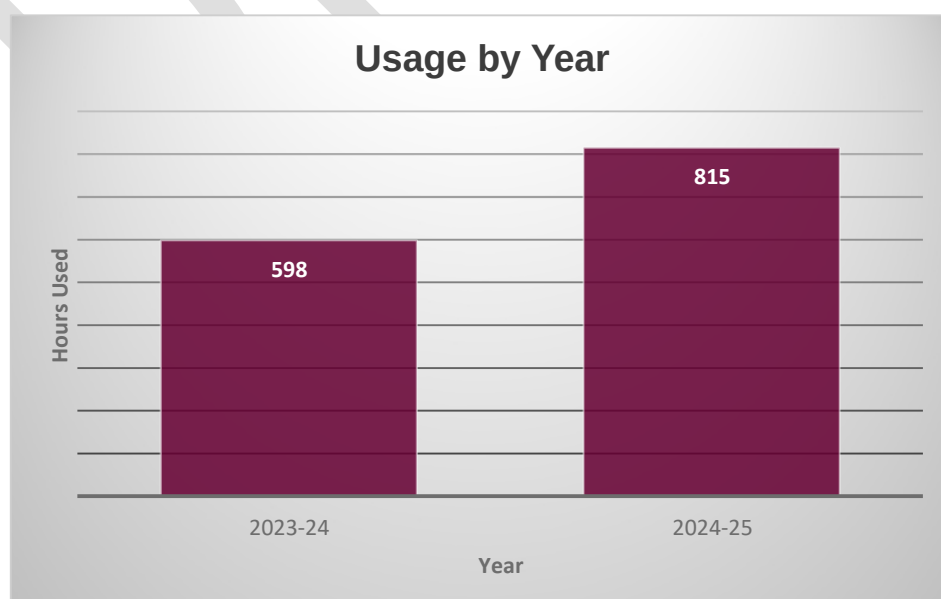
During 2024-25 the Hub, a partnership workspace based at Skills Development Scotland's premises in Albert Street, Kirkwall, has been used by partners for a variety of purposes. These include one-to-one meetings and work across the partnership (Education, UHI Orkney, DYW, SDS, Housing, OHAC, NHSO, VAO), group work activities, training and employer engagement events.



HUB USAGE 2024-25



In total the Hub has been used for **815 hours** to deliver support, training and opportunities for staff and the individuals/communities we work with during 2024 - 25. This is a significant increase from 2023-24 in which The Hub was used for 598 hours in total.



The Jedi Council - Employability Pathway Resource

The Jedi Council is a group of individuals with a variety of lived experience of local employability support services in Orkney, who provide a valuable and accurate insight into employability support in Orkney.

The group are recognised as an official sub-group within the Local Employability Partnership reporting and governance structure, with a nominated member attending the monthly meetings to report on progress made against delegated tasks.

During 2024-25, the Jedi Council worked with the Local Employability Partnership to gather relevant and key information about each organisation/service and the support they offer, to help people make positive steps towards learning skills and work.

Working with the Strategy Collective the team then planned and designed a new accessible web-based platform detailing the information called the Orkney Employability Pathway resource.

The Jedi Council worked hard towards the initial launch of the resource, which included a social media countdown campaign and an official opening event at which two members presented the idea behind the resource, the work undertaken to design and build the platform, and how partners and the public can use the resource.



The Orkney Employability Pathway resource can be found [Directory | Orkney Local Employability Partnership](#)

Sunday Funday

In July 2024, all three CLDE teams, Employability, Adult & Family Learning and Youth Services worked alongside the Yard Plant Nursery, to plan and deliver a Sunday Funday activity day.

The day comprised of a variety of family learning activities including planting flower baskets, rock painting and a numeracy scavenger hunt. Families also received an information and activity pack which included family learning activities and information on local support agencies including CLDE Services, Homestart, Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau and Orkney Money Matters.

Throughout the day 150 individuals attended making up 55 families.



“Thank you for the quieter hour as it suits our family.”

“Thank you for this fun event for the family. More events like these are needed”

UHI Orkney Outreach Programme

Working with UHI Orkney, the CLDE Employability Service continued to develop and enhance the bespoke accredited outreach programme to support individuals with historic barriers to formal education. A college lecturer was appointed to deliver person centred, bespoke learning opportunities to meet individual needs and deliver sessions in a variety of settings in the local community, including on the ferry linked isles. During 2024-25, eight individuals engaged with the Outreach Programme, and all individuals gained confidence and self-esteem whilst making positive steps towards their personal goals and future aspirations.

Five individuals applied for and were accepted of courses at UHI Orkney and satellite campuses.

Four individuals gained SCQF accreditation through completing a Personal Development Award

Two individuals are volunteering in their local communities.

Fast Track Programmes



This year the CLDE Employability Service worked with UHI Orkney and local employers to plan and deliver two Sector Work based Academy Programmes (SWAPs), Fast Track to Hospitality and Fast Track to Construction. Each programme was a combination of practical and theory sessions to support the development of sector specific skills and knowledge, site and employer visits, accredited qualifications and work experience.

Fast Track to Hospitality included training in Barista skills, latte art, bar skills and mixology, front of house service, general kitchen duties and cookery, communication skills, REHIS Food hygiene certificate, Control of Substances Hazardous to Health and work experience in the Overblikk restaurant.

Six individuals were referred to the programme with five successfully completing the programme. The five individuals who completed have all gained work experience in the industry and three have successfully moved into employment.

Fast Track to Construction included drystone walling, joinery and furniture making, machine and plant driving, core skills, Construction Skills Certification Scheme card and industry visits to Maes Howe, St Magnus Cathedral and the new Care Home site in Kirkwall.

Over the six-week programme, individuals gained experience in various construction vocational areas, developed transferable employability and accessed formal and accredited learning opportunities.

Of the six individuals who engaged in the programme, four have gained employment, one person completed and achieved their Constructions Skills Green Card certification and two completed and passed their LANTRA Forklift Truck Licence.



"I couldn't recommend the course more for people. It's been an incredible experience and made me feel proud and confident about myself."

"Doing this course has made me feel optimistic about my future"

Blide Trust Café: Paid Work Experience for Care Experienced Young People.

During 2024-25, the CLDE Team and Orkney Blide Trust continued to work together to provide employment and training opportunities within the Blide Trust Café. Two of the young people employed were Care Experienced and one had significant adverse childhood experiences. All the people supported through the No One Left Behind funding gained skills and experience, not just in café work but also in transferable skills including customer service and interacting effectively with people in a community mental health support setting. The young people employed in the project demonstrated a significant increase in skills and confidence, and have become trusted and valued members of the team, appreciated by colleagues and Blide members (service users).

Working together, the CLDE Employability Team and the Blide Trust have also supported employees and Blide members to access food hygiene and barista training. This has supported the implementation of a regular cooking class and regular volunteering opportunities within the Café space.

Get Ready to Volunteer

Working with Voluntary Action Orkney, the CLDE Employability Team planned, co-ordinated and delivered two Get Ready to Volunteer programmes during 2024-25. These programmes were designed to support individuals who may require a little extra information and support to get involved with volunteering in the local community. Sessions included an introduction to volunteering and the benefits, roles and responsibilities, Saltire Awards scheme and talks from organisations and volunteers including CLAN Orkney, Employability Orkney, The Yard, Island Games 2025 and the St Magnus Festival and where to get support to get involved in opportunities. In response to feedback a group volunteering activity at Tankerness House Gardens was also arranged for the second programme.



In total 15 individuals were referred across the two programmes with 11 people completing the programme. Eight young people gained a Saltire Award for their contribution, and all participants received a completion certificate. Of those who completed the programme nine are now actively volunteering in their local communities.

Participants reported that the course helped them to develop their skills and knowledge. Participants reported that the programme made them feel more confident in getting involved in volunteering and had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing. Participants also stated that the course had helped them to develop skills for employment, and made them feel more connected and included in their local community.

“The relaxed and friendly environment has made me more confident to get involved in volunteering.”

“I enjoyed learning about the different types of volunteering opportunities available.”

Connect Project

The Connect Project worked with 26 young people aged 15-21 years during 2024-25. All had significant barriers to accessing formal education, learning programmes or employment.

Connect also offered a follow-on link to a further 10 young people (19-25) who have moved on from Connect but needed advice or social support.

Connect provided individual learning programmes for young people who were not yet able to move onto those more formal destinations. There continues to be a complexity of needs of the young people referred to Connect, whether they have come out of provision from outside Orkney, have experienced homelessness or have family input with the court system which means that managing wellbeing and helping them feel safe and secure has been a vital first step in identifying barriers and needs.

Some young people have made progress in confidence, some have volunteered in the community to build skills, and many moved into full or part time education. Some have moved into their own homes this year and are in employment.

Liam McArthur MSP attended an event to recognise achievements in Volunteers Week and spoke to the families and community partners who have recognised the growth in each of the individuals from when they were first referred to Connect. The young people were described as being more hopeful, healthier and taking better care of themselves, being more outward focussed, more engaged with the community and able to make plans for the future and sustain positive transitions.

Employment Support Team (Autism and Learning Disability)

People with learning disabilities are arguably the group most excluded from the labour market, with the Scottish Government estimating that between 4 - 8% are in work compared with 82.5% of the general population. The Employment Support Team, based in Orkney Health and Care, support people with learning disabilities including autism, not only to gain employment, but to stay in work long term and develop careers.

The work includes engaging with employers to promote the principles of No One Left Behind, embedding these within the local economy along with promoting what support is available locally and nationally to encourage employers to embed the principles.

The service also supports individuals to complete vocational profiles and look at suitable fair and sustainable work opportunities. The service then works with employers to complete job matching exercises, broker work trials/experience and offer in-work support if initially required for individuals to gain confidence and skills within a new role.

During the 2024-25 period, the service has worked with and supported 31 individuals, 16 of whom are in paid employment and four people are in volunteer roles.

Those the service supports are employed in a range of companies and organisations in Orkney and undertake work in areas such as retail, hospitality, catering, tourism, administration and gardening.

Case study: Neil

Neil recently began employment with a local Community Interest Company. The position is being funded through the Employer Recruitment Incentive for the initial 12 months. Neil has been involved in various tasks in his role such as garden tidy ups, grass cutting, boat maintenance and decorating. Neil has also been supported to engage with local volunteering opportunities and recently started at the Yard Plant Nursery. Neil was supported to visit the Yard initially, meet other volunteers and staff and find out what tasks he may be involved in. He now attends independently and volunteers a few hours every week.



St Andrews Ready for Life Course



Working with the Youth Services Team and St Andrews First Aid the CLDE Service's Employability Team planned and co-ordinated a two-day accredited training opportunity for young people outwith education. The two-day accredited course covered Emergency First Aid for Work and First Aid for Mental Health.

Six young people engaged with the course and all six completed and achieved their qualifications. In addition, St Andrews staff visited the Blide Trust and delivered an information and awareness session for seven young people.

Both sessions were very well received with all young people indicating they had gained new skills and knowledge that would help them in the future.

"The tutor had a great knowledge of the course, and it was easy to follow. There were lots of practical tasks to which was a bonus."

"It was helpful to have an open and honest discussion about mental health and how I can maybe help someone in the future"

Employer Engagement and Support

In 2024-25 Orkney Islands Council externally procured an Employer Engagement Service through Employability Orkney. The scope of the service is to provide targeted employer engagement support across the Local Employability Partnership and to enhance in-work and after care support to help individuals sustain their initial progressions to employment.

The work includes engaging with employers to promote the principles of No One Left Behind, embedding these within the local economy, along with promoting what support is available locally and nationally to encourage employers to embed the principles. The service also supports individuals to complete vocational profiles and look at suitable fair and sustainable work opportunities. The service then works with employers to complete job matching exercises, broker work trials/experience and offer in-work support if initially required for individuals to gain confidence and skills within a new role.

Over 2024-25, 28 individuals engaged with the service. Of these, eight have been supported to gain and sustain employment. Employer engagement was a key element in securing two of these opportunities with two work trials being organised in lieu of a traditional job interview.

Eleven people were supported to engage with volunteering opportunities within their local communities.

The service also promoted learning and training opportunities to add to the skills and confidence of clients. **Six individuals were supported to apply for and attend various opportunities including Tourism and Tour Guiding SCQF Level 6, Fast Track to Hospitality, Introduction to Care, Counterbalance Forklift Training, Communication course, Manual Handling Certificate and Cleaning Operative Certificate.**

Case Study: Sam

Sam was diagnosed with ADHD, Tourette's and Asperger's from a young age. He had never held a permanent mainstream job, being unsure what he wanted to do and often feeling overwhelmed by this.

The Employer Engagement Officer (EEO) worked closely with Sam to identify his skills and strengths, develop his social skills and awareness of employer expectations. Sam particularly liked cleaning tasks— he liked the structure of doing certain, set tasks at specific times and liked the physical aspect. After this initial vocational profiling the EEO started to approach suitable local businesses/organisations to explore potential employment opportunities. One of the organisations was a local commercial cleaning company. Working proactively with both the employer and Sam, the EEO brokered a suitable employment opportunity that met organisational needs but also met Sam's individual needs and employment aspiration

Initially a structured four-day work trial was arranged to allow Sam to familiarise himself with potential tasks and for the employer to observe Sam's skills in a practical setting. In preparation for this, the EEO worked with the employer and offered practical support and guidance on how they could best support Sam within the working environment. This included sharing an Autistic Toolkit for Employers resource. Sam also completed a Cleaning Operative short course and a Health and Safety in the workplace course.

The work trial was successful, and Sam was offered a 15 hour per week contract with the company. The EEO has continued to offer in-work support to Sam and the employer. This has been crucial for the sustainability of the job. It allows both the employer and Sam to identify areas of concern at an early opportunity and ensure appropriate support is offered to manage the situation.

"I've been in my job for a year now and still loving it. I feel very lucky to have the ongoing support from Ian and also to have such a supportive employer."

"We were approached by Employability and asked if we would consider taking on a staff member on a trial basis as they had shown detail in cleaning tasks given them at employability."

"The work placement went well, and the staff member was duly appointed - the support offered by Ian to the staff member and ourselves meant we were able to make simple workplace adjustments that worked for the staff member and ourselves. The staff member's confidence has grown as the year has gone on as they have become adjusted to having employment and the changes to routine this has meant for them. Staff member is a welcome team member, and we would encourage other employers to work with Employability Orkney and offer work opportunities where they can draw on Ian's support to make the employment a success!"

Work Experience

The Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) School Co-ordinators, who are based in the two secondary and three junior high schools, work with their respective senior leadership teams, careers advisers and pupils to identify and organise work placements. These can be week-long, half-day or full-day placements and can help young people to develop transferrable and practical skills, raise career awareness and increase confidence as well as help with college or university applications or secure an apprenticeship.

Throughout 2024 - 25, 115 pupils undertook a work placement, supported by 51 employers. This is an increase of 15 pupils from the previous year.

Some of the positive outcomes include pupils being offered summer placements, permanent job opportunities and apprenticeships with employers because of their performance on a placement. Placements also enabled pupils to gain an insight into careers which supported their college or university applications and interviews, contributing to them securing places to undertake further studies.

School pupil: “The main benefits that I found [with the placement] was the chance to see whether or not I actually enjoy the work or not. I did, so it meant I am now sure this is the area I would like to work in in the future. I also think the chance to go out and find connections was beneficial.”

Employer: “The work experience placements provided by DYW have been a hugely positive experience for our business. It gives us the chance to connect with young people who are interested in a career in construction, provide them with an opportunity to try a diverse range of tasks, and see the enthusiasm and potential they bring. For students, placements offer valuable hands-on experience and help them take their first steps into the industry. One of the students we had on placement last year impressed us so much that we offered them an apprenticeship once they finished school.”

Orkney Careers Fair

Developed and delivered in partnership by DYW Orkney and the Orkney Skills Development Scotland (SDS) team, the third Orkney Careers Fair was held in October 2024. A biennial event, it is open to all senior phase pupils, college and university students, parents and carers, and the general public.

The event was attended by over 900 young people and adults, approximately 550 of whom were senior phase pupils from Stromness Academy, Kirkwall Grammar School and Sanday, Stronsay and Westray Junior High Schools. In addition, two teachers and 13 senior pupils from Farr High School in Bettyhill attend the event.

A total of 64 stands, featuring 76 exhibitors including local employers, education and training providers and local support services were on hand to speak to those attending the event. Employers spoke about the careers and jobs available in their sector and gave advice about training or education routes into those careers as well as the skills they look for when recruiting.



Training providers, universities and colleges were able to give tailored advice about the different courses they offer which may suit a particular career or sector, while support services could explain how they can help individuals take the next step on their career journey.

A new addition to this year's event was the introduction of a relaxed session which was open to young people or adults who would prefer to attend at a quieter time. Over 100 people attended this session, including a small number of school pupils and UHI Orkney students who are undertaking progression courses, all of whom benefited from attending during a quieter time.

The event supported everyone in identifying their next steps and helped them chose the right pathway to suit their individual skills and aspirations.

Sector Specific Session in School

DYW School Co-ordinators have also developed a number of sector specific inputs in local schools. Over the last academic year some of the sessions have included:

Farm to Fork Event

Delivered in partnership with the Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET), Farm to Fork was an early careers event for S1 pupils developed to help them explore the wider careers associated with the agricultural sector. Pupils were able to speak to exhibitors to learn more about how food is produced by farmers, then used by local food and drink producers in the final product. **A total of 230 pupils from local secondary and junior high schools attended the event. Read more [here](#).**



Lunch with an Employer

'Lunch with an Employer' continued at Stromness Academy, with **17 employers attending throughout the academic year, engaging with an average of 75 pupils per session.** These inputs allow pupils to engage with employers in an informal, relaxed environment, learning about local businesses and organisations, careers and potential routes and pathways. They have developed into very interactive sessions, with employers taking along hands on activities for pupils to try out.



Stromness Academy Careers Week

Careers Week is an annual week of activity held at Stromness Academy. Now in its sixth year, it was developed to support S3 pupils as they make their subject choices for fourth year.

Throughout the week, pupils learn about some of the careers available to them in Orkney and hear about the different pathways they can take to achieve their future career. The aim of the week is to inspire pupils and help them make more informed choices for the subjects they want to study in S4 and beyond.

The week's activity included an opening assembly where pupils heard from an inspirational speaker; a series of workplace visits to see 'behind the scenes' of a business and learn more about the different careers available; four 'Lunch with an Employer' sessions were held, offering a variety of activities to help pupils learn more about some of the skills they may need in a particular business.

The week concluded with a careers fair held in the school which was attended by 16 exhibitors and open to all S3-S6 pupils, with S1 and S2 pupils attending a drop-in session over break-time. Throughout the week, S3 pupils had the opportunity to engage with 25 different businesses and organisations, learning about a variety of careers and pathways.



Health and Wellbeing Marketplace



Kirkwall Grammar School hosted a health and wellbeing event to support senior pupils in the run up to their exams, which was organised by the school's DYW Co-ordinator and Guidance Team. The purpose of the event was to encourage pupils to take care of their mental and physical wellbeing while they complete final practical assessments and prepare for their SQA exams.

The event began with an introductory assembly which gave pupils the chance to learn more about the day's activities and hear from three guest speakers. The guest speakers were Liam McArthur MSP, who opened the event; Musician and Radio Orkney presenter Marcus Cordock and, Gina McMahon from NHS Orkney.

Throughout the morning pupils were taken to a Health and Wellbeing Marketplace in the school where 17 local organisations were on hand to promote the support that is available to help young people to navigate this stage in their life, as well as some of the extracurricular and mindful activities they can access to take care of their physical and mental wellbeing.

Medical Careers Insight

NHS Orkney and GPs from Heilendi Medical Practice offered a Medical Careers Insight session to pupils in S3, S4 and S5 who are studying two or more sciences. The session gave an insight into following a path into the medical profession. Pupils were given tips on how to gain experience and develop transferrable skills to help them when applying to university or when working. There was also a practical element which gave pupils the opportunity to learn basic life-saving skills including using a defibrillator and how to help someone who is choking. **Forty-seven pupils attended the session.**



Heritage Careers Week

Heritage Careers Week is a national campaign held annually at the end of October. Kirkwall Grammar School held a careers event for their S3 History classes to learn more about careers in the heritage sector. The event included Tour Guides, local Museums, Orkney Library and Archive, Historic Environment Scotland and UHI Orkney's Archaeology Institute.



Employer Recruitment Incentives

Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) play an important role in supporting those with the greatest barriers to obtain and remain in sustainable employment. The Employer Recruitment Incentive has been developed to integrate with existing employability and skills programmes and is available to use as a financial contribution towards the additional costs of recruiting and sustaining eligible individuals in employment.

Employers can apply for funding to help with the costs of recruiting and employing someone who fits the eligibility criteria for the fund. It can provide up to £6,000 for newly created jobs or vacancies.

In 2024-25 **the CLDE Employability Service negotiated and administered three Employer Recruitment Incentives across a range of third sector organisations in Orkney**. All individual supported in 2024-24 were 25 years+.

Of the three people who were employed through the incentive **all three remain in fair and sustainable work (100%)**.

In addition, the CLDE Service's Employability Service continued to support five individuals and employers to sustain ERIs established in 2023-24. Of the five ERIs established in this period **three individuals remained in sustainable and fair employment when the funding ended, and one individual returned to further education. This equates to an 80% sustainability rate**.

Flexibility Works Workshops

The Inclusion and Diversity sub-group of the Local Employability Partnership worked with Flexibility Works to design and promote two bespoke learning sessions for local employers, focused on flexible working practices. One session was delivered in person at the biennial Careers Fair, and a second session was delivered remotely via Teams.

The sessions offered free resources to local employers with the specific focus on increasing fair, flexible and sustainable work opportunities locally, to support employers recruit and sustain high quality and skilled staff. Sessions covered:

- A business case for flexible working and current flex landscape in Scotland – supported by key research data.
- An overview of the types of flexible working including flex in frontline roles.
- Case studies of flex in action in a range of sectors.
- Unpicking key employer challenges in relation to flex.
- Top tips to move the dial on flex in your organisation.
- An overview of new flexible working legislation – 2024.

Employers also had the opportunity to access bespoke one-to-one consultation session with Flexibility Works to discuss the specifics of implementing flexible working within their organisations.

In total 13 employers engaged with the sessions.

Scottish Mental Health First Aid Training

The CLDE Service's Employability Team worked with UHI Orkney to plan, co-ordinate and deliver a two-day Scottish Mental Health First Aid course for local employers and managers. This was in response to local businesses and organisations feedback stating that this was an area they would like training on. Employers were keen to develop skills and confidence in supporting their employees and colleagues who may be experiencing mental health challenges.

The course was extremely popular with 14 employers across the public, private and third sector, engaging and completing the course. There have also been expressions of interest from other employers for future courses.



"I found the course to be very informative and now feel that whilst I was not necessarily doing anything wrong previously, I feel more confident to offer help and support and point anyone in the right direction if further help is needed. The venue was excellent, and it was great to meet and interact with a new group of people."

"I really enjoyed these two days course. It provided a good overview of a number of mental health conditions and contributing factors, as well as how to help those in need. We had participants from all sectors (public/private/third) which was really beneficial. Everyone brought different experience and opinions to conversations and contributed throughout. Thanks again for running this course."

Challenges

As this report demonstrates, there continues to be a huge collective effort across the partnership to progress towards and meet the actions and outcomes of the Local Employability Partnership Delivery Plan, with numerous positive outcomes achieved.

However, once again during 2024-25, there have been significant challenges at all levels of provision, including planning and service delivery due to delays in Orkney Islands Council receiving the Grant Offer Letter from Scottish Government and the persistence of only receiving annual funding to deliver on a three-year plan. Late confirmation of funding allocation and conditions, combined with a hard stop of March 2025, makes allocating and distributing funds in a reduced time scale extremely challenging, with little lead in time and even less delivery time. The Local Employability Partnership had to mobilise, deliver and report on an annual allocation within a 10-month period, which despite being challenging they managed to do effectively.

These challenges have included:

- The inability to plan in a timely and effective manner to meet the needs of the individuals and communities we work with
- The inability to recruit or maintain staff and deliver on intended outcomes
- Challenges to procure sustainable provision/services needed within the community

The CLDE Service, wider Orkney Island Council colleagues and Local Employability Partnership partners have consistently engaged with Scottish Government to raise these challenges and push for multi-annual funding allocations that are administered in an open and timely manner. Without this, the Local Employability Partnership will continue to have significant challenges in providing effective and efficient provision.

In addition to the financial challenges detailed above, partners across the Local Employability Partnership have identified that the needs of the individuals we are supporting are becoming more complex. Many individuals are experiencing multiple barriers to progressions and therefore they require more individualised and sustained support to support their first steps back into engaging with the community, learning, training and work.

During 2024-25, 60% of the people accessing support/services under No One Left Behind identified themselves as having a disability or long-term health condition. As individual needs grow, it is more important than ever to have sustained Employability Keyworker provision available. Despite the challenges associated with the short-term annualised funding, this report highlights the invaluable work that is taking place across the Local Employability Partnership and the significant support that is being provided to allow people to progress and achieve their full potential.