ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Item: 11

Education, Communities and Housing Committee: 11 November 2026.

Local Employability Partnership Annual Report.

Report by Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

1. Overview

1.1. This report presents the Local Employability Partnership Annual Report 2025/26, for noting.

1.2. 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).

1.3. The 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.

1.4. In March 2022, the Local Employability Partnership published its NOLB 3 Year Operational Plan, which outlines the partnership's collective efforts to deliver on the national policy content.

1.5. In 2025, the Local Employability Partnership published an Annual Investment Plan, detailing intended outcomes, and expenditure, for 2025/26, which sits within the overall No One Left Behind 3 Year Operational Plan.

1.6. The Orkney Local Employability Partnership Annual Report 2025/26, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, details progress made, across the Local Employability Partnership, to work towards, and meet, the collective vision and outcomes set out in the Annual Investment Plan.

1.7. Work is currently underway to develop an updated No One Left Behind 3 Year Operational Plan, despite funding continuing to be allocated on an annual basis.

1.8. There was a slight increase in NOLB funding in 2025/26, from £330,000 in 2024/25 to £381,308 in 2025/26. However, challenges remain due to the annual allocation and ringfenced nature of the funding.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:

i. Note the Orkney Local Employability Partnership Annual Report 2025-2026, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, in so far as it relates to the Council.

3. Background

3.1. No One Left Behind: Employability Strategic Plan 2024 to 2027 is the 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 require help and support on their journey towards, into and in work - particularly people with health conditions, people with a disability and others who are disadvantaged in the labour market.

3.2. No One Left Behind: Employability Strategic Plan 2024 to 2027 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.

3.3. The Council is the Lead Accountable Body for No One Left Behind. 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.

For Further Information please contact:
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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: Operational Plan 2022-2025.

No One Left Behind: Employability Strategic Plan 2024 to 2027.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – The Orkney Local Employability Partnership Annual Report 2025-2026.

Appendix 1

Orkney
Local
Employability
Partnership



Orkney Local Employability Partnership Annual Report

2025 - 2026

Contents

Foreword **4**

The Local Employability Partnership **5**

Aims and Objectives 5

Objectives 6

Structure 6

Background 7

Budget 2025-26 7

Progress **8**

Qualifications and Accredited Awards **10**

Courses Completed 2025–26 10

Partnership Work **11**

Pathway Planning Meetings and Co-ordination 11

The Bridge Programme 13

Skills Development Scotland Partnership Projects 15

The Blide Trust Group 16

Westray Isles Visit 17

The Hub for Learning, Skills and Work 18

The Jedi Council - Employability Pathway Resource 20

Sunday Funday 20

Picky Family Fun Day 21

UHI Orkney Outreach Programme 22

Fast Track Programmes 23

Get Ready to Volunteer 24

Supported Volunteering Service 25

Connect Project 26

Employment Support Team (Autism and Learning Disability) 27

Carved Roles with Orkney Health and Social Care Partnership 28

Carved Role in CLDE 29

Neurodiversity Training 30

Employer Engagement and Support **31**
Employer Engagement Event 33
Orkney Islands Council Work Experience 34
Blide Trust Café: Paid Work Experience 34
Work Experience 35
Sector Specific Session in School 35
Isles Careers Roadshow 36
Midwifery Insight Programme 37
Apprenticeship Marketplace 38
Employer Recruitment Incentives 38
Challenges **39**

Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Local Employability Partnership's Annual Report for 2025-26. This report outlines just some of the great work and achievements across the Local Employability Partnership over the past year.

The Local Employability Partnership is focused on utilising a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to meet employability needs in Orkney. The partnership is focused on implementing the national No One Left Behind agenda, by using holistic and inclusive approaches to support people, especially those facing barriers and challenging circumstances, to achieve and succeed. The Local Employability Partnership are committed to responding to local needs, providing flexible and bespoke support and opportunities, to enable people to achieve positive outcomes and effectively access positive progression routes, including sustained volunteering and fair and sustainable work.

Orkney's Local Employability Partnership has 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 and the Council Plan 2023-2028. To ensure effective scrutiny and governance, the partnership reports annually to Orkney Islands Council's Education, Communities and Housing Committee and through Orkney Community Planning Partnership's Sustainable Development Delivery Group.

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 and importance of collaborative approaches and partnership working to improve delivery and to ensure the people we work with are supported to learn and achieve their full potential.

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

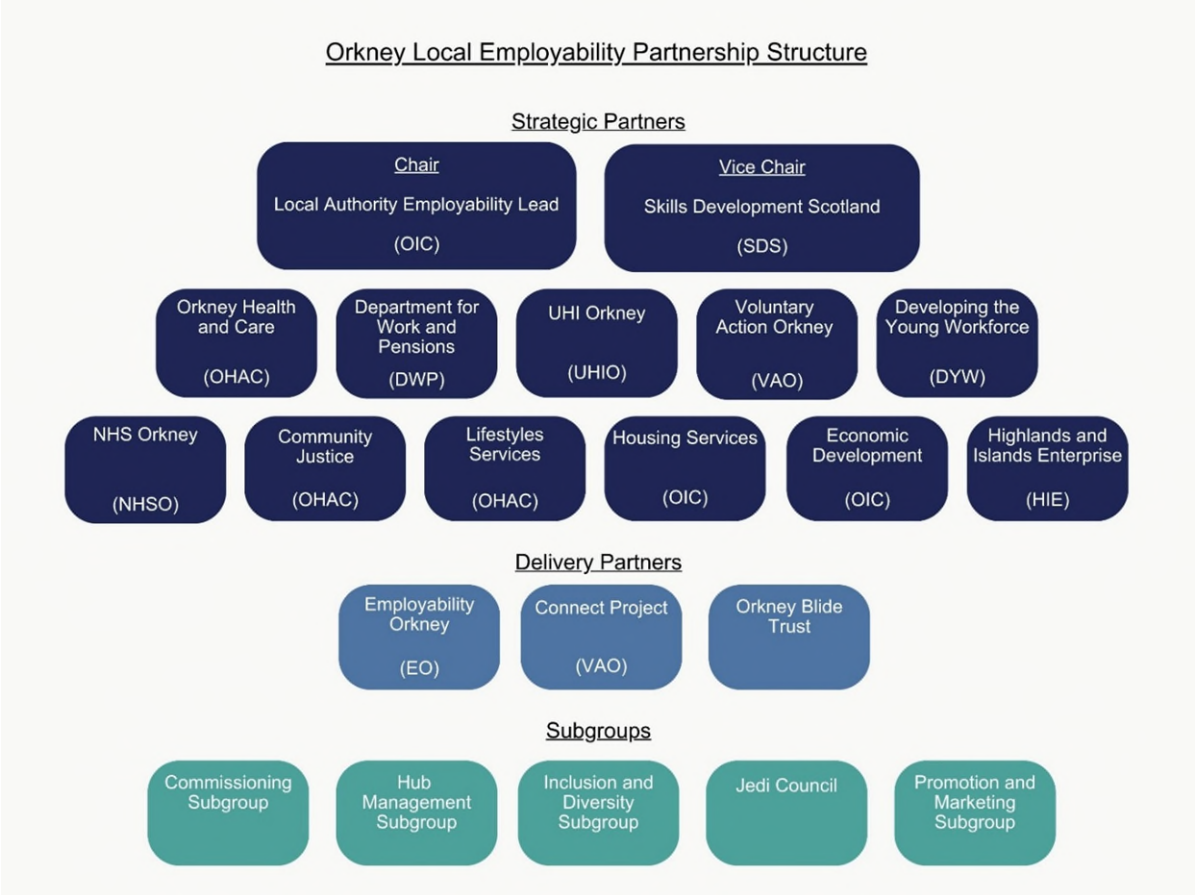
The Orkney Local Employability Partnership plan, co-ordinate, and deliver employability provision which supports individuals to progress towards fair and sustainable employment that suits their needs and that of the local community. Employability services are pivotal to avoiding the widening of social and economic inequalities. As such, the Local Employability Partnership work collaboratively to support 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 Local Employability Partnership Delivery Plan

Due to annualised funding the Local Employability Partnership agreed to work to an annual investment plan during 2025-26, however work is now under way to develop and publish a new three-year delivery plan, detailing agreed local strategic outcomes to meet local priorities and needs.

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 various plans, including, the Council Delivery Plan 2023-2028, the CLD Partners Plan, and a quality assurance structure for the work being undertaken across the partnership.

Budget 2025-26

The amount allocated through No One Left Behind in 2025-26 was £381,308, this was an increase of £51,308 in comparison to 2024-25 allocation. However, £59,000 of this funding was allocated to Specialist Employability Support which was a new 'ring-fenced' area of work for the Local Employability Partnership.

Investment	Orkney Allocation 2024-25	Orkney Allocation 2025 - 26
No One Left Behind	£134,000	£133,691
Parent Employability Support	£143,000	£134,685
Specialist Employability Support	£0	£59,932
General Revenue Funding	£53,000	£53,000
Total	**£330,000**	**£381,308**

Progress

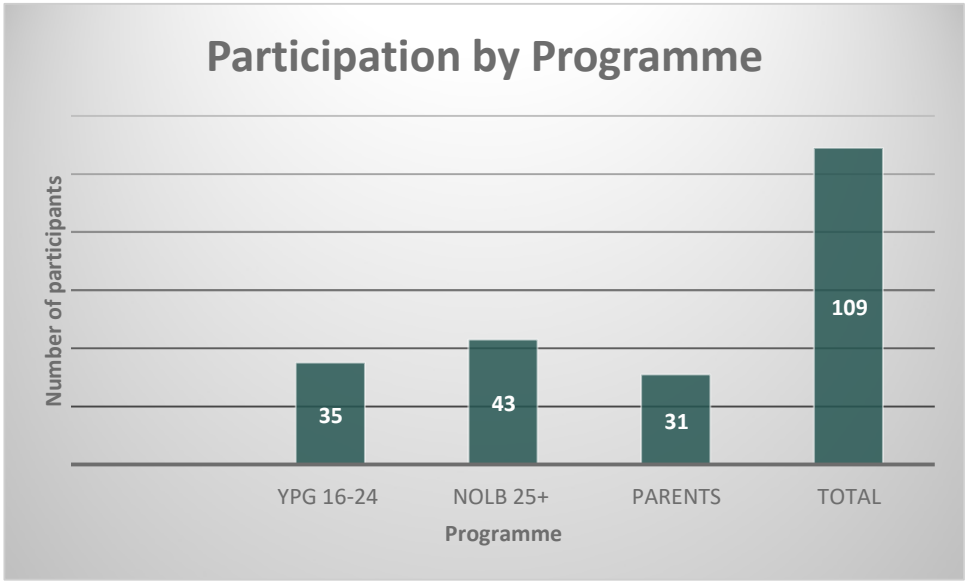
In 2025-26 Orkney Islands Council's Community Learning Development and Employability Service (CLDE) employed 4.06fte staff through the No One Left Behind external funding, to deliver the Council's Employability Service. However, it must be recognised that for most of the year the team have worked with significantly less staffing resource.

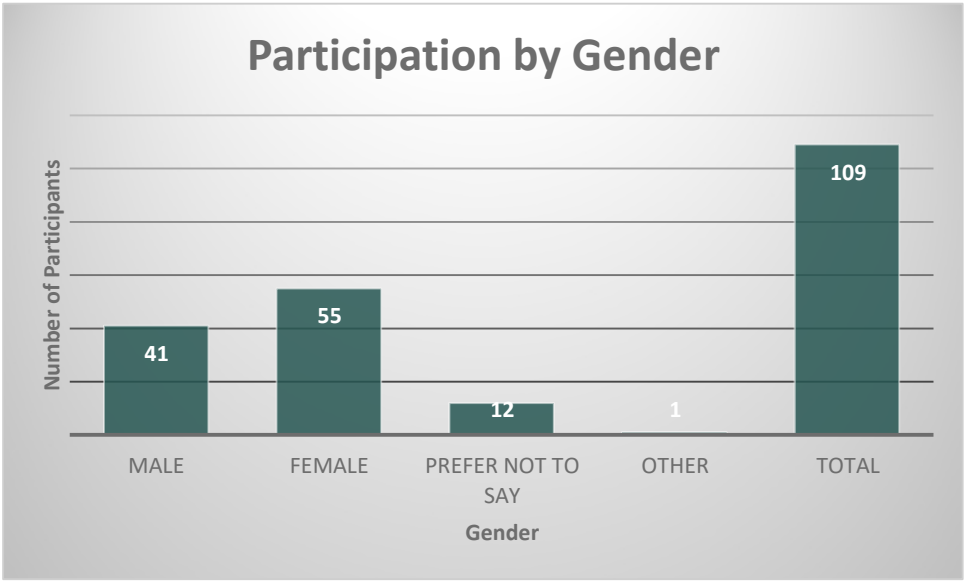
- CLDE Team Manager Employability – 1.0fte (April 2025- March 2026)
- Employability Keyworker – 0.68fte (August 2025 – March 2026)
- Partnership Officer Child Poverty and Employability – 1.0 FTE (January 2026 -March 2026
- General Youth Worker – 0.7fte (April 2025 – March 2026)
- Administrative Assistant – 0.7fte (April 2025- March 2026)

The Employability Service have supported 109 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 the 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.





During this period, 43 individuals progressed from the CLDE Employability Service and 66 continue to access support. Of those who progressed, 21 individuals moved on to employment/self-employment, 11 people advanced to Further/Higher Education, two individuals returned to school and one individual progressed to sustained volunteering.

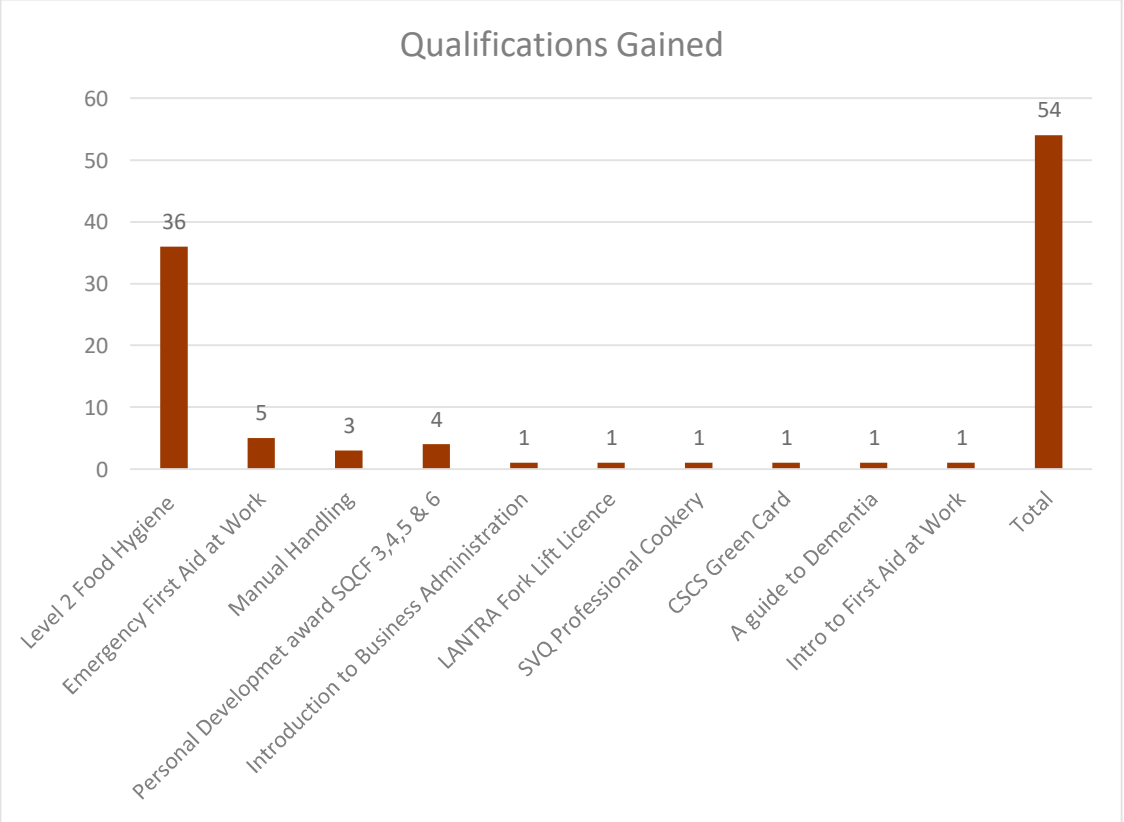
This equates to an 81% positive progression rate.

Qualifications and Accredited Awards

Qualifications and Accredited Awards gained

In 2025-26, **43 individuals** were supported by the CLDE Employability team to work towards and gain a variety of accredited qualifications, resulting in a total of **54 accredited courses being achieved**. Topics included: First Aid at Work, Level 2 Food Hygiene, Health and Safety at Work, Business Administration- Introduction, SVQ In Professional Cookery, Manual Handling, Construction Skills Certification Scheme Green Card and SCQF Personal Development Awards at level 3,4,5 and 6.

Courses Completed 2025–26



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 they work with.



Partnership Work

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

Pathway Planning Meetings and Co-ordination

Pathway planning continues to provide an important mechanism for identifying young people who may require additional support to achieve a positive post-school destination. The meetings, coordinated by SDS, are held with both mainland secondary schools each academic term and include SDS Careers Advisors, DYW staff, Guidance and Curriculum Support staff and CLDE staff. The meetings enable partners to co-ordinate early and responsive support and help ensure that employability provision reflects the needs of young people and the local community. Meetings with Junior High Schools are coordinated as and when required.

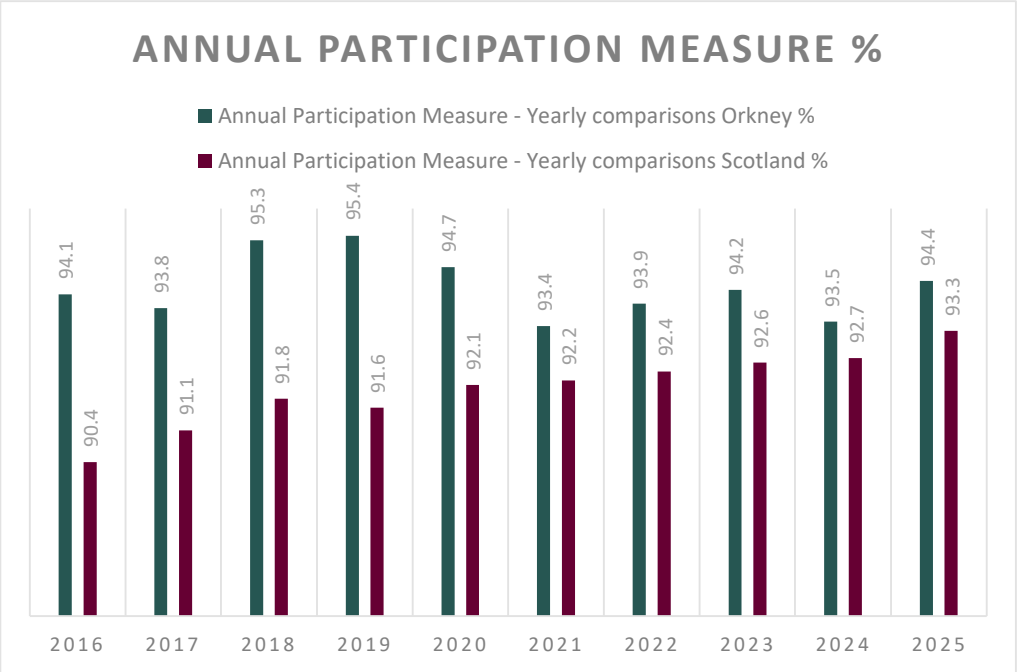
Objective:

- 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.

During 2025/26, partners continued to strengthen the pathway planning process. Refreshed guidance and a revised minute template were produced to improve the consistency, clarity, accountability and sharing of information. Through partnership working with schools, Curriculum Support staff and other agencies, meetings continue to support early identification and co-ordination of targeted interventions, for young people who may require additional help with their transition from school.

Partnership working continues to make an important contribution to positive outcomes for young people in Orkney, as demonstrated by the Scottish Government's 2025 Annual Participation Measure (APM). The proportion of 16–19-year-olds participating in education, employment or training in Orkney, increased from 93.5% in 2024 to 94.4% in 2025. Orkney also strengthened its national position, moving from 14th to 11th out of Scotland's 32 local

authorities, while continuing to achieve a participation rate above the Scottish average of 93.3%. This achievement is especially positive in the context of a growing cohort, with the number of 16–19-year-olds included in the measure increasing from 920 in 2024, to 965 in 2025, the largest cohort recorded in Orkney since the APM was introduced in 2016.



In addition, 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 2025-26.

- SDS has delivered 478 Career Information, Advice and Guidance engagements, for 185 post-school customers through a mix of group and one-to-one sessions, including employability sessions which were delivered in partnership with CLDE.
- There were 129 Modern Apprenticeship starts. 66.7% of the starts in the local area were aged 16-24 years.
- As of 31 March 2026, there were 179 Modern Apprentices in training. The Modern Apprenticeship achievement rate in Orkney is 82.5%.

The Bridge Programme

During Pathway Planning meetings with Kirkwall Grammar School, partners identified that there were a group of young people who were being identified, as early as S3, as being at risk of not achieving a positive post-school destination. Often, they have low or non-attendance at school, and in some cases are supported through an amended timetable, which means they do not engage with partner organisations or opportunities to help them progress or access key activities, such as work placements.

As a result, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Orkney, worked in partnership to develop and deliver a programme to support these young people. The programme is known as 'The Bridge' and is delivered outwith the school setting in The Hub.

Pupils were identified in partnership with the school's Guidance Team and drop-in sessions were offered to young people and their parents or carers, to allow them to meet the staff and see the venue where the sessions would be held.

The programme focused on helping pupils to engage in a group setting, build their confidence and skills, and introduce them to some of the services that can support them when they leave school. Work was undertaken to help pupils identify their skills and the network of people who can support them. Many of the young people felt quite negatively about themselves and focused on their lack of formal qualifications, so it was useful for them to see what other skills they have.

As the programme progressed, partner organisations came along to speak to them about the support available, and visits were undertaken at UHI Orkney, to learn about progression courses; Voluntary Action Orkney to learn about volunteering opportunities and, CLDE and the Learning Link to learn about the Youth Services team and how they can gain qualifications outwith school. They also met staff from the Connect Project.

Workplace visits were also undertaken at the Orkney Cheese factory and Kyloe as these were areas two of the group had expressed an interest in. A visit to CLDE provided an opportunity to see another workplace, and for one young person, to hear about a supported placement opportunity with the team as an Administration Assistant, which is an area they are keen to work in.

The programme concluded with an event which the young people organised. Family and friends and the businesses and partners who had supported the programme were invited along. Organising the event was a great chance for them to develop their transferable skills.

One of the young people is staying on at school so will continue with the programme after the summer holidays, while two others have now left school but have been supported to engage with one of the other programmes running in Orkney.

The Bridge will run again in 2026-27, alongside a similar course which is being delivered in school for pupils who attend the school's Curriculum Support Department.

Two of the parents whose children attended The Bridge have provided us with some feedback:

"The Bridge has benefited my son in several important ways, the relaxed atmosphere has made him feel comfortable and able to participate, it has supported the development of his independence and confidence and, the staff have built strong, trusting relationships with him. He has embraced the experience wholeheartedly and has thoroughly enjoyed taking part. He is now keen to continue working with Skills Development Scotland since the course has ended, which speaks volumes about the positive impact the programme has had on him." – Parent 1

"Our son started attending the Hub after years in secondary school which saw him isolated from his peers and lonely, struggling with a lack of confidence, low self-esteem and frightened for the future. Through getting to know our son, his needs and his interests, the team were able to build up a schedule of planned visits to prospective employers and establishments. Time was also spent working on identifying strengths and weaknesses, highlight skills that he didn't recognise as such. Our son was made to feel a welcome part of the team and that has done wonders for his self-worth, and in turn has given him the confidence to not feel afraid of what lies ahead and to take these next steps." – Parent 2

Skills Development Scotland Partnership Projects

2025-26 saw the continuation of the strong partnership between the CLD Employability team and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), with delivery of an Employability Programme, CV Workshop and Job Hub. The programmes were planned and delivered by staff from both teams, ensuring that participants developed links with both services to ensure they get the support they required in the future.

The Employability Programme underwent some re-development following a review process. As a result, it was offered for one-full day per week for three-weeks, rather than its previous much longer half-day a week format.

Four people completed the programme, gaining confidence in skills identification, applications, CV writing and interviewing skills. **Five people completed the CV writing workshop,** gaining the skills to create and then maintain their CV's. The Job Hub provided a drop in space for people to attend for support with looking for or applying for jobs or further training/education.

> "*Learned useful ways to structure CV writing and interview answers."*
> Employability Programme Participant

> *"This has been really helpful, thank you. I now have a CV that shows what I can do.*"
> CV Workshop participant.

The Blide Trust Group

The CLD Employability team continued to work in partnership with the Blide Trust to coordinate, 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 over the year**, and an average attendance at each session of seven 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 the young people, which enables more focused one-to-one support to be offered out with the group setting if required.



Sessions during 2025-26 have included visits to local heritage sites, a four-week printing course at Soulisquoy Printers, craft and sewing sessions; health and wellbeing sessions; flower arranging; driving safety and CPR training with the Fire Service; budgeting and cooking sessions; team building challenges; and confidence and self-esteem building activities.

"The group gives me routine and helps me to meet people and socialise. I also get to try new things with a group."

"The best bit about coming to the group is we cook and eat together. I have learned to cook new things. It is nice to sit around the table with people and chat."

Westray Isles Visit

In October 2025 the CLDE team worked with Westray Development Trust and the wider community to plan, coordinate and deliver a two-day learning event on the island.



After consultation with the community, the team developed a learning programme that included Sewing for Beginners; DJing Skills; Internet Safety and Awareness; Level 2 Food Hygiene; and working alongside UHI Orkney we were also able to offer Emergency First Aid in the Workplace. The team also delivered a family learning event which included a family cooking session, numeracy challenges and family indoor golf and boccia activities.

All the sessions were well attended over the two days; **14 people gained a Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate. Nine people gained an Emergency First Aid at Work certificate**, nine people attended the DJing Skills session, 14 people attend the sewing for beginners and 10 parents, and 13 children, attended the family learning session.

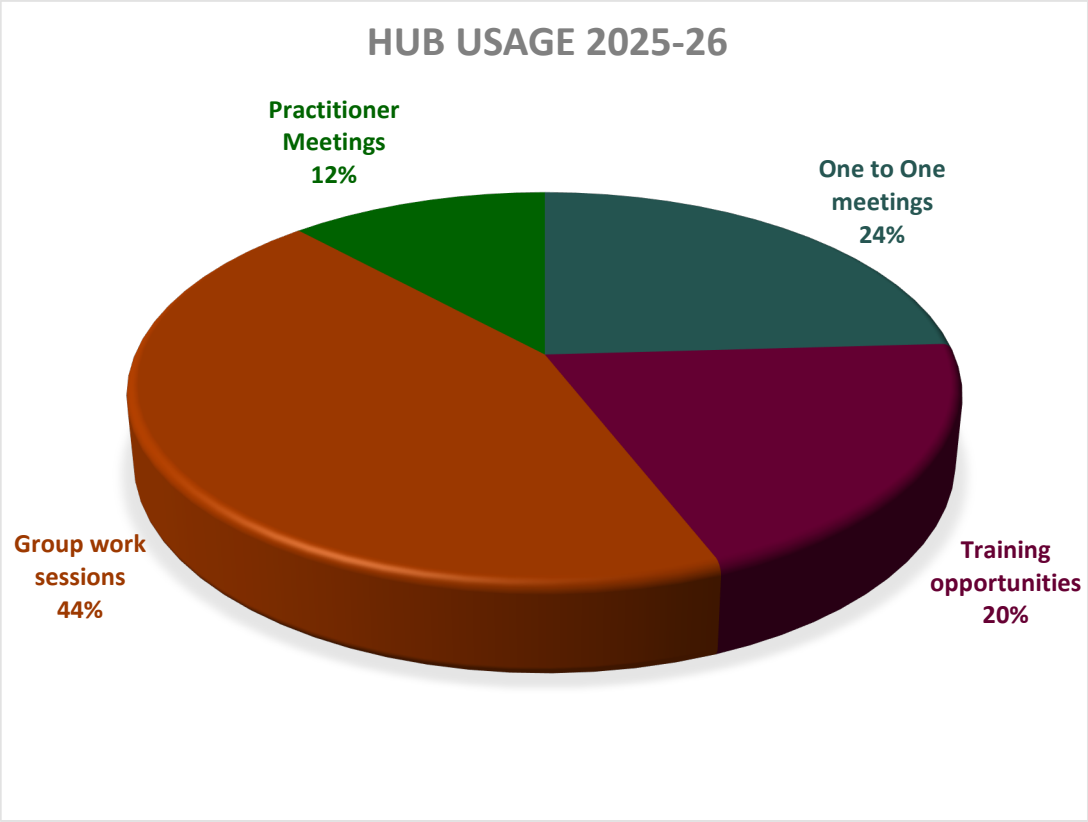
"Thank you for coming out to the island, especially in such bad weather! It is great to have course delivered on the island as it is tricky for us to get into Kirkwall for course start times."

"It is great to have something different to do with the kids and keep them entertained."



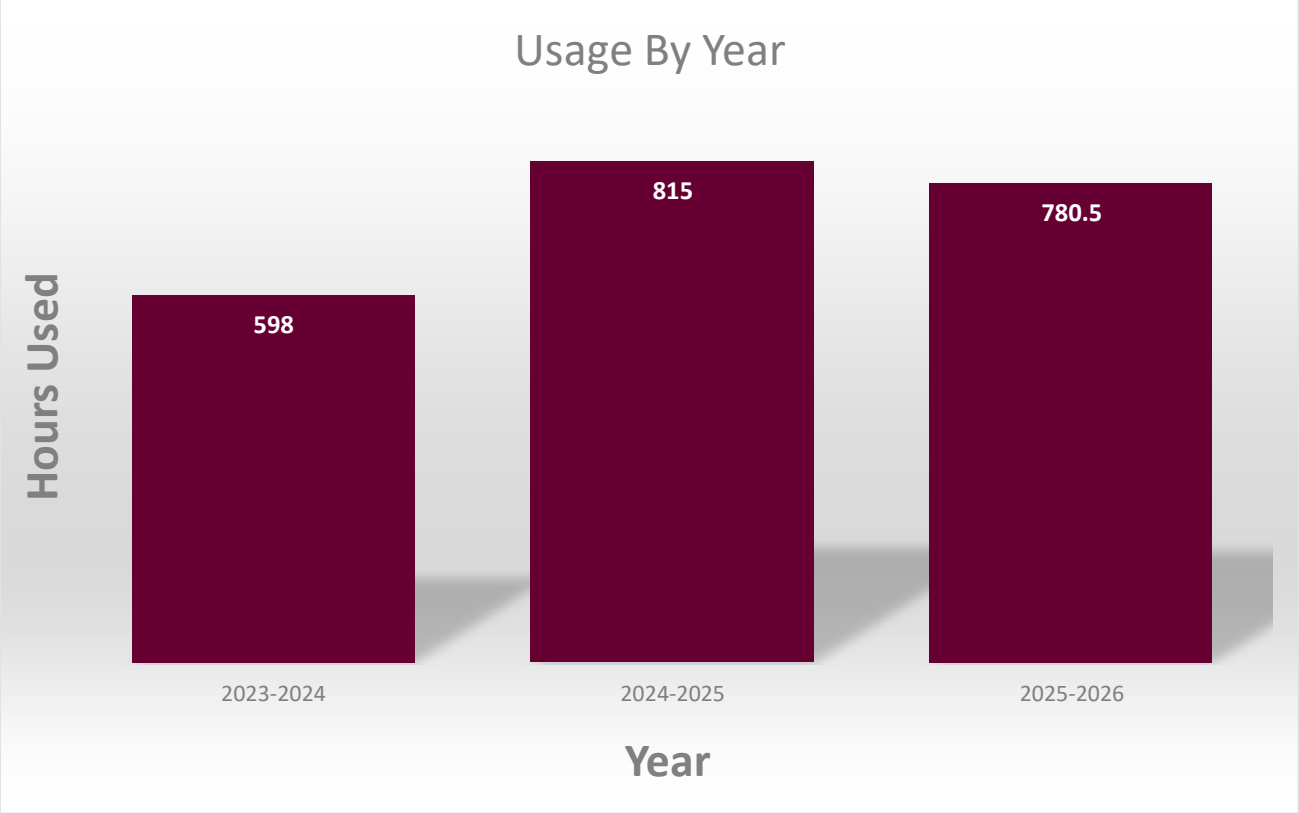
The Hub for Learning, Skills and Work

During 2025-26, 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, partnership events, group work activities, training and employer engagement events.



In total the Hub has been used for **780.5 hours** to deliver support, training and opportunities for staff and the individuals/communities we work with during 2025-26.

This is slightly down from the 815 hours used during the previous year; however, it is still a significant increase from 2023-24 in which The Hub was used for 598 hours in total.


Usage By Year
Hours Used
598
815
780.5
2023-2024
2024-2025
2025-2026
Year

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 subgroup 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 2025-26, the Jedi Council have worked across the partnership, to promote the Employability Pathway resource, that was created during 2024-25. This has included visiting partner organisations to deliver promotional materials and talking to individuals who access the different services. They have also completed a recruitment campaign to encourage others to become members of the Jedi Council. This has resulted in four new members joining the regular meetings.

The Jedi Council also engaged with Scottish Government and actively supported the design of a national research campaign to provide timely and robust insight into service user experience and embed continuous improvement as required.

The findings of this research can be found here https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781807753917

Sunday Funday



In July 2025, 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; Home-Start; Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau; and Orkney Money Matters.

Throughout the day 100 individuals attended, 53 parents and 47 children.

"It is great to get out and do something different with the kids. The fact that it is free is amazing"

"We have all had such fun. More family activities like this would be great"



Picky Family Fun Day

The CLDE team planned, co-ordinated and delivered a free, family engagement and learning event, which was delivered by the full CLDE team with input from the Council's Sport & Leisure team.

The initial hour and a half, of the event, was a targeted, invite only session, which it was hoped would ensure engagement with parents from the priority groups (lone parents, larger families with three or more children, parents under 25, families with a parent or child with a disability, minority ethic families and families with a child under one). Invites were distributed through partners including Women's Aid Orkney; Inclusive Orkney; Home-Start Orkney; The Blide Trust; Orkney Foodbank; Social Services - Family Support Team; and the CLDE Family Engagement Team.

The event provided a variety of informal learning activities and opportunities, to increase and/or promote confidence, skills, knowledge, motivation and health and wellbeing through learning. These included STEM activities and Bubble Tea with Youth Services, boccia and indoor golf with Active Schools, numeracy challenges, baking and dinosaur scavenger hunt with Adult Learning and the Orkney Corner with model making, Orkney artifacts and rune coding with the Museums Team. In addition, there was a basketball challenge and bouncy castles provided by the Pickaquoy Centre.



The CLDE team also used the event to consult with attendees on local provision, barriers to accessing opportunities and potential solutions through a Conversation Corner where people could get tea and coffee and speak to staff.

On the day, **481 individuals engaged with the sessions and activities. In total 280 children and 201 parents/carers from a variety of geographical locations across Orkney, including the ferry linked Isles attended the event.**

Nine adults and 14 children attended the invite only session.

192 adults and 266 children attended the open session.



"Thanks to the staff. Very well run. Various activities for all ages. Big plus was it was free. More days like this please."

"I loved the bubble tea. The day was the best. So much fun. I loved everything, amazing! I wish they would do this every month. AWSOME. Fantastic."

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 2025-26, **13 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.

Outcomes from the Outreach Programme include:

- Two individuals progressed to Further Education.
- Four individuals gained SCQF accreditation through completing a Personal Development Award levels 3-6.
- One individual completed a Level 5 Introduction to a Career in Social Care.
- One individual accessed the Learning Link for further confidence and qualifications.
- Two individuals are volunteering in their local communities.
- Three individuals will continue the programme in the 2026-27 academic session.

Fast Track Programmes

This year the CLDE Employability team worked with UHI Orkney and local employers to plan and deliver two Sector Work-based Academy Programmes (SWAP's), Fast Track to Business Administration and Fast Track to Hairdressing.

The programmes were designed to include a combination of practical and theory sessions to support development of sector specific skills and knowledge, site and employer visits, accredited qualifications and work experience. **Eight individuals engaged and completed Fast Track to Business Administration** and **five engaged with and completed the Fast Track to Hairdressing** course. Of those who attended the programmes three people gained employment, three have applied to do further study at UHI Orkney, and two have secured and sustained volunteering placements.



"I really enjoyed the work experience placement, and I now know that I would like to work in administration"

"I feel like I've really worked in an office this morning." "It was really fun and busy."

"Doing this short course has given me the confidence to apply for another course and return to college".

Get Ready to Volunteer

Working with Voluntary Action Orkney the CLDE Employability team, planned, co-ordinated and delivered a ‘Get Ready to Volunteer’ programme during 2025-26.

Sessions 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, including the benefits, roles and responsibilities; information about the Saltire Awards scheme; talks from organisations and volunteers, including Orkney Folk Festival Committee, Employability Orkney and The Peedie Retreat, and, where to get support to get involved in opportunities.



In response to feedback, a group volunteering activity at Gilbertson Day Centre was also arranged. This session supported participants to engage with a group inter-generational befriending activity and gain confidence to volunteer in the future.

Five individuals completed the programme and all five have actively volunteered in their local communities after completing the course.



“I enjoyed the course and feel I am getting my confidence back from taking part.”

“I enjoyed hearing about the different volunteering opportunities and discussion with other people”.

Supported Volunteering Service

Throughout 2025–26, Voluntary Action Orkney's, Supported Volunteering Service, continued to establish itself as an important route into volunteering in Orkney, for people who face barriers to participation. By working closely with individuals, volunteer mentors and host organisations, the service is enabling more people to access opportunities that are tailored to their interests, strengths and support needs.

A key focus during the year has been building a network of local organisations ready to provide inclusive volunteering placements. As awareness of the service has grown, so too has the range of opportunities available, giving supported volunteers greater choice, and helping local organisations recognise the benefits of creating accessible volunteering roles.

At the end of the reporting year 2025-26, three supported volunteers and their mentors were about to begin placements across a range of services - at the Yard, Restart and St Rognvald's House Care Home.

The introduction of structured referral pathways, combined with bespoke one-to-one mentoring, helps remove practical and personal barriers that might otherwise prevent people from volunteering. This personalised approach gives supported volunteers the confidence to try new experiences, develop skills and become active contributors within our community. Each mentor provides a personalised package of support, intentionally stepping back as the supported volunteer grows in confidence, develops their skills and is able to step forward with increasing independence.

Although many placements were just set to begin by the end of the reporting period, the impact on participants has already been significant. Early feedback highlights improvements in confidence, wellbeing and social connection, alongside the development of practical workplace skills.

One supported volunteer reflected:

"Before I started, I was really quite nervous and anxious, but I've definitely been feeling happier since I started volunteering because it gives me a purpose to get up in the morning and to meet new folks.

"I would say I feel more confident now and having my mentor with me has been great… and I can really connect and relate with him.

"I enjoy the job satisfaction that I get from it and I'm learning things too – how to follow instructions and stay focused on what I'm doing right until I've finished the task.

"It feels good to be putting something back into the community, and it's opened my eyes to what is out there."

Connect Project

During 2025–26, the **Connect Project supported 26 young people through its main programme**, all of whom faced significant barriers to engaging with education, training or employment. A further four young adults who had previously been supported by Connect returned for advice or support when they needed it.

Young people referred to Connect, continue to experience increasingly complex needs, including poor mental health, autism, disability, social isolation, family pressures and difficulties engaging with education, training or employment.

Connect provides flexible, individual support built around trust, safety and each young person's circumstances. For many, the first steps are improving wellbeing, developing confidence, building relationships and gaining the skills to communicate, self-advocate and move forward.

During the year, young people took part in volunteering, community activities and short training opportunities. **In total, three progressed into further education, two secured full-time employment and two took on part-time work. Others made important progress in confidence, routine, social connection and participation in their community.**

Feedback continues to demonstrate the importance of the service.

One community organisation described the contribution of Connect volunteers as 'genuinely life changing', while a parent spoke about their young person developing a routine, enjoying leaving the house and making friends.

A referral partner highlighted the importance of Connect, where there was no other service able to meet the young person's needs.

Connect is now entering an important period of transition as it develops from a Voluntary Action Orkney project into an independent charitable organisation. The focus will be on ensuring the service remains sustainable and can continue to develop in response to the needs of some of Orkney's most disadvantaged young people.

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 the Orkney Health and Social Care Partnership, support people with learning disabilities and autistic people, not only to gain employment, but to stay in work long term and develop careers.

During 2025-26 **the service worked with 25 people, supporting four individuals to start new roles, and 14 to maintain their existing employment**.

Central to the work of the Service is the understanding that those individuals supported, can work in real, meaningful jobs in mainstream workplaces and that this is vital to facilitate inclusion in our communities.

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

Carved Roles with Orkney Health and Social Care Partnership

During 2025-26, the CLDE team worked with Orkney Health and Care's Lifestyles Service, to explore and develop supported paid work opportunities for service users.

Lifestyles Services, provide person-centred services and opportunities for adults who are 18 and over with learning disabilities. The Service collaboratively supports individuals to achieve their goals, supporting the things people wish to do and achieve in their lives to maximise their quality of life.

Focusing on ability, the Lifestyles Service provide individuals with tailored employability support, advice, choice and job-coaching for those who wish to develop their work skills and opportunities towards paid work. As part of this support, the service operates St Colms Café and Crafts which has 3 main projects: Wooden garden furniture and gifts; a café which has as much homegrown produce as possible, and a card/stationary making department. These are open to the public and items made can be purchased in person or online.

Individuals engaging with the Lifestyles service historically volunteered in the three project areas to help develop their skills, confidence and experience, and to support any future transitions towards learning, training and work.

Using the funding allocated for Specialist Employability Support, the **CLDE Team have worked with the Lifestyles Service and HR colleagues to create 12 contracted carved roles across the projects to allow Lifestyles service user to gain meaningful paid employment.** In addition, funding will support increased keyworker and job coach provision to support transitions to employment opportunities within the local community. This will create a sustainable model, allowing the vacancies to reopen, so that more service users can benefit.

The paid roles allow individuals to gain initial employment within a familiar and trusted, supportive environment, of which they are already accustomed to, and where they have pre-existing support mechanisms in place. Although volunteering supports skills development and confidence, the paid opportunities bring with them increased self-worth and esteem, as well as, for some, an initial established employment status. It also brings the wider aspects of employee responsibilities, professional development opportunities, managing absences and holidays, etc. Paid employment also has a positive wider impact on managing personal finances and is a crucial, positive step forward on the individual's employment journey.

The increased keyworker/job coach provision will not only support individuals within their role in Lifestyles, but will work with individuals and local employers to develop supported paid employment roles within the community.

From the **12 carved role positions established within the Lifestyles Service, four individuals have started their employment**.

Initial feedback from staff and service users has been very positive.



Emma:

"I have a fantastic job; I am currently working on restocking the drinks in the café myself. I completed my goal of making cheese scone by myself, I felt really proud and happy. Staff are happy to help me when I ask and support me to try things myself first. I love my job. I like talking to my keyworker about what's going great each week, I am really happy."

Emma's Keyworker:

"Emma was ecstatic when offered her job. Over the last few months, I have noticed that she has really settled into her job and is gaining confidence to try new tasks and supported to achieve these independently. Emma is always very happy when she talks about her job, and you can tell how much achieving her work goals means to her. She has been able to develop her skills in the kitchen with cooking and baking and serving in the Café, she puts into practice her customer service skills when speaking to customers and is the first to help with any problems that might arise, which she used to be unsure about, but with support and regular practice has overcome this. Having her job has also helped with Emma's timekeeping as she now clearly knows when she starts her working day and when it finishes."

Carved Role in CLDE

In addition to the carved roles within the Lifestyles Service, CLD Employability Team, Orkney Health and Care, Skills Development Scotland and HR colleagues, worked together to establish a carved role opportunity for an individual accessing support from the All-Age Disabilities team. The role of Hub Assistant will sit within the CLDE Team and will have responsibility for supporting the ongoing weekly management of The Hub. The role has been designed alongside the individual and partners, to incorporate the personal strengths of the person, whilst meeting the organisational needs. It has also been designed to allow travel from a ferry linked isle to attend work.

Neurodiversity Training

The CLDE Employability team, worked in partnership with Inclusive Orkney, Education colleagues and national training providers to plan, co-ordinate and deliver a bespoke neurodiversity training programme for parents, carers, volunteers and professionals. **A total of 91 people engaged in the training with included two in-person sessions, for parents, and one shorter evening session, for volunteers and professionals.** The training was delivered by Colin Foley from Neurodiversity Training UK.



In total 55 parents and carers attended the parent/carer training session which was delivered in-person at Kirkwall Town Hall. This provided those who attended a safe space to share examples and strategies that have helped them support their neurodivergent child. Additionally, it gave parents the opportunity to engage with a national training provider and ask questions to help them better support their child and create an inclusive and accessible environment for them.

In addition, 36 volunteers and professionals attended the volunteer training session which was offered on Friday evening, via Microsoft Teams.

Both sessions gave an introduction to neurodivergence, an overview of several conditions and strategies to support a neurodivergent child, be it within the family or within community settings.

The CLDE Team also used the in-person events, to consult with parents and carers on local provision, barriers to accessing opportunities, and potential solutions through the creation of a small consultation space, where people could get tea and coffee and speak to staff. Through the consultation activity, **the CLDE Team gathered 200 responses to the questions from parents/carers. Additionally, 52 parents/carers expressed a wish to be involved in future**.

"Really useful and interesting session. I found it really thought provoking and will definitely take away some new techniques to make our events and programmes more accessible. Colin was a great presenter." - Volunteer

"*The trainer was very knowledgeable in this subject and using experiences and examples to get the points across really did enable me to understand. Very clear voice, engaging great use of humour. A very, very positive and powerful experience.*" *– Parent/carer*

Employer Engagement and Support

During 2025-26, Employability Orkney continued to work in partnership with the CLDE Team, and wider partners, to deliver the Employer Engagement and Support Service.

The support provided varied depending on individual needs and included assistance with job applications and interviews; support to apply for training and education; liaison with employers; signposting to other agencies and other practical and moral support.

Throughout the year, 31 people engaged with the service, 18 of which were new referrals.

Some of the outcomes achieved include:

- Ten people were supported to gain and sustain employment in a range of sectors including hospitality, retail, food processing and tourism.
- Four people were supported to engage with new volunteering opportunities, while a further four were supported to increase volunteering hours and explore other opportunities.
- Eight people completed training, including Counterbalance Forklift Training, Island Tourism and Tour Guiding, Food Hygiene and Fast Track to Administration.
- Three were supported to apply for further training or education including the Introduction to Social Care; an online Teacher of Foreign Languages course and an opportunity through Open University.
- Nine were signposted to other partner agencies for specialist support and advice, including the Learning Link, Department for Work and Pensions, the Community Mental Health Team, the Family Engagement Team, Business Gateway and Advocacy Orkney.
- Finally, the Service also engaged with 33 employers. This included exploring work experience and trial opportunities, exploring job-carving specific roles, ongoing check-ins regarding in-work clients, advocating and asking questions on behalf of clients.

Case Study: Declan

Declan self-referred into service in February 2025. He had been out of work for two years following a serious car accident. His confidence was low; he wasn't sure what work he could do and wanted support with job searching and confidence building. He wanted to try volunteering on the Restart van as he had always done physical jobs but wanted to ease into this gently in a supportive environment as he had just recovered from a serious back injury. Throughout the spring and summer, he volunteered on the van gradually building up his hours and strength until he felt confident to apply for paid work. He was supported to apply for a job at Cooke Aquaculture as a Factory Processor and was delighted to be offered a full time, permanent job.

"The support I have received at Employability Orkney is second to none. Far more than I ever dreamed of receiving. If ever I found something difficult to move physically, we figured out an alternative way to move it that I could manage. There has been a lot of positive reinforcement that has been enormously beneficial to me. Ian helped me apply for the job that I have now got, and his support has been simply fantastic. I can honestly say that without Ian and everyone else at Restart Orkney, I do not think I would have made it to where I am today."



Employer Engagement Event

In November 2025, the Local Employability Partnership hosted an Employment Support Showcase, which enabled local employers to access free advice, funding opportunities and expert support to help them recruit, retain and grow their workforce.



Co-ordinated and delivered by the CLD Employability Team and the LEP Inclusion and Diversity subgroup the event included sessions on the Local Employability Partnership, Employer Recruitment Incentive funding, Work Experience and the creation of positive pathways to employment. There was also a focus on offering inclusive employment with information about Access to Work, Disability Confident, Scottish Union for Supported Employment (SUSE), Mentally Healthy Workplaces and support that is available for individuals with drug and alcohol use.

The event received positive feedback, and those who attended agreed that the information shared had been beneficial to them and their business.



Unfortunately, turn out for the event was low, despite considerable promotion across the partnership and local media streams. From reviewing the evaluation feedback, the partnership plan to run shorter sessions on specific topics identified by local employers.

Work is currently ongoing with a variety of local/national training providers to explore the options for delivering Neurodiversity Awareness within the Workplace sessions, as this has been requested locally by organisations and employers.

Employer engagement will also be undertaken at the Orkney Careers Fair in October 2026 to raise awareness of the Local Employability Partnership and find out from employers what information would be beneficial for them.

Orkney Islands Council Work Experience

During 2025-26, the CLD Employability Team worked with internal HR colleagues, to establish a Project Officer – All Age Work Experience and Placement post. During this project, two part-time temporary project officers worked with Local Employability Partnership stakeholders, individuals accessing services and internal Council teams, to develop a framework to increase all age inclusive work experience within Orkney Islands Council.

The work included online research for best practice; gap analysis across the organisation; a managers' survey to scope current practice and areas for development; work experience policy development; programme process framework; implementation plan and the development of three toolkits to support managers/buddies and individuals which include information and resources to ensure systematic and positive work experience within the organisation.

A paper was also drafted to go to the Corporate Leadership Team with recommendations for future progress and required resource. The continuation and implementation of the recommendations will be dependent on funding to continue a post to co-ordinate and progress recommendations, but it is hoped that funding can be sourced for 2026-27, to allow the continuation of this work, and to increase and improve, work experience opportunities within the local authority.

Blide Trust Café: Paid Work Experience

During 2025-26, the CLD Employability Team and Orkney Blide Trust, continued to work together to provide employment and training opportunities within the Blide Café, with three people employed through the No One Left Behind funding. This included two young people, one of whom is care experienced, and one older person.

All three gained experience, not just in café work, but by developing transferable skills, including customer service and interacting effectively with people. The 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 alike.

Employees and Blide members have been supported 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.



"I love working at the Blide, it has helped me overcome my anxiety"

Work Experience

The DYW School Co-ordinators, who are based in the two secondary and three junior high schools, work with their respective school's senior leadership team, 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 2025/26, 95 pupils undertook a work placement, supported by 51 employers. Of these, 30 were with Council departments and included opportunities in Early Years settings; care homes and day centres; Orkney Ferries and the IT department. It is hoped that the work undertaken with CLDE and the Council's HR Department will open up many more opportunities across the organisation in the future.

Sector Specific Session in School

Alongside work placement opportunities, 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:

Isles Careers Roadshow

Developed by the DYW School Co-ordinator for the Junior High Schools, the Isles Careers Roadshow gave pupils who live on Sanday, Stronsay and Westray the chance to meet local employers and learn more about the careers available across Orkney.

Held in each of the Junior High Schools, the events were targeted to pupils in upper primary (Primary 5-7) and secondary school (Secondary 1-4). Pupils were able to speak to employers and ask questions, learning more about what their business does, the variety of jobs available and some of the routes into careers including apprenticeships, further training and education. There was also a chance to try out some fun activities and some of the equipment used in different jobs.



The islands' Development Trusts also attended their local event, helping young people to understand more about the role they play on the island, and showcasing some of the local job opportunities with the development trust. In addition, at Westray Junior High School, the Parent Council also attended to explain how they add to school life.

DYW Orkney and Careers Advisers from Skills Development Orkney, were also on hand with information about apprenticeships, courses available at UHI Orkney, and support for anyone who needed help to take the next step on their career journey.

Across the three events, 14 different businesses and organisations attended, including NHS Orkney, Police Scotland, the Pickaquoy Centre and BAM Nuttall.

Midwifery Insight Programme



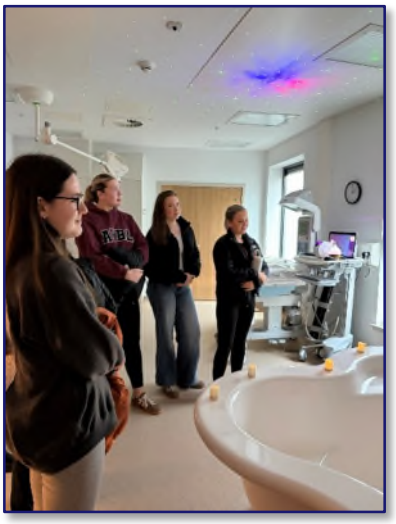
A group of pupils from Stromness Academy took part in a programme to gain an insight into a career as a midwife.

Developed and delivered in partnership with NHS Orkney, the Midwifery Insight Programme was offered to pupils who are interested in becoming a midwife when they leave school. The programme aims to help them learn more about the role of a midwife and help them gain knowledge that will be beneficial for a college, UCAS or job application and interviews.

The first part of the programme saw the pupils taking part in the Solihull Course for Young People, which was delivered by staff from Orkney Islands Council's Early Years Team. The course gives an insight into early child development and looks at the importance of pre-conception health and how babies' brains develop.

Pupils were then able to observe Parentcraft classes, which are delivered by a midwife and attended by expectant mum and their partners. Attending Parentcraft classes helped them to learn more about labour and delivery.

The programme concluded with a visit and tour of the maternity unit where pupils were able to see the clinical environment midwives work in and learn more about some of the activities midwives undertake as part of their duties. Pupils were also able to ask questions and learn more about the different routes into a career as a midwife.



Apprenticeship Marketplace



Kirkwall Grammar School held an Apprenticeship Marketplace in November, as part of Scottish Careers Week. The event was aimed at senior phase pupils (S4-S6) and timed ahead of prelims and the subject choice period, when many pupils are considering their next steps.

Seven businesses came along to speak to pupils about the apprenticeship opportunities they offer, while Construction Industry Training Board and UHI Orkney attended as training and learning providers to provide advice on accessing apprenticeship opportunities locally.

Careers Advisers from Skills Development Scotland were also on hand to offer careers advice and guidance, while DYW Orkney staff provided information on the range of apprenticeships available.

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 2025 -26 the **CLDE Employability team negotiated and administered three Employer Recruitment Incentives, across a range of third sector organisations in Orkney**. Two individuals supported during 2025-26 were aged under 25 and one individual was aged 25+.

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

Challenges

As this report demonstrates, there continues to be a huge collective effort across the partnership to work collectively to deliver bespoke and holistic employability support based on local need.

However, during 2025-26, there continues to be significant challenges at all levels of provision, including planning and service delivery due the persistence of only receiving annual funding. This combined with a hard stop of March 2026, makes allocating and distributing funds in a very small-time frame extremely challenging, with little lead in time and even less delivery time. The Local Employability Partnership have to mobilise, deliver and report on an annual allocation within a 12-month period, which despite being challenging they managed to do effectively.

In addition, despite the aspiration of NOLB funding being used locally to streamline provision the 'ringfenced' nature of how the funding is allocated can add further challenges.

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 it is supporting are becoming more complex. Many individuals are experiencing multiple barriers to progressions, and therefore they require more individualised and sustained support to help in their first steps back into engaging with the community, learning, training and work.

During 2025-26, **58% 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.