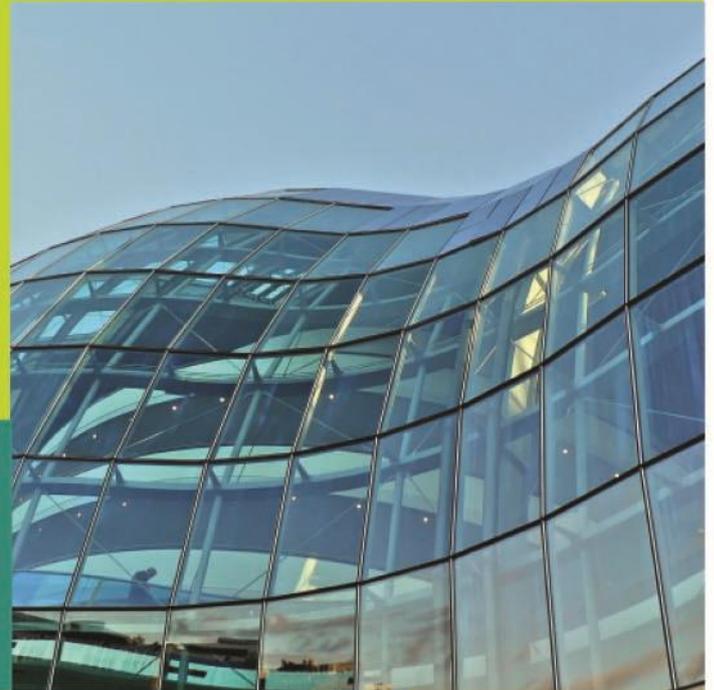




Evaluation of Accelerate

Final Report March 2019



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Accelerate delivers intensive holistic employment support for people who are unemployed or economically inactive to gain or move towards employment and/or education/training. It forms part of the national Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme and is delivered by a wide-ranging partnership led by Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency (CWCDa). This evaluation report is based on a review of relevant documents and data, interviews with each of the delivery partners and some wider stakeholders, and consultations with participants. Key findings are structured around the questions posed in the evaluation specification.

What difference did the project make, to whom and why?

As at the end of November 2018, Accelerate has supported 933 people, with additional demand for its services apparent. Each and every participant interviewed reported that they had made progress towards employability as a direct result of the support provided by an Accelerate partner. Commonly, consultees reported that progress was substantial, even life changing in many cases. Accelerate has provided participants with some combination of greater confidence, higher self-esteem, improved mental health and a sense of social inclusion.

Has the project supported participants as it was proposed in the initial project plan?

Accelerate has achieved great success in engaging and successfully supporting the types of groups for which the BBO programme was designed. Consultations confirmed that Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches typically lacked the time to be able to deal with the specific needs of Accelerate participants. The capacity of Journey Guides to spend time listening to participants combined with their ability to empathise and their knowledge of how best to support each individual (either directly or through referral) have been fundamental to Accelerate's achievements.

Has the project led to the development of a delivery model that is effective and sustainable?

Arriving at the model was based on a rigorous process of exploring potential partner interest and suitability. This time and effort expended at the outset proved to be a worthwhile investment. The size and scope of the partnership has enabled provision of a broad offer of services to participants. However, there does appear to be a sense in which partners have tended to operate in silos. The anchor role provided by CWCDa has been a key factor on Accelerate's success, providing both leadership and support in an effective and efficient manner.

The factors that contributed to/inhibited the performance and achievements of Accelerate

The success of Accelerate is largely due to the hard work, skills, experience and attitudes of the people working to deliver it. A consistent theme was the amount of time that is needed in order to understand the needs and aspirations of individuals, identify specific barriers to employment and develop/implement a programme of support. The two main constraints on the programme appear to have been resources and bureaucracy.

The implementation of the sustainability and equality & diversity action plan

Partners have their own sustainability and equality & diversity action plans and were therefore well placed to deliver on the plans developed for this project. In respect of equality and diversity, the project supported three times as many people from BME communities as was forecast.

The monitoring and evaluation of the targets, results and outcomes

Programme bureaucracy made monitoring a time consuming experience but it was evident that all partners were compliant and that monitoring data was therefore complete and up to date. A robust system was put in place by CWCDa both to ensure this was the case and to act promptly in response to any issues that monitoring information revealed.

The functionality of the Accelerate partnership

The time and effort invested from the outset in identifying and working with partners appears to have reaped its rewards. Partners work well together and the referral system was regarded as efficient and effective. Having a participant on the Steering Group seems to have been effective but more generally having service users attending various events has been beneficial in promoting Accelerate, demonstrating its achievements and celebrating success.

Project achievements

Project outputs have been impressive and as time passes outcomes and impacts will continue to increase. Getting a participant into employment might be regarded as the 'ultimate' prize, but that ought not diminish the achievement of other impacts and outcomes, which have clearly been significant in terms of both the numbers reported and the significance of these achievements for the individuals concerned. In addition, Accelerate has left legacies for its partners, including increased capacity, raised profile and new connections, helping to make the third sector across Coventry & Warwickshire more stable and sustainable.

Lessons learnt

Perhaps the most important lesson learnt relates to the resources required for delivery and the functions that each partner needed to perform, especially in respect of funding for administration of project bureaucracy. In addition, existing knowledge of the extent of demand for mental health support and the need to take delivery to locations that are accessible for clients was confirmed.

Suggested changes to the project for future delivery

There would be merit in having some central co-ordination of employer contacts, for marketing purposes, provision of support to employers, gaining feedback from employers and maintaining contact with participants entering employment. It is therefore suggested that a database of employers be developed and that it becomes part of the role of the Opportunity Connector and/or one or more of the Journey Guides to lead on employer engagement.

Linked to the above is the need for ongoing support to participants. Given the vulnerability of participants to future shocks, there would be merit in having in place, in-work or in-volunteering placement support to ensure that people did not regress and lose their jobs/placements.

There would be merit in partners undertaking a formal assessment of participants, both at the time they join the project and on completion, as a matter of routine. This would enable them to demonstrate the value of their intervention in terms of the progress made by individuals in respect of appropriate indicators.

Summary

Accelerate has clearly been a successful project, not just in terms of the numbers of people participating but in its ability to engage with precisely the types of people for whom the project is intended. It has not sought easy targets merely to satisfy output requirements. Partners have demonstrated genuine commitment with many individuals having gone above and beyond what might have been expected of them in order to support clients. Feedback from participants was almost universally positive and it was absolutely clear that the support received had impacted beneficially on many people's lives and in ways that had moved them closer to (and often into) employment. It is also apparent that the services provided do not duplicate those on offer from other organisations (including Jobcentre Plus) and that there remains a significant level of demand for such services across Coventry and Warwickshire.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In October 2018, ERS was commissioned by Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency (CWCD A) to undertake an evaluation of Accelerate. CWCD A was awarded funding for the Accelerate programme in 2016, and it forms part of the national Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme.
- 1.2 The programme delivers intensive holistic employment support for people who are unemployed or economically inactive to gain or move towards employment and/or education/training. Further information on the project and its delivery can be found on the Accelerate website www.accelerate.org.uk
- 1.3 This evaluation sought to establish the following:
- What difference did the project make, to whom and why?
 - Has the project supported participants as it was proposed in the initial project plan?
 - Has the project led to the development of a delivery model that is effective and sustainable?
 - To provide evidence and analysis to explain the factors which contributed to and/or inhibited the performance and achievements of the Accelerate project.
 - The implementation of the sustainability and equality and diversity action plan.
 - The monitoring and evaluation of the targets, results and outcomes.
 - The functionality of the Accelerate partnership.
 - Whether or not the project achieved its aim.
 - Lessons learnt- what worked well and what could be improved?
 - Suggested changes to the project for future delivery.
- 1.4 This Final Report builds on an Interim Report submitted in draft in October 2018 and finalised in March 2019.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The methodology was shaped by both experience and understanding of the Accelerate delivery model, the characteristics of intended beneficiaries and the local economic geography. Consistent with UK Evaluation Society (UKES) guidelines, the method was based on UKES principles, in that it sought to:

- Be collaborative and participative, with project staff and participants actively involved;
- Be conducted openly and transparently, sharing learning with and gaining learning from other relevant evaluation and research activities;
- Meet high standards in research, analysis and reporting, with reports written in clear and plain English;
- Meet all deadlines;
- Protect and enhance the reputation of the client and its partners; and
- Comply with data protection and other legal and good practice guidelines.

Inception Meeting

2.2 Following appointment, an inception meeting was held involving two representatives of ERS and two representatives of CWCD. This meeting helped to clarify and agree the exact terms of reference for the evaluation, establish working procedures, finalise the approach to the work, collate immediately available information, reports and data and identify potential consultees.

2.3 Within three working days of the Inception Meeting, a Project Inception Document (PID) was submitted setting out:

- A clear outline of the project objectives, scope and deliverables;
- Roles, responsibilities, points of contacts and contact details;
- Finalised methodology, including tasks and resource allocation;
- Dates for key deliverables, including when contribution/sign off will be required from the client;
- Timing and method of progress updates, meetings, presentations;
- A record of agreed actions and decisions from the Inception and update meetings.

Documentation Review and Data Analysis

- 2.4 A review of documentation has been undertaken, covering the following:
- The original BBO application
 - Internal evaluation of Accelerate
 - Monitoring reports
 - The sustainability and equality and diversity action plan
 - Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership's European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy and Strategic Economic Plan
 - Warwickshire Together People, Places and Prosperity a Sustainable Community Strategy
- 2.5 The review of documentation has enabled the evaluation to compare what was envisaged for Accelerate (e.g. the size and scope of the partnership) prior to and during delivery, exploring the reasons for any changes in approach and what impacts (if any) this had on achievements. It has also provided a strategic context for the evaluation.
- 2.6 The analysis of monitoring data sought to assess whether/the extent to which the Project Targets have been met and, within this, whether each of the partner organisations have met targets in respect of outputs (e.g. recruitment of people with disabilities), outcomes (e.g. people develop new skills through project training) and impacts (e.g. number who move into education or training on leaving).

Logic Model/Evaluation Framework

- 2.7 The Logic Model below sets out the resources that have gone into Accelerate, the activities this has funded and the outputs, outcomes and impacts (results) that have been generated.

Accelerate Logic Model				
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts (Results)
£3 million Funding via ESF and Big Lottery Fund Accelerate staff team and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tailored packages of support and advice ▪ Confidence building activities ▪ Work experience ▪ Skills enhancement and enterprise support ▪ Support to address a wide variety of barriers to employment ▪ Opportunity Connector - helping partners to ensure participants connect with specific provision of most benefit to them 	890 people across the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP area to be supported: 445 will be male 445 will be female 357 will be unemployed 553 will be economically inactive 154 people who are 50+ 181 will have a disability 104 will be from an ethnic minority	Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ feel more confident and have a more positive outlook which will enable them to look for and take up work/training opportunities ▪ gain a clearer understanding of the world of work, what is available in the labour market and employers' expectations ▪ gain new skills and overcome specific barriers helping them move closer to work and new approaches to job creation opportunities for specific groups which are poorly represented in the labour market Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced service delivery 	Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Move into education or training ▪ Move into employment/self-employment ▪ Commence job search if previously economically inactive ▪ More stable lifestyles ▪ Reduced dependence on benefits Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follow-on funding ▪ Additional collaborations ▪ Improved capacity and capability to work with and support these target groups
Cross-cutting themes: Everyone involved in the project will gain an improved understanding of integration of sustainable development and gender equality and equal opportunities working practices				

- 2.8 Ideally, this would have facilitated a detailed understanding of how each of the activities undertaken have generated target outputs and the desired outcomes and impacts. However, this was dependant on being able to gather robust evidence of the added value of different interventions and unfortunately this was not available, as discussed later in this report. (Participants do complete an initial assessment but this is not used as a baseline against which subsequent progress can be measured).
- 2.9 An Evaluation Framework was established describing the evidence that was to be gathered, how it was to be gathered and from where it was going to be gathered. This in turn led to the development of research tools that were used to underpin our primary research.

Consulting the Delivery Team

- 2.10 The Inception Meeting also provided an opportunity to gather the views of key members of the programme Team (the Operations Manager and Finance Manager). A separate interview was subsequently conducted with the Operations Manager as well as the current and previous Opportunity Connector.

Consulting Delivery Partners/Wider Stakeholders

- 2.11 A full list of interviewees representing each of the Delivery Partners and five Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches can be found in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively. These interviews centred on gathering largely qualitative evidence to assess the processes, challenges, impacts and lessons learnt from each partner's activity, as well as thoughts on the operation of Accelerate as a whole.
- 2.12 It had been hoped to engage with a wider range of partners, in particular employers. Unfortunately, there is no central database of such contacts, nor do any of the Journey Guides maintain a database of employers (or at least none they were willing to share). Appeals to Journey Guides directly and via the Opportunity Connector for details of employers failed to elicit any response.
- 2.13 Similarly, contact was made with those at Groundwork and CAB leading on other aspects of the BBO programme in Warwickshire but failed to elicit a response.

Consulting Participants

- 2.14 From the outset, it was recognised that it would be sensible to take advice from delivery partners to ensure that evaluation methods were sensitive to and appropriate for each target group. Hence, consultations with delivery partners identified how participants were to be consulted. A breakdown of participant consultations is presented in Appendix 3.
- 2.15 In total 63 participants were consulted via one-to-one interviews (predominantly face-to-face and by telephone/e-mail where this was not possible) or attendance at small group sessions in which the views of all attendees were canvassed. The majority of participants were actively seeking paid work at the time of consultation. A number of individuals were unemployed or long-term unemployed, often due to the ending of previous fixed-term contracts or redundancy and facing a range of barriers to employment. Consultees had engaged with Accelerate as recently as September 2018, whereas some had engaged at the beginning of the programme. Further, consultees had been engaged in a broad range of activities offered by the programme, from ESOL sessions to Basic Skills classes, confidence-building courses, start-up business coaching, ICT classes, job search activities and interview preparation. Participants were drawn from each and every one of the partner organisations delivering Accelerate activities at the time of the evaluation.

3. CONTEXT

Local Strategies

- 3.1 It has long been established (and again confirmed in Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership's European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy and Strategic Economic Plan) that there are significant levels of deprivation and social exclusion across Coventry and Warwickshire (including Bedworth, Rugby and Nuneaton, as well as many parts of South Warwickshire). Furthermore, it is apparent that service delivery (especially outside of Coventry) is patchy, meaning that significant numbers of people who are out of work can struggle to access the support they need to help them get a job or at least move them closer to the employment market. Indeed, many of those living in rural Warwickshire have the added problem of being reliant on infrequent and relatively expensive public transport.
- 3.2 Furthermore, the LEP's ESIF Strategy also identifies particular groups in need of employability support, including: lone parents not engaged in employment or training and who have few employability skills; people living in troubled and chaotic families; BAME communities (especially those whose English needs improving and women from particular cultural backgrounds); ex-offenders; people with disabilities/long-term health problems and individuals involved in substance misuse. The ESIF strategy goes on to recommend employability as a key element in securing better social inclusion and advocate "more intensive, flexible and tailored support" in order to be able to achieve this.
- 3.3 The Coventry Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership for Coventry, representing partners from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors) has set as a key priority: 'Growing the City and Tackling Poverty'. The partnership believes that to pursue this requires collaboration amongst a variety of organisations, with a particular focus on the aim of getting people into good jobs.
- 3.4 The Warwickshire Together People, Places and Prosperity a Sustainable Community Strategy (August 2009- March 2026) also notes "significant pockets of concentrated worklessness that can be found throughout the County". It adds that: "concentrations of worklessness can increase the various barriers to employment that may already exist within our priority groups (such as poor skills or health related problems) by reducing confidence and aspirations, limiting the flow of information about job opportunities, and limiting accessibility to employment." As such, the Strategy endorses activities designed to help people overcome barriers to employment.
- 3.5 It is apparent that Accelerate has continued to support the ambitions of LEP and County Council strategies by filling a vital gap in service provision.

The Needs of Local People

- 3.6 In addition to the above, it was apparent that the particular support needs of certain groups were not being met by mainstream service providers. Furthermore, although voluntary and community sector organisations had previously or were at the time delivering some support to some groups, there was a need for additional funding in order for them to be able to sustain or extend their activities.
- 3.7 In respect of the unemployed and economically inactive people generally, there was a sense of needing to tackle a host of barriers, including institutionalisation, isolation, outdated skills, negative thinking, low self-esteem and employer prejudices. In respect of specific groups:
- People with physical and/or learning disabilities – can suffer (amongst other things) from employer misperceptions (about workplace risks, needs for adjustments, compliance with the law etc.), lack of support structures and limited work experience, as well as specific disadvantages relating to their disability, which can include an ability to access the workplace (e.g. due to an absence of private transport options and anxiety over using public transport). In this regard, mental health conditions can be as excluding as physical disabilities.
 - People from ethnic minorities - can suffer (amongst other things) from racial discrimination, poor English language skills, cultural traditions that limit or rule out employment options for women, non-transferability/non-recognition of qualifications gained outside the UK and lack of awareness of/familiarity with job search/application procedures in the UK.
 - People who are 50+ - can suffer (amongst other things) from age discrimination, outdated skills, lack of/limited IT skills, health limiting conditions which restrict employment options and eroded confidence (e.g. due to being out of the workforce for an extended period).
- 3.8 As a result, it was recognised that the Accelerate project could have a significant role to play in boosting the employment prospects of the unemployed/economically inactive generally and people in the above groups specifically.
- 3.9 In this regard, it is important to note that the Accelerate bid was informed by consultations with clients undertaken by delivery partners. In all, 20 partners consulted 229 individuals from priority groups, 209 interviewed individually, 20 via focus group discussions. Through self-identification, it was apparent that those consulted represented a good cross section of priority groups, including those needing help with literacy, having disabilities, from BAME groups, lone parents, with a history of substance misuse, ex-offenders etc.
- 3.10 Consultations covered support received, what was thought useful/not useful and barriers to gaining employment. Key barriers identified included lack of work experience/references, long term unemployment, communication issues, poor computer skills, poor literacy and numeracy, poor language skills, lack of qualifications, health problems, sense of hopelessness, anxiety/lack of confidence, criminal record, alcohol issues, debt issues, no bank account, homelessness, families not wanting them to work, caring responsibilities, fear of losing ESA benefit, no access to computers and phones, cost of transport, disability discrimination, age discrimination, discrimination due to mental ill health and discrimination due to race/country of origin.

- 3.11 Consultees identified the need for more time and ongoing personalised support with a key worker. Specific support requests included: work experience with employers; health advice; money management advice; support with language; access to qualifications/ training; help with job search/applications; transport and clothing costs for interviews; finding accommodation; gaining access to the internet; finding childcare; help to set up own business; coping skills for anxiety and depression; matching with employers who understand health/disability issues; briefing employers to promote understanding of disability; and workplace support once in job.
- 3.12 Consultations with delivery partners suggested that Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches typically lacked the time to be able to deal with the specific needs of Accelerate participants, due to the work pressures under which they operate. The capacity of Journey Guides to spend time listening to participants combined with their ability to empathise and their knowledge of how best to support each individual (either directly or through referral) have been fundamental to Accelerate’s achievements.
- 3.13 Consultations with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches themselves confirmed the value of Accelerate from their perspective, specifically in being able to:
- Access clients through outreach work (e.g. in local libraries and other community venues)
 - Provide access to services they cannot (e.g. specific training, work placements, employability skills, ESOL classes etc.)
 - Signpost to specialist support providers.
- 3.14 All Work Coaches interviewed considered Accelerate to be a positive asset to employment support provision in Coventry and Warwickshire. All Work Coaches had consistently referred multiple clients to Accelerate and were very happy with the working relationship and appreciative of the benefits to clients. Work Coaches often lack the time to understand the underlying causes of worklessness, whereas Accelerate can spend the time with the client to understand the causes/barriers and put in place a plan to address these. In this regard, Accelerate was seen to have played a valuable role in helping to address some of the financial barriers that prevent participants moving towards employment.

4. THE ACCELERATE PROGRAMME

Overview

- 4.1 The Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme aims to combat the root causes of poverty, promote social inclusion, address long-term unemployment and empower socially excluded people. It is funded by Big Lottery Fund and European Social Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) Growth programme 2014-2020.
- 4.2 Accelerate is the £3 million Tackling Barriers to Work strand of the BBO programme operating across the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership area, providing a range of support to unemployed and economically inactive individuals legally able to take up work in the EU. It focuses on those who are furthest from the labour market, helping them progress towards and, in some cases, into employment. Specialist support is available for lone parents, ex-offenders, people with mental/physical ill health and disabilities, BAME communities, people with substance misuse issues, poor functional skills and ESOL needs, the homeless and people who are aged 50+.
- 4.3 The programme commenced in July 2016 and was originally scheduled for completion in December 2018. However, permission has been received from Big Lottery Fund to extend operations until 30 June 2019 in order to utilise unspent resources.
- 4.4 As one of the earliest BBOs, there seemed to be a sense in which approaches and activities were being piloted. It also meant that as the requirements of BBO changed, there were more changes required of Accelerate than those programmes that began later, when operating guidance and reporting systems were more established.
- 4.5 The aims of the partnership as a whole are to:
- Provide the means through which disadvantaged people become work-ready and are able to access learning, training and job opportunities;
 - Engage and support disadvantaged people to enable them to overcome barriers to work, including supporting those with more complex barriers move closer to employment; and
 - Provide holistic and integrated support to people.
- 4.6 Accelerate sought to provide support to a total of 890 people. In order to be eligible, participants must be: allowed to work in the UK; be unemployed (claiming Job Seekers Allowance) or economically inactive; aged over 19; and live in Coventry or Warwickshire
- 4.7 It was recognised that each individual accessing the project would have strengths, attributes, problems and issues and many would have a range of complex needs. The project offers intensive support designed to address each individual's particular employability issues with the aim of moving them closer to the jobs market and, where feasible, help to secure employment for some participants. This includes engaging people in activities that address issues of confidence and low self-esteem, developing skills and giving them experience that enhance their employability and providing practical support (e.g. advice on benefits entitlement), as appropriate. This includes ensuring that practical support such as childcare is available to enable them to participate in Accelerate-sponsored activities.

The Delivery Partnership

- 4.8 CWCDCA is a not for profit organisation that provides a range of enterprise, employability and financial inclusion services, helping communities across Coventry and Warwickshire to develop and become more sustainable. Having established that it would like to be centrally involved in putting together a proposal for BBO funding, CWCDCA then used the BBO forum operated by Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA) to invite organisations to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI) to join a CWCDCA-led partnership.
- 4.9 CWCDCA received 32 EOIs of which 31 were invited to a partnership development meeting (attended by 27 organisations) and subsequently to individual meetings (taken up by 29 organisations). The latter enabled discussions on a draft delivery model, individual partner roles/service offer, information about specific barriers faced by the priority groups, the number of participants each partner could support and the geographical area they could cover. This process ensured that Accelerate involved partners with the right skills and experience to address the aims of the BBO programme, support all of the priority groups and cover the whole of Coventry & Warwickshire.
- 4.10 Subsequent to those meetings, each organisation submitted an outline budget to support their proposed activities. This process resulted in 28 partners being party to the BBO application, the substance of which was based on the group and individual discussions, as well as liaison with other agencies (such as Jobcentre Plus).
- 4.11 By the time the BBO application was approved, the Accelerate partnership had reduced to 23 organisations. For example, Business in the Community, May Day Trust and Voluntary Action Stratford on Avon, had indicated their interest in being involved but never actually joined the partnership. Similarly, Crossroads was to support ex-offenders move closer to employment, but as CWCDCA had many years' experience working with ex-offenders in other employability programmes, it took on primary responsibility for this group once Crossroads withdrew.
- 4.12 The delivery partnership therefore comprised the following 23 organisations:
- Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency (lead)
 - Action for Blind (left June 2018 following strategic policy change)
 - Coventry City Council (left June 2017)
 - Coventry Cyrenians Ltd.
 - Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre
 - Foleshill Women's Training Ltd
 - Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire
 - Groundwork West Midlands
 - Heart of England Mencap
 - Hereward College
 - Life Path Trust Limited
 - New Bilton Community Association (left December 2017 following internal policy change)
 - Orbit Group Limited (Orbit Heart of England)
 - Radio Plus (left the partnership)
 - Sky Blues in the Community
 - The Highlife Centre Ltd.
 - Valley House
 - Voluntary Action Coventry
 - Volunteer Centre North Warwickshire Limited

- Volunteer Friends
 - Warwickshire County Council (WEST, Warwickshire Employment Support Team)
 - Workers Education Association (WEA)
 - Working Actively to Change Hillfields (WATCH) Ltd
- 4.13 As indicated above, this number was reduced further during the delivery period, reflecting the closure of some organisations following funding cuts and in other cases decisions to re-focus their activities, often linked to the appointment of new senior staff. Whilst these withdrawals were unfortunate, none of them appears to have served to significantly weaken the offer due to the ability of other partners to fill any gaps.
- 4.14 It is believed that smaller organisations considered the bureaucracy that accompanies participation to be too burdensome and that this was a major factor in their decision to withdraw from or never join the partnership.
- 4.15 Further to the above, Groundwork, Heart of England Mencap, Hereward College and WEA left the partnership in line with the original project end date of December 2018, although the vast majority of partners will continue to deliver throughout the extension period.

Governance and Management

- 4.16 Full partnership meetings are held twice a year, providing an opportunity to review progress and share learning.
- 4.17 In addition, Accelerate has a Project Steering Group which includes representatives from the partnership and one participant. This group meets quarterly with the Project Management Team to review project progress and learning and identify any adjustments required. Other stakeholders (e.g. Jobcentre Plus) can also be invited to attend these meetings. Attendance at these meetings was reported to be very good. The Group is perhaps misnamed, in that it does not so much steer the Project as offer information and advice, as well as providing the management team with a sounding board.
- 4.18 Project management and administration is provided by CWCD, with relevant staff members having considerable experience of managing/delivering large, complex European-funded employability projects. The team (all of whom are based in the same office) comprises the following posts with attendant responsibilities:
- Operations Manager (32.75 hrs per week): project implementation, joint contract management, delivery, structures and procedures; partner relationships including support, compliance, monitoring, communications, marketing, procurement requirements, risk management, performance improvement; tracking project progress against outputs and results; delivery compliance to ESF requirements; compiling outputs, results and delivery elements of the claim. Overall contract management and project audit preparation.
 - Finance Manager (37 hrs per week): joint contract management, financial compliance to ESF requirements, financial procedures and risk management, support to partners to ensure financial compliance, webinars for partners to complete accurate financial claims, payment to partners, project budgets, procurement, completing financial elements of claims to Big Lottery, project audit preparation.
 - Accounts Technician (22.75 hrs per week): checking participants' documentation, checking partners financial claims for accuracy, support partners to complete correct financial claims, support Finance Manager with compiling financial claims to Big Lottery and audit requirements.

- Operations Technician (22.75 hrs per week): developing enhancements to output/result reporting templates for partners, managing online Partnership Management System and social media outlets, ensuring partners complete accurate output/result claim documentation, managing client database, producing reports for Partnership Manager for claims, management information requirements and audits.
 - Two Project Support Administrators (one 30 hours per week; one 20 hours per week - to complete administrative tasks associated with delivery and finance.
- 4.19 The current Operations Manager joined CWCD A in May 2017 and effected what was evidently a smooth transition, with none of the partners reporting any disruption to the operation of the Project. This reflects positively on both the postholder and the partnership for the manner in which the process was managed.
- 4.20 As part of its role, CWCD A carried out an initial verification assessment of each partner's systems and continues to undertake quarterly risk assessments of partners against budget spend, activity and output/result achievement and reporting compliance. Partners are allocated a risk rating of green (low risk), amber (medium risk) or red (high risk), with red assessments requiring supported improvement. In the event that a partner received a red risk rating over two consecutive quarters, the sanction of non-payment of a claim is available.
- 4.21 To date, two delivery partners have been rated 'red' and subsequently received intensive one-to-one support from CWCD A and operated to a Performance Improvement Plan. In both cases, all concerned regarded it as a positive experience that helped significantly.

Delivery Structure

- 4.22 The core elements of the support provided as part of Accelerate are as follows:
- **Journey Planning and Guidance** - each participant is allocated a Journey Guide to help them access a tailored package of support and advice. Specialist Guides are available for those within priority groups requiring particular types of support.
 - **Confidence Building** – a variety of confidence building and work readiness activities, both general (to help people change mindset and move to sustainable outcomes) and specific to key groups (e.g. those with disabilities, ex-offenders etc.).
 - **Work Experience** – recruiting employers to provide a range of supported work experience opportunities (employer visits, short work tasters, longer placements or volunteering).
 - **Skills Enhancement and Enterprise** – covering basic skills (IT, literacy, numeracy and ESOL) and a number of sector-specific skills (e.g. food hygiene, customer care etc.), as well as business advice for self-employed/new business starts.
 - **Barrier Breaking** – tailored support to address a wide variety of barriers to employment (e.g. pre-therapeutic counselling to address psychological issues, support to maintain accommodation, money management for transition to work etc.).
 - **Opportunity Connector** - helping participants to connect with the specific provision that would be of most benefit to them, whilst also facilitating joined-up working between partners.

- 4.23 Although the Opportunity Connector post was regarded as vital, it was not possible to recruit a suitable candidate from the outset and the post was not filled until February 2017. The postholder moved on in April 2018 and in July 2018, following an open recruitment process, was replaced by someone who had been a Journey Guide with one of the delivery partners. Whilst not essential, their familiarity with Accelerate was undoubtedly beneficial.
- 4.24 Journey Guides are employed by a variety of delivery partners. Once an individual is referred to them, it is their responsibility to confirm eligibility, conduct an assessment and refer that person on to the most appropriate delivery partner. They maintain contact with participants and at the end of the intervention(s) aim to guide them to an exit route, which might include paid work, vocational training or job search (having previously been economically inactive). The knowledge of Journey Guides and their ability to source support from a wide range of services was regarded as a big plus of the project.
- 4.25 In the context of routes to work, the programme benefits from the fact that a number of Journey Guides came to their roles having already developed relationships with a number of employers, including major retailers such as Ikea, Morrison's and Tesco. Originally, there was a member of staff at Coventry City Council dedicated to employer engagement, but spreading responsibilities across Journey Guides has clearly worked well given the number of job outputs achieved.
- 4.26 Delivery is supported by an online Partnership Management System (the 'Extranet') which includes each partner's profile and their project service offer, internal referral mechanisms, a library of project resources, forums for partner communication, frequently asked questions, standard documentation templates, delivery and claim guidance/manuals, communication forum, sub-group sections for communication and online reporting and claim system. Although this system was supposed to be up and running from the outset, issues with the contractor appointed to develop the system meant that it was delayed by about a year.
- 4.27 Amongst delivery partners the consensus appeared to be that whilst in principle the Extranet ought to have been a useful resource that in practice it had been under-utilised. This appears to be partly because delivery had already been taking place for some time before it became operational (and so partners were used to delivering activities without recourse to the Extranet) and because some partners found it to be not very user friendly. It should be noted that training in the use of the Extranet was offered to all partners.

Participant Engagement

- 4.28 The single biggest source of referrals has been Jobcentre Plus, typically as a result of the relationships that Journey Guides have developed with individual work coaches and in some cases through repeat visits to JC+ offices. In addition, participants have been engaged directly by delivery partners and through their wider networks. As these are all established organisations, known and trusted within their local communities/particular communities of interest, they are well placed to recruit participants to the programme. In this regard, it has been helpful to have established relationships with various community groups and specific support groups as well as Priority Family Units in local authorities (as well as Jobcentre Plus offices) around Coventry & Warwickshire. In some cases, word of mouth has been especially important. For the most part, delivery partners have recruited onto the programme those of their clients with whom they had a relationship or who have more recently come to them seeking support, having identified Accelerate as an appropriate option and subsequently had their eligibility verified.

- 4.29 It was reported that demand in Coventry was so high that only limited promotion of the programme was undertaken, as there simply was not the capacity to cope with any additional demand this might generate. Indeed, latterly, relatively little promotion was being done across Warwickshire more broadly for the same reasons. However, this ought not overlook the promotion and networking undertaken by partners in the early stages of the programme nor the continuing liaison with key contacts, in particular Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches.

Support Provided

- 4.30 The consultations undertaken in preparing the BBO bid revealed that more than a third of those surveyed identified lack of skills as a significant barrier, including English, literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Consequently, functional skills (especially courses in Maths, English and IT, as well as ESOL provision) and vocational training form key parts of the Accelerate offer.
- 4.31 In addition, 30% of consultees identified physical and mental ill health as their main barrier to employment. In response, Accelerate provides health and wellbeing activities and pre-therapeutic counselling to help participants progress towards employment.
- 4.32 An especially notable aspect of provision, directly and indirectly, relates to confidence building. Three of the delivery partners (Foleshill Women's Training, Groundwork and Orbit Housing) deliver confidence building courses on a variety of bases. Perhaps the most intensive, is the two-day course delivered by Orbit Housing in a variety of locations around Coventry & Warwickshire. Feedback from participants who have attended these courses was universally positive. Indeed, it was testament to the Orbit course (named GOALS) that those attending day one almost always attended day two, under no compunction to do so but clearly motivated by the quality of the experience.
- 4.33 In addition, participants commonly reported that their confidence and self-esteem had been built or re-built simply by attending learning and social sessions and interacting with their peers and with support workers. This aspect of confidence building should not be overlooked. Many participants reported that realising that other people had faced or were facing similar difficulties was reassuring, making them realise that they were not unique and not alone. Furthermore, being able to see how other people facing similar barriers to employment as them had progressed was commonly described by participants as 'inspirational'.
- 4.34 It was suggested that whilst the Accelerate offer overall was pretty comprehensive that there was a lack of provision in respect of some basic skills development, including ESOL classes. In addition, feedback from some participants in some locations revealed demand for courses in beauty, customer care and the use of Microsoft Office. Where referral to colleges and other learning providers is not accompanied by any necessary financial support, individuals report often finding it impossible to pursue some learning opportunities. It is unclear as to whether those consulted had requests rejected or were informally advised by a delivery partner that they would be unlikely to be supported as there are budgets to resource the removal of barriers e.g. to fund training.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- 4.35 It is a requirement of all projects in England in receipt of European Social Fund (ESF) monies that they address the cross-cutting themes of environmental sustainability and equality & diversity. The Accelerate project has comprehensive sustainability and equal opportunity policies that are regularly updated. Training in these areas has been provide at partnership events and partners report on these areas quarterly to the Operations manager.
- 4.36 Partners have their own sustainability and equality & diversity action plans and were therefore well placed to deliver on the plans developed for this project. In respect of sustainability, a key aspect of the project was to take provision to people wherever possible, rather than have clients travel any significant distance. Although this may have been motivated more by a desire to ensure clients could access provision, it has also had environmental benefits.
- 4.37 In respect of equality and diversity, the project supported three times as many people from BAME communities as was forecast. The performance of individual delivery partners in this regard will have reflected local demography.

5. PROGRAMME DELIVERY

- 5.1 This Chapter reviews the delivery of the Accelerate programme, based on consultations with the delivery team, partners, and participants.

Delivery Model

- 5.2 The delivery model of the Accelerate programme was considered appealing by delivery partners from the outset, due to the partnership approach and focus on delivering joined-up, person-centred support as opposed to participants accessing more ‘linear’ progression pathways. The partnership approach is also considered to have provided smaller organisations an opportunity to benefit from EU-funding which they may not have secured acting alone (albeit concerns about bureaucratic burdens prevented or curtailed the participation of some smaller organisations). Furthermore, the partnership approach was a motivational factor for organisations to get involved due to an ability to access specialisms outside of their own expertise. Facilitating this, the model of incorporating Journey Guides and an Opportunity Connector was perceived as a unique and appealing feature of the programme.
- 5.3 The infrastructure offered by CWCDAs was also a strong motivator due to a perception that it possessed the capacity and expertise to lead and act as the accountable body. It is felt that CWCDAs presented a clear vision whilst at the same time incorporating ideas from across the partnership at the development phase. Importantly, the fact that CWCDAs are themselves voluntary sector organisations was seen as a positive due to understanding the way such organisations operate and common barriers faced.

“CDA had fantastic reputation locally, their vision was really clear. They had the infrastructure and capacity to lead and be the accountable body. There was good partnership working from the start in terms of feeding people's ideas into the bid writing processes- we were communicated with well.”

“We have always felt well supported and communication has been excellent.”

- 5.4 There is consensus amongst partners that the Accelerate programme was a ‘good fit’ with existing provision and with the needs of existing client groups, and allowed organisations to develop existing support or to provide an additional offer. Indeed, the partnership approach was felt by one partner to be “paramount” in identifying and responding to employment barriers and provide access to support within Coventry and Warwickshire i.e. through responding to area-wide issues as a collective rather than in isolation.

“Accelerate appealed as it felt like a wise journey for some of the people we were already working with, and something that we were not quite hitting before.”

- 5.5 It should also be recognised that Accelerate is one strand of the BBO programme in Warwickshire, alongside Breakthrough (led by CAB) and Progress (led by Groundwork). CWCDAs meet roughly quarterly with the other two programme leads and liaise with them regularly. This includes having made referrals onto both other strands, although much more so in respect of Progress given the needs of the Accelerate client group.

Partnership Working

- 5.6 Practically, the partnership has led to delivery organisations being able to share learning and offer support to one another, for example on shared challenges or specific queries. The Extranet has also been used to share upcoming courses and provision offered within the partnership, and many partners have used this as a way to keep updated on what might be applicable to clients they support.
- 5.7 That said, this type of interaction has not happened as frequently as it could have and has often depended on partners taking it upon themselves to make contact with each other and forge relationships. Whilst partner events held by CDA were appreciated, it was acknowledged by delivery partners that these did not occur frequently, and the networking and conversation possible at these events was minimal. It should be noted that CWCDAs offered shared practice forums for Journey guides and partners supporting participants with disabilities. Broadly, partners would appreciate more informal opportunities to get together with other partners and share experience.

“Perhaps should have had more contact with other partners. That perhaps hasn't been as good as it could have been. There was an event at the start, and a mid-term event. Semi-regular networking events would be useful to allow people to mingle and talk and get to know people- look them in the eyes and understand what it is they really do. It'd be good to share practice too.”

- 5.8 There is a strong consensus that the size and scope of the partnership has enabled Accelerate to provide a broad offer of services to participants. Furthermore, as each delivery partner has relationships with organisations external to the partnership, this means that the overall offer can be broadened quite considerably although in practice these wider networks have not needed to be exploited to any significant extent.
- 5.9 In addition, from a practical point of view, there were reports of delivery partners being able to use each other's premises to deliver provision and/or take advice on which accommodation to use in order to be able to deliver services to people in accessible locations.
- 5.10 However, there does appear to be a sense in which partners have tended to operate in silos. For all of the efforts of the Opportunity Connector, the existence of the Extranet and the various events/communications that have taken place, there is perhaps a natural instinct to revert to 'the day job'. With everybody busy, it is all too easy for good intentions to be set aside when direct delivery issues become much more pressing. Whilst there is no evidence of client prospects being damaged as a result of partners not having referred them or not providing joint support, there was a suspicion amongst interviewees that service delivery might not always have been as efficient or effective as it could have been.

Referrals

- 5.11 The referrals process was generally considered to have been efficient and effective. Indeed, consultations with participations revealed that Journey Guides dealt with referrals quickly (meeting participants within a week or two of the referral) and then arranging appropriate support to commence shortly thereafter.

“I was stuck and didn't know what to do or where to go. I had started to believe there was nothing that could help me but I was wrong. Getting onto this programme was a lot easier than I'd imagined and has changed my life.”

- 5.12 It is believed that it was important to achieve a high profile for the project from the outset. In pursuit of this, a PR company was engaged which was successful in generating a significant amount of coverage in the local press. It is thought that this helped to promote the project to prospective participants.
- 5.13 Individual partners have also undertaken promotional activities, including spending time in Jobcentre Plus offices, liaising with JC+ Work Coaches, attending jobs fairs and spending time in libraries and other community facilities. Of these, liaison with JC+ Work Coaches was reported to have been by far the most fruitful source of referrals.
- 5.14 In the early stages of the project it was apparent that some partners were bypassing the Journey Guide system, which meant that clients were not necessarily accessing the most appropriate support and ran the risk of some participants not being eligible (not having been subject to verification). CWCDA rectified this very early, including ensuring retrospective verifications were undertaken.
- 5.15 A number of delivery partners expressed that referrals between partners have not happened as frequently as they may have initially expected. Conversely, a minority of partners have seen a greater proportion of incoming referrals compared to those they refer onward. This is particularly for organisations within the partnership who possess a particular specialism or cater for a group with specific needs not covered elsewhere within the partnership. For example, one partner supporting people with learning disabilities described having seen a relatively high number of referrals from within the partnership, whilst it has not always been possible for them to make outward referrals due to wider provision consisting of 'mainstream' support.
- 5.16 In spite of regular partner meetings, a few interviewees confessed to not being fully aware of what other partners could offer and hence had not made as many referrals as might have been the case had they been better informed. Although mention was made of a booklet describing partner activities, it was felt this could not be relied upon once it was evidently out of date (as demonstrated by some partners no longer being active in the project and some having changed their roles slightly). Whilst it was acknowledged that the presence of Journey Guides should mean that each partner need not have comprehensive and up to date knowledge of the full service offer, several interviewees thought that their lack of awareness of provision was a hindrance in some instances.
- 5.17 Partners also mentioned that it can be difficult to track what happens to a participant once a referral has taken place as partners or journey guides have not always reported back on what has become of the individual. However, this information is available via the Extranet and interviewee comments again point to a lack of use of this resource.
- 5.18 Positively, in the absence of a 'payment on results' model, partners believe this has avoided partners feeling compelled to "hang on" to participants in order to claim particular outcomes or draw down funding.

"We don't hang on to people- we want them to get what they need. So many non-Accelerate projects don't do that."

- 5.19 Importantly, one factor positively affecting the ability to make referrals has been the capacity of partners to work with clients to a level where their needs can be adequately understood, in-depth, which then smooths the process of making “warm handovers”. The additional support of the Journey Guides is also seen to contribute to a more person-focused experience for clients.

“Accelerate has enabled us to have a better understanding of what's out there and the offer, but also a conduit to transfer people to a partner or back to a Journey Guide. It's good if the Journey Guide is able to build positive rapport with client; they are another person that's got the back of the client, so they're not just getting support from one partner, they've got someone else asking how it's going but also fitting them in to other things.”

- 5.20 In a few instances, it was suggested that there was scope to work more closely with Jobcentre Plus offices and that there would be merit in additional training for Journey Guides to enable them to better support clients/advise partners supporting clients, especially those with mental health challenges. There was also one appeal for an expert on the benefits system within the partnership. However, it is important to place these comments within the context of the majority of partners having extremely good relationships with Jobcentre Plus staff and of Journey Guides performing very effectively in their roles.

Duplication or Gaps

- 5.21 When asked to consider whether there was any duplication of other provision, partners (including those with county-wide oversight) and wider stakeholders (with no vested interest) were in agreement that Accelerate did not compete with any other offers and indeed complemented/added value to mainstream and any other provision. Furthermore, the support available through Accelerate was widely seen as meeting needs that were significant at the individual level and in aggregate, and which otherwise would not have been met. In particular, it was noted by delivery partners (and widely confirmed by participants) that Jobcentre Plus staff are constrained (not least by time) in what they can do to help their clients address any barriers to employment. As such, many Journey Guides reported that Jobcentre Plus staff were very pleased at being able to refer clients to Accelerate knowing that this would enable them to access support that they simply cannot provide.
- 5.22 In respect of any service gaps within the partnership, most partners agreed the offer was pretty comprehensive, albeit there were some gaps identified by local area and types of service. In respect of the former, it was noted that places such as Stratford upon Avon and Leamington to the south of the County and Bulkington and Bedworth to the north of the County were poorly served by public transport, meaning that provision centred on Coventry was difficult to access for many people (on the basis of both travel time and cost). Some of these locations suffered relatively high levels of unemployment (in a Warwickshire context) and there was said to have previously been a sense of people feeling neglected.
- 5.23 In respect of the latter, suggestions for additional provision included: working more closely with Jobcentre Plus offices; advanced or accredited IT provision; training for Journey Guides to be better able to support clients / advise partners supporting clients with mental health challenges; CSCS cards; and, having an expert on the benefits system within the partnership. One partner also noted a gap of ESOL support, which seemed to relate to a specific location given the provision available within the partnership.

5.24 It is also noteworthy that, whilst not considered gaps, partners have referred clients to relevant offers or organisations outside of the delivery partnership, for example, SIA courses at a local college. Participants at Sky Blues in the Community have also benefitted from free support provided by Barclays (this relationship having been initiated as a result of the Accelerate programme).

Delivery Activities

5.25 The roles performed by each of the partners active at the time of the evaluation is summarised in the table below.

Partner	Roles
Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency (Lead)	<p>Project Management</p> <p>Journey Guidance: with specialist focus on lone parents, people who are 50+ and ex-offenders</p> <p>Skills Enhancer: Business Advice for social enterprise start up, sector skills training</p>
Coventry Cyrenians	<p>Skills Enhancer: Accredited training in food hygiene, health & safety and customer care</p>
Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre	<p>Specialist Journey Guide for Refugees and Migrants</p> <p>Skills Enhancer: ESOL</p> <p>Barrier Breaker: Immigration and housing advice and support</p> <p>Work Experience Provider: in own organisation and social enterprises</p>
Foleshill Women's Training (women only)	<p>Specialist Journey Guide for BAME women</p> <p>Skills Enhancer: Basic IT</p> <p>Barrier Breaker: Language support, childcare, health and wellbeing programmes</p> <p>Confidence Builder: motivation, confidence building, work readiness</p>
Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire	<p>Specialist Journey Guide for people with learning disabilities in Coventry & Warwickshire</p> <p>Match individuals with specific employers, job carve roles and set up workplace circles of support for job sustainability for people with learning disabilities</p>
Groundwork West Midlands	<p>Generalist Journey Guide in target areas of Coventry</p> <p>Confidence Builder: sector specific employability programmes and job placement designed with specific employers to fill actual vacancies</p>
Heart of England Mencap	<p>Specialist Journey Guide for people with learning difficulties</p>
Hereward College	<p>Specialist Journey Guide for people with physical disabilities providing advice, guidance and mentoring</p>
Life Path Trust	<p>Skills Enhancer: Specialist intensive support for people with learning disabilities and autism to set up micro enterprise</p>
Orbit Heart of England	<p>Confidence Builder: The two day GOALS programme to help people</p>

	change mind-set and move to sustainable outcomes
Sky Blues in the Community	Skills Enhancer: numeracy, literacy, basic IT, sports leadership
The Highlife Centre	Enterprise start up support for BAME communities
Valley House	Barrier Breaker: Pre-therapeutic counselling for people with mental health issues
Voluntary Action Coventry	Experience Organiser: volunteer placements through brokerage, supported placements and community projects
Volunteer Centre North Warwickshire	Experience Organiser: volunteer placements through brokerage, supported placements and community projects Skills Enhancer: Numeracy, Literacy and Basic IT
Volunteer Friends	Experience Organiser: volunteer placements through brokerage, supported placements and community projects Skills Enhancer: numeracy, literacy and basic IT
Warwickshire Employment Support Team (WEST)	Specialist Journey Guide: for people with learning disabilities working with employers to place and train in work/volunteer placements Skills Enhancer: basic IT
Workers Education Association	Skills Enhancer: Numeracy and literacy
Working Actively to Change Hillfields (WATCH)	Generalist Journey Guide in target areas of Coventry Specialist Journey Guide: for refuges and migrants

- 5.26 In terms of the resources provided to each of the partners, naturally this has varied but typically involved paying a proportion of employment costs of the lead contact, plus a proportion of the employment costs of support staff (finance and administration) and other specialist staff, as well as the full cost of a Journey Guide, where applicable.
- 5.27 Some partners reported not having costed all elements of their involvement in Accelerate (e.g. senior staff time) and it was also stated the funding received did not in practice fully cover costs of delivery. This related to both the use of hourly rates for the project (albeit these were agreed by partners at the outset) that differed from the perceived hourly rates of some partners and (mainly) the additional unclaimed hours that many partners had contributed. However, where there were cases made in support of additional resources (on the basis of more staff time being needed than had been originally budgeted), these were responded to positively by CWDA. Some partners also reported cashflow difficulties as a result of delayed payment of grant claims, which had caused real difficulties for some smaller organisations. In this regard it is important to note both that any such delays only arose when evidence supporting a claim was missing/incomplete and that where potential cashflow difficulties were anticipated, all partners had the option of being paid two thirds of their claim in advance. Nevertheless, even those organisations incurring higher than anticipated costs/suffering cashflow issues believed they had benefited from their involvement in other ways and so it had been a worthwhile investment.

- 5.28 Some partners reported having had a slow start to delivery, simply because of the amount of time it took them to get used to new ways of working and the requirements of this particular programme (including those relating to finance and administration). In respect of project bureaucracy, there was almost universal despair at the amount of paperwork that accompanied participation and considerable frustration at the number of occasions on which paperwork had been changed.
- 5.29 This experience was reported to have been especially painful when the changes were retrospective, requiring paperwork to be re-done for the period affected. For clarity, these criticisms were levelled at the BBO funders not CWDA. It was also acknowledged that as one of the earliest BBO projects, Accelerate was always vulnerable to such changes which are almost inevitable as paperwork is altered over time. However, the most recent alteration to paperwork came in October 2018 – two and a half years into the project and with only two months to go to the original end date.
- 5.30 Nevertheless, it is important to make the point that bureaucracy soaks up resources and where it is disproportionate to the funding to which it relates is a big disincentive to participation, as is evident from the perception of a number of organisations who changed their minds on joining the project, who left early or have chosen not to continue delivery through the extension period. It should also be noted that whilst smaller organisations have laboured under the bureaucracy that it has impacted bigger organisations as well, for example in having to drill down to identify specific costs and then collate supporting evidence within organisations that handle a huge amount of financial data and attendant paperwork.
- 5.31 Furthermore, the BBO bureaucracy was reported to have had a direct impact on participants. As a result of them having to sign various pieces of paperwork, the amount of effective contact time has been reduced and participant consultees often mentioned feeling deflated by having to do so (even though relevant staff have been encouraged to be flexible on appointment times).
- “I’m here for about an hour a week and I seem to spend half that time going through paperwork. I know they have to do it but it’s ridiculous.”*
- 5.32 In most cases, existing delivery partner staff were deployed on Accelerate but some partners did suffer delays in appointing suitable staff, which hampered early progress. In addition, some partners experienced disruption in trying to replace staff who left during the delivery period. In some cases, this has not proved possible and hence delivery has had to be scaled back accordingly and in one case stopped altogether, five months before the intended end date. It should be noted that this was the choice of the partner concerned and was a decision made before it was known that further funding was secured to continue delivery.
- 5.33 Although the services provided and the characteristics of participants varied across the partnership, one of the consistent themes was the amount of time that is needed in order to understand the needs and aspirations of individuals, identify specific barriers to employment and develop/implement a programme of support. Indeed, it cannot be stressed enough that the vast majority of participants (judging by consultations conducted for this evaluation) begin their journeys towards work a considerable distance from the jobs market.
- “I didn’t leave the house for six years, so coming to these sessions is a really big thing.”*
- 5.34 In this context, for some participants it is a matter of resolving practical issues (e.g. fear of eviction/homelessness) before being able to move onto dealing with emotional issues (e.g. poor mental health) and only then beginning a journey towards improved employability.

- 5.35 It is also important to highlight the range of provision and how valued it is by participants. For example, short courses in IT have proved invaluable to those engaged by relevant delivery partners and in a number of ways. People who have been economically inactive often have no experience of Microsoft Office/similar software packages, which many office-based employers expect as standard. Learning to use (and have access to) the internet has opened up new worlds for some participants and helped the overcome social isolation through use of social media. Attending classes has been a motivation for people to get out of their homes and provided an opportunity to meet new people and develop friendships
- 5.36 Another (linked) example is travel training, whereby individuals without access to private transport are taught how to use public transport in order to get to the locations they need or might need to go to. Whilst the wider population might consider this a basic skill, a significant number of Accelerate participants come to the programme lacking the confidence and skills required to make journeys on public transport, severely limiting their ability to pursue employment and training opportunities and often leaving them socially excluded.
- 5.37 It should also be noted that some partners offer a number of different options in order to meet a range of participant needs. For example, Volunteer Centre North Warwickshire runs a craft group for people with a range of mental health issues, as well as a memory café for people with dementia, a computer club to help people develop IT skills and a jobs club to support those closest to the employment market in helping them with job searches and applications.
- 5.38 The length of time for which individuals receive support varies significantly, from around three months up to two years. None of the delivery partners put a time limit on the support they offer, but each is mindful that there can come a point at which their support is not going to progress an individual any further and so make arrangements for them to exit. Although a typical average proved difficult to arrive at, it seemed that most commonly participants received support over a period of around six months with large variances around this central figure.
- 5.39 In addition, the intensity of support provided over the period of support also varies, but probably averages around a couple of hours a week. Those partners delivering training can better plan and budget for their delivery (e.g. running hour long sessions twice a week) whereas other partners have to respond to situations as they arise (e.g. an individual in crisis and facing eviction from their home). In respect of the latter group, it is important to recognise that those organisations (and more particularly their staff) do whatever they need to do in order to meet client needs rather than being constrained by whatever resources they have been allocated. Furthermore, whilst commendable it is not necessarily sustainable and the resources necessary for any further iteration of Acceleration should be carefully considered.
- “In terms of demand we could have supported twice the number of people but we didn't have the capacity or resources to be able to do that.”*
- 5.40 From an evaluation perspective, it is disappointing that partners do not use the initial assessment of participants as a baseline to measure progress, nor undertake an updated assessment on completion to determine progress. This would enable them to demonstrate the value of their intervention in terms of the progress made by individuals in respect of appropriate indicators (e.g. mental wellbeing). An exception to this is Valley House which uses Outcomes Stars to inform a support plan for participants, undertaking assessments on entering the programme, part way through support delivery and upon their exiting the programme.

6. PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

6.1 The tables in this section are based on data provided by CWEDA. Figures in red/green indicate performance that is at least 10 per cent below/above target.

Outputs

6.2 The latest monitoring data is presented in the table below:

Beneficiary Type	Lifetime Target	Actual (November 2018)
Men	445	523
Women	445	408
People who are unemployed	533	656
People who are economically inactive	357	275
People who are 50+	154	271
People with disabilities	181	384
People from ethnic minorities	104	309
Total	890	933

6.3 As Table 1 above shows, as of September 2018, the programme had already over-achieved against the majority of lifetime targets, including the overall target which it has exceeded by 5 per cent. Especially impressive has been Accelerate's ability to engage people who are unemployed, which was already 23 per cent above target. Furthermore, in respect of participants within specific categories, the project had far exceeded its targets: people who are 50+ are 76 per cent above target; people with disabilities are 112 per cent above target; and people from ethnic minorities are 197 per cent above target. In other words, Accelerate has not performed well by simply targeting groups that are relatively easy to engage and support but has achieved great success in respect of the types of groups for which the BBO programme was specifically designed.

6.4 At least 60% of all activity was to take place in priority wards, as follows:

- Coventry - Binley & Willenhall, Foleshill, Henley, Holbrooks, Longford, Radford, St. Michaels, Upper/Lower Stoke and Westwood.
- Rugby - Admirals & Cawston/Bilton, New Bilton, Newbold & Brownover.
- Warwick District/Leamington Spa - Warwick West.
- North Warwickshire/Atherstone - Atherstone North.
- Nuneaton – Abbey
- Stratford - New Town and Stratford Avenue.

6.5 Aided by specific promotion in these wards, currently, 55 per cent of people engaged are from the above wards. In practice, delivery has been skewed a little by South Warwickshire where demand proved to be higher than anticipated.

Outcomes Against Targets

6.6 The table below is a summary of outcome achievements to September 2018 against lifetime targets. On the plus side are:

- People develop new skills through project training (95% above target)
- Participants access more job interviews (54% above target)
- Participants access more job interviews (54% above target)

6.7 More disappointing are:

- Participants with limited skills have improved language, IT, Numeracy or Literacy skills (only 76% of target)
- Participants set realistic job goals (only 67% of target)
- Participants take up work/voluntary experience (only 42% of target)

6.8 That said, there is scope for significant further progress within the project lifetime.

6.9 In addition, it was suggested that not all targets are being met as Journey Guides do not complete enough outcome surveys. This was particularly the case during the early stages of the project. Journey guides are now more aware of the need to collect outcome surveys and statistics are improving. In addition, CWCD A has reviewed outcome surveys to make them easier to complete.

Outcomes	Lifetime target	Actual (Sep '18)
<i>Project participants feel more confident and have a more positive outlook which will enable them to look for and take up work/training opportunities</i>		
Participants express a feeling of increased confidence re their job future	537	468
Participants more actively looking for work and training opportunities	471	452
Participants access more job interviews	170	261
<i>Participants gain a clearer understanding of the world of work, what is available in the labour market and employers' expectations</i>		
Participants take up work/volunteer experience through the project	494	206
Participants express improved understanding of the world of work	377	442
Participants set realistic job goals	692	462
<i>Participants gain new skills and overcome specific barriers helping them move closer to work and new approaches to job creation opportunities for specific groups which are poorly represented in the labour market</i>		
Participants with limited skills have improved language, IT, Numeracy or Literacy skills	420	318
People with learning disabilities access job carved roles and set up micro enterprise	0	113
People develop new skills through project training	115	224

6.10 The following pages explore each of the outcome indicators in more detail.

Project participants feel more confident and have a more positive outlook which will enable them to look for and take up work/training opportunities.

- 6.11 Participant outcomes which fall under the above category have included: confidence; positive outlook and increased self-esteem; increased aspirations; clearer direction; increased wellbeing; social benefits; and new experiences.

"I can see the future more clearly every time I go, and I want to do it. I am more outward. I've set myself the goal that I don't want to go into the job centre after January next year. You feel a different person every time you go in."

"I know people here, so I have the confidence in doing things. Although I still have panic mode when meeting new people, it has helped with this. I have had successes here."

"I've done things I never would have done before. The support has encouraged me to do that. I now think more positively and I'm willing to try out things that I know might be difficult. Being shown that people can care really changes your outlook."

"I'm so excited, because I can see it and I can feel it now. I couldn't before, I was empty, but now I can picture it."

"It's not just getting a job, it's all the other changes for people who are new to the country, or have other needs... it's the changes to their wellbeing. People feel safer."

"Other outcomes include reduced isolation, connections with community groups, confidence, quality of life, self-esteem and self-image, awareness of own ability... higher expectations for life."

"The social aspect of the project is really important. Without it I would be isolated."

"Staff have been so supportive and it is good to learn from other women that you are not the only one in this situation and to be able to see others who have got to where you want to get to."

- 6.12 For the purposes of this evaluation, participant consultees were asked: "On a scale of 0-10 (0 is not at all confident, 10 is extremely confident), how confident did you feel about your chances of finding a job **before** the support from Accelerate?" Participants were then asked to answer the question according to how they felt **after** having received Accelerate support.

- 6.13 All participants reported that they felt more confident following the support, often by a significant margin. Indeed, in the vast majority of cases, participants described moving from a 2 or 3 out of 10 to an 8 or 9 out of 10. Whilst a few consultees suggested progress was more modest (improving by only a couple of points), there were also several instances of people saying that they had gone from 0 to 10. Not a single interviewee stated they had progressed by anything less than two points on the scale.

"A two before because I was low in confidence. In prison it's a very structured environment, someone tells you when to get clothed or showered. Now I'm out into the big wide world. The journey they have taken me through is fantastic. Now I'm at an eight because I have two more steps to complete, my mock interview is the next thing. They've never let me down and everything I've needed they've touched on. They always give me it step by step."

"Before I started coming here I was nowhere. I'd have given myself 0 out of 10. But it's absolutely changed my life. Now I'd give myself 10 out of 10. I know I'm going to get a job."

6.14 In the vast majority of cases, this therefore represents remarkable progress. Consistent themes were that participation in Accelerate had boosted the confidence of participants, enabled them to regain their self-esteem, helped them to address mental health issues and enabled them to resolve practical problems (especially linked to debt and benefit entitlements).

6.15 Consultations additionally prompted participants on what had led to the positive change reported in order to identify attribution. Participants were clear that the support they had received on the Accelerate programme had led to that change. Furthermore, when exploring the counterfactual (i.e. what would have happened to people had they not participated in Accelerate) consultees were clear that they would likely be stuck in the same place, with no job, not participating in training, lacking confidence in being able to get a job and, in many instances, not in a fit state to even try to get a job.

“Before I don’t understand English. After I understand more.”

“Before we didn’t know what to do, how to apply for jobs here (in the UK). Can’t do it on our own.”

“I’d been to the Job Shop in town but they couldn’t help much. Everything I’ve achieved is down to Foleshill Women’s Training.”

“Losing my job really hit my confidence but coming here every week has made me realise I can do things and I can get another job.”

6.16 To further confirm attribution, most participant consultees state that they did not receive any other support from outside of the Accelerate partnership across the same time period in which they had been engaged in the programme.

Participants gain a clearer understanding of the world of work, what is available in the labour market and employers’ expectations.

6.17 Participant outcomes which fall under the above category have included:

- **Increased knowledge of job search processes** and websites, supplemented by greater knowledge of UK culture and processes around employment.

“Was hard before. They showed me what to do. Saved my CV on to website so I can apply for jobs. Learned how to do it by watching. Saw them do it many times.”

- **Increased awareness and more realistic expectations of employment options.**

“Getting more of an idea of what to do next. Feel more aware of what services are available. Alone you’re not sure which agencies to go to and what’s best for you.”

- **Interview Skills:** a number of participants cited improved interview skills, talking about how they were now aware what to wear in an interview, more equipped with tools to respond to questions, more aware of employer expectations and common interview dos and don’ts.

“Know interview techniques e.g. ask them to repeat the questions, give them alternative examples if I don’t have exact examples.”

“Feel prepared for the interview process. I have tools I can use... Benefits include allowing me to open up and answer questions and not be scared in answering questions.”

- **CV writing skills:** Some participants reported having boosted their CV writing abilities, with CVs receiving more attention than prior to this support.

- **Business Skills / Awareness:** participants focussed on establishing a business had gained skills and knowledge around a range of essential processes.

"I needed things like finance, permits, and I didn't know where to apply. They helped me do cashflow and work out profits. Now I feel more confident, seeing the possibility for profit. Have more skills and knowledge."

"I didn't have any business support before and the business failed. Now I realise and understand why it didn't work."

Participants gain new skills and overcome specific barriers helping them move closer to work and new approaches to job creation opportunities for specific groups which are poorly represented in the labour market.

6.18 Participant outcomes which fall under the above category have included:

- **Improvements to English language skills** as a result of structured ESOL provision offered by Accelerate. ESOL provision also has benefits beyond employability, such as helping people to feel more confident undertaking day-to-day tasks, and to interact confidently with a wider variety of people.

"Big difference. Confidence to speak to people, to respond to questions in a job interview. To speak to people outside, to different people. Great and have tried to get a job. Helped a lot with grammar. Can apply for jobs now, before couldn't apply"

- **Participants have gained basic skills and qualifications**, for example: computer skills, Food & Hygiene certificates etc.

"If it was not for this project I would be trapped at home. It has given me somewhere to come each week, meet people and get qualifications. Now I am looking for a job."

- *"This is important not just for me but for my children. They can see what their mother can do, getting qualifications and hopefully getting a job."*

"Before, I couldn't even leave the house. Now I do IT training and go to the gym and am looking at doing a university course."

Participant Impacts

- 6.19 The table below is a summary of impact achievements to date against targets. The most notable achievement to date is in respect of the number of people who have moved into employment or self-employment on leaving who were unemployed previously (89% above target). The biggest shortfall has been in respect of the number of people who were economically inactive who moved into job searching on leaving the project (only 11% of target). However, it should be noted that a conscious decision was taken not to exit people just to gain the job search result in favour of them remaining on the project and gaining employment.
- 6.20 In reviewing the table below, it is important to state that impacts are the last things to be achieved, hence it may be well into 2019 before many of the people currently receiving support register an impact.

Result	Lifetime target	Actual (Sep '18)
Number who move into education or training on leaving	100	21
Number who move into employment or self-employment on leaving	94	118
of those the number who were unemployed when joined the project	45	85
of those the number who were economically inactive when joined the project	49	33
Number who were economically inactive who moved into job searching on leaving the project	132	14

- 6.21 Each of the impact indicators is explored in more detail below.
- 6.22 Participant impacts have included:
- **Moving into education or training.** In addition to courses undertaken as part of the Accelerate project, some participants have exited onto college and university courses, up to degree level.
 - **Moving into employment or self-employment.** These have typically been in relatively low-wage and/or low-skilled roles, such as Food Service Industry, Care Work, Retail, Warehouse Distribution, Cleaning and so on. However, that is not to suggest that such employment does not provide useful incomes as well as bring other significant benefits to those who secure jobs, especially in terms of their confidence, self-esteem and sense of social inclusion.
 - **Commencing job search.** Amongst economically inactive participants, the complexity and multiplicity of barriers to employment have been such that most of them came to the programme a considerable distance from the jobs market. Support has had to be provided over an extended period, hence lack of progress.
- 6.23 Securing a volunteering placement is not a specified participant impact, but has been used (successfully) by delivery partners as a means of enhancing employability. It could further be argued that it is a positive end in and of itself, conferring many of the benefits of employment in terms of skills development, confidence building, heightened self-esteem etc.
- 6.24 It was noted that for many participants entering the world of work (either as a volunteer or in paid employment) was a huge step. Most participants consulted appeared to favour part-time work, especially where full time work would have resulted in a move from Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

- 6.25 It is also fair to say that a number of participants may never secure paid employment because of the nature and multiplicity of the challenges that they face. However, universally, those consulted reported having benefited hugely from Accelerate, in providing them with some combination of greater confidence, higher self-esteem, improved mental health and a sense of social inclusion. In short, Accelerate has made people feel better about themselves and helped them to lead more enjoyable lives.
- 6.26 In addition, it ought to be recognised that many (possibly most) participants do not follow a smooth upward trajectory in terms of their progression. Some will plateau and some will fall backwards, for example due to external factors affecting their mental health. Furthermore, participant consultations suggest that in some cases Accelerate has not merely lifted people from where they were prior to engagement with the programme but has played a major role in preventing their further decline and them drifting even further away from the labour market.
- 6.27 In considering the impacts that have been generated, it is important to recognise that the roles and responsibilities of individual partners differ. As such, the fact that some partners may be responsible for lower levels of jobs gained than others reflects the types of clients with which they are dealing and how far away they are from being able to secure employment. In other words, comparing the contributions of different partners would be inappropriate – it is more a case of each playing a part in Accelerate’s overall success.
- 6.28 Finally, whilst it is the case that some Journey Guides have good contacts amongst employers and learning providers that the focus of delivery partners is much more on developing the capabilities of clients so that they are in the best possible position to apply for new work/volunteering/learning opportunities. In so doing, delivery partners are helping to develop capabilities that should endure rather than simply doing everything for their clients in order to effect an exit with a positive result.

Delivery Partner Benefits

- 6.29 Although there are no project outcomes or impacts described for delivery partners, it is apparent that they too have gained from their involvement in Accelerate.

- **Capacity:** for many organisations, Accelerate was crucial in a landscape of reduced funding to allow them to secure the capacity to continue supporting participants. The Accelerate funding opportunity coincided with a period where demand for the services of delivery partners has increased. Having fully-funded posts supported by Accelerate awards has been crucial in generating the capacity to undertake delivery, and, in turn, additional capacity has enabled better community outreach and engagement. Without fully-funded posts it would not have been possible for many partners to deliver Accelerate to anywhere near the same degree, particularly due to the “burden” created by the extensive paperwork.

“We would have had to lose staff were it not for the funding that Accelerate provided and would have been unable to provide the volunteer placements that have supported our wider activities.”

“Thanks to Accelerate we have been able to deliver our services beyond Coventry, extending to Leamington, Nuneaton and Rugby.

“The project is now embedded into the organisation. But also the clients have more knowledge about the resources within the organisation and how it may be able to support them on an ongoing basis.”

“Prior to Accelerate, considering the employability of the people with whom we work was not one of the organisation’s priorities, but it is now an important part of what we do.”

“Accelerate funding has enabled us to further diversify our activities and support local people with learning disabilities in new ways.”

“We now have a completely different and more strategic approach to our work, as opposed to operating ad hoc.”

- **Added Value:** throughout delivery, the partnership approach has provided key benefits and added value. This has included strategic advantages, such as a more “credible voice” to influence decision-makers, as well as benefitting from a programme-level promotional campaign which has raised the profile of organisations. Participation in the project is also felt to have led to new relationships and an increased knowledge of available provision in the city to refer clients on to.

“It’s about tackling the issues in the city, and for me, being part of that partnership gives you a stronger, more credible voice for tackling some of the issues around unemployment. Having a project that’s worked with as many clients now as Accelerate has, it’s harder for some decision-makers not to acknowledge and recognise that knowledge-base. Having a number of partners straddling a number of years of delivery makes for a stronger voice.”

- **Additional collaborations and connections:** which may lead to future working relationships or joint funding bids, and also means that partners are more aware of provision and therefore better able to signpost clients to relevant support.

“Found out more about the offers available in the city- far more aware. Also creates potential for future funding opportunities.”

“Being part of the Accelerate partnership has raised our profile and we can see opportunities for bidding and working with other partners in the future.”

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The conclusions and recommendations relate to each of the evaluation questions.

What difference did the project make, to whom and why?

7.2 As much as anything, this evaluation has reaffirmed the need for and value in a programme such as Building Better Opportunities. Although Accelerate has supported 933 people (as at end November 2018), it is apparent that there are many hundreds more that it has not had the capacity to support and that demand for the services provided has by no means been fully met by this Project and indeed that there are more candidates emerging all the time.

7.3 Each and every participant interviewed reported that they had made progress towards employability as a direct result of the support provided by an Accelerate partner. Commonly, consultees reported that progress was substantial, even life changing in many cases. Accelerate has provided participants with some combination of greater confidence, higher self-esteem, improved mental health and a sense of social inclusion. In so doing, the project has not merely lifted people from where they were prior to engagement but has played a major role in preventing their further decline.

7.4 Furthermore, alongside the enhanced ability of participants to enter into the jobs market it was abundantly clear that many of them were in a much-improved state in terms of confidence, self-esteem, mental wellbeing and social inclusion. Whilst these issues all feed into employability, they have merits in their own right and addressing such issues is of benefit to society as a whole as well as the individuals concerned (not least as a result of reduced pressures on other public services on which they would likely have otherwise depended or at least a reduced reliance on them).

Has the project supported participants as it was proposed in the initial project plan?

7.5 It is evident that Accelerate has achieved great success in engaging and successfully supporting of the types of groups for which the BBO programme was designed. The target relating to participants who are unemployed is already 23 per cent above target, and in respect of specific categories, the project has far exceeded its targets for people who are 50+ (by 76 per cent), people with disabilities (by 112 per cent) and people from ethnic minorities (by 197 per cent).

7.6 Consultations carried out for this evaluation confirmed that Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches typically lacked the time to be able to deal with the specific needs of Accelerate participants, due to the work pressures under which they operate. The capacity of Journey Guides to spend time listening to participants combined with their ability to empathise and their knowledge of how best to support each individual (either directly or through referral) have been fundamental to Accelerate's achievements.

7.7 It is therefore apparent that Accelerate has supported the ambitions of the LEP and County Council strategies by filling a vital gap in service provision.

Has the project led to the development of a delivery model that is effective and sustainable?

- 7.8 It ought to be noted that arriving at the model in the first place was based on a high level of awareness of the third and public sector infrastructure across Coventry and Warwickshire, an extensive trawl of potential partners and a rigorous process of exploring potential partner interest and suitability. This time and effort expended at the outset proved to be a worthwhile investment.
- 7.9 The size and scope of the partnership has enabled Accelerate to provide a broad offer of services to participants. However, there does appear to be a sense in which partners have tended to operate in silos, in spite of the best efforts of the Opportunity Connector, the existence of the Extranet and the various events/communications that have taken place.
- 7.10 There is no doubt that the anchor role provided by CWCDa has been a key factor on Accelerate's success. Delivery partners were all appreciative of the support that had been provided in terms of training, advice and guidance.
- 7.11 Journey Guides (at CWCDa and within other delivery partners) alongside the specialist staff within delivery organisations have also played a crucial role. They have brought significant experience, either time served with the delivery partner and/or gained in another capacity. They have also displayed personal/professional qualities very well suited to their roles, which participant consultations revealed to have been hugely appreciated.
- 7.12 Although (as with all things) there is scope for improving the effectiveness of the delivery model, its sustainability is largely dependant on the availability of sufficient resources. However, in terms of its credibility amongst partners, external stakeholders and participants, the model is certainly sustainable in terms of the widespread support it enjoys.

The factors that contributed to/inhibited the performance and achievements of Accelerate

Positives

- 7.13 The success of Accelerate, as with many such programmes, is largely due to the hard work, skills, experience and attitudes of the people working to deliver it. Across the partnership it was evident that the people involved were strongly committed to Accelerate and the people they supported. As noted above, CWCDa staff, the Opportunity Connector, Journey Guides and other delivery staff have been integral to Accelerate's achievements.
- 7.14 A consistent theme was the amount of time that is needed in order to understand the needs and aspirations of individuals, identify specific barriers to employment and develop/implement a programme of support. Those on the front line did whatever was necessary in this regard and those managing the programme did all they could to offer them support in doing so. Participants were hugely appreciative of the amount of time that delivery staff had spent listening to their problems/ambitions and then the effectiveness with which they resolved those problems/facilitated the means by which ambitions could be realised. The trust and respect that delivery staff have earned with participants has been crucial.

"Unemployment and mental health issues can isolate people. Contact with people who have an interest in developing you... it's difficult for people to believe they can do things... gives you motivation, raises you up. The people have been the most important thing."

- 7.15 In this regard, numerous participant consultees mentioned the non-judgemental attitude of delivery staff.

“They have a real interest in what you do, treat you normally, not judging, nice enough, put at ease made feel good, gives confidence, ask what you want to do- not ‘got to’, contrast to the job centre which can feel very disempowering.”

- 7.16 In respect of specific support provided, the range, quality and accessibility of provision have been other positive factors, evidenced not least by the extent to which it is valued by participants. In this regard, it is important to note that the courses offered provide much more than the opportunity to gain a qualification. They have played a significant role in helping some people to overcome social isolation, as well as boost their confidence and self-esteem.

- 7.17 Not putting a cap on the length of time for which individuals can receive support will doubtless have impacted negatively on the achievement of outcomes and impacts to date, but may aid the achievement of target results over the longer term. Accelerate has recognised that some people require help over an extended period.

“Having everything explained in a bitesize way is really helpful. It has been tailored to me and I've been able to choose the pace. If there were any problems with it, I just wouldn't go. Couldn't ask for anything better, and it's enabling me to access jobs.”

“Giving time for the appointments- a long appointment so people don't feel rushed out of the door. Giving them the time to build up their skills and see that progression- over a couple of years.”

“That the most disadvantaged individuals require more support, and that's what's unique about this project- it allows you that time to support. Everything is done at such a fast-pace these days. It builds the confidence of the individual and increases engagement as they feel supported and want to come back.”

“Being able to spend a lot of time with the client to get to know the individual and understand what their needs are. The funding enabled that capacity. Rather than rushing through a 6-month project, so the duration of the programme important. Some women with multiple barriers take longer to reach that point where they're ready to go into employment.”

Negatives

- 7.18 The two main constraints on the programme appear to have been resources and bureaucracy. At the outset, several partners seriously underestimated the resources needed to deliver their contribution to the programme, in addition to which additional resources would have enabled most partners to deliver services to more people. Complying with the demands of Big Lottery Fund resulted in some partners withdrawing (albeit not to any significant detriment to the programme) and placed significant burdens on others that were unwelcome and which impacted adversely on their ability to deliver. Bureaucracy also succeeded in annoying a number of participants.

The implementation of the sustainability and equality & diversity action plan

- 7.19 Partners have their own sustainability and equality & diversity action plans and were therefore well placed to deliver on the plans developed for this project. In respect of sustainability, a key aspect of the project was to take provision to people wherever possible, rather than have clients travel any significant distance. Although this may have been motivated more by a desire to ensure clients could access provision, it has also had environmental benefits.
- 7.20 In respect of equality and diversity, the project supported three times as many people from BAME communities as was forecast. The performance of individual delivery partners in this regard will have reflected local demography.

The monitoring and evaluation of the targets, results and outcomes

- 7.21 Programme bureaucracy made monitoring a time consuming experience but it was evident that all partners were compliant and that monitoring data was therefore complete and up to date. A robust system was put in place by CWCDa both to ensure this was the case and to act promptly in response to any issues that monitoring information revealed, as part of its 'traffic light' management system. This led to only two organisations requiring dedicated support and all parties reported this to have been a positive experience.

The functionality of the Accelerate partnership

- 7.22 The time and effort invested from the outset in identifying and working with partners appears to have reaped its rewards. Clearly, it was a significant advantage that some partners were already known to CWCDa (and vice versa). Given the size of the partnership, the combination of one-to-one and group discussions led by CWCDa must have been a daunting and exhausting task. However, it probably saved a huge amount of time subsequently by ensuring (for the most part) that partners were in a position to deliver on their commitments.
- 7.23 Although the Extranet was a perfectly good idea in principle, in practice it was under-utilised. This appears to be partly because delivery had already been taking place for some time before it became operational (and so partners were used to delivering activities without recourse to the Extranet) and because some partners found it to be not very user friendly. It is apparent that CWCDa did all it could to facilitate use of the Extranet by partners, but many seemed to display a reluctance to do so.
- 7.24 Partners work well together and the referral system was regarded as efficient and effective. However, over time, knowledge of what each partner offered and to whom was eroded in some cases and some partners would have benefited from updates.
- 7.25 Having a participant on the Steering Group seems to have been effective but more generally having service users attending various events has been beneficial in promoting Accelerate, demonstrating its achievements and celebrating success.
- 7.26 It is evident that there is a good deal of mutual respect and goodwill within the partnership, which are big assets in a project of this size and complexity.

Project achievements

- 7.27 Project outputs have been impressive and as time passes outcomes and impacts will continue to increase. There is no doubt that Accelerate has filled a gap in provision that would otherwise not have been met, specifically in providing support to significant numbers of older people, those with disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups.
- 7.28 Getting a participant into employment might be regarded as the 'ultimate' prize, but that ought not diminish the achievement of other impacts and outcomes, which have clearly been significant in terms of both the numbers reported and the significance of these achievements for the individuals concerned.
- 7.29 In addition, Accelerate has left legacies for its partners, including increased capacity, raised profile and new connections, helping to make the third sector across Coventry & Warwickshire more stable and sustainable.

Lessons learnt

- 7.30 Perhaps the most important lesson learnt relates to the resources required for delivery and the functions that each partner needed to perform, especially in respect of funding for administration of project bureaucracy. Other key lessons have been the extent of demand for mental health support and the need to take delivery to locations that are accessible for clients, meaning a need to utilise delivery spaces in places such as Stratford and Leamington. Addressing this is likely to require a combination of recruiting additional partners and having some existing partners do things differently.

Suggested changes to the project for future delivery

- 7.31 What is evident from consultations with partners and participants, as well as from the output figures recorded in the absence of any promotion of the programme for some time, is that there is still considerable latent demand for the types of services delivered through Accelerate. In this context, there is a clear need for continued delivery.
- 7.32 Relationships with employers appear to be good (based on partner consultations and the evidence of the employment outputs that have been achieved) but there is scope for improvements. Whilst understanding that partners may be inclined to be protective of their contacts, there are benefits in having some central co-ordination, for marketing purposes, provision of support to employers, gaining feedback from employers and maintaining contact with participants entering employment. It is therefore suggested that a database of employers be developed (not least as contacts could easily be lost as and when individuals working for delivery partners move on) and that it becomes part of the role of the Opportunity Connector and/or one or more of the Journey Guides to lead on employer engagement.
- 7.33 Linked to the above is the need for ongoing support to participants. Helping someone to get a job, for example, is not the end of the story. It may be sometime before it is apparent as to whether or not the job is suitable. In addition, external factors may impact negatively on an individual requiring extra support to help them to continue in work during a difficult period. It is likely that help to keep people in work or to transition to a more suitable job would be much more cost effective than having them decline to the extent that they must begin their journey all over again, with all of the support that entails. Given the vulnerability of participants to future shocks, there would be merit in having in place, in-work or in-volunteering placement support to ensure that people did not regress and lose their jobs/placements.

- 7.34 There would be merit in partners undertaking a formal assessment of participants, both at the time they join the project and on completion, as a matter of routine. This would enable them to demonstrate the value of their intervention in terms of the progress made by individuals in respect of appropriate indicators (e.g. mental wellbeing). The partnership should therefore explore what approach would be most appropriate with a view to adoption should Accelerate secure additional funding.
- 7.35 There is a perception amongst some delivery partners that only one outcome can be claimed per person, even though they may achieve several and this achievement could be supported by more than one delivery partner. Partners have been reminded of this but it seems likely that this misunderstanding will have meant some outcomes not having been reported.
- 7.36 Consideration should be given as to whether there is a point at which partners stop signing up new clients. This will of course be informed by confirmation of any additional funding and whether or not there is any change on focus. Quite clearly, there would be little point in signing up people for whom support could only be provided for a very short period. At the same time, if Accelerate is to continue, it would not want to re-commence from a standing start.

Conclusions

- 7.37 In summary, Accelerate has clearly been a successful project, not just in terms of the numbers of people participating but in its ability to engage with precisely the types of people for whom the project is intended. It has not sought easy targets merely to satisfy outputs requirements. Accelerate has also exemplified why the Building Better Opportunities was needed and the gap it fills in service provision, thereby also supporting the ambitions of the LEP and County Council strategies. It is apparent that the services provided do not duplicate those on offer from other organisations (including Jobcentre Plus).
- 7.38 The time and effort expended at the outset by CWDA in identifying potential partners and exploring their interest and suitability proved to be a worthwhile investment. Thereafter, the leadership and support it has provided has been key to the project's success.
- 7.39 The range, quality and accessibility of provision have been valued by participants. Partners have demonstrated genuine commitment with many delivery staff having gone above and beyond what might have been expected of them in order to support clients. The two main constraints on the partnership appear to have been resources and bureaucracy.
- 7.40 Feedback from participants was almost universally positive and it was absolute clear that the support received had impacted beneficially on many people's lives (in terms of greater confidence, higher self-esteem, improved mental health and a sense of social inclusion) and in ways that had moved them closer to - and often into - employment. Indeed, the target relating to participants who are unemployed is already 23 per cent above target, and in respect of specific categories, the project has far exceeded its targets for people who are 50+ people with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities.
- 7.41 There remains a significant level of demand for these types of employability support services across Coventry and Warwickshire and clear justification in continuing to fund Accelerate going forward.

APPENDIX 1: DELIVERY PARTNER INTERVIEWS

Partner	Contact
Coventry Cyrenians	G Lee
Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre	D London
CWCDA	M Bygrave, C Allen, K Henderson and J Clugston
Foleshill Women's Training	C McNaught
Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire	A Rigler
Groundwork West Midlands	A Whitefield
Hereward College	M Maffey
HOE Mencap	S Hotten
Life Path Trust Limited	T Malin
Orbit Group Ltd (Orbit Heart of England)	D Wilson
Sky Blues In The Community	C White
The Highlife Centre Ltd.	C Amoakah
Valley House	S Tonks
Voluntary Action Coventry	S Ogle
Volunteer Centre North Warwickshire	M Horner
Volunteer Friends	M Kalsi
Warwickshire Employment Support Team (WEST)	C Lewis
Working Actively To Change Hillfields (WATCH)	T Evans
Workers Education Association (WEA)	H Matharu

APPENDIX 2: JOBCENTRE PLUS CONSULTATIONS

JC+ Office	Work Coach
Bedworth	One work coach
Leamington Spa	Two work coaches
Nuneaton	One work coach
Stratford-Upon-Avon	One work coach

APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT CONSULTATIONS

Partner	Numbers/Characteristics of Participants Consulted
Coventry Cyrenians	One man and one woman, age unknown. One male ex-offender over 50 years old.
Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre	3 male refugees, one over 50. An Eastern European migrant family (mother and college-age son).
Foleshill Women's Training	Three women from BME backgrounds, one in her 20s, one in her 30s and one in her 50s
Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire	One man with learning disabilities, over 40. One white British man with a learning disability. One woman with a learning disability, from a BME background.
Groundwork West Midlands	Two men and one woman, in their 20s and 30s, all white British
Hereward College	Two men, one white British the other from a BME background, both in their 20s
HOE Mencap	One man, white British and in his 20s
Life Path Trust Limited	One woman, under 20, and on the autism spectrum.
Orbit Group Ltd (Orbit Heart of England)	ERS attended session in Leamington Spa and consulted four men and four women, three in their 20s and five in their 50s, all white British
Sky Blues In The Community	None consulted
The Highlife Centre Ltd.	Two women, one over 40 years old. One person, gender and age unknown.
Valley House	Three women and two men, one in their 30s the others in their 50s
Voluntary Action Coventry	None consulted
Volunteer Centre North Warwickshire	Four women and two men, ranging from their 20s to their 50s, all white British
Volunteer Friends	One man, white British in his 60s
Warwickshire Employment Support Team (WEST)	ERS attended sessions in Nuneaton and Rugby, and consulted four men and five women, ranging from their 20s to their 50s, all white British
Working Actively To Change Hillfields (WATCH)	One man over 40, one man under 40. One woman from a BME background.
Workers Education Association (WEA)	Two white British women over 40. Two refugee / migrant women from BME backgrounds, age unknown.