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# Career L E A P

(Local Employment Action Partnership)

## **An Evaluation of Career LEAP: A Work-readiness Programme for Young Adults Not in Education, Employment or Training**

**Carmel O'Sullivan  
Jennifer Symonds  
Jos Akkermans**



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Jos Akkermans**



**“It’s the best. It is one of the best programmes that I have done in my life. It changes your idea about life, it changes your negative idea about getting a job.” (Young adult participant, 2016)**

**“Yes. It was brilliant. I learned a lot and if I didn’t do it I wouldn’t be where I am now. I’m out doing things now. I’m motivated more as well.” (Young adult participant, 2016)**

### **Note on report**

This report highlights the key findings of the research study *An Evaluation of Career LEAP: A Work-readiness Programme for Young Adults Not in Education, Employment or Training*. It is an abridgment of a more comprehensive and detailed report of the study presented in a number of published articles.

© Carmel O’Sullivan, Jennifer Symonds, Jos Akkermans, 2018

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders or the partner organisations.

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## About this report

This report is the result of over two years research and consultative work using a partnership approach.

Collaborating with East Wall Youth, Swan Youth Service, Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI), and a number of prominent businesses, Career LEAP emerged out of an innovative project between research, community and business partners, funded by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDET), the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and a number of local businesses operating in the docklands area of Dublin city centre.

An ambitious social justice programme designed to help unemployed young adults develop key psychosocial competencies for finding and sustaining employment during the school-to-work transition, Career LEAP (Local Employment Action Partnership) was developed by Carmel O'Sullivan, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, and her research team, Jennifer Symonds, School of Education, University College Dublin (UCD) and Jos Akkermans, Department of Management and Organization, School of Business and Economics, VU Amsterdam. The study investigated the area of work-readiness among young unemployed adults (18-24) in the north east inner city of Dublin, many of whom were experiencing significant barriers to employment.

Career LEAP adopted an approach to research called the DIEACC Framework (Design, Implement, Evaluate Actions in Community Contexts), developed by Carmel O'Sullivan. In contrast to other designs more typical of work-readiness evaluation studies, the DIEACC framework involved the research team in all aspects of the study, from the original conception and design to implementation and evaluation.

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- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DYCA), A&L Goodbody, Diageo, KPMG and Trinity College Dublin.

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**Dr Carmel O'Sullivan**  
**Dr Jennifer Symonds**  
**Dr Jos Akkermans**

July 2018

# Introduction

The study aimed to explore work-readiness among young adults not in education, employment or training (NEET) and living in the north east inner city of Dublin.

The collaborating community and business partners' overall objectives were to:

- Enhance young people's employability skills in the north east inner city of Dublin;
- Increase their knowledge and awareness of business in the area;
- Increase their confidence in securing employment / gain increased access to employment.

Being prepared to work, and managing a career, is not straightforward for 18-24 year olds. In the current era, there is an overwhelming range of education and training choices, and fierce competition for entry-level jobs. Young adults are increasingly expected to deal with these challenges themselves. Employers in many nations are concerned that young adults, including university graduates, lack the social skills, higher order thinking skills, and self-management skills necessary for the workplace. The Career LEAP (Local Employment Action Partnership) programme was designed to combat these career development and employability problems, with a focus on unemployed young adults who may lack work experience and educational qualifications.

In the pilot study we aimed to evaluate a work-readiness programme for young adult unemployed job seekers, entitled Career LEAP. Its anticipated training outcomes were that participants would be better able to position themselves in the workforce and become effective and engaged employees as a result of participating in the programme.

Specifically, the study objectives sought to:

- 1 Examine how valid the work-readiness measurements were?
- 2 Explore how much work-readiness changed across the training and work-placement periods for each participant?
- 3 Explore how much work-readiness changed across the training and work-placement periods for the group?
- 4 Assess how reliable any changes were.

The programme was based on the notion of work-readiness, which is the extent to which people possess the skills, knowledge and attributes that enable them to be successful in the workplace (Cabellero & Walker, 2010). The first component of the programme was a 2-week, part-time training course delivered to the young adults by skilled trainers, comprising activities designed to enhance specific aspects of work-readiness. This was immediately followed by a 3-week mentored work-placement conducted by local businesses, where the young adults could practice the work-readiness skills learned in the training.

The training course was designed to enhance participants' soft skills integral to work-readiness, notably:

- *Career competencies*: career motivation, knowledge of personal qualities including work skills, self-profiling ability, work exploration and career control.
- *Higher order thinking skills*: of critical and creative thinking.
- *Social attitudes and skills*: specifically, workplace civility, valuing diversity, negotiation, conflict management and leadership.

- *Personal skills:* of self-presentation, self-management and work engagement.
- *Job-specific skills:* learned on the work-placements.

These were drawn from research on career competencies (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers & Blonk, 2013), from over 50 studies of employers' and educators' perceptions of what makes a good employee, and from several meta-reviews of those studies, which we synthesised in a systematic review of the work-readiness literature (Symonds & O'Sullivan, 2017). The aim of the literature review was to analyse the designs and documented outcomes of major work-readiness programmes in the UK and Ireland, and to explore whether they offered young people opportunities to develop their work-readiness competencies and agency. We found that few interventions purposefully connected work-readiness training to the work-placements that followed. Therefore, in the current study, we designed the second week of work-readiness training to prepare the young adults for success in the workplace.

In the literature review we also examined the structure and pedagogy of other work-readiness programmes. Based on design examples, and addressing gaps in provision, we designed the Career LEAP training course using the following methods:

1. Deliberate coverage of multiple and major facets of work-readiness, as listed above.
2. Use of the scientific knowledge base (psychology, sociology and educational research) to extensively research those facets of work-readiness, and translate that knowledge into concrete learning objectives and activities.
3. Use of established training methods proven to be effective in facilitating motivation and engagement, and in changing attitudes and behaviour.
4. Use of a developmental, social pedagogy approach to design and deliver the training in synchrony with participants' age-related concerns and interests (16 – 24 year olds), community environments and social support networks. This is of particular importance given that we are working with unemployed young job seekers who were experiencing multiple barriers to employment.
5. Use of creative and arts-based approaches drawn from the drama in education tradition which prioritises process based enquiry and playful thinking.

The training course was designed so that in each session, participants would:

- **Uncover new skills** through guided awareness and discovery learning.
- **Practice new skills** using active learning methods including role play, improvisation, case studies, vignettes, activity carousels, games of suspense and challenge, and collective problem solving.
- **Reflect** on their current career and workplace competencies and **plan for change**.
- **Receive positive feedback** on their learning through social interaction, enhancing their self-efficacy beliefs and sense of personal transformation.
- **Be inoculated against setbacks** by tackling generic barriers to education and employment in a supportive environment. Distancing methods such as role play and vignettes were used to protect the young adults' self-esteem.

## Work-readiness

The transition from school to work has always been a major career transition for young adults, which poses unique challenges and changes, such as finding one's work identity and attempting to find one's first job (Akkermans, Nykänen, & Vuori, 2015). This transition has only become more complex and challenging for young people given the many changes in careers that have occurred over the past year, including an increasing need for proactivity and self-management (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017), while at the same time facing an increase in flexible work and rapid (dis)appearance of jobs (Kalleberg & Marsen, 2015). In all, these changes have caused a situation in which young people need to actively prepare themselves for the transition into working life, that is: they need to be work-ready.

The notion of work-readiness is used to convey the extent to which people possess the skills, knowledge and attributes that make them prepared or ready for success in the workplace (Cabellero & Walker, 2010; O'Neil, Allred & Baker, 2014). This is a separate notion from college readiness, which refers to the qualities that are typically necessary for achievement in tertiary education (Camara, 2013). The notion of work-readiness is holistic: it refers to all facets of the person that enable them to cope with the demands of work. Although there are too many of these to name, studies of employers' perceptions conducted across a 40-year period demonstrate remarkable consistency in the broad areas within which desired skills or competencies are listed (ACT Inc. 2000, Jackson, 2010; Jones, 1996; O'Neil et al., 2014).

Around the world, governments, youth services and other charitable agencies have developed training programmes to help unemployed young adults improve their work-readiness. These "capacity-building programmes" (Grist & Cheetham, 2011, p. 41) focus on enhancing young adults' academic, vocational, personal and social skills, and subsequent human capital (Hamilton, Hamilton, Bianchi & Bran, 2013) through classroom education and work-based-learning. Evaluations of those programmes often focus on their instrumental value; using employment data to indicate successful outcomes for participants. This type of evaluation may be useful for deciding where to invest national and local funds, but tells us little about how those programmes impact the personal competencies they are designed to enhance, through programme design, teaching and learning.

Governments, humanitarian organisations and researchers wishing to learn about this process, perhaps with the goal of designing new and more effective programmes, will require knowledge of how work-readiness, methods used to assess it, and programmes designed to enhance it, connect theoretically and practically. Using a systematic literature search, we were unable to identify this type of integrated review. Rather, we observed that the bodies of knowledge on work-readiness and employment support programmes are reasonably disparate, with only a few publications addressing both issues (e.g. Grist & Cheetham, 2011). This owes much to the type of research evaluations which are typically commissioned by stakeholders (such as the US Department of Labor and the United Kingdom Department of Work and Pensions), as these mainly report on the quality of the programmes' design components using young adult, mentor and organiser perceptions, and consider only a few work-readiness indicators in this process.

In response, we took up the task of providing a synthesis of knowledge on work-readiness and its enhancement, in order to inform the development of a work-readiness intervention for unemployed young adults in Dublin, Ireland. In the review we attempted to answer an integrated set of questions:

1. What is work-readiness?
2. How can work-readiness be assessed?
3. How is work-readiness being enhanced in Ireland and the United Kingdom?
4. What is the climate of those programmes?
5. What is the evidence that those programmes enhance work-readiness?

We concluded the review by discussing the links between work-readiness competencies, assessment and enhancement in Ireland and the UK, comparing this work to that done in the US, and addressing silences in the evaluation literature regarding programme pedagogy and the role of parents, families and communities (see Symonds & O'Sullivan, 2017).

The review focused on employment support programmes in Ireland and its closest neighbour, the United Kingdom (UK). The target group for this review was 18-24-year-old job seekers in those countries, who are not in employment, education or training. Research from the UK finds that the personal qualities of those young adults are diverse, as are their pathways to unemployment (Spielhofer et al., 2009). However, many members of this group leave education with no school leaving qualifications; as national statistics data from Ireland indicates (Kelly & McGuinness, 2015). Also they may have other significant and multiple barriers to employment, such as coming from low-income families, substance abuse, mental ill health, convictions, health problems, early parenthood, a lack of basic skills, and low levels of motivation and confidence (Skyblue, 2015; Simmons & Thompson, 2011a). In addition, their pathways of early school leaving followed by periods of unemployment make for little or no work experience, and a subsequent lack of the basic job-specific skills such as using spreadsheets or operating a pressure cleaner, that employers advertising entry level positions sometimes require.

These features can put this group at the bottom of the ladder of job applicants, in an increasingly elevated employment arena, where more young adults enter with a tertiary level educational qualification and there is fierce competition for entry level jobs (Doorley, 2015; Russell, Simmons & Thompson, 2011b). Developing the requisite basic skills for writing attractive CVs and making job applications is not necessarily easy for unemployed young adults, who may have finished school with low levels of literacy and strive to avoid further study given their previous negative experiences of classroom based learning (Symonds, Schoon & Salmela-Aro 2016). Furthermore, many have grown up in stressful developmental contexts such as poverty, making it more difficult for them to develop their 'soft skills' such as self-regulation, self-competency, self-management, self-efficacy and pro-social self-esteem (Margo, Grant, Longford & Lewis, 2010). In essence, the poles of vulnerable young adult job seekers and entry-level positions are moving further apart, separated by a large sea of socially constructed personal deficit, where the unconventional skill sets of some unemployed young adults are stranded. It is in this setting that we explored the concept of work-readiness, its assessment, and programmes designed to enhance it.

# Participant demographic information

## 1 Application process

Following advertisement, young adults were asked to complete a detailed application form, followed by an invitation to attend a face-to-face interview with the Career LEAP project manager during which the applicant's suitability for the programme was assessed, and the details and demands of the training, work-placement and research components were presented and discussed. Applicants were invited to nominate a parent, family member or good friend who might be willing to attend a meeting with the research team about Career LEAP. The project manager continued to maintain occasional contact with the applicants before the programme began as a way of reassuring those who were nervous about starting the programme, and of reminding others about the start date, location and time. Several acknowledged that they had fallen out of routines and needed prompting to ensure they remembered and turned up on time on the start date.

### *Expression of interest and recruitment*

## Expression of interest (25)

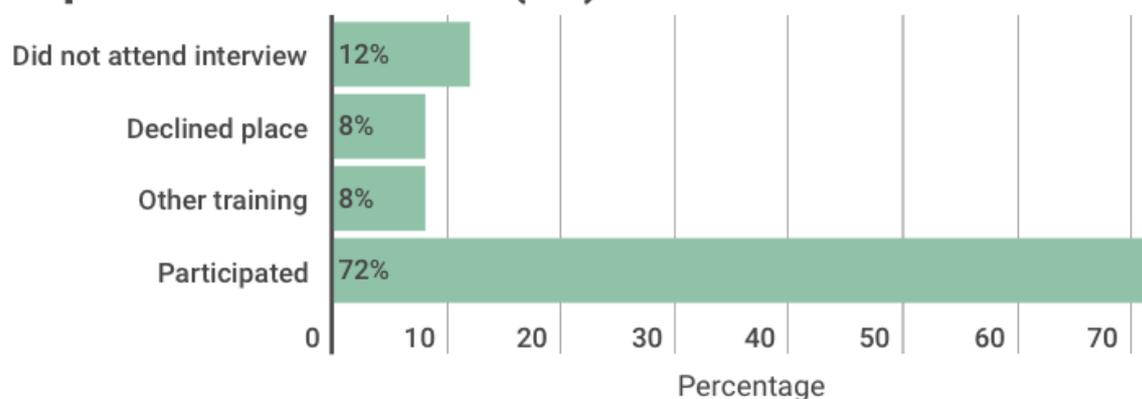


Figure 1. Expression of interest

Of the 25 who expressed an interest, 3 did not attend the interview (missing multiple appointments), 2 decided not to take up their place, 2 completed the initial application form but did not participate owing to other training commitments, a family member's ill health, and a lack of confidence. There were expressions of interest from 11 female and 14 male young adults.

Participants were recruited through referral agencies, key workers, youth worker, youth services, recommendations from friends and walk-in's.

## Recruitment (18)

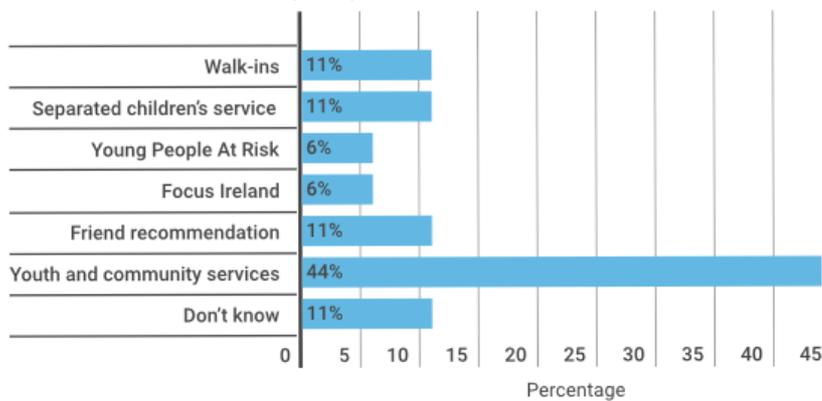


Figure 2. Recruitment

### Background of participants

## Nationality (18)

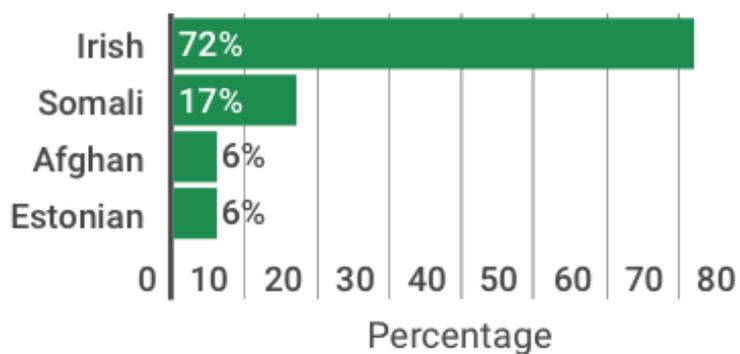


Figure 3. Nationality

18 started the programme in July 2016, presenting predominantly as Irish nationals (13 Irish, 3 Somali, 1 Afghan, 1 Estonian). 12 identified as male and 6 identified as female participants.

A third (n=6) presented as being homeless at the time of the programme, ranging for between 6 months and up to 3 years.

## Background of participants (18)

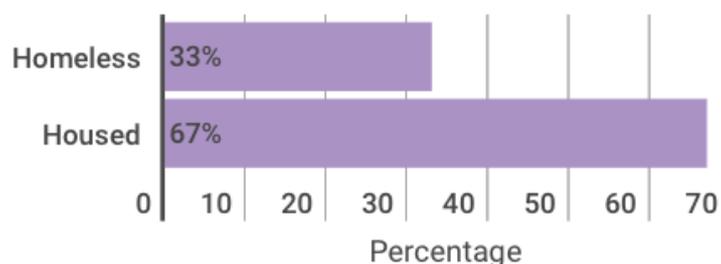


Figure 4. Accommodation status

There was a diversity of levels of education with only 1 participant having no Junior Certificate.

## Highest educational qualification (18)

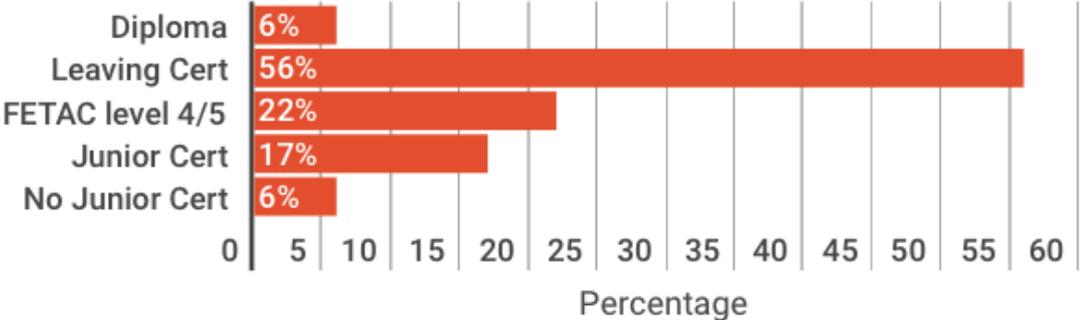


Figure 5. Highest level of educational attainment

All were unemployed with the majority claiming job seekers allowance and participating in training schemes locally. Several had undertaken a number of training schemes in succession. Two reported that they were not claiming anything or engaged with any services.

## Employment status (18)

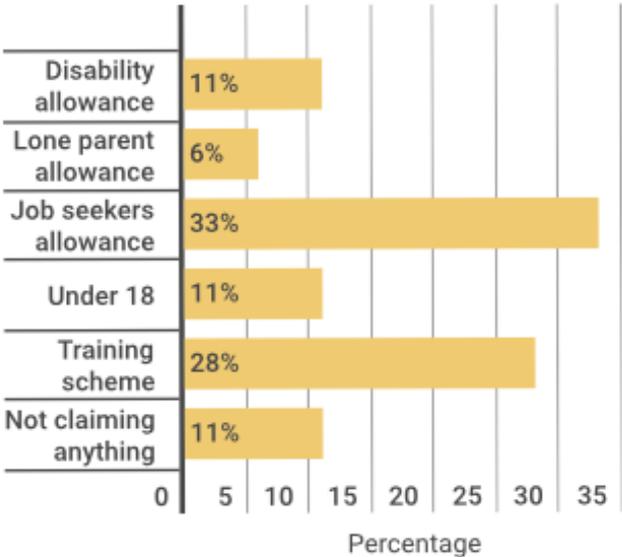


Figure 6. Employment and allowances pre-project

In terms of previous work experience, only 3 had up to 2 years experience in the form of casual short-term contracts, with the majority having less than 3 months work experience, predominantly in the form of unpaid voluntary placements.

## Work experience (18)

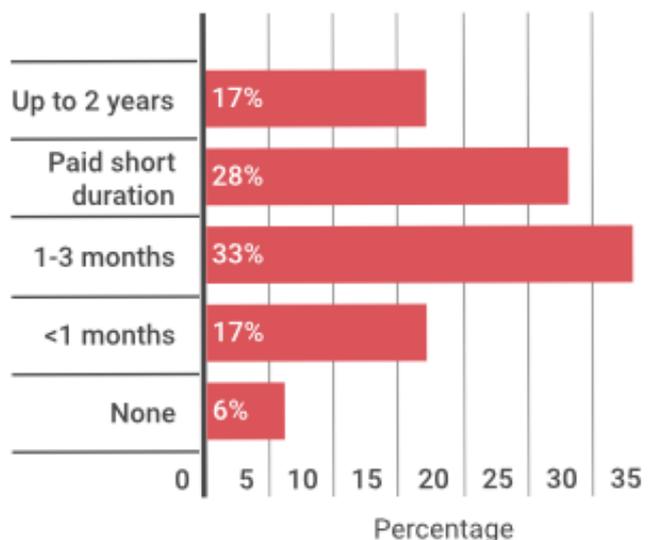


Figure 7. Periods of prior work experience

In summary, data from the participants' application forms and initial interviews with the project manager revealed that out of the 18 who started the programme, all reported that they wanted a job; all reported lacking work experience; 9 noted that their CV was poor; 6 referred to an inadequate level of qualifications as impeding opportunities for finding employment; 2 identified a lack of networks to help them get a job; 5 identified literacy problems, mainly reading challenges; 2 declared previous drug addictions; 2 reported having criminal records, with an additional 2 receiving cautions for under 18 offences; 2 noted that they had significant medical conditions; in addition, 1 reported having ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and 2 reported having depression.

The project manager recorded significant social and communication skills deficits at recruitment stage in over a third of participants. These ranged from limited vocabulary use, going off topic, and short contracted sentences when speaking, to poor eye contact, fidgeting when seated, and regularly being late for meetings. In addition, inappropriate dress to attend a meeting was recorded in just less than 20% of cases.

Participants were invited to respond to the following questions in their application forms, and the following quotations, reported verbatim, are representative of the range of comments provided.

### Biggest challenge in finding a job:

"I have no work experience to put on my CV. I have only had part time jobs in the past but nothing solid" (David).

"I haven't had much experience, so I think this is a problem. I never get to interview stage" (Alex).

"As I am an early school-leaver, I find that my gap in education stunts my options in the working world. I have not completed a leaving nor a junior certificate but I

feel I have still the skills and potential to excel in a job, were I given the opportunity. I have lost confidence in myself which leads me to fail at presenting a positive image of myself to employers" (Roisin).

"Where i live in" (Paul).

#### Hopes for your future

"To be successful and happy in a work environment were I can be valued at the role I play" (Alex).

"I'd like to have my own career in either childcare or lifesaving. I would rather be working with people than sat behind a desk" (Rachel).

"My ultimate goal would be to be a professional psychiatrist with my own office" (Larry).

"I see myself having my own to live. I hope to be working. I am still deciding on my career path as I am interested in many different areas" (Sarah).

#### Why do you want to participate in this programme?

"The programme design suits my needs. I am interested in work experience. I hope to gain experience and be on step closer to getting a job" (Sarah).

"I hope to get a job out of this and show my skills" (Matthew).

"To have a good job that I like. I would like to save and travel around the world and try new things" (James).

"As far as I'm concerned any experience is good experience and when I heard of this course, I thought that this was deffinetly no exception and I'd gain much needed experience in all right areas" (Larry).

#### What skills do you need to be successful in a job?

"Being able to be a team player setting goals, and the ability to work hard" (Jake).

"Open to learn, good communicator and listener, be passionate about the job, be punctual and responsible with my tasks, being a good team player" (Ali).

"be poilit, respectful, honest, hard working" (Matthew).

"Been able to be a team player, setting over all goals, And the ability to work hard" (Jake).

### **Completion rates: Training**

**15 out of 18 completed the training programme in full** (4 female and 11 male participants). 3 were unable to complete the second week (1 was hospitalised owing to illness, 1 whose grandmother was admitted to hospital felt unable to continue, and 1 had childcare challenges and family illness to manage).

**Out of the 15 who completed the training component**, 10 had excellent attendance rates (over 90%); 3 had satisfactory rates (70% - 89%) and 3 had lower rates of attendance (50%-69%).

Punctuality was excellent for 10, satisfactory for 3, and poor for 2 (regularly late and occasionally needed to leave early for appointments).

### **Completion rates: Work-placement**

**13 out of 15 started work-placement** (2 participants, a male and a female, did interviews immediately after completing the training programme and were offered paid employment. They took up those positions and did not therefore complete the work-placement component. Both are still in those positions).

**9 out of 13 completed the programme in full** (2 female and 7 male participants). 4 experienced unforeseen problems: 1 completed two days of work-placement (had an accident at home), 1 completed one day (a family member died), 2 left mid-way through placement (1 has a chronic illness and 1 experienced an accommodation crisis).

With 4 out of 18 (22%) failing to complete the programme for reasons other than gaining employment (n=2) or documented illness (n=3) as noted above, these data highlight a number of challenges which these young people experience. These relate to life events and issues around distal and proximal family resilience which are discussed later in the report.

# Methodology

## Training programme

### 1 Work-readiness competencies

In November 2015, the Trinity College Dublin research team began a review of the international literature on the competencies that young adults needed for success in the workplace, and programmes for enhancing this 'work-readiness' in unemployed young adults in Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK) (Symonds & O'Sullivan, 2017). In this review, they identified 5 core work-readiness competencies (Table 1) of job-specific skills, basic skills, thinking skills, social skills, personal qualities and career motivation. They also discovered that major employability programmes tended not to give young adults explicit training in these competencies, despite the high levels of importance ascribed to them by employers and higher education staff. Rather, employability programmes focused on 'job-first' training that helped young adults quickly enter the workforce by practicing job-searching skills, CV writing and being interviewed. This presented a gap - clearly, a programme was needed that would go beyond the job-first remit and enter the territory of holistic skills building so that young adults could better manage their careers and flourish in whatever pathway they took, be this employment or education focused.

Table 1. Work-readiness competencies

Work-readiness competence	Description
Job-specific skills	Psychological and behavioural skills that enable an individual to do a specific job, e.g. using spreadsheets, computer programming, sales techniques.
Basic skills	Literacy, numeracy and information communication technology skills.
Thinking skills	Critical and creative thinking, metacognition.
Social skills	The ability to work well with others, e.g. interpersonal, communication and teamwork skills, leadership, conflict management, and responding appropriately to people's instructions and requests.
Personal qualities	Latent psychological qualities of the individual relating to work, including attitudes towards work and the workplace (e.g. valuing diversity), tendency for work engagement, and self-regulation when working.
Career motivation	Drive for developing own career pathway, including conscious management of career in response to environmental factors.

Using the framework in Table 1, the research team designed a programme to enhance young adults' soft skills, which are often overlooked by employability programmes as we found in our review. First, it was necessary to more narrowly define those competencies to design specific activities to enhance them. The research team further investigated each competency area in the occupational psychology evidence base, to identify strong traditions of research on specific skills that could be enhanced through training. This search alerted the

Trinity College team to the work of Associate Professor Jos Akkermans from VU Amsterdam (who was invited to join the research team). Akkermans had already designed and administered a successful training programme for enhancing psychological career competencies in high school students, based on his six-domain career competency framework (Akkermans et al., 2013).

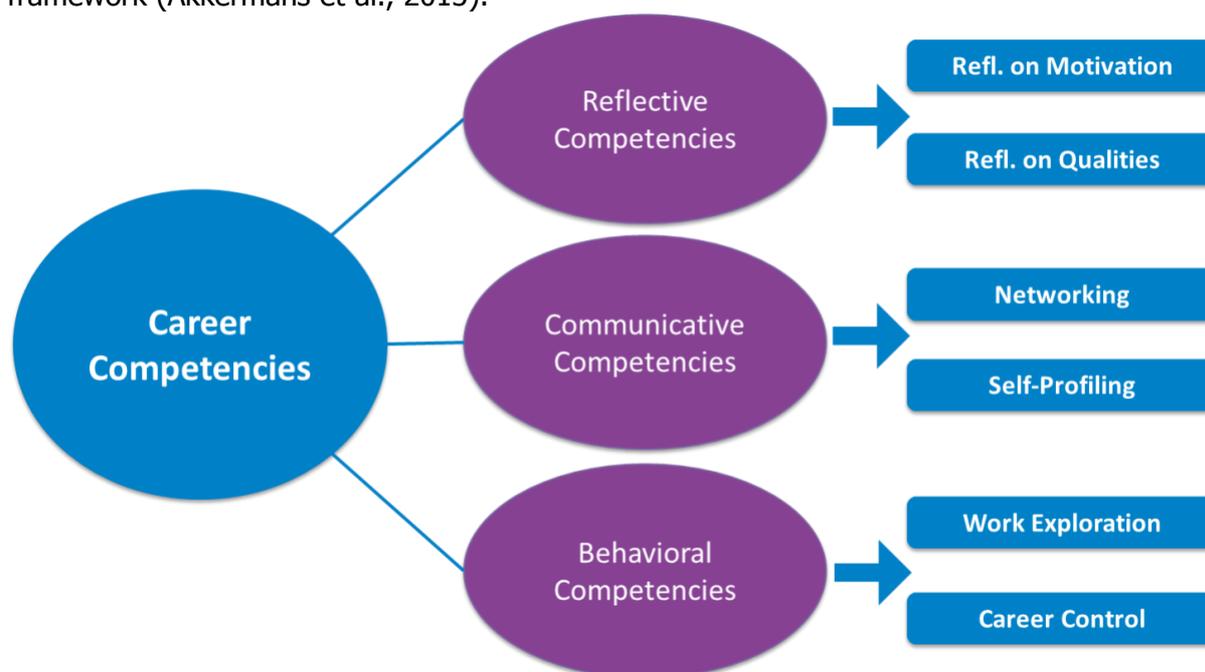


Figure 8. Contemporary career competencies (Akkermans et al., 2013)

Together, these efforts resulted in the narrowing of those broader work-readiness competencies to the following two sets which were operationalized in this study:

#### *Career competencies*

- Reflecting on one's values, personal strengths and interests, and capacity for motivation.
- Networking in order to progress one's career.
- Self-profiling to communicate one's knowledge, abilities and skills to prospective employers and education providers.
- Exploring employment, education and training opportunities.
- Controlling one's career by setting career goals and actively pursuing them.

#### *Workplace competencies*

- Having positive social attitudes of valuing diversity and being civil in the workplace.
- Interacting effectively with others through negotiation, conflict management and leadership.
- Using higher order thinking skills of thinking critically and creatively.
- Maintaining a professional work ethic by working in accordance with workplace norms, and developing professional identity and behaviours.
- Staying actively engaged in work through conscious management of thought and behaviour while being engaged in work tasks.

## 2 Training programme pedagogy

A second major finding of the work-readiness review was that the evaluations and descriptions of major employability programmes in Ireland and the UK contained no information on programme pedagogy. In other words, there was no evidence that the programmes used specific educational theories or strategies to help participants develop new skills. Rather, the programme reports described how the responsibility for participants' learning was often outsourced to additional job-specific and basic skills short courses, and to experiential learning on the work-placements. Possibly, the programme designers did not have a background nor interest in educational processes, thus overlooked the large body of evidence on how people learn effectively which could have been incorporated into the programmes to help the young people. In contrast, using this knowledge was a priority for us, as our research team was led by a specialist in creative pedagogies (O'Sullivan) and was also staffed by an educational psychologist (Symonds) and an occupational psychologist (Akkermans).

This led us to do further research on training programme pedagogy, with a focus on career skills programmes designed for young adults, adolescents, and vulnerable young people. We studied the methods of programmes from the United States, Finland and The Netherlands, to find a series of techniques that had been demonstrated to be effective by the programme evaluations. To these we added the approach of social pedagogy: a method popular in Continental Europe for helping children and young people build their personal capacities through authentic and meaningful relationships with teachers. This led to our adoption of the six specific pedagogies detailed in Table 2 below.

*Table 2.* Selected pedagogies

Pedagogy	Brief description
1. Active learning	Activities that stimulate learning through practical engagement (e.g. drama, debate, problem solving, vignettes, simulation games, quizzes, demonstrations) and that utilise more advanced cognitive skills that are in the higher levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy (e.g. prioritising, synthesising).
2. Social cognitive learning	The process of learning from feedback in the social environment, which includes making observations of the self and others, evaluating own performance and adjusting one's behaviour accordingly (Bandura, 2001).
3. Social pedagogy	Participants are seen as a 'whole person' and trainers seek to develop positive relationships with participants in order to support them personally, emotionally, and socially during the training (Hatton, 2013).
4. Developmental pedagogy	Activities are a good match with the learners' stage of biopsychosocial development, to ensure that they have developmental relevance and purpose which

<b>Pedagogy</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
	should enhance engagement in learning.
5. Reflection on competencies	Participants are encouraged to reflect on their competencies to help internalise central messages and experiences from each session.
6. Inoculation against setbacks	Participants prepare for and practice responding to challenges that would prevent their competency development and use. This is based on the stress-inoculation theories of Meichenbaum (2017).

### 3 Training programme structure

Each work-readiness competency was painstakingly researched to uncover mechanisms for altering it through training. A large number of intervention studies were reviewed, and their results summarised in the Career LEAP programme training manual (O’Sullivan, Symonds & Akkermans, 2017). Ten 3-hour sessions were designed to enhance the specific competencies overviewed in Table 2. Each session consisted of activities that as a group covered each of the programme pedagogies. The programme was ‘through designed’ meaning that the activities were sequential: building on each other within sessions and on activities done in prior sessions. Two manuals were developed: one for trainers which contained an introduction to the work-readiness competencies, programme pedagogies and details for how the activities in each session were proposed to work; and a workbook for participants. The sessions were as follows in Table 3 below:

*Table 3.* Training modules

<b>Career Competencies</b>		
<i>Module Title</i>		<i>Module Content</i>
1	Introduction	Career identity and career planning
2	Me, myself and I	Knowledge of personal skills and CV writing
3	Network the night away	Personal and career networks
4	Show them what you got	Self-presentation and interviewing
5	Making it happen	Career goals and career development opportunities
<b>Workplace Competencies</b>		
<i>Module Title</i>		<i>Module Content</i>
6	How do I feel about you?	Workplace civility and valuing diversity
7	Working together	Negotiation, conflict management and leadership
8	Super thought	Critical and creative thinking
9	Own it like a pro	Professionalism and self-regulation
10	Finding your groove	Workplace engagement

### 4 Training programme administration

The 2-week training was led by two members of the research team (O’Sullivan and Symonds), and supported by two community and youth workers in the role of assistant trainers. On any given day, one member of the research team led whilst the others provided discrete support during small group activities or writing tasks as required. The training began each day at 1.30pm with a sandwich lunch. Beginning the training with lunch was built into the programme design to support 5 needs:

- provide an opportunity for participants to socialise and interact with each other and with the trainers;
- ensure that all participants had food in their bodies to help sustain their concentration and focus during the subsequent training activities;
- allow the trainers to get to know the members of the group collectively and individually in an informal setting;
- provide participants with an opportunity to quietly 'check in' with the project manager about personal issues impacting their attendance, and about their career interests (i.e. in what industry they would like to undertake their work-placement, e.g. retail, construction, catering, administration, facilities, etc); and
- facilitate a timely start to the training at 2pm.

Each day was designed to cover the content of a module, which took between 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 3 hours to cover. A 10-15 minute break was provided mid-way through the afternoon. Based on evidence from the research in young adult development studies, the training was scheduled to take place in the afternoons rather than the mornings. This recognised the importance of adequate sleep for some young people and was planned to optimise participant attendance rates. Half day sessions were chosen to maximise concentration levels in recognition of the potential demands that some of the activities might place on participants. Acknowledging the discouraging experiences of some young people in the NEET category with timetabling and the structure of formal education and schooling, Career LEAP was designed to reflect shorter and more intensive bursts of activity. The venue was similarly chosen to reflect the world of business rather than a school or traditional educational or youth work setting. This was deemed important in providing participants with an opportunity to start afresh and engage fully with the training component without carrying any negative baggage from earlier experiences. Selecting an appropriate venue within the business world was also regarded as a mechanism to raise the status of the training programme in the eyes of the young adult participants.

A daily sign-in sheet was available immediately outside of the training room, and participants with unexcused absences were discretely told by the project manager that anyone with more than 3 absences would not be able to complete the programme. All participants were reminded of the importance of letting the project manager know if something unexpected came up for them.

A key design feature of the Career LEAP partnership programme was the involvement of prominent local business people during training. Each day during the second week, one or two members of the business community were invited to join the sessions. They initially shared their own career journeys to date, noting successes, and barriers and challenges along the way and how they overcame these. Then they worked alongside the young adults in small groups during the active training methods, listening, sharing, encouraging and discussing the tasks as group members. During plenary sessions, they were invited to share their insights and advice as relevant on the topic under exploration with the whole group, and to respond to queries and comments from participants. A coteaching approach (Murphy and Martin, 2015) was adopted in Career LEAP between the trainers and the visiting business people. It was designed to enrich the experience for participants, trainers and visiting business people, and involved a sharing of knowledge, practices and skills, sharing responsibility for participants' learning and concurrently learning from each other. Reflective of 21<sup>st</sup> century attributes such as flexibility, critical thinking and problem solving, imagination and curiosity, coteaching advances more equal roles in the training room, promoting a less hierarchical approach to work-readiness education.

## **5 Work-placement**

Following completion of the training component, participants undertook a 3 week unpaid work-placement in a local business in a docklands, north inner city or city centre location. Businesses who had agreed to partner with the programme released staff members to participate in a half day mentor training programme with the PI of the research team and lead trainer. This session took place on one of the mornings during the second week of the young adults' training programme, and provided an opportunity for the mentors to meet with the young adults over lunch. It was hoped that participants would be more confident and comfortable by the second week meeting with members of the local business community, with whom some of them would be working. It also allowed the mentors to meet with participants and break down any barriers or preconceived ideas about what these young people might be like in person.

The mentor training programme explored a number of relevant areas designed to equip business people with the background knowledge and skills to adequately support and work with the young adults. Employing an active and creative learning methodology, the programme included up to date theoretical knowledge and practical activities to explore areas such as the roles, responsibilities and relationships between a mentor and a mentee; the different ways in which people learn and acquire knowledge and skills; different forms of disadvantage (social, economic, educational and linguistic); and specific strategies to support young people who face significant barriers to entering the workplace. Mentors were awarded CPD credit from Trinity College Dublin for participating in the programme.

A further feature of the structured Career LEAP model was the opportunity for participants to visit their work-placement in advance of their official starting date. Accompanied by the project manager, participants were afforded the opportunity to work out their travel route, visit the workplace and meet with key personnel in an effort to reduce or remove any nervousness or anxiety that participants may have about their forthcoming placement. Recognising that logistical challenges such as ensuring participants know how to get to the workplace and know what they are required to wear, can become hurdles and stumbling blocks for some young adults, the programme built these supports into the design of the model. A limited financial assistance fund was provided to support the purchase of work clothes and travel passes.

Participants worked reduced hours during the first week, typically half days, increasing their hours in the second week to 5 or 6, and undertaking full working hours during the third and final week. This phased approach was designed to ease the transition for participants into a typical working routine. Those who felt able to undertake a full working day sooner and requested to do so, were accommodated. Participants maintained daily contact with their mentor. The Career LEAP project manager contacted them during the first few days of placement to check in, and thereafter at the end of each week, and if an issue arose.

## **6 Feasibility study**

To investigate whether the programme had any impact on participants, with a view to establishing its feasibility for successive iterations, the research team designed and carried out a feasibility study. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2009) framework for evaluating training programmes was used to inform the research design. There, we gathered data on the first three levels of the framework (Table 4):

Table 4. Feasibility study framework

Level	Title	Feasibility study focus
1	Evaluating reaction	What the young adults, mentors and stakeholders thought and felt about the training and work-placements.
2	Evaluating learning	What the young adults learned because of their participation, i.e. whether their work-readiness competencies improved.
3	Evaluating behaviour	How the young adults' behaviour altered because of their participation, represented by their education and employment milestones.

The fourth and final of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2009) levels is evaluating organisational change. There, the focus is on whether the training has impacted the organisation by changing participants' behaviours longer term. We did not include this level as the Career LEAP participants were unemployed young adults who were not necessarily part of an organisation following the programme. We used the following methods to evaluate the three levels:

Table 5. Feasibility study methods

Level	Title	Feasibility study focus
1	Evaluating reaction	a. <b>Open-ended survey of stakeholders</b> post-programme delivery. b. <b>Semi-structured interviews with trainers / mentors</b> post-training / work-placement. c. <b>Semi-structured interviews with young adults</b> post-training and post-work-placement.
2	Evaluating learning	<b>Repeated measures quantitative survey</b> of young adults' work-readiness competencies administered pre-training, post-training and post-work-placement.
3	Evaluating behaviour	<b>Education and employment data</b> gathered at the end of the quantitative survey and from youth services and employers.

### **Open-ended interview of stakeholders**

An open-ended interview of stakeholders was administered at the end of the Career LEAP programme (n=18). Stakeholders (i.e. participating businesses, community and youth services, BITCI) were invited by email to participate in a 20-30 minute face-to-face interview. Stakeholders were asked to state their name, the name of their organisation, the date, and their role in the Career LEAP programme. Their reactions to the programme were then assessed through the following three questions:

1. In your opinion, what were the strengths of the Career LEAP programme?
2. In what ways could Career LEAP have been organised better?

- If you were designing a programme like this for young adults, how would you do things differently, if at all?

### ***Semi-structured interviews with the project manager, assistant trainers and mentors***

We began the interviews with the project manager, assistant trainers (n=2) and mentors (n=9) by asking them to discuss any experience they had to draw on of training and mentoring young adults before taking part in Career LEAP. We also gathered data on their age, gender, ethnic group, highest level of education completed to date and current employment status. Those background characteristic questions were designed based on question formats freely available from the Irish National Central Statistics Office; aligning our study with national data.

We then assessed trainers' and mentors' reactions to the programme by asking questions covering six domains of programme quality identified in a review of evaluations by Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom (2010). Those domains and example questions from the semi-structured interview schedule are in Table 6 below:

*Table 6.* Domains of programme quality

	<b>Domains</b>	<b>Example questions</b>
1	Perceived relationships between the young adults, and between the young adults and the trainers / mentors.	<i>Turning to the young adults, what were their relationships like with other people in the training/work-placement?</i>
2	The programme environment operationalised as resources and demands such as workbooks, job tools and environmental safety.	<i>What were your impressions of the resources that the young adults had to work with during the training/work-placement?</i>
3	The engagement of the young adults and trainers / mentors, defined in terms of attention and participation.	<i>To what extent were the young adults actively engaged in the training/work-placement?</i>
4	How social/behavioural norms, such as cooperation and civility, were adhered to in the programme by the young adults and trainers / mentors.	<i>How well did the young adults cooperate, and behave responsibly during the training/work-placement?</i>
5	Skills building for young adults and trainers / mentors.	<i>To what extent do you think the training and the work-placement helped build the skills the young adults need for employment?</i>
6	Routines/structures inherent in the programme organisation.	<i>Can you please give me your opinion on how well the training/mentoring was organised?</i>

### ***Semi-structured interviews with the young adults***

We investigated the young adults' reactions to the programme using the Eccles Expectancy Value Theory (EEVT) of task motivation and engagement (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, Fredricks & Baay, 2015). There, value is defined as intrinsic value (enjoyment of the

training/ work-placement), utility value (the instrumental usefulness of the training/ work-placement for helping the person prepare for work), and attainment value (the value of the training/ work-placement for developing participant's individual skills useful for working or finding work). Cost refers to the perceived drawbacks of attending the training/work-placement.

To begin, the young adults were thanked for their time in being interviewed, and were reassured that their answers were anonymous and that they were in the process of helping others doing similar programmes in the future. The interviewers also advised them to take their time to answer each question and answer honestly. They were then asked a short series of questions on task value (Table 7), referring in the first interview to the training component and in the second interview to the work-placement.

*Table 7.* Adapted from Eccles Expectancy Value Theory (EEVT)

	<b>Domains</b>	<b>Example questions</b>
1	Intrinsic value	<i>What things did you most enjoy about the training?</i>
2	Utility value	<i>How useful was the training for helping you with your career planning?</i>
3	Attainment value	<i>How important was the training to you? Why do you say that?</i>
4	Cost	<i>Were there any setbacks of attending the training? If so, can you please describe some of these?</i>

Interview data were audio recorded, transcribed, manually coded and analysed using qualitative thematic, content and discourse analyses (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Two members of the research team established a coding rubric by iteratively coding a set of participant responses. Then each researcher used the rubric to independently code a subset of responses. To establish coding reliability the responses were compared and achieved a consensus estimate of over 90%. One researcher used the rubric to code the remaining interviews. Individual profiles were developed using excel to track and record each participant's data through recruitment, pre-training, post-training, post-placement and follow up stages. Emerging themes drawn from the domains of programme quality and Eccles Expectancy Value Theory are reported in the qualitative results section. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines in Trinity College Dublin for working with vulnerable youth, and received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee in the School of Education, Trinity College.

### ***Quantitative survey of young adults' work-readiness competencies***

The second level of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2009) framework is change in learning occurring because of the training. Unlike many other employability programmes (Symonds & O'Sullivan, 2017) Career LEAP targeted a specific set of work-readiness competencies prioritised by employers and important for unemployed young adults, with a focus on transferrable soft skills in the training and work-placements, and additional job-specific skills

in the work-placements. Our measure of whether the programme had affected the young adults' work-readiness was similarly targeted, so that we could identify change occurring in the domains that the programme was designed to enhance.

This required us to develop a novel measure of work-readiness, based on freely available measures published in the academic, peer reviewed literature. It was not possible for us to evaluate this measure statistically as we only administered it to 18 participants in the first instance, with 11 giving data across all 3 waves. However, our results demonstrated that there was very little variance around the mean values for each domain (standard deviations were small) at each time point. Also, there were observably different patterns in the growth of each domain (change in mean values) across time. In other words, most domains developed in unique manners to each other across the programme, and the development of those domains was relatively consistent across the participants, signalling that the measure was reasonably valid.

We assessed six domains of work-readiness, matching with the targets of the training programme. Table 8 below gives details on those domains and the original measures we adapted questions from. The item wording from those measures was altered in some cases to suit the young adults' culture and potential literacy level, and the scoring was revised to a consistent 5-point scale so that the items had the same anchors and measurement level. This only impacted some items, as most original measures used a 5-point scale.

*Table 8.* Development of the work-readiness questionnaire

Measure	Subscale(s) used	Items used	Example item	Authors
The Career Competencies Questionnaire	Reflection on motivation Reflection on qualities Self-profiling Work exploration Career control	21	I can clearly see what my work interests are	Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers & Blonk, 2013
The Career Ambition Scale	-	4	I have set high goals for my career	Dijkers, van Marloes & Vinkenburg, 2010
Work-readiness Scale	Motivation for work	4	I am actively job searching	Rose, Perks, Fidan & Hurst, 2010
Workplace Incivility Scale	-	4	It is okay to sometimes ignore or exclude people at work	Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001
The Workplace Diversity Survey	Emotional reactions	2	I feel positively about working with people who are different to me	De Meuse & Hostager, 2001
The Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH)	Compromising	4	If I were to disagree with someone at work, I would try to	De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer & Nauta, 2001

Measure	Subscale(s) used	Items used	Example item	Authors
			find a solution that suited both people	
The Leadership Skill Inventory	Leadership	6	I can lead a discussion	Townsend & Carter, 1983
The Attitudes Toward Thinking and Learning Survey (ATTLS)	Separate knowing	4	When I am thinking about something, I consider all of the evidence	Galotti, McVicker Clinchy, Ainsworth, Lavin & Mansfield, 1999
Pharmacy Professionalism Instrument	Respect Excellence Duty Accountability Honour & integrity	4	When working I follow through with my responsibilities	Chishold, Cobb, Duke, McDuffie & Kennedy, 2006
Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)	Vigour Dedication Absorption	9	I can become immersed in my work	Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003

### ***Feasibility study timeline***

The feasibility study was carried out across the Career LEAP programme, starting with assessing the young adults' work-readiness qualities at baseline (before training) and ending with a final assessment of work-readiness and interviews with young adults, trainers and mentors. A useful part of the design was that we assessed work-readiness before and after the training and after work-placement, enabling us to later compare any changes in work-readiness that occurred in relation to the training, versus the work-placement. A simplified timeline is below (Table 9).

*Table 9.* Feasibility study timeline

Career LEAP	Month		
	June	July	August
Training	✓	-	-
Work-placement	-	✓	✓
<b>Feasibility study</b>			
Work-readiness questionnaire	✓	✓	✓
Young adult interviews	-	✓	✓
Trainer interviews	-	✓	-
Mentor interviews	-	-	✓
Stakeholder interviews	-	-	✓

# Work-readiness survey results

## Participants and attrition

The survey was administered pre-training (Wave 1: W1), post-training (Wave 2: W2) and post-work-placement (Wave 3: W3). 18 young adult participants filled in the pre-training survey. 3 then dropped out of the research due to individual circumstances including relative illness, personal hospitalisation and complications with child care. 15 participants completed the post-training survey, then another 4 dropped out again due to individual circumstances including not completing the work-placement. 11 participants completed the post-training survey, and we had data on those participants from every wave. The results reported here are based on those 11 participants (9 plus the 2 who secured jobs immediately after completing the training).

The group of participants were recruited with a view to including every participant who met the inclusion criteria for the programme (e.g. unemployed, lived in the north east inner city) up to the number of participants that the programme could accommodate. Given that this group was not selected to represent a larger population (i.e. they were not intended to be a sample of a larger group) we refer to them as 'the group' or as 'the young adults' rather than as the 'sample'. Accordingly, the results of the work-readiness survey are ideographic (representing our group alone) rather than nomothetic (representative of what might occur in a larger population).

## Analysis plan

Because the survey results were ideographic, we did not examine the development of work-readiness with inferential statistics, as these are designed to test how well the results for a sample can be reliably generalised to a larger population. An example of inferential statistics is the Students' t-test of mean differences, which generates a standardised estimate of the size of the difference between means (the t statistic) and the reliability of this estimate across multiple potential samples (the significance test of probability:  $p$ ). Using a statistic like a t-test assumes that we are checking to see how well the findings in our sample can be generalised to a larger population which the sample represents.

However, doing this with a non-representative sample, like the one we have here, is what Gorard (2014 p. 400) calls a "misplaced emphasis on random errors". Certainly, researchers do not need to use inferential statistics to analyse numerical data. There are more fitting ways to assess whether change has occurred for non-representative samples. The most important thing to know about the data is whether any change in scores across time is a valid representation of what is actually occurring within and across the participants in the group. Secondly, it is useful to produce some type of standardised estimate so that readers can easily compare amounts of change between times and persons.

Accordingly, we used appropriate non-parametric calculations to indicate these features of the data. Table 10 lists our questions for the quantitative analysis and summarises how we answered them.

Table 10. Analysis questions and calculations

Research question	Analysis methods
1 How valid were the work-readiness measurements?	<p>a. Calculation of mean scores (M) for each work-readiness domain, for individual participants, by averaging their responses to all the items within each domain (e.g. leadership skills).</p> <p>b. Calculation of each participant's standard deviations (SD) for each domain, which is the spread of scores for each item around the mean value. This tells us how 'tightly' participants' responses fitted into each domain.</p> <p>c. Assessment of the percentage of participants that had a SD within each domain that was larger than 1 unit of measurement on the items' scales (e.g. moving from 1 = <i>completely disagree</i> to 2 = <i>disagree a little</i>), and 1.5 units. This yielded 2 levels of validity (good fit, reasonable fit). SDMs larger than 1.5 were considered to represent a poor fit of items within domains.</p> <p>d. Item analysis of any domains with under 60% reasonable fit.</p> <p>e. Calculation of the mean SD within each domain across participants (SDM). SDMs larger than 1.5 were considered to represent a poor fit of items within domains.</p>
2 How much did work-readiness change across the training and work-placement periods for each participant?	<p>a. Comparison of each participant's domain scores, and overall career and workplace competencies scores, across the two time periods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-training to post-training (W1 – W2)</li> <li>• Post-training to post-work-placement (W2 – W3)</li> </ul> <p>b. Pattern analysis of which participants changed the most and the least overall for career and workplace competencies.</p>
3 How much did work-readiness change across the training and work-placement periods for the group?	<p>a. Comparison of the average domain scores within the group across the two time periods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-training to post-training (W1 – W2)</li> <li>• Post-training to post-work-placement (W2 – W3)</li> </ul> <p>b. Calculation of Hodges g effect size to provide a standardised version of the change within each domain.</p>
4 How reliable was this change?	<p>a. Calculation of the Number Needed to Disturb (NNTD) (Gorard &amp; Gorard, 2016) which generates the number of participants that would have to be randomly added to the group to make the effect disappear. The NNTD is based on the effect size and on the mean differences and is a measure of the reliability of the mean difference.</p>

## Results

### 1 How valid were the work-readiness measurements?

Table 11. Measurement validity

Domain	N items	Pre-training		Post-training		Post-placement	
		SDM	% < 1.499	SDM	% < 1.499	SDM	% < 1.499
motive	4	0.7	100	0.4	100	0.3	100
quality	3	0.7	73	0.5	91	0.2	100
network	4	1.2	64	1.0	64	0.8	64
profile	3	0.8	73	0.4	100	0.4	91
explore	3	1.0	73	0.6	100	0.4	100
control	4	0.8	73	0.3	91	0.4	100
ambition	3	0.5	91	0.2	100	0.2	100
search	5	0.7	91	0.8	64	0.6	91
civility	4	0.8	73	0.6	91	0.8	55
diversity	4	0.8	91	0.3	91	0.4	100
conflict	3	0.9	82	0.3	100	0.5	100
leadership	3	0.6	91	0.4	100	0.4	100
CCT	4	0.6	91	0.2	100	0.4	100
prof	5	0.9	55	0.4	91	0.2	100
engage	9	0.6	100	0.4	100	0.6	82

The validity analysis revealed that all domains had reasonable validity. The average variation of participants' scores within each domain was under 1.5 points on the measured scale of 1 – 5, as indicated by the SDM.

Participants' scores within each domain grew more consistent across time, as demonstrated by the increasing percentage of participants whose item responses varied on average by less than 1.5 points within that domain.

The domains that were least valid were professionalism at W1 and civility at W3. Item analysis revealed that of the 5 professionalism items, one item was creating this variation at W1. Participants' scores on the item *when working it is wrong to cheat to achieve higher rewards (for example, grades or money)* were polarised, with scores being either 1 (disagreeing) or 5 (agreeing). Further analysis of this item found that 3 of the 4 participants who agreed with that item changed to disagreement after the training. The W3 civility item analysis found that of the 4 items, 2 were consistent but 2 were varied (*At work, it is okay to not pay attention to other people's statements or opinions, It is okay to sometimes ignore or exclude people at work*), with participants who had previously disagreed with these statements developing less certain views after the work-placement.

## 2 How much did work-readiness change across the training and work-placement periods for each participant?

Table 12. Average change for each participant

	Training				Placement			
	Career		Work		Career		Work	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Alex	0.52	0.85	0.13	0.56	-0.60	0.59	0.21	0.39
Roisin	0.64	0.52	0.39	0.36	0.19	0.27	0.07	0.27
Sia	0.41	0.65	0.55	0.85	0.09	0.30	0.22	0.26
Jaydan	0.18	0.80	0.30	0.38	-0.36	1.01	-0.19	0.41
Ben	0.29	0.46	0.21	0.56	-0.30	0.49	0.14	0.24
James	0.32	0.44	0.31	0.48	0.37	0.42	0.17	0.37
Ali	0.08	0.49	-0.10	0.14	0.05	0.26	0.12	0.21
Jake	0.29	0.28	-0.16	0.34	-0.03	0.33	0.21	0.42
David	0.22	0.71	-0.05	0.27	-0.26	0.78	0.02	0.48
Sarah	0.46	0.54	-0.01	0.24	-0.02	0.34	-0.14	0.40
Alisha	0.53	0.44	0.60	0.61	0.02	0.18	0.08	0.35

To identify change for individuals, we first calculated the mean and standard deviation for each domain at each wave. Those tables, which incidentally provide readers with all the necessary data for replication of these results and secondary analysis, are available from the research team. In Table 12 we report the global change within the career and work-place competencies, occurring across the training period (between W1 and W2) and the work-placement period (between W2 and W3).

The change within these broader domains across both the training or work-placement periods was relatively small for each participant. No participant changed more than .6 of the 5-point scale on average. However, across the group some of these changes presented as large effects as we discuss in a later section.

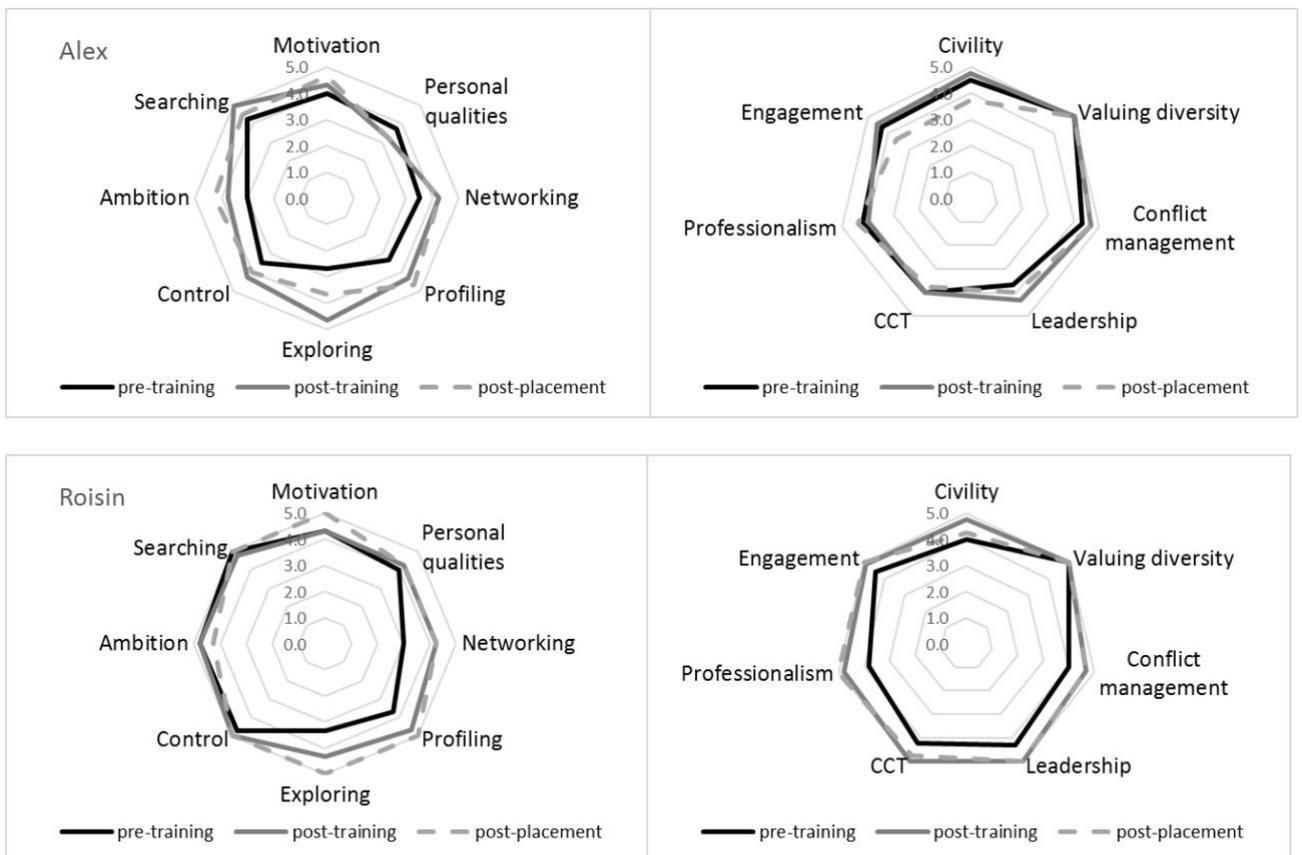
Table 13. Individual profiles of change

Training Career	M	Work	M	Placement		Work	M
				Career	M		
<b>Roisin</b>	0.64	<b>Alisha</b>	0.60	James	0.37	<b>Sia</b>	0.22
<b>Alisha</b>	0.53	<b>Sia</b>	0.55	<b>Roisin</b>	0.19	<b>Alex</b>	0.21
<b>Alex</b>	0.52	<b>Roisin</b>	0.39	<b>Sia</b>	0.09	Jake	0.21
Sarah	0.46	James	0.31	Ali	0.05	James	0.17
Sia	0.41	Jaydan	0.30	Alisha	0.02	Ben	0.14
James	0.32	Ben	0.21	Sarah	-0.02	Ali	0.12
Ben	0.29	Alex	0.13	Jake	-0.03	Alisha	0.08
Jake	0.29	Sarah	-0.01	David	-0.26	Roisin	0.07
<b>David</b>	0.22	<b>David</b>	-0.05	Ben	-0.30	<b>David</b>	0.02
<b>Jaydan</b>	0.18	<b>Ali</b>	-0.10	<b>Jaydan</b>	-0.36	Sarah	-0.14
<b>Ali</b>	0.08	Jake	-0.16	Alex	-0.60	<b>Jaydan</b>	-0.19

We then used these overall changes for each participant, to identify whether there were any patterns of response to the training and work-placement (Table 13). In that table, we have emboldened participants' names who reported the most positive change in response to the training and work-placements (banded by the top 3 participants listed) and the most stable or least positive change (banded by the bottom 3 participants listed).

The pattern analysis revealed that Roisin, Alisha and Sia (all female), and Alex, were most responsive to the programme. In contrast, Jaydan, David and Ali (all male) had the most negative change or were least responsive. These results are depicted visually for those participants' full set of career and workplace competencies, in the following spider diagrams. The patterns of change are unique to each participant. For example, Roisin reported increases across the board in her career and workplace competencies. Alisha reported gains in career competence, but only increases in leadership and professionalism within the 5 workplace domains. Alex and Sia reported quite stable workplace competencies, but had large increases in career competencies following the training. In contrast, Ali scored highly on all career and workplace domains and showed little change in these across time. Both Jaydan and David only altered in a few competencies, hence their stability compared to the rest of the group.

### Most responsive participants



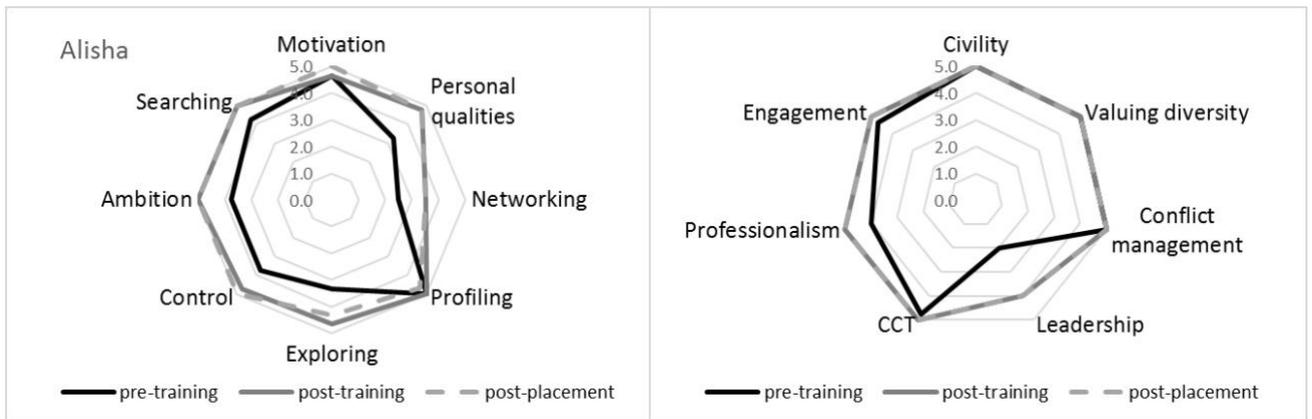
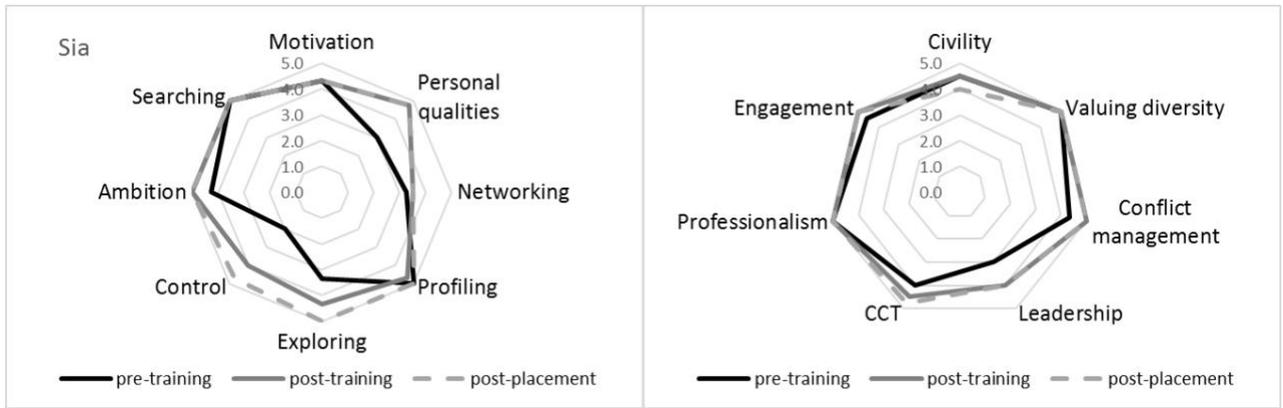
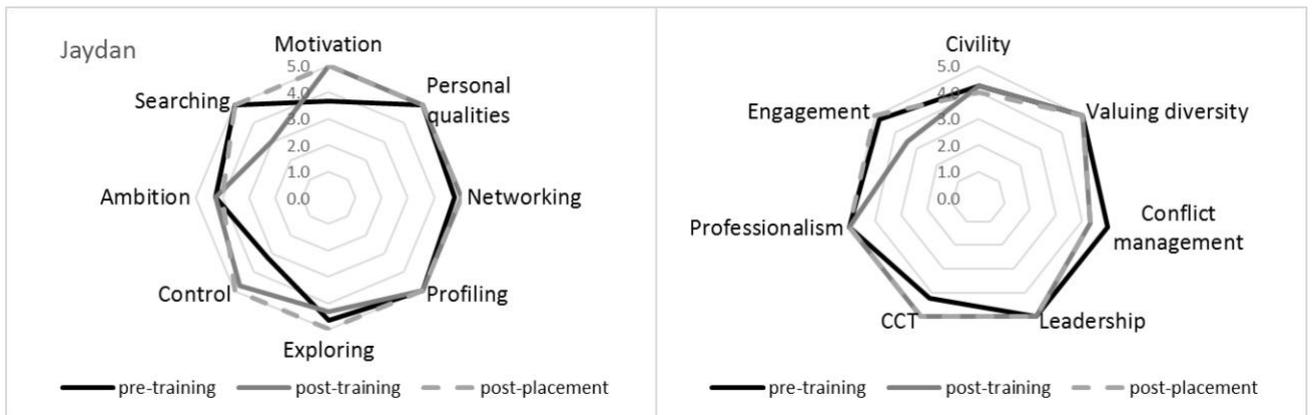


Figure 9-12. Most responsive participants

**Least responsive / most negative change participants**



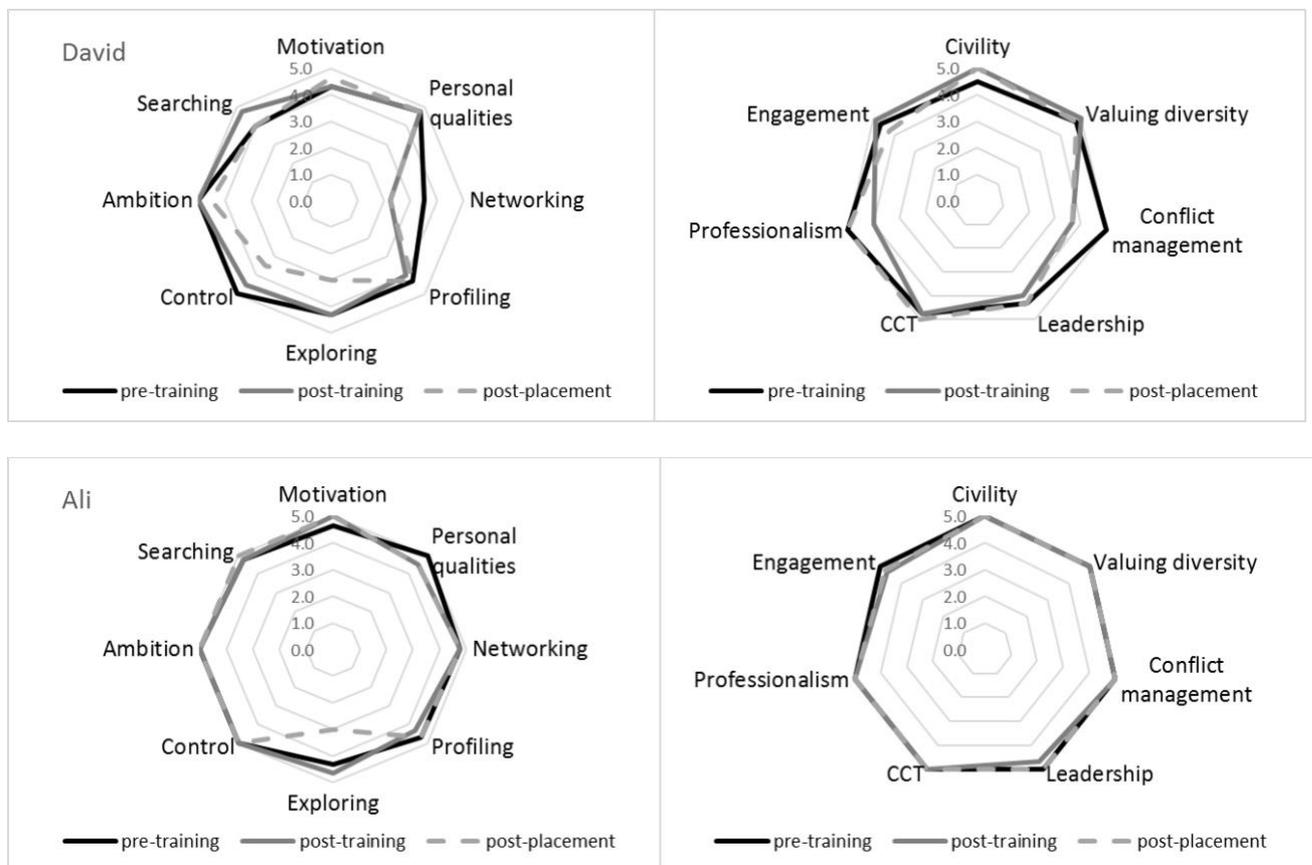


Figure 13-15. Least responsive participants

### 3 How much did work-readiness change across the training and work-placement periods for the group?

The following two figures demonstrate the extent to which the career and workplace competencies changed for the group within each domain, across the training and placement periods. In those figures, change is represented by the effect size Hodges *g*. The tables following the figures give details on the mean values, standard deviations, effect sizes and the sensitivity statistic (NNTD) which we will report on in the final section.

The results for the group were that career competencies changed far more than workplace competencies, with average effects rising from .3 (a small effect) up to 1.7 (a large effect). In contrast, the workplace competency effects were all below .8 and hovered around the .3 effect size.

Both career and workplace competencies altered more following the training than the work-placement. There are many possibilities for why this might have been the case. One such possibility is that the participants 'maximised' their change during the training, leaving little room for the work-placement to add competency growth. Another is that the work-placements were less impactful than the training, on the specific competencies studied here. This may have something to do with the training being specifically designed to impact the measured competencies. It is possible that there were many competencies developed during the work-placements that were unmeasured.

The career competencies of exploration, control and ambition, and the workplace competencies of civility and valuing diversity, all declined after the work-placement. We

might expect a decline in exploration, as several participants found work by the third wave of measurement, or had continued in their placements. The declines in control and ambition were minute. However, the declines in civility and valuing diversity after the work-placement were more notable. As discussed earlier in our validity analysis, participants became less certain whether it was wrong to ignore, exclude and not pay attention to other people at work, after the work-placement. In comparison in real terms, the shift for valuing diversity was small, with 2 of the 11 participants shifting from completely agree, to agree a little, that they felt positively about working with people who were different to them.

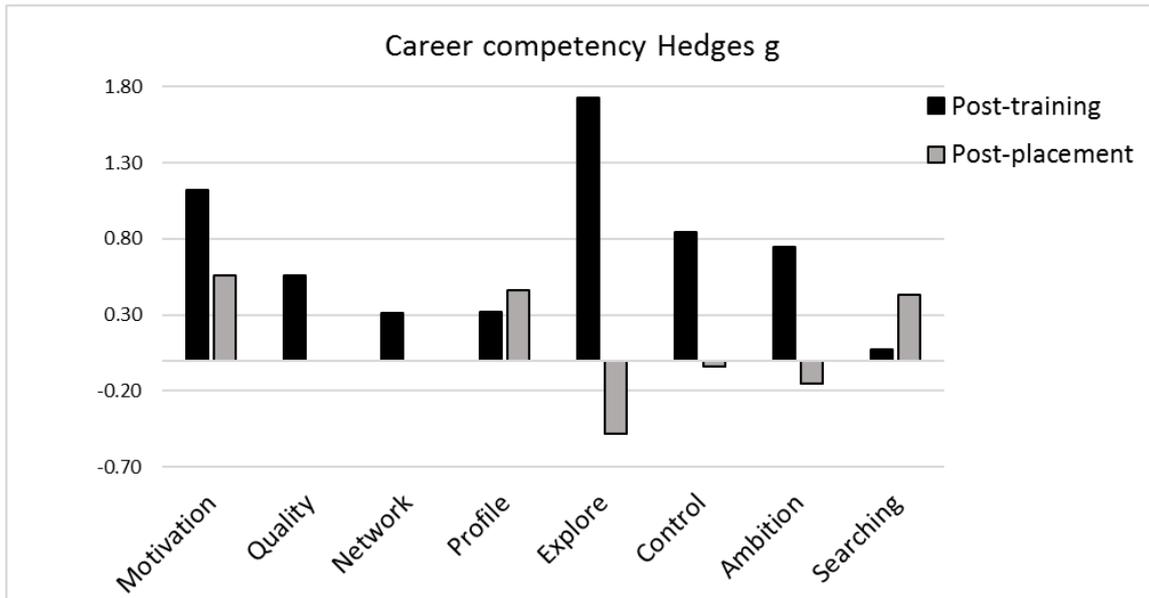


Figure 16. Career competency Hedges' g

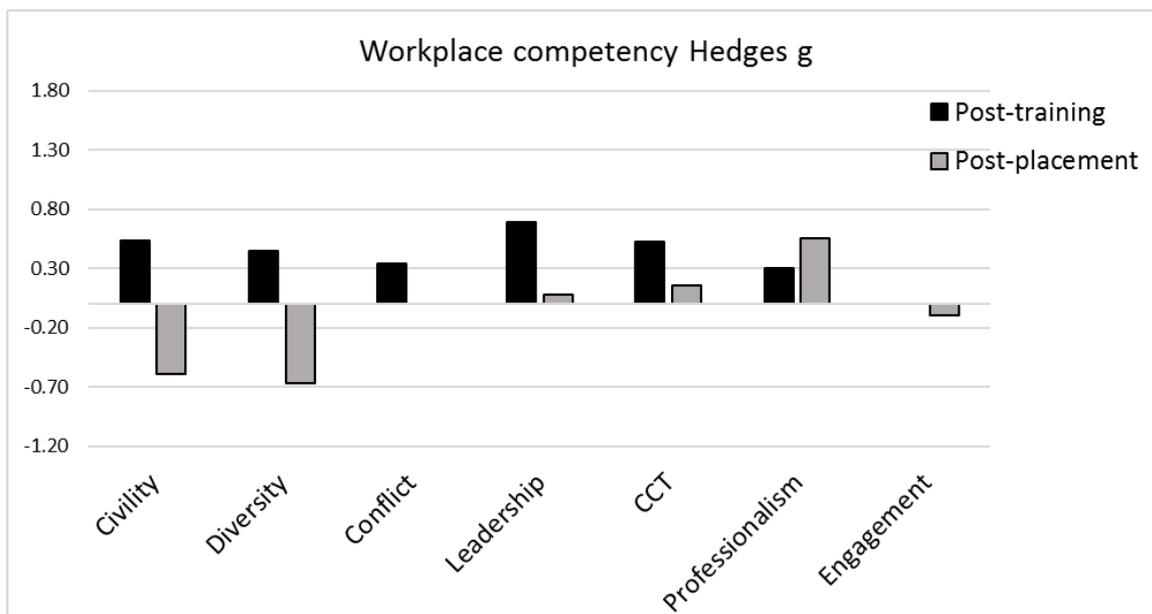


Figure 17. Workplace competency Hedges' g

Table 14. Group change in career competencies

		Motivation	Quality	Network	Profile	Explore	Control	Ambition	Searching
Pre-training	M	4.33	4.25	3.75	4.39	3.76	4.00	4.23	4.52
	SD	0.33	0.75	0.80	0.59	0.68	1.01	0.66	0.55
Post-training	M	4.67	4.59	4.02	4.55	4.61	4.61	4.64	4.57
	SD	0.30	0.50	1.02	0.37	0.25	0.38	0.48	0.78
	Mdiff	0.34	0.34	0.27	0.15	0.85	0.61	0.41	0.05
	g	1.12	0.56	0.31	0.32	1.73	0.84	0.75	0.07
	NNTD	12.35	6.16	3.43	3.53	18.99	9.27	8.21	0.77
Post-placement	M	4.82	4.59	4.02	4.70	4.33	4.59	4.57	4.82
	SD	0.27	0.50	1.02	0.31	0.80	0.67	0.43	0.34
	Mdiff	0.15	0.00	0.00	0.15	-0.27	-0.02	-0.07	0.25
	g	0.56	0.00	0.00	0.46	-0.48	-0.04	-0.16	0.43
	NNTD	6.11	0.00	0.00	5.06	-5.29	-0.48	-1.72	4.78

Table 15. Group change in workplace competencies

		Civility	Diversity	Conflict	Leadership	CCT	Professionalism	Engagement
Pre-training	M	4.57	4.98	4.52	3.88	4.34	4.60	4.62
	SD	0.34	0.08	0.50	1.02	0.67	0.49	0.19
Post-training	M	4.73	5.00	4.67	4.39	4.64	4.73	4.62
	SD	0.28	0.00	0.42	0.42	0.49	0.38	0.43
	Mdiff	0.16	0.02	0.15	0.52	0.30	0.13	0.00
	g	0.54	0.45	0.34	0.69	0.53	0.30	0.00
	NNTD	5.89	4.91	3.77	7.60	5.78	3.34	0.00
Post-placement	M	4.50	4.95	4.67	4.42	4.70	4.89	4.57
	SD	0.50	0.10	0.42	0.42	0.38	0.21	0.57
	Mdiff	-0.23	-0.05	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.16	-0.04
	g	-0.59	-0.67	0.00	0.08	0.16	0.56	-0.09
	NNTD	6.45	7.34	0.00	0.83	1.78	6.14	1.01

#### 4 How reliable was this change?

For all of the findings where there was an average change of above a small effect size (> .3), the number of counterfactual cases needed to be added to the group to make this effect size disappear was between 3 and 7. Another way of viewing this, given that the group had 11 participants, was that if the group were 30 – 70% larger, this could have impacted the results. However, it is the case that the measurements were reasonably valid for each participant and for the group, as we demonstrated through our validity analysis. It is also visible that the changes for all the participants tended to point in the same direction – towards a notable increase in career competencies and a small increase in workplace competencies, with most change occurring after the training. Therefore these findings are a good representation of what happened for this group of participants, but are not meant to be generalised to other cohorts.

## **In Summary**

### **Career competencies, ambition and searching for work**

Of the participants with complete data (3 waves), there was a consistent trend of improvement in career competencies (motives, qualities, networking, profiling and control) and in addition career ambition. Only career exploration was stable across time. There was some evidence for growth in career competencies being more pronounced after the training, in comparison to after the work-placement where levels remained fairly stable across time. Searching for work decreased across time, potentially as participants were supported in gaining work experience across the programme, and felt less need to actively look for work.

### **Workplace competencies**

Regarding workplace competencies, participants' attitudes towards diversity were stable across time. Although they felt more vigorous, ready to become absorbed in work, and able to manage workplace conflict after training, they were less confident in these areas following the work placement and in addition felt less dedicated towards working. This evidences a decrease in the three domains of workplace engagement (dedication, absorption and vigour) after the work placement. Participants' confidence to lead others, professional attitudes towards work, and reports of thinking critically and creatively increased after training, and held stable after the work placement.

Like the career competencies, the workplace competencies seem to have increased more after the training. The stability and in some cases declines of workplace competencies after the work placement points towards the qualitative data for possible explanation in the following section. It is possible that participants' workplace ideals and interest were strongly encouraged by the training, but then after experiencing daily life in the workplace they moved towards more realistic thinking, as their scores on workplace competencies were already high before training.

## Education and employment status twenty months after the programme ended

Follow-up data were gathered at 6, 12, 15 and 20 monthly intervals after the programme ended by the Career LEAP Project Manager and youth employment worker who maintained contact with participants. This included those who had completed the full programme, those who had not completed work-placement, and those who had not completed the training component.

### *Completed the full programme (n=11)*

Of those who completed the programme (and for whom we had full waves of data):

- 5 are in full time education** (4 of whom are also working part time whilst studying: 3 in the same company they undertook placement with),
- 1 is undertaking an apprenticeship**
- 5 are working full time**

Of those in full time education, 2 started level 7 degrees, 3 are doing Level 5 and 6 FETAC programmes and expressed an interest in continuing to level 7 in the future.

Of those working full time, 4 are still with the same companies: 1 has been promoted to a supervisor in a telecommunications company, 1 is working in the catering industry, 1 in retail who was promoted to floor supervisor after a year and then moved to be a supervisor in a new retail company, 1 in construction, and 1 in a bank.

The two participants who secured employment immediately after training attributed their success to the training component:

"Jaydan completed the two weeks training which gave him the confidence to get back in touch with a recruiter he had previous contact with. From this he was offered an interview and got the job. Jaydan attributes his succeeding in getting the job to the confidence and skills he gained during the training, in particular the networking elements". (Project Manager)

"Alisha completed the full two weeks training, during which time she undertook her first ever interview, which she received coaching from a participating business mentor. She was shocked and surprised that she got the job and started after the training. Alisha has kept in contact and is doing well in employment. She attributes her job success to the training and support she received from Career LEAP. She hopes to continue her studies to become a nurse in the future." (Project Manager)

### *Did not complete work-placement (n=4)*

Of those who did not complete placement but completed the training component:

- 2 are working full time** (1 as a chef in a catering company, and 1 in the waste and recycling industry having completed a Safe Pass course after the training – both want to do Career LEAP again)

**1 is working part time and doing a training course** (working in a bakery, and indicated that “he loves it” and wants to do Career LEAP again to rebuild confidence and skills)

**1 is volunteering in a charity shop** and is eager to apply again to complete Career LEAP (has a chronic medical condition that impacts on ability to work)

*Did not complete training (n=3)*

Of those who did not complete the training component:

**1 is attending Youthreach** and asked to come back to finish Career LEAP (attended over 70% but child care issues proved an insurmountable hurdle)

**No contact with 2** (changed contact details and have moved).

### **Accommodation issues**

6 were homeless when they started the programme

**2 remain homeless:** 1 is working full time, and 1 is in education; both are continuing to engage with the Career LEAP Youth Employment Worker.

Another participant attributed her ability to secure rented accommodation to getting a job:

“Sia completed the full programme and was offered fulltime work as a Treasury Support Admin at Bank of Ireland. She has also been able to find rented accommodation due to having a reference from an employer. Sia expressed her gratitude at how much the programme has helped her and finding her her ‘dream job’. She spent four years looking for work prior to the programme attending various trainings and not having any luck” (Project Manager).

# Results from interview data

## 1 Overview of participants' interview data

This section presents interview data provided by the young adult participants across three data collection points during the study. As some of the pre-training data has been presented in the demographic section already, attention is primarily paid to what the young adults had to say post-training and post-placement. Providing space to their voices, opinions and experiences as self-reported through repeated qualitative interviews is prioritised here. In the following sections, we illustrate participants' perceived changes using participant quotations to act as a lens through which to explore their experience and participation in the Career LEAP programme. Immediately below, we return to Eccles Expectancy Value Theory (E EVT) of task motivation and engagement (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, Fredricks & Baay, 2015) to consider the overall impact of the programme on this group of young adults.

### ***Eccles Expectancy Value Theory***

Using Expectancy Value Theory within a qualitative educational framework, we investigated the young adults' reactions to the programme. According to this theory, learners' achievements and choices are influenced by their expectations of whether they are likely to succeed in a task, and how useful, important or enjoyable they perceive that task to be (Cooper et al., 2017). These two factors in turn can determine their consequent levels of engagement, continuing interest and achievement outcomes. If a person believes they can succeed, and expects to do well in something, it tends to impact positively on their actual performance (Domenech-Betoret, 2017). According to Eccles et al. (1983) the value learners place on a task impacts their motivation, interest and persistence in completing it. However, other factors such as environmental and demographic characteristics, parent and family beliefs, previous experiences, negative stereotypes, and how you perceive others' behaviours and beliefs can indirectly affect achievement outcomes (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002; Lykkegaard and Ulriksen, 2016).

We found that participants were highly motivated at the start of the programme. Applying Eccles' concept of subjective task values (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000), this group of young adults were confident in responding to the question of 'Do I want to do this programme, and why?'. The large majority (16 out of 18 / 89%) expected to complete the programme and were looking forward to undertaking a structured work-placement. Belief that the programme would be manageable for them was quickly established over the course of the first two days (Assistant trainer, research journal). At the end of the training component, most participants (13 out of 15 / 87%) similarly expressed high expectations about their work-placement and a belief that they were appropriately prepared to succeed. We found that this group of Career LEAP participants found value in the programme. They showed positive changes in the components of expectancy value theory and reported high levels of engagement in the programme post-placement (see Table 16). We found little negative consequence in terms of the 'cost' of their participation in Career LEAP. No unfavourable psychosocial consequences such as fear or anxiety were reported as a result of participation. Similarly, there were no reports of adverse effects on their time, financial demands or missed opportunities while undertaking the programme.

Table 16. Response to Eccles Expectancy Value Theory (EEVT)

Domains		Evidence
1	Intrinsic value <i>Interest in and enjoyment of the training and work-placement components of the programme</i>	We found evidence of high intrinsic value – the programme was rated highly by all participants, including those who did not complete all elements. Of those who didn't complete, all except 2 with whom contact was lost, expressed a desire to re-do the programme at the next available opportunity, and regret that external circumstances impeded their ability to complete it on this occasion. While a large majority of participants were eager to undertake the programme in the singular hope of finding a job, they reported that they did not <i>expect</i> to be interested or to enjoy the training component. Similarly, a large minority perceived previous work-placements to be unstructured and unfulfilling, leading to no further opportunities. 100% reported being interested in the content and in particular, enjoying the pedagogy and structure.
2	Utility value <i>Usefulness and relevance of the training and work-placement experience in helping with career planning</i>	Participants self-reported a strong correlation between the knowledge, skills and experiences encountered on the programme, and their current and future short and longer-term career goals. Their ability to recall, name and identify specific elements of the modules and indicate how various skills and attributes were useful to them during work-placement, was interpreted as evidence of a high utility value in the Career LEAP programme.
3	Attainment value <i>Importance of the training and work-placement for personal and professional identity and sense of self</i>	We found salient changes in aspects of the participants' personal and professional attributes, and how they perceived themselves at programme end. These were demonstrated through changes in language use, increased confidence and self-efficacy, ability to network and engage with colleagues and peers, enhanced understanding of social relations, improved awareness of diversity, and an articulated vision of their future selves in relation to careers and quality of life.
4	Cost <i>Too many demands on time, overly challenging, loss of other opportunities, stressful</i>	We found no reported negative consequences associated with participating in Career LEAP. However, for those who did not finish the full programme, external factors impeded their progress and ability to complete. These included child care, family care, and health problems, including minor addiction issues for 3 participants which was not identified at recruitment stage. The evidence would appear to support that these factors were not as a consequence of participation in the programme.

All four domains were positively valued by participants, and somewhat unexpectedly, they were valued equally. However, while the evidence suggests that the value of the overall programme resides across the reciprocal relationship between these different dimensions, there was a marginally higher value attributed to the domain of attainment value. Here participants' sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem and their belief in the opening up of future career pathways at programme end was slightly more strongly perceived than for the other domains.

The area of parental and familial support was mentioned earlier in this report, and is discussed in the review of literature underpinning this study (Symonds & O’Sullivan, 2017). Parental expectancies are a key feature of Eccles Expectancy Value Theory (Partridge et al., 2013) and it is expected that parents place greater value in one domain over the others in accordance with their own belief systems and personal experiences. Consequently, parents or close family members provide different levels of encouragement and opportunity based on what they believe their child’s aptitudes to be. These beliefs are usually reflected in the feedback provided to their children in relation to expectancies, values and gender-stereotypes. Consistent with models of socialisation, the child will typically adopt their parent(s)’ or close family members’ expectancies about their abilities in an area, and their parent(s)’ values about the importance of an activity. However, Eccles’ theory is also consistent with motivational theories which emphasise self-efficacy (Partridge et al., 2013; Bandura, 1986, 1989) in that if children believe they are highly competent in an area, they are more likely to be motivated to achieve in that area. But the evidence is well supported in that what a parent expects and believes, has an impact on their child’s own perception of their competencies and their expectancies of success.

The results in this study are silent in relation to the involvement or impact of parental support around career decisions for this group, and perhaps not unsurprisingly owing to their age, and the context of their demographic data which highlights challenging home situations for over two thirds of participants. This context would help explain the finding above where the domains in Table 16 were equally valued in contrast to Eccles’ expectation that one would be more highly valued arising from parental influence and beliefs. We found a majority of participants’ to be self-motivating at the outset of the study and in keeping with Bandura’s social cognitive theory alluded to above, they reported a high degree of perceived self-efficacy in relation to their personal and professional skills sets as assessed through the initial work-readiness survey. Whilst these may not be readily attributable to direct parental involvement, they may signal intervention by care workers, social workers or youth workers. In view of the relationship between EEVT and motivation (Wigfield, 1994), the group’s belief that they would benefit from participating in the programme is likely to have contributed to their persistence. When combined with their reported satisfaction with the training and work-placement components, it led to successful outcomes for those who completed it.

### ***Domains of work-readiness***

Using discourse, content and thematic analyses a positive correlation was found between participation in the Career LEAP programme and improvements across most of the domains of work-readiness used in this study. Participants’ post-placement data were compared with baseline interview data and aggregated across the group. They are summarised below (Table 17).

*Table 17.* Comparison of participants’ pre-training with post-placement results

<b>Measures (domains)</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Positive change</b>	<b>No change</b>	<b>Negative change</b>
Career motivation	Knowing their likes and interests in a job and career	✓		
Career qualities	Knowing their personal strengths, weaknesses and talents	✓		
Career networking	Knowing people who can help them with their careers	✓		

Measures (domains)	Description	Positive change	No change	Negative change
Career profiling	Their ability to showcase their career competencies	✓		
Career exploration	Knowing how to explore education, employment and training opportunities		✓	
Career control	Setting career goals and actively pursuing them	✓		
Career ambition	Being ambitious in their career plans		✓	
Job searching	Being serious and active in job searching		✓	
Workplace civility	Attitudes towards being civil towards other at work		✓	
Workplace diversity	Attitudes towards working with diverse others		✓	
Managing conflict	Skills in managing workplace conflicts	✓		
Leadership	Confidence in leadership skills	✓		
Critical and creative thinking	Ability to think critically and creatively	✓		
Professionalism	Professional competencies: timekeeping, reliability, integrity	✓		
Work vigour	Feeling vigorous when working or studying	✓		
Work dedication	Being dedicated to work or study	✓		
Work absorption	Being absorbed in working or studying	✓		

Table 17 reveals some key messages about the impact of Career LEAP on this group of young adults. It aligns with a number of differences which emerged in the survey data where several participants appeared to be stronger in some domains before the programme started, with slight decreases in these domains by programme end. We did not find that participants' skill sets deteriorated over the course of the programme but rather the qualitative evidence points to an initial over estimation of their abilities, skill sets and levels of preparedness about what they wanted to do with their life and how to behave professionally in the work environment. The interview data reveals that almost two thirds of participants felt *very confident* or *confident* about areas such as career ambition, motivation, career control and their ability to interact successfully in the workplace before the programme began. Participants' perspectives changed over the course of the interview data, with post-training results reflecting a general enthusiasm about acquiring new skills and abilities, some of which they thought they previously had but noted that the training had considerably improved and developed. However, post-placement results reveal a deeper level of personal reflection by most participants. With a majority lacking practical work experience, they now reported recognising the intricacies of a workplace environment and the complexities of managing workplace relationships, conflict, diversity and maintaining professional competencies, often for the first time in their life.

The thorough pre-planning which underpins the Career LEAP model ensured that participants' work-placements were structured, meaningful, appropriately challenging and contributed to the day to day activities of that industry. Such an experience appears to have contributed to participants' re-assessment of their skill sets, and in many cases, re-evaluating what they had previously professed as their desired career choices. By the end of the

programme, several rated themselves lower on some domains as evident from the survey results, and as reported during post-placement interviews. This realisation was not negatively reported however, but welcomed by participants and attributed to the critical and reflective capacities developed during the training programme and the challenging but positive experience they had on work-placement. The certainty around 'job choices' and what they wanted to do with their lives which over half had initially reported during pre-training interviews, was replaced by a degree of confident and comfortable 'uncertainty' at the end of the programme, and a growing awareness of different career paths and the role of education in moving towards these at different stages of their life cycle. The formative influence of visiting business leaders during training and of their mentors was notably reported on here as participants referred to these experiences during post-placement interviews.

Table 17 also highlights that some domains remained relatively unchanged or reflected small changes only, such as career exploration, job searching, workplace civility and respecting diversity. We found that participants appeared well prepared in these domains before the programme began, and they remained reasonably stable over time. Career ambition was rated highly throughout, signalling this group's strong desire to enter the workplace. However, the data revealed a qualitative difference in the language used to discuss career ambition pre-training and post-placement. Unequivocal aspirations to get 'a job' in the retail, services or construction industries for a majority of the group were replaced at programme end by extended discourse identifying concrete pathways and strategies to develop a career either in the same industry (which remained stable across time for almost two thirds of the group), or to follow a different career path. Opportunities to re-engage with formal education as a pathway to help them achieve their career ambitions was identified by over half of the group during post-placement interviews.

## 2 Pre-training interview results

Data from the pre-training interviews reflected participants' anxiousness about beginning the programme, particularly with people they may not previously know, but this was combined with a strong sense of excitement and of wanting to begin so that they could move closer to getting 'a job'. A large majority of participants reported an expectation or a hope that the programme would provide them with a job at the end. Members of the research team and the Project Manager addressed this during the training, re-iterating that Career LEAP is a work-readiness programme and does not provide participants with guaranteed employment on completion.

Motivating themselves to get 'out of bed' and turn up for the programme on time was identified as a challenge for just over half of the participants. This was attributed to having acquired 'bad habits' from watching movies and playing online video games late into the night, and not having a routine as a result of being long term unemployed or never having had the opportunity to work before. Poor attendance at previous training programmes was identified as a significant issue for two thirds of participants, but they noted that this programme seemed different owing to the application process and the interview they did with the project manager, and the opportunity of getting work experience.

Support with childcare issues was identified by only one participant.

The results from participants' post-training and post-placement data and mentor and stakeholder data are presented in the sections below.

### 3 Post-training interview results

This section summarises the main findings from the post-training data collection phase. A number of key strengths of the programme are highlighted, along with several weaknesses and areas for improvement as perceived by participants. Data are illustrated through participant quotations. All participants reported enjoying the training, and the analysis revealed 4 strong themes evident in their responses: (i) participants responded well to the nature of the training programme, and (ii) to the pedagogy and teaching style. They recognised that they were (iii) learning new skills, and (iv) developing personally.

#### **Programme strengths**

The training programme is believed by participants to be particularly beneficial in the two areas of development it was designed to target – participants' personal development, and for the preparation and teaching of practical skills to enable participants to focus on their career planning and secure employment. Specifically, participants highlighted contributions towards their personal development, such as an increase in self-confidence, learning new skills, meeting new people and learning about their own capabilities. Participants also noted learning a wide range of new practical skills such as preparation for the work-placement, writing CVs and learning about 'their future job'.

*"I just enjoyed everything about the programme because this is the first part of it. And the first week of the programme it was about getting to know what you value at work, and how to get your CV prepared and I actually enjoyed everything."* [Roisin]

Participants were also impressed with the innovative nature of the teaching methods. They spoke about the programme as being informative and engaging; involving interesting teaching methods such as teamwork and fun activities.

*"I enjoyed every bit of it. ... There wasn't one thing I disliked about it. I have to say it's a very interesting course because you are learning about yourself and learning about staying strong ... like you're hearing about other people's problems how they couldn't get a job and you're explaining yourself how you can't get a job. So it's really interesting."* [Jaydan]

*"I liked when we were giving examples and the people in the class they were practicing it and so we could see like what should we do and what should we don't, you know, if you see it visually. I loved the mock interviews – liked the physical. Put you on the spot to remember small details. Proud of our work in role. ... I enjoyed listening to trainers and their enthusiasm."* [Larry]

The development of communication skills, networking skills and confidence development were among the most commonly recurring themes across all responses in the post training interviews. The theme 'development of communication skills' appeared across a third of the main questions in the interview. The participants spoke about their awareness of how to talk appropriately and politely at work. They felt better able to approach colleagues for advice and felt they were able to express themselves better.

*"... learned how to ask politely 'would you know someone who would know someone who would have work that I'm interested in'."* [Ben]

*"My communication skills are a lot better now. It's given me more motivation and more confidence to find work."* [David]

*Very helpful. Big improvement in works skills. ... Communicate better. Able to ask people questions. For example, if I needed advice."* [Kieran]

They spoke of their awareness of the importance of using different communication styles whilst at work and when with friends and family members. They also valued the opportunity to meet people from various backgrounds and strongly agreed they would carry that knowledge into their future jobs and work environments. The participants specifically valued the exercises on speech training as it allowed them to learn to speak appropriately in the work place. They highlighted becoming more professional with their speech and were using differentiated communication styles – with their friends and the business people they met during the training.

The participants highlighted their experiences of working in a team and learning to listen to everybody. They were better able to get along in groups of unknown people and were able to meet new people and introduce themselves. They agreed they have developed their networking skills and improved friendship and relationship development skills. They identified learning networking skills as particularly valuable. The theme 'networking' appeared in 6 out of 13 main questions selected for the analysis in the post-training interview. Over the duration of the training programme, the participants also continuously built their relationship with course trainers and visiting business people. As their networking skills developed they were able to interact more freely with business people participating in the training programme, which in turn helped them to gain a perspective on what employers are looking for in employees. They valued the opportunity to learn something new from different people and from people from different backgrounds. They agreed that it made the overall experience of the training programme less frightening and more human.

*"I lack confidence a lot. I'm usually a shy person. This programme just sparked me out. It made me more confident to speak to the interviewers, to meet managers. I met some of the most important people around. People in HR, including the Minister of Housing, that's big."* [David] [This participant was invited to address a meeting of a housing forum for homeless people during the training, which he noted he would not have been able to do without developing his social and communication skills during training.]

*"I learned to talk louder and approach someone."* [Alisha]

*"Yeah, speaking in front of the group as well with people you wouldn't have met before. Yeah public speaking really helped us."* [Sarah]

In turn, the theme 'development of confidence' appeared in 4 out of 13 main questions. The participants spoke of 'growing their confidence', being able to stand up in front of the group and speak, being able to speak louder and clearer, and being able to speak to the research interviewers. They learnt how to approach people, and how to talk to people they previously didn't know with confidence.

*"It was very very useful because I used to be shy. I used to never really talk to anyone in a new different place but I felt really comfortable in here. It was real peaceful and like I'll get to know him and it will all just happen now. And once you*

*walk in the door it's like 'Ah, how are you [name]?' You feel relaxed in there. It's just relief because you're after coming out of your shell. It's like a flower. It starts out as a little seed and grows up and blossoms. That's the way I felt."*[Matthew]

They were able to make new friends and interact in a respectful way. Participants strongly agreed that they learnt both about work and life over the duration of the training. They stressed that the training programme 'was huge' on experience and confidence building. As a result, participants felt more confident and more excited about their future. They identified that working together and sharing experiences seemed more useful than working in isolation, and aided their overall development. Among the confidence building strategies, one they were particularly impressed with was the development of different voice strategies such as interview voice, voice on the phone, etc. Importantly, as appears from the results of the data analysis, a distinction should be made between the development of confidence skills, organisational skills and the development of enthusiasm and motivation of the participants. These three themes came up as separate themes in their responses. In terms of being more organised- the participants agreed they were better able to settle into a routine now. In reference to being more enthusiastic and feeling more motivated- they were excited about meeting new people and were appreciative of peer support.

- The group placed equal importance on their personal development, preparation for the work-placement and careers, and learning of practical skills.

Among the most important parts of the programme they highlighted were the following four areas: learning of CV skills and the information on what a CV should contain. Secondly, they stressed learning a number of work related practical skills such as appropriate professional behaviour at work, the importance of professional conduct and how 'not to mess around' in the work environment, the importance of showing that you are interested in the job, communication skills and networking. Thirdly, they valued the opportunity to undertake meaningful and practical work experience. They maintained that this experience was extremely important and very hard to get outside of this training programme. And lastly, they were positive about participating in career planning – they felt more motivated and felt able to make realistic plans about their future careers.

*"I felt like all of the exercises were brilliant, like the interview skills and the general brainstorming situations like that were very good for helping you out in situations of all types like discrimination in the office and conflict in the office, things like that. It kind of taught you what to do in that situation which was very good."*[Rebekah]

### **Areas for improvement**

Several participants suggested a small number of areas in which the training programme could be improved.

The first area is related to pedagogy. As emerged from the data analysis, in the first week of the programme there was a lot of focus on 'work': about the importance of work and getting ready for work. It was perceived as too person focused by one participant.

*"... I didn't like the first week as much when they were going on about the work, yourself and getting ready for work. I didn't like that because it was all about the person but it depends on what way you would go about working and what you would like."*[Sarah]

Another respondent did not like the socialising aspect of the programme and was not in favour of being put into a situation of having to talk to other people. Also, 2 participants did not enjoy some of the writing activities of the training programme. They highlighted that sometimes writing tasks reminded them of schoolwork, and at times made them feel frustrated and lose interest in learning as a result.

*"I didn't enjoy using the workbook... the workbook involved being seated and stationary, and I preferred the more interactive activities."* [Kieran]

*"... the writing sometimes felt a bit like schoolwork. That's when I get frustrated and lose interest."* [Rachel]

There was recognition that the development of confidence and motivation to approach and talk to people, takes time. This specifically related to personal skills development and getting to know people. A number of participants (n=5) felt that the length of the training programme could be increased to allow for more training on the development of interpersonal and communication skills which were one of the mostly frequently mentioned skill sets positively developed as a result of training.

When asked if the programme was long enough, 5 noted that it is 'good as it is'. They clarified that 3 hours of training during the day was long enough, and the timing was perfect. They noted that if the programme was longer, they may lose focus.

*"No, three hours is enough, coz I think at the end of it everyone was getting worn out."* [Alex]

*"Yeah it was grand. We weren't getting tired or lazy. It was just like perfect timing to be actually doing it because we had lunch and were all functional ... if you were doing a full day you'd get tired and bored. You'd start slouching and falling asleep and all. So 3 hours is grand."* [James]

Nevertheless, these participants expressed a preference for slightly longer breaks, with one cautioning about getting too comfortable with one another, which he noted had happened in other courses he had participated in.

*"Yeah, just a little bit longer break please, maybe 15 minutes. I think afternoons was great. That was fine because I think if I was to wake up in the morning I wouldn't be full of energy to do any of this stuff. Full days, no, I think the time was perfect. I think if it was longer than 2 weeks then we are all going to get too cozy together. We'll forget, we'll be like oh we're friends now. We'll forget what we're doing. Yeah, I don't want to get too cozy, two weeks was enough. It was good to socialise and all but I have to keep my mind on what's important to me."* [Larry]

In addition, 2 participants noted that the programme could be delivered over one week full time, while 7 participants stressed that the programme's length could be increased by a few weeks. They clarified that it would help them to learn more, to become more knowledgeable, to meet new people and get to know them better. They wanted to learn and practice more interview and CV skills. One respondent called for a slight extension to the day, noting:

*"Maybe another hour but that's just me. That's just how I feel. Other people could be like No it's too long... No the time that it is – half one to five o'clock. That isn't bad"*

*but even from half one to half five. It would be six hours. That's good. That's good learning. Because before I used to just go home from FAS and decide what I am going to do today. I walk home from this and it's just whow. I'm actually thinking, on the way home about my career and what we learned."*[Matthew]

### **Areas of particular note**

Several dominant themes emerged from the interview data and these are reported below, supported by evidence from transcripts.

#### ***Pedagogy***

The data analysis revealed that the programme was perceived to be very informative and engaging by all participants, and involved interesting teaching methods like teamwork, role play and various 'fun activities'. When speaking of the nature of the training programme, participants used words like 'great', 'enjoyable', 'very helpful'.

When referring to the teaching styles and the teaching in general, participants spoke about the impact of the trainers. A number of teaching methods were found to be valuable – debates, anecdotes from other people's lives and stories, group activities, interviewing each other, and mock interviews with trainers and the visiting business people. The teaching styles of the trainers were seen as new, innovative and interactive. One respondent was most impressed with the Matrix method of decision making, related to the activity of the blue and red pill (creative and critical thinking exercise). The participants pointed out that career planning was taught in an interactive style. They stressed that every day they learnt something new. Responses highlighted that the interactive approach helped them to stay focused and motivated: 'it was brilliant' and it 'kept you alive'.

*"I just think [name of trainer] in general is amazing. I think she has a way of teaching that I've never seen before. Because I left school at a young age, been in courses and other things in my life. But the way she has and the way of teaching, for me personally, for me she just sucks me in and I just listen to her. She's very good. It was just nice, she's full of energy. She's not one of those that bores you to death. She's full of energy and she keeps you sucked in. Yeah she's a good teacher."*  
[Rachel]

The teaching methods were seen as very engaging, interactive, full of energy and enthusiastic, but some of the content had been met by participants before, albeit experienced differently.

*"There was a lot of things that I learnt before in courses and that, like interview skills but it was like I didn't actually know them before now. The way they was taught here was different and meant something to you. Like networking and communication skills, really good teaching. It kind of sticks with you the way it's done, and it was fun."*[Grainne]

*"In ways, I had sort of seen them before (interview skills, planning, networking), but the way you approached them was new and innovative, like the other day we had the Matrix one with the blue and the red pill and I was on the debating team. I thought that was very good, like it gives you a chance to hear what other people think and to practise critical thinking."*[Roisin]

The opportunity to speak freely to trainers and express opinions was highly valued by all participants.

Learning from the workbook was identified as both enjoyable and positive by a large majority.

*"I liked everything. The work we done in the books. I learned loads from them."*

[Paul]

The exercise of writing in their workbooks was seen as useful for the development of organisational skills and helped them to settle into a routine. Several activities from the workbook were valued, such as the CV error spotting task, and the workplace civility exercises. In turn, role play was also highlighted as helping to learn about oneself and to see how everything works in practice, and an appreciation of the related poetry exercises were noted.

The pedagogy, particularly concerning how the training programme was organised and delivered, was identified as being balanced by participants. The majority particularly valued the motivational aspect of the programme. While learning specific skills was highly rated, the motivational aspects and person-centred approach was found to be the most valuable aspect by the majority of participants (over 90%).

*"Motivation was a big factor for me because of the way the course was organised and the leader's interest in the group. Meeting new people from the businesses was also very motivating, like to think they stated off like us, crazy to think of that, but it's true. Received a lot of peer support too from the group. I really wanted to attend this course and I'm so glad that I got the chance to do it".* [James]

Teamwork was highlighted as a positive aspect that provided the experience of working in a team, learning new skills and the opportunity to listen to everybody. They noted that their confidence grew as a result. Over two weeks they learnt to get along with others and were able to stand up in front of the group, to speak, to ask questions and interact in a more open and engaging way. For most participants it was reported as the first opportunity in their lives to feel as valued members of a group and interact with unknown people, feeling relaxed and able to enjoy the experience. At the same time it was noted that the pedagogy allowed them, concurrently, to start thinking about their future in regard to how to secure a good position in a company and start building a good career.

By the end of the training, participants felt well equipped with the skills relevant to work. They learnt appropriate professional behaviour, how to be polite and considerate of others, of the importance of showing that they are interested in the job when at an interview, tailoring their CV to different jobs on offer, preparing for interviews, appropriate communication styles and networking skills.

When asked if the training programme should be delivered by business people on their own, the majority (13 out of 15) were in favour of a joint delivery approach. 2 participants rated the contribution of business people in the training programme as slightly higher than that of the trainers. But all responded extremely well to the integration of members from the business community into the classes in an active way, identifying that it facilitated a real-life perspective on the work environment and on people's career development. They weren't just sitting and listening to them, they got to see them 'in action' and work with them. One respondent specifically mentioned that having both trainers and business people run the

training programme exposed them to two different perspectives of the experience of job searching and preparation for 'a life of work'. She maintained that it made the experience more accessible:

*"Their experience – the different sides to it. It made the experience more understandable to me."* [Grainne]

*"I was shocked when actually all the business people were there when we turned up at the lunch. ... Literally we were just going around talking to different business people, introducing ourselves and talking about jobs and all so. Like I wouldn't have done that any time in my life, I wouldn't have. Would never have thought of it. Never thought I'd be able to do it either. Yeah. I could go onto that street there and go out and introduce myself to anyone now. ... No. It would be too professional like if the course were run by the business people alone."* [Paul]

Experiencing real life examples of how successful business people built their careers from the ground up, was identified by participants as motivating them to develop their own careers and giving them 'something to think about', 'a valuable take home message' every day. The respondents also felt that the trainers prepared them well to be able to face business people and to know how to interact in the workplace and behave at interviews:

*"... especially to hear where they started from, most of them started out and left school at the age of 13 or 14 with no qualifications either. I think having the community as part of Career LEAP is good, they do a lot more for the people. Some communities like the Swan Youth club and all, everyone is great and all but you are getting that extra opportunity here to learn something new from different people. I thought it was great and I would keep it the way it is."* [Jayden]

*"There were one or two people, business people we met every day. Some of them had nothing as well and built their way up. It's like they put the ladder up against the wall and it was like a never ending wall for them. I mean does that not really just make you think how far you can actually drag yourself without giving up. That's how I see it. Business men came in and business women. That's helpful because you are learning what their job is. You would need the normal trainers there as well for the advice because if you walked in and there was like four Bank of Ireland managers sitting there what are you going to think about? You wouldn't know what to do."* [David]

It was evident that the respondents perceived business people as of high status and generally felt that they might be unapproachable. However, their participation in the training programme and the pedagogical approach used to actively engage them, helped to eliminate that perspective:

*"Yes, very helpful. ... Suits equals status to me. Meeting them made them more human and less frightening. The interview with the Minister made me feel more on an even level with them as ordinary people like."* [Matthew] [A Government Minister of State visited the programme and engaged in a role play with a number of participants.]

### ***Job Versus Career***

The participants felt well prepared across a range of skills that they perceived as necessary to secure employment. In comparison to the pre-training data, the discourse analysis revealed a slight but significant shift in language use amongst participants from 'getting a job' to 'having a career'. Career was mentioned almost as often as the word 'job' in post-training interview data.

The theme 'career / preparation for career and career planning' emerged across the responses to 6 out of 13 main questions in the post-training interview. In response to the question *'What did you enjoy most?'* more than three quarters of participants identified that they enjoyed thinking about the future, thinking about how to get a good position in a company and their options for building 'a good career'. The training programme was perceived as very helpful for preparing them for career planning. The study participants agreed they started to think about the future and how to get a good position in a company, building a good career over time, rather than thinking in terms of getting a job. One respondent specifically mentioned that he now felt able to begin to move towards his dream career. The study participants agreed feeling more motivated and able to make realistic plans about their futures:

*"Yeah it got you thinking about what you wanted to do and got you thinking more, and like making realistic plans."*[Alex]

They also felt confident and comfortable sharing their career plans with fellow participants:

*"... The career planning. Because we all got together and then we all split up into groups. We got to share what career we wanted, and plan how we plan to get there. I said mine and then he said his, and then she said hers. I feel great. It's like I can actually feel myself now. I know where I'm going. I have motivation now."* [Rachel]

The teaching method based on an interactive teaching style was identified as innovative and helpful for learning career planning skills.

*"I have done career planning but it was nothing like the way we done it. A whole different layout. ... like a totally different layout to when I was in school. You're not just sitting there behind a desk with your finger in your mouth not saying anything. When you are there you can let everything out and it's like you can walk out and be like, what a day – I'm working on my career plan. I can't wait for tomorrow. That's how I see it."*[Rachel]

A number of the participants were open to the possibility of returning to formal education as part of progressing their careers. For example, one became aware of a training course he needs to take to be able to move to the career he dreamt of. His aspiration was to work in the children's hospital and he needed to take a childcare course:

*"Such as, when I was told that the porter job that I wanted to do, that you'd need certain things, coz it depends on the porter work that you want to do, if you want to work in a kids hospital or in an adults' hospital. Things like a childcare course would be useful coz you would be working with kids. I am thinking about doing that next."* [Alex]

2 out of 15 participants (a significant minority) were not sure how helpful the training programme was for their career planning.

*"Mostly useful. Parts of it I didn't really see how it would be of much use. It's still good to think about different aspects of career development that you wouldn't really think to think about."* [Ali]

The theme 'skills' emerged in responses to 7 out of 13 main interview questions in the post-training interview. One of the most often mentioned skills learnt at the training programme was how to structure and compose a CV. Aspects of a CV such as relevant information, layout and matching the CV to the position on offer were mentioned. The participants also highlighted learning a range of career planning skills such as interview skills, networking skills, people skills, critical thinking skills and work-placement skills. Their personal attitude has also improved significantly – they perceived themselves as more punctual, enthusiastic and more aware of how to present themselves in a professional setting. They felt better equipped for working in a team and interacting in groups.

The participants perceived themselves as well prepared for work-placement and future jobs and education opportunities. The theme 'preparation for work-placement and a job' has emerged across the responses to 5 out of 13 main interview questions. In regard to what to expect during work-placement, the participants spoke of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour at work and were aware of how to settle a conflict. The analysis revealed that participants were aware that behaving professionally at work and feeling confident is important. Among the critical reasoning and creative thinking skills learnt, participants identified the following: being better prepared to face challenging situations at work and able to identify and resolve issues of possible discrimination and conflict; being able to suggest solutions to work tasks and different ways of seeing and doing things to get a better result.

*"I learned a lot around behavioural work. What's appropriate, what's inappropriate, being civil to the co-workers, things along those lines."* [Sia]

*"... I felt like all of the exercises like the interview skills and the general brainstorming situations like that were very good for helping you out in situations of all types like discrimination in the office and conflict in the office, things like that. It kind of taught you what to do in that situation which was very good."* [Alisha]

They spoke of work experience as being very important, but difficult to get.

*"I thought it was very important to have work experience as part of the course. I feel like it is very hard to get even work experience, to even get a second look in a workplace, everyone is looking for experience and when no one is handing out jobs it's very hard to gain experience."* [Ben]

The work-placement experience was perceived as valuable because it would show them what it actually means to be in a real job.

### **Social awareness**

There was a sense of appreciation of the welcoming and friendly environment of the training programme that made participants feel 'safe' and better able to focus on learning as a result. They felt comfortable working in groups and were able to express themselves, which they

had previously not experienced in other training situations or in school. This they felt improved their learning and their awareness of the needs of others.

*"The social aspect of it, working in a team, learning new skills, learning to listen to everybody to hear their point of view and how we work with others."*[Alex]

In addition, the responses seemed to highlight a social awareness issue where participants perceived people in management roles (managers, administrators and HR people) as important and of high status, and generally felt that they would be unapproachable. Participation in the programme and the opportunity to interact with representatives of the business community helped to eliminate that perspective. One participant used the words 'I was shocked when actually all the business people were there to meet us' to describe his attitudes towards the involvement of the representatives of the business community in the training programme.

There was evidence that participants lacked confidence and basic social and communication skills prior to the start of training (Project Manager's profiles, pre-training interviews and application forms). For example, almost half were late for one of their meetings with the Project Manager during the initial stages of the programme, or didn't return a call. This lack of the social context of the workplace could be linked to their education levels, and lack of previous employment opportunities. While we found self-reported evidence that all participants felt their social skills and awareness of the needs of others had improved during training, a number of issues remained during work-placement for several young adults which are discussed in a later section.

### ***Aural confidence***

The participants displayed a high level of aural confidence throughout the responses to the questions, responding directly and in a focused manner to the questions asked. It can be suggested that the high levels of displayed aural competence and confidence could be indicative of the effectiveness of the training programme and of its impact on the development of their communication and interview skills. It is recommended that an assessment of participants' communication styles prior to the start of the training programme be undertaken in future iterations of the research study as a more reliable measure of its impact. Learning to concentrate, focus and listen more intently to peers, trainers and the visiting business members was identified by over a third of respondents as a skill set acquired during training.

### ***Family link***

There appeared to be no direct evidence of family influence on participants' expectations of the training programme, of their work-placement experience, or of their career planning. No reference to family members was made by any participant in this regard.

## 4 Post work-placement interviews

*"Well if I give it from 1 to 10, I will give 11. Yeah, it was amazing and the people were very helpful and very nice. Yeah, I loved it. .. First of all I enjoyed the people around me, they were very nice, very kind and second thing that I enjoyed, was the amount of work experience that they gave to us in that short period of time. And the amount of effort that they did with me and the guy that I was with so... it was amazing."* [Sia]

The section below summarises the main findings from the post-placement data. A number of key strengths and weaknesses of the work-placements are highlighted. The role of the training programme in the work-placement experience is discussed, along with the role of the mentor. The summary also provides examples of the ways in which participants felt supported by their mentors and by work colleagues.

### **Work-placement experience**

In total 13 participants attended the work-placement, as 2 secured jobs immediately after completing the training component. A further 2 respondents got full time jobs arising from their work-placement, an additional 2 received short term contracts, and 4 were offered part time jobs in their placement businesses while they undertook further education. All respondents agreed that they enjoyed work-placement and had a positive learning experience. The data analysis revealed the young adults most appreciated the work-placement experience because it afforded them the opportunity to experience what it is like to be in a real job working with different kinds of people. Participants spoke of their experience as 'really good', 'hugely enjoyable', and 'a real eye opener'. They agreed that sometimes they felt outside of their comfort zones, but nevertheless enjoyed the learning experience, particularly when they got to solve problems. The work-placement offered the opportunity to see if the participants liked /disliked their jobs and the tasks associated with it. It fed into their longer-term career planning strategies, as illustrated by the respondent below, who had initially expressed in his application form that he just wanted a job:

*"Yeah. It was useful overall because I got to see what it was like and overall would I like it altogether, or not. So yeah it was ... It was very useful. Yeah, I now know I would like that kind of work but not for a lifelong job."* [Alex]

One respondent particularly appreciated having a routine, and as a result, he felt more purposeful having something to do on a regular basis throughout the day.

### **Duration of work-placement**

In response to the question if the work-placement was long enough, 5 participants indicated that the length of time was just right, and that 3 weeks were perfect.

*"Yeah, I thought the work placement was perfect. A bit more than that, if you possibly didn't like the job would be a bit much. But I thought three weeks was perfect. Well for me it was perfect because I was told that because I was on work placement I could come in the day, in the night or in the morning, like so I was able to pick the time I came in."* [Roisin]

*"I think it's enough and I am really well prepared now to get a job. ... For me it really helped me and it was enough."* [Ali]

An additional 5 highlighted that the length of time spent in work-placement needed to be increased. These respondents felt that the work-placement experience could run for about a month or slightly longer.

*"It flew by it did. It felt like I just done one week. Just constantly going like. Yeah I'd stay there if I could. I loved it. You could do like the 4 weeks. ... it's a big store, there's loads to actually get around and in three weeks, we done 3 or 4 different departments but I wanted to stay with the visual merchandising team. So I went and asked could I stay there for 2 weeks. I done 10 – 4 every day. And then on my last day, on Friday they asked me to come in at half seven in the morning till 4 o'clock. They were good hours, yeah. Cause it helps you have loads of time to have breakfast in the morning and when you go home like it's not that late, you can do what you had planned, like go to the gym and stuff like that."*  
[James]

Respondents' data reveals the flexibility afforded by the businesses and the mentors in terms of the opportunities, shifts and working hours offered to them whilst on placement which successfully eased their transition into a work environment.

### **Work-placement strengths**

*"Well out of any work or work experience I would have done so far this is the best one I have done. Well I was working in the kitchen. I was supposed to be a chef. And as well as actually doing the work it was a lot of fun so time would fly. And I learned a lot as well."*[Ben]

The work-placement was identified as being instrumental in helping participants to prepare for future employment mostly in the following 3 areas: confidence building, allowing them to see what a real job was like, and in their personal and professional skills development. Confidence building was mentioned by over three quarters of respondents. Participants spoke of the confidence they gained (and re-gained). The majority also reported feeling ready to go out and look for work now.

*"But what I found helpful was the ... what's the word for that? Sorry I keep forgetting the word, the belief that I had lost, the belief that I was lost in myself... I gained that back. The confidence that I lost yeah, so I gained that back and the way that all the time they were encouraging you really helped. So that confidence I gained it back, which was priceless."* [Jake]

*"Very important. Like, as I said, it gave me a lot of confidence. I feel ... well obviously I do ... I have experience now. I know exactly what I want ... well not exactly what I want, but I know what I like. I got several good references and that builds your confidence up too."*[David]

*"Everything, everything, I cannot just name one thing. If I name one I will name the mentor who encouraged me a lot. Like the most important thing was the confidence that I lost in myself because every time I was hearing from the people around me was, 'you cannot find a job, you're worthless, you're like 'this and that'. ... I got my confidence back when they offered me a job."*[Sia]

The work-placement experiences offered the opportunity to see what real employment was like, as many respondents got to work in different sections of the businesses.

*"I felt like it developed me as a worker much more than I was before and helped me just gain a little bit of confidence when I'm going into the work place. What stood out - personal and professional development I thought in myself, and developing in the workplace as a proper worker. Instead of just sitting back and watching everyone do stuff I can get up and do it myself."* [Rachel]

The following skills were identified as *most* developed during the work-placement experience: customer service skills, working with new equipment, speaking appropriately, and critical thinking.

*"Working with like different kinds of people as well, you've to understand if they can't understand you talking, you can't say 'well you should understand me'. You have to try work things out with them."* [David]

The participants felt they became more professional in their behaviour, had better time keeping and organisational skills, learnt good manners and also gained practical work skills related to the business they were in.

*"It was very important cause it got me ready for like if I was going for a job interview, it just gets you ready for the future like. You can't go in and just start messing around, throwing things and all, as if you're going in with your mates. You have to go in and look good, act professional. Everything that's happening on the outside of your life has to stay outside the store when you're going to work. You just have to be a different person. Time keeping, that's very important and good manners."* [Larry]

The work experience was perceived as important as it allowed them to work with different kinds of people, working things out with them, working collaboratively and in a team. They unanimously enjoyed meeting people and learning new things.

### **The role of the training programme in the work-placement experience**

In response to the question '*How useful was the 2 week training programme for helping you during the work-placement*', almost all participants (except 1) drew a parallel between the 2 experiences. 5 themes emerged from across the data: how to behave professionally at work, practising communication skills, learning interview skills, confidence development, and time management/organisational skills. Respondents perceived the training as helping them to deal with challenging situations and resolving minor potential conflicts during placement. They also felt better equipped to behave professionally with different people, including customers and working collaboratively with colleagues. They learnt the importance of using different communication styles with friends and family and in the work situation. The respondents also noted they were more appreciative of different cultures and different languages.

*"A lot of the stuff we practised with [name of trainer] helped me. It helped me know how to act professionally, in many small things like shaking hands properly and keeping a distance between your public and private life. These were new ideas to me which were very useful on the job."* [James]

The participants highlighted that the interview skills and opportunities to playfully explore likely workplace scenarios were the most valued skills they learnt during the training

programme. They reported feeling more confident about themselves and their abilities as a result. They were able to speak up and felt better equipped to work collaboratively with co-workers and customers having had the opportunity to regularly role play a number of such scenarios during the training.

*"... The most helpful thing was of course they gave us scenarios of how to do interviews and stuff and they ask the people in the class to do it so we can see it visually. Where you can see where's your strength and like... it was very helpful, very helpful, everything was helpful, but the most important thing was yeah the training us how to behave on the job, of course that's the most important thing."*  
[Sia]

*"... And learning that not all of the interviewers are against you. That they want to find the best candidate who could possibly be you for that job, so you pick up a good few things like this which are really helpful on the job."* [Participant 12]

They also felt they could plan better for their futures as a result of the training which came to life for them during placement. All of the participants felt better organised and prepared. The following were the most frequently reported *organisational skills* they learnt during the training programme which helped them during placement: being punctual and on time, being a good listener and tuning in to instructions, remaining focused on the task, being confident enough to suggest ideas to work colleagues, and being better organised throughout the day.

*"Brilliant. It taught me always to be punctual. To be on time, all the time. It's very important to get there early instead of coming in rushing late. Having your stuff organised. It taught me to get my stuff organised. Yeah. It was good. It helped me a lot."* [Ben]

*"... How to keep your home friendships and work friendships separate and how to talk to someone in work and how to talk to someone at home."* [Alex]'s

*"It was very useful, there a good connection between training and work experience. It got us ready for going in like 'cause we learned about the different cultures that we were going to be using, like talking to different people with different languages, like how to use your good manners. Like, I could have gone in one day in a bad mood and they probably wouldn't have been happy with me but when we were doing the training that's what we learned before we went in. Like we learned how to do all that."* [David]

*"Yes. Wonderful because before we go to the work placement we have to get advice for example. You know, the training. For example this training it was kind of teaching you how to be professional in the work placement. So it has prepared me to be professional before I go to the placement so it is really, really helpful."*  
[Roisin]

When asked what *career planning skills* the respondents used in their work-placements, the analysis revealed the following themes: interacting with people at work, practising networking skills, motivation and enthusiasm, deciding whether this employment area was a career option for them in the future, knowing what they valued in the workplace (i.e. being busy, interacting with customers, working with other people, flexible shifts), and computer

skills. The respondents noted that the skills they used were all as equally useful as each other. Among the interaction skills the following were mentioned: working in a team, helping the public and customers, giving advice, interacting with people, good customer service and communication skills.

The analysis of responses to the question *'How useful was the training programme for helping you develop and explore your personality and personal skills whilst on placement?'* indicated that the respondents highlighted first and foremost an increase in self-confidence. They also noted that they felt better about themselves having something to do during the day, they got on great with people and were more confident and motivated to work and meet people.

When asked *'if the Career LEAP Programme was different from other training programmes you have participated in before'*, 4 respondents said it was the first course they have attended. They noted that the course was excellent, it was designed to get them ready for work and they felt it gave them many opportunities as well as practical and interview skills. 6 participants noted that the course was different to ones they have previously attended. They explained that the Career LEAP training programme involved the trainers and the companies working together, the training and work experiences were well organised, and the respondents felt mentally and emotionally supported. One respondent who secured a full-time position alluded to the inter-connectedness of the approach:

*"It was the first thing I did that I liked. It was excellent. I really enjoyed it. If I were out of work again it is something I would do.... See the thing is they tell you, you don't get a job out of it. That it's not designed for that. It's just designed to get you ready for work. It is very well designed to get you ready for work but if you do go in there and show people you want to learn and work hard there could be a job at the end of it for you. Just show them what you can do. Obviously they can't tell you at the start that you might get a job because then you wouldn't try. ... It gives you so many opportunities."* [Jaydan]

Highlighting the translation of theory into practice, another participant differentiated between the nature of the 'training' in Career LEAP and other training courses she had participated in previously:

*"Yes. I can say that the training I did before had interview skills. But it was really different from the one I did here because I got more experience. Like, it really helped me to do interview skills, practical skills. But before, I never practiced them. I have never seen practical interview skills. Yea, it was ... I can really say it was really different. But this training was my first real experience of training."* [Sia]

Career LEAP's integrated model which adopts a joined-up approach was identified by several young adults as a key strength:

*"Yes. I think it is a bit different because ... well it involved everybody. Not just like a work placement in a company. It's the company, the tutors, like everybody is involved. So I think it is very, very important. For example, in some training programme they only give you the training. They don't give you the work experience. The work placement, you can just go and find it for yourself. So this has everything organised, you know. I think this is most important."* [Ali]

*It is totally, completely different. Especially the work experience that they gave. It's completely different... I loved it. The most important part for me, to be honest, I loved the training that they gave you. Yeah, so, for me that was the most important part. Even when you learn something sometimes you forget, you don't remember every single thing. Sometimes it will not change your life. But what will change your life is, as I said, somebody mentally supporting you like the tutors and mentors."*[Sia]

All participants strongly agreed they would recommend Career LEAP to their friends, family members and colleagues. 4 were most impressed with the work-placement experience as a hands-on practical experience, but all specifically valued the teaching approach of the Career LEAP programme noting that it taught them how to behave when they 'were actually on the job' and how to approach and interact with work colleagues and customers. They perceived that they had been well prepared in what to say and what to do. They felt supported by the trainers, Project Manager and mentors with whom they had developed a strong bond of trust over a short period of time.

*It is different. It's a lot more hands on. You know I technically was, I suppose, a student, but I didn't feel like it. So, I mean, everybody was on the same level. Like in the workplace, there was nobody higher than anybody else. I felt like I had actually talked to the leaders [trainers] and the mentors, which I actually have and I bonded with them, you know.* [Larry]

### **The role of mentor in work-placement**

The mentor was described as being extremely important during placement in 4 different ways: in helping with work, as an authority figure, working in partnership, and in encouraging confidence. A number of different ways in which the mentors helped were identified, including helping to sign in with security in the businesses, collecting the participants on day one and acting as 'authority figures' to introduce them to other workers, providing guidance, support and encouragement. Almost all of the young adults indicated that they got on very well on a personal and professional level with their mentor(s), who made them feel welcome, supported and part of the team:

*"I felt as if I was working there all my life."*[Ben]

*"For the first few weeks I had work experience they showed you where everything goes and what to do. ... And then by the end of the work experience I felt confident in that I knew where everything was and I was still learning as I went."*[Larry]

Among the examples of how the mentors supported participants in the workplace included explaining and helping with things about the workplace, participating in informal discussions and providing support, instilling confidence, and helping to compile a 'to do' list of tasks throughout the day.

*"When we were looking for things he'd explain it. He wouldn't get angry when I forgot where things were or where things went. He'd just take me step by step and eventually I got it."*[Alex]

The respondents also acknowledged that they enjoyed most working with different people in their work-placements. They described their mentor and colleagues as 'amazing', 'brilliant', 'helpful', 'nice' and 'approachable'.

5 participants specifically acknowledged they fitted in well and worked well with other workers while on work-placement. They added that they worked well in a team, felt respected and comfortable in the environment. An additional 3 acknowledged that they got on very well with their fellow colleagues, and noted that they felt as if they were working there all their lives.

### **Work-placement weaknesses**

In response to the question '*What things did you least enjoy about the work experience*' the majority of the respondents highlighted that they enjoyed everything and pointed out that everything was interesting. Nevertheless, 2 participants mentioned that it would have been better to have been involved in more work during placement. They acknowledged they occasionally felt bored, and were standing around waiting for work. One respondent highlighted poor communication from his manager, and identified that he was not getting enough information from co-workers, and needed to know what to do.

In response to the question '*Were there any setbacks / drawbacks of attending the work experience?*' the majority (9 out of 13) identified there were no drawbacks and setbacks.

*"No there were no setbacks or drawbacks. I actually attended every single day there. And I was very happy working from the morning to the evening like a normal employee. It was really good for me to experience all that." [Jake]*

They agreed they enjoyed the full three weeks of placement and felt it was a very good experience for them. They noted they got a lot of help from colleagues in the businesses and felt supported. Of the remaining 4 participants who began work-placement but did not complete owing to external factors (health and family issues), they did not identify any drawbacks as a result of attending work-placement which accounted for them failing to complete their placement.

## Results from stakeholder interviews (business partners)

Key stakeholders in the study (n=15) included representatives from the partnering businesses, and Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI). All of the respondents were directly involved in the programme, some through planning and development of the study on the advisory and management groups, most through attending the CPD training session and directly participating in the training component with the young adults. Extensive data were provided and will be discussed in a separate publication. The major themes are summarised in Table 18 below, supported by illustrative quotations and an indication of the level of frequency of occurrence in the data.

### Overview

The responses from the participating business community members concerning their general reflections on the Career LEAP programme were positive. Respondents used the words 'innovative', 'very interesting', 'excellent training material', 'positive', 'absolutely enjoyable', 'unique', when describing their attitude towards the programme. The majority confirmed that Career LEAP ran smoothly from their perspective and had a very interesting format.

Table 18. Summary of major themes from stakeholder interviews (business partners)

Themes	Frequency (%)	Illustrative quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High quality programme - well-researched material that matched the abilities of the group</li> </ul>	100%	<p>"Excellent training material, the delivery of the programme was very well researched, very well thought out". (Business Respondent 3)</p> <p>"It was targeted. I mean the level was correct for the audience." (Business Respondent 14)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting and interacting with the participating young adults during the training component</li> </ul>	100%	<p>"Loved meeting the participants, blown away by them – very, very strong group. It has been an amazing journey, I feel like I have been learning for life". (Business Respondent 2)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature of the programme – balanced, partnership approach, unique</li> </ul>	100%	<p>"I think it opened a lot of doors for people, for the young people that possibly wouldn't have been there before. I think the longer training was a good fit for some people as well. It was longer than some pre-employment sessions but yet shorter than a six month training programme. I think that is a real positive." (Business Respondent 9)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trainer's delivery style during CPD training for community and business partners</li> </ul>	87%	<p>"Enjoyed programme leader delivery style, and enjoyed participation of the community. [name] herself is an excellent, excellent teacher. I really enjoyed the kind of participative nature of it. ... and I also really enjoyed the fact that they had community people in it as well." (Business Respondent 4)</p>

Themes	Frequency (%)	Illustrative quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Different from other programmes respondents had experienced previously</li> </ul>	80%	<p>"I enjoyed it because it was different. The training methods and the delivery. ... So, I was wondering if it was going to work and I was wondering what the outcomes would be. It was really nice to see a different approach. And just from my own perspective to reflect on my own work to see a different way of doing things. I enjoyed it a lot. The group had a nice feel to it. A nice dynamic." (Business Respondent 9)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Business community involvement in the planning stages of the programme - willingness to work together</li> </ul>	73%	<p>"I think getting the businesses involved in the initial meetings was a really good idea." (Business Community Respondent 1)</p> <p>"What is unique number one is that you got a number of companies coming together and sitting around the table." (Business Respondent 2)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collaboration within the business community to achieve greater impact - having a large number of business partners provided joined up thinking with everyone working on the same goal</li> </ul>	60%	<p>"Good to be able to collaborate with other businesses." (Business Respondent 6)</p> <p>"Getting a large number of businesses to collaborate together or to be involved is difficult. ...But to be involved and on board with the same programme is impressive." (Business Respondent 4)</p> <p>"The coming together of so many different businesses- all the organisations working together on a common goal. It's a real opportunity to make a difference." (Business Respondent 7)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Academic involvement in the design, implementation and evaluation of the partnership programme</li> </ul>	53%	<p>"Involvement of Trinity has been very good, because they have been able to bring value to this kind of project." (Business Respondent 6)</p> <p>"I love the fact that we had a third level institution, well regarded, well respected researching the area and providing materials for the project. Because that has never really been done before. So to link up business, academia, community." (Business Community Respondent 3)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordination role – valuable point of contact for partners</li> </ul>	40%	<p>"The coordinator role was a great strength in it, because that person was kind of the link point for everybody: the community organisations, the corporates, yourselves in Trinity and Business in the Community. So I think that role is quite critical." (Business Respondent 10)</p> <p>"I had limited dealings but what I did have with Business in the Community, the coordination was really good and it is a fantastic programme and a fantastic opportunity to bridge that gap with young people." (Business Respondent 7)</p>

Themes	Frequency (%)	Illustrative quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personality and leadership style of the programme developer and trainer</li> </ul>	40%	<p>"I actually think a key reason why it was going so well was the personal relationship that [lead trainer] had developed with the clients." (Business Respondent 4)</p> <p>"The programme leader was able to build rapport with the young people and a good relationship with everyone on the project." (Business Respondent 12)</p>

### Is there anything that you would change?

In response to the question: 'If you were designing a programme like this for young adults, how would you do things differently, if at all?' several varied responses were offered. One respondent noted that it might be useful to have a day just to listen to customers and explore how to interact with them:

*"I might bring them in, for example, if I was doing it again, and have a day listening to customers ... just listening on the end of telephone lines to customers and how our staff handle customers who might complain or might be looking for a complex theory." (Business Respondent 6)*

Another suggested that integrating a diversity of experiences, in addition to work experience, could enhance the learning outcomes of the programme. Suggestions included doing online webinars and looking at ways to afford more experience with social media:

*"Maybe doing online webinars because basically everything is done online and in social media." (Business Respondent 7)*

Two respondents noted that better planning and communication at the planning stages of Career LEAP would improve the training programme and its delivery:

*"Yeah I enjoyed it. The nature of working collaboratively has been challenging and I guess, you know, as much as you think you have communicated, communicate, communicate, communicate is certainly a mantra that I will take away from our learning." (Business Respondent 8)*

*"So in terms of getting terms of reference sorted and governance issues sorted and communication styles and communication boundaries and all that kind of stuff sorted. We were under a massive time pressure to get everything done. ... I think I would revert back to that project plan piece. I do think we have veered away from that." (Business Respondent 15)*

The importance of building personal relationships with all of the participants before the training programme starts was highlighted by 2 respondents:

*"So typically, I come from a community development background, so do some of the other partners, youth and community background, and you'd always ask them what do they want before you would devise something. And even though you would use international best practice and everything else you would have focus groups with*

*them to ask, ok, what do you think would work? And if so does a model like this work, before you'd actually commit to delivering anything."* (Business Respondent 8)

*"I would maybe give maybe slightly more time before the training starts. Just to build up relationships with the young people involved."* (Business Community Respondent 9)

## Results from stakeholder interviews (community partners)

Data were gathered from key community partners and two assistant trainers who also came from the community youth work sector (n=5). All of these respondents were directly involved in the programme from its original conception and design, as members of the management and advisory groups, and 4 directly participated in the training component with the young adults. Extensive data were provided and will be discussed in a separate publication. The major themes are summarised in Table 19 below, supported by illustrative quotations and an indication of the level of frequency of occurrence in the data.

### Overview

When describing the programme, community partners commonly used words like 'exciting', 'very interesting', 'good learning opportunity', 'enjoyable' and 'intensive training programme'. We found that all respondents enjoyed participating in the study. They enjoyed getting to know the young adults and preparing them to be 'job ready', but recognised the amount of work involved in that task. The academic component of the study was found to be very valuable and reported as the most important aspect of the project. The strength of the collaborative approach between the youth workers in different organisations, and with the business community, in the context of funding cuts for projects within the sector overall was also reported. The design of the programme was favourably commented on, particularly 'with a young person in mind'. Focused on the needs of the young adults, respondents identified that the programme was able to match participants' learning styles and the range of their skills and preparedness for learning during the training activities and subsequently with appropriate work-placements. The interactive approach where trainers were patient, flexible, playful and facilitative of the needs and stages of readiness of the young adults was noted as being very successful with these 'difficult to engage' participants.

Table 19. Summary of major themes from stakeholder interviews (community partners)

Themes	Frequency (n out of 5)	Illustrative quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic involvement in the design, implementation and rigorous evaluation of the research study</li> </ul>	5 out of 5	<p><i>"To me the strength is the research. It's the absolute lynchpin of the whole project. (Community Stakeholder 5)</i></p> <p><i>"... and I think that having [name] expertise, having that academic component. Because I have been involved in a lot of pilots and projects and the value, to have an internationally recognised institution, the academic component is an absolute strength of Career LEAP." (Community Stakeholder 2)</i></p> <p><i>"And we're guilty of it ourselves. We start off with a big project; we put loads of work in. The first thing is, it is not properly researched before we start. We get the young people; they do whatever; no evaluation. It's not written up. I mean there is evaluation, but it's never written down, so that in a year's time if somebody was to go and look for that project or look at that study, there's nothing. (Community Stakeholder 1).</i></p>

Themes	Frequency (n out of 5)	Illustrative quotes
		<p><i>"There were three legs to the stool, i) it was an innovative new way of looking at things; ii) it was researched fully and iii) a paper was produced and it was written up. They were the three reasons we got funding for Career LEAP."</i> (Community Stakeholder 3)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Many young people in the north east inner city are not 'job ready' and work placements without a work-readiness programme are not enough to break down the barriers</li> </ul>	5	<p><i>"It became much more than we had anticipated at the start, trying to define exactly what the study should be. You know, initially it was job placement and whatever, and then it developed much more when we came to the conclusion that people weren't exactly job ready. The baseline was very, very low, so they actually weren't capable of being job ready. So the focus changed to, you know, from a job placement or working with businesses, to helping the young people become job ready."</i> (Community Stakeholder 1)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Different from other programmes respondents had experience with previously – provided better support in transition to employment</li> </ul>	5	<p><i>"We had tried in the past to find out why young people didn't engage with either education or training. We would have worked with a lot of young people who are going into training workshops, but we found that a lot of the time the experience of the training workshops wasn't actually a good one for the young person, because it was just the one thing and then they were back out there. There was no follow up. There was no end product, if you like, because a lot of the young people that we certainly would deal with they need an awful lot more support in finding a path into employment or into education; because they have a lot of, you know, much more needs than the, what-would-you-say, the ordinary young person coming out of school with an education would have. A lot of them will have dropped out early. They won't have any qualifications. And there's absolutely no home support for some, no role models."</i> (Community Stakeholder 1).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interactive approach to training</li> </ul>	5 out of 5	<p><i>"I think the uniqueness of it was that it was completely young person based. The modules were devised to be interactive, because again going back to the young people, a lot of them don't have great literacy skills, so to have them sitting in a room writing something for three hours ... it doesn't work. It needs to be interactive and I think that was one of the great things about the modules. It wasn't sitting down and somebody talking at you. It was you being part of it all. The sessions I went to, where I saw the young people in action, they were enthused, they were an active part of what was going on."</i> (Community Stakeholder 1)</p>

Themes	Frequency (n out of 5)	Illustrative quotes
		<i>"There was very much an interactive aspect to the whole thing and I think that's very different to what the young people have been used to up till now."</i> (Community Stakeholder 5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structured nature of the programme – social pedagogy, creative pedagogy</li> </ul>	5 out of 5	<i>"Well like I was saying, the objectives, the structures, the competencies they were trying to develop in the young people. Having them so well thought out and each module focusing on one and that was unique. But yeah. In fact the whole programme is unique because there has been nothing like it. I mean we do little ad hoc pieces like I was saying you know. Working on the CV and talking to people about interviews and talking on the phone and everything but it's not enough. It's not comprehensive enough .... normally dropping in and doing one to one with them. It's usually one to one. Sometimes it can be with pairs if people are comfortable with that. But it's not enough."</i> (Community Stakeholder 3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positively influenced the self-esteem and confidence of participants</li> </ul>	4 out of 5	<i>"It was a different way, I suppose, of learning a skill, because I remember one young guy saying to me that whenever he spoke to people, I thought it was very funny, he said 'whenever I talked to people, I talked to their chest'. And I didn't get it for a minute. And then I realised he never lifted his head to speak face to face. He never made eye contact with the person he was speaking to, because his head was down all the time. And even for that one skill, if that person came out after two weeks knowing 'if I want to speak to somebody I make eye contact. I speak face to face. I don't talk to their chest'."</i> (Community Stakeholder 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionalism of the trainers</li> </ul>	4 out of 5	<i>"And then just the input. People seemed to feel at ease quite quickly within the group which was great. And that must have been up to the facilitators I'm sure to a great extent. There was a nice respectful atmosphere throughout. No issues. You know, and these people are quite marginalised."</i> (Community Stakeholder 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holistic approach to working with young people</li> </ul>	3 out of 5	<i>"This is a much broader holistic sort of an approach. I thought, you know that it was quite interesting. The first half working on the person and getting to know themselves and strengths, weaknesses, barriers they might have, and ways to overcome those things. And the next part was where they actually get into the work place. You know that ... people are never actually, I don't think, taught anything about that, you know. It was good to do that in the group."</i> (Community Stakeholder 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration between community partners</li> </ul>	3 out of 5	<i>"And it was very good to work with a neighbouring community partner. Since the cutbacks, networking collaborative pieces have been really</i>

Themes	Frequency (n out of 5)	Illustrative quotes
		<i>squashed. Everyone is inside and working away on their own. I did enjoy working with [name of organisation] in a collaborative way, and the collaboration has continued.</i> (Community Stakeholder 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivered with a young person in mind, and from the young person's view</li> </ul>	3 out of 5	<i>"For the community based partners, I think we were coming from a young persons' point of view. No politics, agendas whatever between us. It was just the reason only which is good. That is an absolute strength."</i> (Community Stakeholder 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong support from the Dept of Children and Youth Affairs (DYCA) and the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB)</li> </ul>	3 out of 5	<i>"I think the budget. I mean it was great. It wasn't an unsubstantial budget. To be fair to the ETB, the strength was they believed in the project and they believed enough to put the money in and allow the experts to go work it out. They did not have a prescriptive approach."</i> (Community Stakeholder 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivered on Corporate Social Responsibility</li> </ul>	2 out of 5	<i>"So, I absolutely enjoyed it. So anything that is new, if there is an opportunity for young people in this area, we'll support. I found it interesting and worthwhile from the point of view of the whole Corporate Social Responsibility."</i> (Community Stakeholder 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personality and leadership style of the programme developer and trainer</li> </ul>	2 out of 5	<i>"And I would say [name] is the kind of glue that brings all the different things together, but that bridging of the corporate partners and the young people and bringing it all together, that was her strength albeit that there were issues. But there are always issues with this kind of thing."</i> (Community Stakeholder 2)

### Is there anything that you would change?

In response to the question *'If you were designing a programme like this for young adults, how would you do things differently, if at all?'*, we found positive results with the majority saying they would change nothing.

*"To be honest, I wouldn't do anything any different.* (Community Stakeholder 4)

*"I actually don't think I'd do them differently. I really don't. I think this is very innovative and, you know, I don't think I would do things differently."* (Community Stakeholder 5)

One respondent (assistant trainer) suggested that the training manual could be shortened a little for people who are not used to this pedagogy, and the duration of the training sessions could be longer. In addition, the second assistant trainer noted that the timing of the programme needs more thought in order to avoid holiday periods. More detailed feedback was provided in response to the question: *'In what ways could Career LEAP have been*

*organised better?* 4 themes emerged here, and are presented in Table 20. We found that a lot of goodwill was shown by all stakeholders from both the community and business sectors. People gave considerable time and effort to the study, and while these were freely given and people expressed a desire to be involved and to contribute their time, energy and expertise, they need to be recognised as considerable contributions to the study.

Table 20. Ways to improve the organisation of Career LEAP (community perspective)

<b><i>In what ways could Career LEAP have been organised better?</i></b>	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
1. Clarifying the boundaries of work and research, need detailed guidelines to explain ethical standards of research to all partners	<i>"Much more clarity about the boundaries in terms of research and work"; "some boundaries were crossed"; "clarifying what each partner's role is, what exactly we are doing, and their our remit in this study is".</i>
2. Advisory group meetings could be more regular	<i>"Should have kept our Steering Group meetings ongoing throughout"; "there were agendas mostly and these helped people be clear and everything needs to be circulated".</i>
3. More resources in staffing needed, to be able to liaise with businesses, liaise with community groups, and in the recruitment of young people	<i>"Need to be lot more resources"; "resources in terms of staff needed"; "need resources for helping with delivery and organisation of the programme"; need resources for the reporting on things, it takes time to give feedback".</i>
4. Adjusting different approaches of communication to further help collaboration	<i>"Very formal language used in the private sector"; "coming to terms with the different languages"; "the language in research can be complicated when you see it in writing but we understood it when [name] explained things to us about ethics and being objective, and not doing things to interfere with the research process"; "coming together with different approaches".</i>

## Results from interviews with the project manager

The results from two interviews with the Project Manager are presented below (one immediately after the programme ended, and the second several months later). The data are organised in response to guiding questions which underpin the study.

These data reflect an insider perspective on the impact of Career LEAP across the partnership between community, business and academia. The Project Manager was engaged in Career LEAP from the very start of the study- he participated in the preliminary planning meetings, engaged with the community groups and businesses, referred and recruited participants to the programme, organised work-placements, and provided follow-up support for 7 months afterwards (he left the programme at that stage and was replaced by the youth work coordinator). He agreed that he enjoyed participating in the programme, adding that it was extremely challenging at times as there were significant differences in the language used by the academics, community groups and the private sector, particularly at the beginning of the study:

*"It was very challenging in the sense of even language that is different between academics, community groups and the private sector. It was extremely challenging to go round and get consensus in the beginning."*

A very strong Management Group and a separate Advisory Group were identified as among the strongest aspects of Career LEAP:

*"I think it has become a really enjoyable thing. We've got a very strong management group and a huge advisory group too. Loads of different community groups, businesses and Trinity College."*

**Question:** *Have you been involved in other programmes like Career LEAP?*

The Project Manager noted that he had worked on many similar programmes and with similar groups previously in Ireland, but had never participated in a training programme of this kind. He identified the Career LEAP approach as being distinctly different owing to its focus on employment, rather than just on education alone:

*"Similar, in terms of working with people with disadvantaged backgrounds or poverty. Different in their approach and maybe the level as well. ... So, while this programme in particular was focussing on employment in a holistic way, others were focussed on only education."*

**Question:** *In your opinion, what were the strengths of the Career LEAP programme?*

The Project Manager identified several strengths, observing that the variety of partners involved in the research study design was a unique feature:

*"I think the strength from the beginning was the amount of people around the table and the strength that attracted me to the programme to apply for the position. Everyone was at the table and everyone was there for the same reason, to tackle youth unemployment and try to come up with a work readiness programme."*

The openness of everyone and the level of trust that developed over the course of the programme were also identified as core strengths:

*"From day one, the involvement of academics and community groups, that was key. I think the main programme itself, the openness of business and no issue was too big or too small for anyone involved. And they had a very open attitude to all the young people, whether it was at the assessment stage, during the training or afterwards. I think that developed a level of trust between myself and the trainers with the young people."*

The length and part-time nature of the programme was identified as contributing to building trust with the young adults. He felt that it reduced the pressure and intensity which can be associated with full time programmes in his experience:

*"And also, it was because part-time over two weeks, we had time to build that trust. Whereas I think if we had done it full time we would have had very different outcomes and we wouldn't have had as much trust built with the participants. I think our approach of openness and trust with the young people and the amount of time we had with them during the training was very strong."*

Identifying an uncompromising commitment to quality provision and engagement across all stages of the programme, the Project Manager regarded the involvement of the private sector and the opportunity to attend a work placement which offered a full experience of full-time employment as important strengths of Career LEAP:

*"Other strengths were having the private sector there and having high quality placements. I stressed from the beginning that we didn't just want to have people photocopying in the back and not really getting a full experience. So I think we were really able to achieve getting quality placements that were in the core business areas in companies that had never worked on a programme like this before and would never have offered work placements for jobs for people from this demographic background."*

**Question:** Career LEAP aspired to be an innovative programme. In your opinion, in what ways, if any, did it make a unique contribution?

The inclusive nature of Career LEAP and the involvement of business, community and academia, facilitated young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in the north inner city to experience meaningful employment and in most cases secure a job or undertake a formal course in education:

*"I think the big innovation is how we went about it ... and the inclusive nature of the programme involving all relevant partners. The open approach to everything provided an alternative progression from the D1 community into businesses that they wouldn't ordinarily have opportunities to visit or even have knowledge of. So I think the real innovation here is our approach of being inclusive and looking for input from every kind of sector."*

The Project Manager also mentioned the trainers' approach which was open and honest, He reported that this approach created a sense of anticipation and interest in who from the business community was coming in every day:

*"In terms of innovation, the training I think everyone can agree isn't anything that's completely new or ground breaking in the sense of content. But it's more about the delivery, how it is delivered and the approach of the trainers and the approach of everyone involved which contributes in an innovative way. It was an open and honest and personal approach where no question was a stupid question, no person had a rank or a position in there. We had business people coming in from all walks of life. From Heads of HR, lead project managers to every kind of worker coming in. Once they walked in that door, they were coming in as an individual and telling their story, answering questions and working alongside the young people, rather than their position being prioritised."*

*"So I think by breaking things down and de-mystifying what it is to be a working person, I think the young people really responded well to that. Then each day it was a case of who was coming in next ... I think the organisation and the delivery was definitely an innovative contribution and the final innovation was the demand that any work-placement that was going to be offered needed to be of quality and supported in terms of the young people."*

**Question:** *In what ways could Career LEAP have been organised better?*

Among the challenges experienced in the course of the programme delivery, the following were highlighted: need to establish rules and guidelines, and a lack of attention to detail at the operational phase. A concern was identified that at the very start of the programme a degree of confusion had arisen from the use of different languages and a lot of effort was put into arriving at a joint agreement and working through tensions:

*"I think there was a lot of goodwill at the start but with the goodwill there was a lack of attention to detail, to governance and putting down on paper rules and responsibilities for the partners. I think that created some problems and challenges as we went into more of an operational phase."*

Differences in the languages used in each sector were highlighted. As a result, the Project Manager reported that detailed guidelines needed to be put in place to explain ethical standards of research, and the challenges of adjusting to different approaches to communication and collaboration within each sector. The Project Manager added that there was a need to put greater resources into delivering the programme, particularly in terms of staffing and liaising with the partners, and in terms of participant follow up:

*"There needs to be a lot more resources in terms of staff being put in place for the programme. For example, the role of Project Manager was expected to liaise with businesses, liaise with community group, recruitment of young people, supporting those young people, helping with delivery and organisation of the training and reporting back, make all the placements and all the documentation that was around that."*

**Question:** *If you were designing a programme like this for young adults, how would you do things differently, if at all?*

The Project Manager expressed broad support for keeping the programme as it is, noting the need for additional staffing:

*"Yes, I think we would need similar structures to what we have now where you would have a Project Manager, and a young work coordinator. You would have a dedicated trainer and a dedicated support person for the client.*

He identified the potential for self-interests in a cross sectoral partnership like this, and a degree of political manoeuvring which could derail the focus on the young people. He highlighted the importance of keeping them to the fore in future programme deliveries:

*"I think one of the key things which keeps coming to mind for me during this whole process is that a lot of the time people lose sight of the young people themselves, what we are trying to achieve. And a lot of times politics come into play and territory comes into play, whether it be a community service or a business focussing on looking at what they get out of it or what comes out of it from their side, as opposed to helping young people. At every meeting, I have always taken the duty of care of the young people as my responsibility."*

## Results of interviews with mentors supporting work-placement

### Overview

While almost 30 people participated in the mentor training programme, only 9 were directly involved with this group of young adults. Data is reported only from these 9 respondents. We found a difference between those who had participated in the mentor training programme (n=5) and those who had not (n=4). Organisational issues and timing meant that some young people were placed with a mentor who had not been directly involved with the programme. Of the 4 who did not complete work-placement, 3 were placed with mentors who had not attended the training and did not receive a copy of the Career LEAP manual. It is unclear whether this had a direct impact on participants' ability to continue with the programme when issues arose in their lives. When asked, 3 of the 4 mentors indicated that such training would have been very helpful to them in this role.

All reported enjoying the experience but over a third acknowledged that there were challenges, particularly in terms of balancing a busy working day with the responsibilities of mentoring a young adult who needed additional support. They found the background information and profile provided by the Project Manager to be very helpful in supporting them in this role. All agreed that they received excellent support from the Project Manager.

A number of themes emerged from the data analysis which are summarised in Table 21.

*Table 21.* Summary of major themes from mentor interviews

Themes	Frequency (n out of 9)	Illustrative quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The young adults were well prepared and used their training during placement.</li> </ul>	6 out of 9	<p>"He had two weeks of training. It seemed to help him a lot. I could not have asked for anyone better to come in, any better prepared." (Mentor 6, Banking sector)</p> <p>"We met them for the first time at the training course and I have to admit I am a quiet and shy person as well. So these people came in and it's the same with anyone. If I go to a new department tomorrow, I'll have to go and introduce myself to everyone. So for me, I'm still nervous doing that but I'm well used to it now and I'll do it. When these guys came in, it was still nervous for all us to meet them. But it was a hundred times worse for them to meet us. But I have to admit they were very forward and welcoming. They told us this is the stuff we learned on this course. They weren't acting like robots but they said 'I wouldn't normally go up and do this and meet someone and network so to speak. This is what we were advised to do'. A lot of them said they were nervous but after that they were fine." (Mentor 9, Legal)</p> <p>"I think 100% it made a difference because I was not involved in their training in the Career LEAP programme, but when [mentee name] was with me she had a job interview during her work placement with us here. She was able to say that the interview skills she had learnt on the training course, every question that [name of trainer]</p>

Themes	Frequency (n out of 9)	Illustrative quotes
		<i>had covered with them through role play, had pretty much come up in the interview. She said she felt really well prepared."</i> (Mentor 4, Banking sector)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants fitted into the workplace well, practicing and developing their personal and professional skills</li> </ul>	6 out of 9	<p><i>" ... as he didn't have the experience at the beginning, he waited until somebody told him to do something, but gradually he was already able to see what he can do without asking. By the second week, if he was given a task he didn't have to ask every step of the way anymore."</i> (Mentor 2, Facilities)</p> <p><i>"He was great. Great morale. He was not afraid to ask questions. We did encourage him to ask questions but he blended in very well. It wasn't as if he was here on the LEAP programme, he was actually part of the workforce. He gelled very well with the work. Professional skills – he really did not have much. But his personal skills, he used his own initiative, he didn't need to be told to do anything twice. He just plodded away, got along and did what he had to do."</i> (Mentor 8, Catering)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentors rated participants on a par with existing workers</li> </ul>	5 out of 9	<p><i>"But I'm telling you, I'd rather work with [name of mentee] than many of the other people we already have working for us, with their education. I said, because it's not about education, it's about your people skills, and his are actually very good."</i> (Mentor 6, Banking sector)</p> <p><i>"We have had some new starters in, they [the Career LEAP participants] would be on par with that intake, if not better. They asked more questions than our employees."</i> (Mentor 4, Banking sector)</p> <p><i>"I can't compare him with other people. We would not have mentored people in the past, just accepted them on various intern schemes. This is my first time mentoring. However, I will compare him with other workers. We outsource a lot of that type of work. Even people who are on relief work, he is far above the capability of those people. Brighter, much better attitude. The comparison I would make is not with people who I have mentored because I haven't mentored anyone in this area before. Compared to other employees we have on site, he is much better prepared. Good positive attitude with things. He was a self-starter."</i> (Mentor 9, Legal)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoyed the experience of being a mentor – they felt they had greater hands on contact with the mentee and greater support in comparison to other schemes they had</li> </ul>	6 out of 9	<p><i>"But I really, really enjoyed it and hopefully they did too."</i> (Mentor 3, Catering)</p> <p><i>"Really felt like a mentor for the first time. Never understood this role before Career LEAP. Usually people come and go, and we don't really interact too much with them apart from giving them jobs to do. This was different, really different. Having to plan and take responsibility to make sure things</i></p>

Themes	Frequency (n out of 9)	Illustrative quotes
participated in		<i>were right, raised the bar a lot. And I had great support from HR in here and also from [name of Project Manager]."</i> (Mentor 3, Catering)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Found the handbook section on mentoring useful – personally and with colleagues</li> </ul>	5 out of 9	<i>"Yes. So I took some of that information and shared it with colleagues. The three interns we had would have maybe interacted with twenty different people across our business. So in giving those people a bit of background and information, I certainly used the Career LEAP Handbook to give them some understanding of what was expected."</i> (Mentor 1, Retail)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responded well to the CPD training provided – liked the theory illustrated through practical activities and advice. Particularly enjoyed the active learning methods.</li> </ul>	5 out of 9	<i>"I loved the experience and it was really good. I was apprehensive at the start of it. But when I did the course with [name of trainer] that was very interesting. And I could have sat down and listened to her all day nine to five. Pity it was only a half day. She made it so interesting and she'd just draw you in. It was very interesting and I did get a lot out of it."</i> (Mentor 4, Banking sector)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different from other programmes in that there was a training component beforehand and the placement was unpaid</li> </ul>	4 out of 9	<i>"The other really good thing about this programme was that there was training beforehand. Training in how to become work ready. You know, it was very commendable that it was a two week programme. But [mentee name] came in and he was polite. He was engaging. He was enthusiastic. Everything that you would want from anyone that works here at the firm. So, yeah, there were some similarities with other schemes but there were some differences, positive differences as well in terms of how they were prepared."</i> (Mentor 2, Facilities)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need much more advance notice – ideally 2 months to get personnel in place, internet access, security passes and clearance organized etc.</li> </ul>	4 out of 9	<i>"We work in a bank and we have different security levels and all that so we sometimes require information that we are required to have. For the next year, for example, it would be easier when you ask the company what are the pre-documentation that they need to have for people gaining access to the different buildings and email, it would probably make it a bit easier."</i> (Mentor 6, Banking sector)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctuality was an issue for a third of participants during the first week</li> </ul>	4 out of 9	<i>"They need to learn that punctuality at entry level jobs is one of the main things that is demanded from them. And sadly that is the moment where it reflected on the team as well, showing a lack of respect for the rest of the team, when you are not coming in to work, or being late."</i> (Mentor 7, Legal sector)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building a personal relationship with the young adults helped mentors support them</li> </ul>	4 out of 9	<i>"It takes time to build a relationship, but it gave me an insight into, you know, how helpful something like this programme can be, to see them go from being quite nervous at the start to being quite confident at the end of their three weeks."</i> (Mentor 5, Retail)

Themes	Frequency ( <u>n</u> out of 9)	Illustrative quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More time went into planning this placement than for other internships but it was more rewarding for mentors and their colleagues</li> </ul>	3 out of 9	<p><i>"Besides, obviously, the benefits to the candidates. It is a fantastic opportunity for them, given that it was something they weren't forced to do. It was an opportunity they could take up if they really wanted to ... that was really good. But for our staff here it was also really positive. Each of the staff have spoken to me since and said, you know, are [mentee name] or [mentee name] coming back? Em, I think there was a lot of personal satisfaction for our own employees, which has gone a long way and they're really on board with taking in more rounds of the Career LEAP Programme."</i> (Mentor 1, Retail)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The work-placement was valuable in helping participants explore career paths</li> </ul>	3 out of 9	<p><i>"He didn't know what he actually wants, but I already saw during the training when we met the young people that most of them didn't know what it is they actually want. So, I think, getting even a short work experience like this helps definitely to see 'if I like the field, or not!'"</i> (Mentor 7, Legal sector)</p>

### **Is there anything that you would change?**

All 9 respondents expressed satisfaction with the organisation of the work-placement, noting that they saw no reason to change anything.

## Domains of programme quality

We assessed business partners', community members', assistant trainers', mentors' and the Project Manager's reactions to the programme by asking questions during interviews which covered six domains of programme quality (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Collating non-numeric evidence from multiple sources, we found that aggregated data from stakeholder interviewees (n=30) confirm agreement in each of the domains at a level of satisfactory and highly satisfactory in most cases below (see Table 22).

Table 22. Domains of programme quality (post-project)

Domains		Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
1	Perceived relationships between the young adults, and between the young adults and the trainers / mentors. <i>What were young adults' relationships like with other people in the training/work-placement?</i>	93%	7%	-
2	The programme environment operationalised as resources and demands such as workbooks, job tools and environmental safety. <i>What were your impressions of the resources that the young adults had to work with during the training/work-placement?</i>	93%	7%	-
3	The engagement of the young adults and trainers / mentors, defined in terms of attention and participation. <i>To what extent were the young adults actively engaged in the training/work-placement?</i>	73%	24%	3%
4	How social/behavioural norms, such as cooperation and civility, were adhered to in the programme by the young adults and trainers / mentors. <i>How well did the young adults cooperate, and behave responsibly during the training/work-placement?</i>	77%	16%	7%
5	Skills building for young adults and trainers / mentors. <i>To what extent do you think the training and the work-placement helped build the skills the young adults need for employment?</i>	93%	7%	-
6	Routines/structures inherent in the programme organisation. <i>How well was the training/mentoring organised?</i>	93%	7%	-

When viewed together, these results can be interpreted as yielding a positive outcome in relation to the quality and perceived impact of Career LEAP by stakeholders. However, outliers in the data, whilst negligible in the context of the positive trends reported here, are worthy of note. Data in the 'unsatisfactory' category were reported by the Project Manager and highlighted the necessity of adequate resourcing to support the needs of a highly marginalised and disadvantaged group in society. Whilst the programme served the needs of the majority, a significant minority of participants did not complete. He identified the extent

of the support required to reach the most vulnerable and at risk young adults, for whom the current model has not worked fully. We say fully because positive outcomes have been reported by those who did not complete the full programme. There is evidence of interest and engagement from these young people who rated their (incomplete) experience on Career LEAP highly and expressed a desire to return to re-do it. They have continued to engage with the Career LEAP Youth Employment Coordinator almost 2 years after initially starting the programme, and of the 5 (out of 7) for whom data is available, 4 are working (full time or part time), and 1 has recently had a child.

The results appear to show that Career LEAP is a high-quality work-readiness intervention, making a significant difference in participant outcomes on measures such as personal, social and prosocial skills, and motivation to start a career and/or seek appropriate educational opportunities. When assessed against the list of soft skills integral to work-readiness which Career LEAP was designed to develop (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers & Blonk, 2012; O’Sullivan, Symonds & Akkermans, 2017), we found strong evidence of participant gain in all of the competencies below:

- *Career competencies:* career motivation, knowledge of personal qualities including work skills, self-profiling ability, work exploration and career control.
- *Higher order thinking skills:* of critical and creative thinking.
- *Social attitudes and skills:* specifically, workplace civility, valuing diversity, negotiation, conflict management and leadership.
- *Personal skills:* of self-presentation, self-management and work engagement.
- *Job-specific skills:* learned on the work-placements.

When measured against the first three levels of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick’s (2009) framework for evaluating training programmes (Table 23), we found that Career LEAP had been positively received by the young adult participants, mentors and stakeholders (level 1); had resulted in perceived and self-reported improvements across all of the work-readiness skills and competencies it was designed to impact (level 2); and created sustained employment and educational opportunities for 91% (10 out of 11) of young adults who completed the programme, leading to changed behaviour relating to education and employment (level 3).

Table 23. Results of feasibility study

Level	Title	Feasibility study results
1	Evaluating reaction	<p>The young adults, mentors and stakeholders rated the training and work-placements very highly.</p> <p>An evidence based, thoroughly researched and tailor-made work-readiness programme was devised especially for this cohort of participants. They reacted positively to the training materials, creative and interactive pedagogy, relationships with trainers, project management team and mentors, and the structured work-placement.</p>

<b>Level</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Feasibility study results</b>
2	Evaluating learning	The study evidences considerable progress and improvements across all competencies and skills listed above, from baseline through to programme end. The treatment effects were still evident at a 20 month follow up round of assessment with the young adults.
3	Evaluating behaviour	With 91% in work or attending formal educational courses, their achievement is reflected in these commendable milestones which are in contrast with pre-intervention statistics where all participants were in the NEET category.

Based on the results of the investigation and the impact of the programme, the feasibility of Career LEAP has been established for successive iterations. The research team recommend dissemination and roll out on a regional and national basis, and further afield, being cognisant of cultural and socio-political local sensitivities.

## Key findings

In a currently unstable socio-political, cultural and economic global landscape, competition for entry level jobs and employment opportunities can be fierce. This can place significant barriers in the pathway of young adults from disadvantaged communities seeking to enter the workforce to gain meaningful employment. We found evidence that the Career LEAP integrated model, designed specifically to support young adults from the north east inner city of Dublin transition to the workplace, yielded a positive set of results. When compared with the best available evidence from comparable studies nationally and internationally (see Symonds and O’Sullivan, 2017), Career LEAP emerges as a strong evidence based, effective and successful work-readiness programme for hard to reach young adults not currently in education, employment or training.

This Research Report is being launched at a time when several government strategies and initiatives, private sector funded projects, and NGO schemes support a number of labour activation programmes for jobseekers in the Irish context. Seeing a fall in unemployment rates year on year since the global recession in 2008, the Dept. of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is concerned with supporting the long term unemployed and those in the youth sector where the decline has been slower. The latest youth unemployment figures (15-24 year olds) stands at 11.4% as of June 2018 (INOUE, 2018). Strategies such as Pathways to Work (2016-2020), the Action Plan for Jobs, Together with Enterprise 2025, the National Skills Strategy, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, the Further Education and Training Strategy, the Irish Youth Guarantee, and Jobs Plus aim to achieve full inclusive employment over their life time through adopting labour activation policies which focus on a more holistic approach to skills building, young person profiling, and structured support. The Dept. of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has several programmes available to assist jobseekers, including its most recently announced scheme, JobPath. The Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs (DYCA) and the Dept. of Education and Skills (DES), amongst other NGOs and charities providing services in the same area, similarly offer support for the unemployed through internships, employment initiatives, job clubs, community employment schemes, and valuable online and face to face resources to equip unemployed young people with the skills needed to contribute to a growing and recovering economy. However, the evidence suggests that the quality of engagement is not yet as effective as hoped in order to meet the Government’s target to reduce unemployment to 6% or below by the end of 2020, particularly for the long term unemployed and those in the traditionally harder to reach categories (e.g. those from disadvantaged areas, ethnic minorities or people with a disability) (INOUE, 2018).

Set against this background, the key findings in this Report could be useful in supporting the Government’s movement towards a coherent employment policy at local, regional and national level for those who have been traditionally marginalised in Irish mainstream society. The main findings are summarised below:

- Almost two years after completing the programme, 91% of its graduates continue to be in full time employment or in formal education (FE and HE courses).
- Career LEAP built confidence, was impactful, and proved enjoyable and appropriately challenging for participants to maintain their engagement and focus throughout.
- The structured and unpaid work-placement proved satisfying and effective for programme participants and created a more horizontal and flexible learning experience between mentors and young adults. The unpaid nature of the placement

also decreased pressure on partnering businesses, particularly from an administrative point of view.

- The content and innovative pedagogy was perceived as being effective.
- Career LEAP's three-pronged integrated partnership model between community, business and research is a novel approach nationally and internationally in the field of labour activation.
- The Career LEAP active pedagogy was perceived as creating trusting relationships between the young adult participants, the trainers and admin team, and the business leaders and mentors, resulting in considerable gains in self-efficacy and confidence, and leading to sustainable career pathways and employment opportunities for over 90% of graduates. Businesses reported an increase in mentors' leadership capacities as a result, and a positive impact on their workforce from a diversity and inclusive perspective.
- Specifically, Career LEAP was successful in:
  - Leading the young unemployed adults to **uncover new personal and professional work readiness skills** through guided awareness and discovery learning;
  - Facilitating the participants to **practice new skills** using active, creative social learning theories and methods, including critical thinking, role play, improvisation and drama in education, arts-based pedagogies, case studies and collective problem solving;
  - Inviting young unemployed adults to **reflect** on their current career and workplace competencies and **plan for change**;
  - Facilitating the participants to **receive positive feedback** on their learning through social interaction, enhancing their self-efficacy beliefs, values and sense of personal transformation; and
  - **Inoculating** young adults in the NEET category **against setbacks** by tackling generic barriers to education and employment in the supportive training workshop environment and workplace contexts.
- The programme created a positive impact in the north east inner city of Dublin with young people recommending it to family members and friends, and youth and community workers and business organisations talking about Career LEAP in the docklands area, expressing an interest in being involved in future rounds. Good will and enhanced understanding of each others' roles was achieved between partners.
- Demand for the programme has proven high, with young adults from the north east inner city actively initiating contact with the Career LEAP youth employment coordinator for details about subsequent rounds. Graduates have continued to stay engaged and in touch with the youth employment coordinator. 'Word of mouth' proved to be the most powerful agent in recruitment.
- The CPD training provided to business mentors and community and youth workers was rated as outstanding or excellent by over 93% of participants and very good by almost 7% of participants (n= 48).
- The different languages of community, business and research struggled to connect during the administration of the study and posed a considerable challenge to its stability and integrity at key moments. Valuable lessons have been learnt from the pilot study which are incorporated into the final model.

***Career LEAP extension study***

Since running the pilot study in June/July 2016, two additional rounds have been successfully rolled out in the north east inner city (in Sep/Oct 2017 and May/June 2018). The initial results appear to suggest a similar pattern of outcome for participants of the 2107 cohort. It is too early to predict for the 2018 group, but tentative results are positive showing several young people being offered full time employment, and paid apprenticeships at the end of their placement.

## Recommendations and future research in the development of the model

Arising from the results of the Career LEAP pilot study (2015-2017), a number of recommendations and areas for further study were identified. These are informed by the international literature in the field and through dialogue with the study partners from the community and business sectors. They receive further attention and exploration in a number of published articles arising from this and related studies being undertaken by the research team.

The findings would suggest that the integrated and evidence-based Career LEAP partnership model could play a role in supporting the Government's current strategy towards labour activation across the cohort of young unemployed people (15-24), and may be useful in supporting inclusive approaches to engaging marginalised groups in society. In addition, these findings can add insights to the *Report from the Labour Market Council* (2016) to the Minister of Social Protection. Drawing from an evaluation by Indecon of the JobBridge scheme, and calling for a new model of work placement, the findings and lessons learned from the Career LEAP pilot study may be of use in the development of future such models, particularly with regard to Indecon's finding that 49% of interns felt JobBridge gave them the opportunity to secure formal training but 33% did not receive such training. Career LEAP may offer insights in the development of a national/international model with regard to an integrated and partnership approach to training and placement in the area of work-readiness with young unemployed adults who face significant barriers to gaining employment.

***Recommendation 1*** - To enable the roll out and dissemination of Career LEAP as an evidence-based, integrated model of work-readiness training and associated work-placement.

Career LEAP developed a unique pedagogical approach which was shown to elicit positive outcomes from this cohort of young adults for whom the dominant paradigms of teaching and learning in schools and education / training centres appeared to have failed previously. Career LEAP pedagogy is built from a fusion of experiential learning, social pedagogy, active and creative arts-infused teaching and learning approaches, critical thinking and critical pedagogy, and occupational and educational psychology, which locate the young person at the centre of the experience.

***Recommendation 2*** - Dissemination of the *Career LEAP pedagogical model with community and youth workers, teachers and adult educators, and others with a professional interest in this area, through provision of an intensive certified CPD training programme to ensure fidelity of implementation with the content, structure and pedagogy of the original model.*

Partnership defines all aspects of the Career LEAP model, operating always with the interests of the young person at its core. The triadic partnership between community, business and academia resulted in the developmental of a high quality, evidence-based work-readiness programme which incorporates the expertise of each area coming together in a structured way to focus on participants' career competencies, workplace competencies and personal and professional skill sets as related to work readiness.

**Recommendation 3** - A Career LEAP Advisory Group should be made up of representatives from the three partners within a local geographical area to reflect the diversity of expertise in the delivery of the programme. This group would appoint one of its members to act as Chairperson, to oversee the implementation and delivery of the programme, and to mediate different languages and expectations within the Advisory Group.

Career LEAP requires large human, financial and material resources to run efficiently and effectively, and to ensure fidelity of treatment, implementation and service administration of the intervention with the published model.

**Recommendation 4** - A cost benefit analysis and a cost effectiveness analysis would be undertaken to examine the relationship between the inputs and outputs in the first case to determine and explore the monetary value of the impact of Career LEAP, and in the second case to explore the relative costs and outcomes relating to delivering Career LEAP in different ways.

### **Areas for further research and development**

A number of unexpected outcomes emerged during the study which require further research and development in future iterations. These are summarised below.

- Impact of family members' health and stability was significant on this cohort of disadvantaged young people (almost all those who withdrew from the programme did so when a family member experienced a period of ill health – these were generally not of a serious or life-threatening nature). The impact of distal and proximal family relations on participants' resilience within communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage will be explored, and consideration will be given to strengthening the programme's content in the area of building resilience and mitigating unintended outcomes from complex family structures and relations. Relevant findings will be used to inform and develop the content in the Career LEAP programme.
- The review of literature (Symonds & O'Sullivan, 2017) discussed the issue of parental support, and while the pilot study attempted to engage with a number of family members or nominated support people (identified by participants in their initial application forms), the sample size of those who did engage with the research team was insufficient to explore the relationships possibly implicated here in sufficient depth. This will be explored further in subsequent iterations.
- The issue of gender roles and gender stereotyping within a declining and traditional post-industrial, inner city docklands community, experiencing socio-economic disadvantage for one or more generations, emerged during the study. The relevant literature in the field documents a number of issues relating to gender inequality and gender imbalances as a concern for young people in the NEET category participating in education and training programmes, but the present study did not have space to explore this issue adequately. It will be returned to as an area of further research in the ongoing Career LEAP study, with a view to incorporating additional strategies, supports and recommendations as practical components of the Career LEAP intervention.

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