

## UHI Investing in Recovery FINAL REPORT



### Executive summary

The University of the Highlands and Islands Investing in Recovery (IIR) project was a three year European Social Fund (ESF) funded strategic project, aimed to ease the effects of recession in the region. This was achieved by providing funding for additional full and part time student places, above Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) funded numbers for the university, and in particular to support young people. With a total project budget of £12.4m, ESF grant of £7m, additional places were provided in academic years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13. The project was funded through a standard scale of unit cost model for ESF, the first unit cost pilot used in Structural Funds in the Highlands and Islands, paving the way for the new simplification approach in the European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 programmes (ESIF).

Participants would acquire the personal, vocational and employability skills to ensure they were best equipped to take up employment, and contribute effectively to the Highlands and Islands labour market. The unemployed, those seeking to return to work, and those seeking reskilling, would benefit from the project and ensure that they were able to remain economically active with the skills required as the economy recovered.

IIR successfully supported 2,074 participants, with 55% of the participants supported under the age of 25, fulfilling one of the university's aims of targeting young people. A significant upskilling is evidenced with an increase in individuals with Level 5 and 6 qualifications from 13% on entry to 95% on exit. Courses identified as key to economic recovery were studied, including HNC/HND and degree courses in Business and Management, Engineering, Marine Sciences, Oral Health Science and Adventure Tourism.

Managing a project with a standard scales of unit cost framework as a new funding approach was not without its challenges, with some extremely important lessons learned throughout the project life cycle. The projected results and outcomes from the project have been effectively realised and the university would advocate that the use of standard scales of unit costs has been in this instance an extremely positive experience. However, key lessons learned through this process are fundamental in informing future unit cost based projects and it is with this in mind that the following recommendations are made.

### Recommendations

The university should ensure that:

- A fully specified grant offer detailing delivery procedures, prescriptive supporting evidence requirements and a defined change control process to address all impacts on the model is received from the Managing Authority prior to any university project performance. This should include impact reporting requirements required beyond the end of a project;
- A full assessment is undertaken of the university's student records system and processes, to plan for all adaptations required to ensure capacity to deliver all reporting obligations and that the system is ready for use at the point of programme/project delivery, including impact reporting beyond the end of a project;
- A financial analysis is undertaken of the supplementary support costs spent on UHI Investing in Recovery to ensure they are incorporated in the 2014-2020 programme forecasting and budgets, e.g. project management, system development, finance and EU programme management, etc.;
- A review of the programme/project management operational structure is undertaken to determine the areas where resources are required, and to ensure the optimum structure is adopted to effectively deliver result-based management programmes to 2020 and beyond.

### Introduction

The UHI Investing in Recovery project (IIR) was a strategic programme approach, coordinating activities across the network, fully utilising the university's blended learning delivery model and infrastructure, delivering across the partnership to students from across the region, thus allowing for maximum impact and also flexibility to meet demand. IIR aimed to build on the university's Strategic Delivery Body (SDB) Phase 1 investment, giving priority to courses developed with ESF funding and which had already established market demand, industry need and/or economic growth. The project would benefit from the new estates, Next Generation IT facilities and equipment, as well as learning support funded through the SDB ERDF and ESF programmes and would help provide additional student places envisaged by the long-term SDB investment – contributing towards the 'lasting legacy' of a sustainable university based in the region.

IIR was established to supplement provision at a time of increasing demand with no increase in recurrent funding from the Scottish Funding Council for additional places. The increase in funded places would allow the university to offer places to school leavers and other target groups who would otherwise be at risk of becoming unemployed. Highlands and Islands (H&I) statistics indicated that young people were being particularly badly hit by rising unemployment, with figures expected to rise over the subsequent three years as the H&I economy suffered disproportionately from public sector job cuts, highlighting the need for a multi-annual response to skills development. Job opportunities would increasingly be unavailable, leading to the risk of young people becoming long-term unemployed with insufficient qualifications to apply for jobs when they did become available, and leaving the labour market with a gap in appropriately qualified people when the economy did improve. It was also critical to support those who had lost their jobs and were seeking to re-skill to allow them to re-enter the labour market. Re-skilling is a key target for the university, and underlies its approach to lifelong learning for flexible employment skills.

### Eligibility Criteria

Participant (student) eligibility was based on two key components. To ensure that the ESF funding supported participants resident in the Highlands and Islands Programme area, home and term time postcodes were used to identify eligible participants. Course subjects were a second key driver for project eligibility. Priority was given to courses developed with SDB Phase 1 ESF investment, which had already established market demand, industry need and/or economic growth, with the incorporation of courses that would help support the Highlands and Islands economic recovery. A course list was defined and approved by the Managing Authority. Students and courses also met all Scottish Funding Council (SFC) criteria for funding eligibility.

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### Process/Methodology

The standard scales of unit cost methodology for the project was the SFC's unit of resource, i.e. the SFC's funding provided for teaching delivery per subject group across all Higher Education institutions in Scotland. The methodology applied this unit of resource (price) for each full-time equivalent (FTE) within a subject group.

The process and systems required adaptations to meet the project's data requirements. The university's student numbers are typically delivered through agreements with Academic Partners and all student data and activity is recorded using Tribal SITS software. SITS is a student records management system, which is widely used in Scotland and the UK, to store, administer and manage all aspects of curricular and student information, i.e. application, enrolment and results.

Students were identified as eligible to participate in the project as early as possible at the start of each academic year in the project. They were contacted to advise of their potential inclusion in the project, then tagged within the SITS system to enable the university to identify and collect the additional data required by the project throughout the remainder of the academic year.

In relation to the IIR project, students had to attend and complete at least one formal assessment to be included as eligible. Assessments were recorded on SITS as they were completed and marked. If students did not attend regularly, they were deemed to have withdrawn and this was entered on their SITS record.

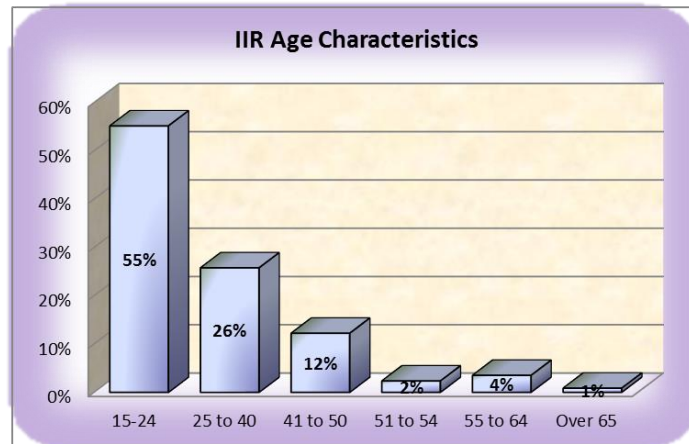
The project was resourced through extensive use of the student reporting system, one full-time project administrator, project management by the Head of Student Records with finance and programme management support. Colleagues in Management Information Services also contributed by developing special tools to allow the efficient collection and storage of the required additional information and reporting tools for returns and audit activities. The reporting structure incorporated a project owner at senior management level and a project board consisting of key senior management members from Planning, Finance, European Development and academic teams to monitor the strategic elements of the project.

The university successfully delivered the three year ESF funded project. However, implementing and delivering a project within the new and very different parameters of standard scales of unit costs demanded continuous flexibility, but at the same time with an equal focus on the project scope. Given the pilot status of the project in the Highlands and Islands, standard scales of unit costs was also a new approach for the Managing Authority.

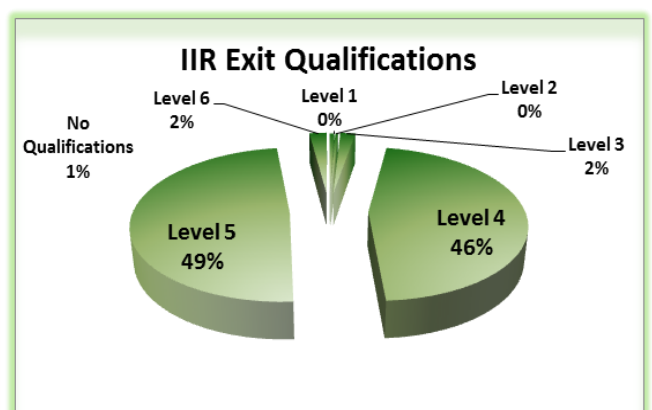
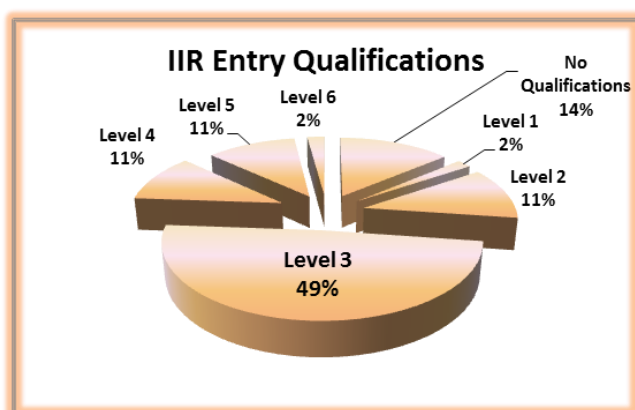
An unfortunate consequence of performing under this new funding process was, for the university, having to deliver without fully specified delivery rules and obligations. The success of the project was in no small part due to the high level of autonomous decision-making by the programme and project personnel, and a reliance on in-house European knowledge and experience.

## Key Findings

The UHI Investing in Recovery project successfully supported 2,074 participants over the three years and fully absorbed the £7m ESF grant with key positive outcomes. The gender split of those supported was 51% female and 49% male. Almost 40% of the project participants were aged between 15 and 19 when they began their course, and assumed then to be school leavers. 55% of the project participants were under 25, fulfilling the university's aim of targeting young people. 38% of participants were aged 25 – 50, with 7% aged over 50. In terms of ethnic origin, the vast majority of project participants (95%) identified themselves as White Scottish.



With regard to achievement, the project funding enabled a marked increase in qualifications achieved, with 74% of those participating in the project gaining a full qualification (Cert HE/HNC or higher) on leaving the university. This is echoed in the significant improvement in the qualification levels of the project participants. At the start of the project 76% of the participants reported that they held qualifications at Level 3 or below. At project closure, participants at Level 3 or below had fallen to 2%, with a significant increase in participants with Level 5 and 6 qualifications from 13% to 95%. It is important to emphasise that the figure is potentially higher than 95%, as there will be a number of participants not included in these figures who were continuing students not yet in their final year of study, and therefore had not attained their final award. *(Full details of all participant characteristic data is appended in Annex 2.)*



*(N.B. Data correct at end of project, continuing student awards not completed at project end.)*

Participants in the IIR project studied a broad range of approved, eligible courses at HN and degree level, which were identified as key subjects for economic recovery for the region, including: Business and Management, Engineering, Marine Science, Oral Health Science, Adventure Tourism Management, Social Care, Sustainable Rural Development, etc. *(A full list of courses attended is appended in Annex 1.)*

### Experience/Lessons learned

The project has had an extremely positive impact for the university and additional funded numbers have now been incorporated in SFC funding, enabling a considerable increase in size from just under 3,500 FTEs in 2010/11, to an expected 6,000 FTEs in 2015/16. It also enabled new courses, with initial small intakes, to grow to the point where they are financially viable, for example BSc Hons Psychology. The ESF funding was also a supporting factor in achieving university status in February 2011. However, managing the project was not without a significant level of challenge.

Delivering a standard scales of unit cost model project creates a shift from financial cost management to a result-based management approach. This shift transfers full responsibility and accountability for determining the unit cost for a project to the Managing Authority. The responsibility for beneficiary organisations then is that of evidencing compliant delivery to be able to draw down the funding, i.e. delivery = payment. Risks for the delivery of unit cost model projects transfer therefore from evidencing costs to evidencing outputs.

While this is a welcome and very positive move, where an organisation can focus fully on the project outcomes, the level of evidence required to substantiate delivery creates an extensive amount of additional work. The student records system enabled this burden to be managed relatively efficiently, however it should be noted that a great deal of staff resource was required to support the inputs and outputs involved. This was particularly demanding with regards to system programming, data analysis and management, and data capture for participant characteristics. The resourcing of future unit cost model projects then will need to ensure resources are costed, and available, to support and deliver a project.

### Standard scales of unit costs

Establishing and delivering to the standard scales of unit costs model took some considerable input, dialogue and negotiation, from both university and Managing Authority personnel. A number of issues emerged at different stages of the project life cycle, with the following having the most impact:

- Issues arose over eligibility criteria after the project was started which created additional work and strain on resources. It would therefore be more effective to fully establish all eligibility criteria in advance and ensure that they are fully defined and communicated at the start of a project.
- A minor change to the SFC's national methodology in the second year of the project, as the basis for the project's unit cost, created a potentially significant issue for IIR. It would be more efficient that where a unit cost is based on an established methodology, there is a process for assessing impacts of any and all changes in the project life cycle that are built in to a project at the start.
- An issue arose over mathematical principles (decimal places and rounding) that impacted on final figures, which was significant because of the number of entries (participants). Specified calculation principles need to be fully defined and communicated at the start of a project.

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### Systems/Processes

- Tagging project funded students for the project demanded additional reporting functionality from the reporting system, SITS. The system required new reports to be written to meet the project needs.
- Reporting against designated participant characteristics required the collection of substantial additional data that was not routinely collected from students and was not incorporated in SITS. Students had to be surveyed through email, mailshots and telephone as a separate exercise to ascertain the data, with associated additional resourcing and cost implications.
- Impact reporting is a requirement for unit cost model projects, typically six months beyond the end of the project. This was not stated as being a reporting requirement for the university. Undertaking a survey to establish this data took a great deal of resourcing and would be better served if it could be driven/captured through SITS.

### Structure/Resources

- Due to the new funding approach of a unit cost model, adequate and appropriate staffing for the project was difficult to estimate at the start of the project. Initial resource assessment built in costs for a full time Administrator for a three year, fixed term contract, and no project manager costs included for the Head of Student Records. Programme management costs were included and claimed in the ESF SDB Management project. However, the time and workload for the project manager was substantial, with considerable input from the programme management team and the Finance team. This additional staff resource, and associated costs, were not built into the project budget and subsequently not claimed as a cost to the project. It is essential that future unit cost model projects ensure that support is fully accounted for, both in terms of staff resourcing and full project costing.
- At the outset of the project the Management Information Services department had an in-house specialist in SITS development who had the capacity to write additional reports during project performance. The project then did not require external ICT to support this additional work. However, the individual left the university to take up an external position, which left a critical resource gap during the life of the project. System report writing played a key role in delivering the IIR project and planning for future unit cost model projects must ensure this element is incorporated in relation to staff resource and costs.

### Conclusions/Recommendations

The ESF project UHI Investing in Recovery successfully supported 2,074 participants, enabling the university to provide places to people in the Highlands and Islands above its SFC funded places and therefore affording the university, and the region, an extremely critical bolster during a significant economic downturn. Without the ESF funding, the university would not have been able to expand as rapidly as it did, particularly given the economic situation at the time.

Piloting a standard scales of unit cost project proved a very successful funding model for delivering the project outcomes. However, many key lessons were learned within this simplified cost approach, which are critical in terms of the effective delivery of standard scales of unit cost projects for the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment funds programme. The lessons learned demonstrates the necessity for a project sponsor to be provided with a clearly defined delivery process, detailing all evidence obligations. Internally, organisations will require an effective and efficient structure, a fully supported records system and supporting processes, and also sufficient staff resource.

A full picture of the impact of the project, and indeed the region, may not be fully realised for some time and may be impossible to fully quantify. However, a participant destination survey has been undertaken by the programme management team, (one of the ESF funding obligations), and an impact report will follow later this year. This should go some way to providing additional information on the project participants.

The UHI Investing in Recovery project successfully achieved its aims and objectives and effectively maximised absorption of the ESF grant. Given that utilising standard scales of unit cost models creates a major shift of delivery, reporting and risk for organisations, and that the 2014-2020 ESIF funds will incorporate unit cost models, the key recommendations of this report are critically focussed on the lessons learned aspects of delivery and mitigating the associated risks. It is crucial for all future project and programme delivery to ensure that the university takes vital steps to mitigate delivery risks, prior to any project/programme performance in the new 2014-2020 ESIF programmes and the following key recommendations are essential.

The university should ensure that:

- A fully specified grant offer detailing delivery procedures, prescriptive supporting evidence requirements and a defined change control process to address all impacts on the model is received from the Managing Authority prior to any university project performance. This should include impact reporting requirements required beyond the end of a project;
- A full assessment is undertaken of the university's student records system and processes, to plan for all adaptations required to ensure capacity to deliver all reporting obligations and that the system is ready for use at the point of programme/project delivery, including impact reporting beyond the end of a project;
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## Annex 1 ESF Attended Courses

Code	Course
U104N	Accounting HNC
U004N	Accounting HND
U014W	Acting and Performance HNC
U17PN	Administration and Information Technology HNC
U75NG	Administration and Information Technology HND
U178N	Adventure Tourism and Outdoor Pursuits HNC
UN870	Adventure Tourism Management BAH
UQ501	An Cursa Adhartais CertHE
UQ532	An Cursa Comais CertHE
U0CFG	Applied Sciences HNC
U115D	Arboriculture and Urban Forestry HNC
U015D	Arboriculture and Urban Forestry HND
UV400	Archaeology BAH
UVF49	Archaeology and Environmental Studies BSCh
UK130	Architectural Technology BSH
U732K	Architectural Technology HNC
U632K	Architectural Technology HND
U113B	Beauty Therapy HNC
U013B	Beauty Therapy HND
UNN21	Business and Management BAH
U001N	Business HNC
U101N	Business HND
UL530	Child and Youth Studies BAH
UX310	Childhood Practice BAH
U102H	Civil Engineering HNC
U103B	Complementary Therapies HNC
U003B	Complementary Therapies HND
U161H	Computer Aided Draughting and Design HNC
UG400	Computing BSCh
U304G	Computing HNC
U006G	Computing: Software Development HND
U204G	Computing: Technical Support HND
U252K	Construction Management HNC
U209W	Contemporary Art Practice HNC
U309W	Contemporary Art Practice HND
UW231	Contemporary Textiles BAH
U013X	Early Education and Childcare HNC
UH600	Electrical and Electronic Engineering BEng
UHH36	Electrical and Mechanical Engineering BEng
UH220	Energy Engineering BEngH
UH100	Engineering BSc
U356H	Engineering Systems HNC
U056H	Engineering Systems HND
UFV99	Environment and Heritage Studies BSCh
UF751	Environment and Sustainability Studies BSCh
UF900	Environmental Science BSCh
U624D	Equine Studies HNC
U224D	Equine Studies HND
U107H	Fabrication Welding and Inspection HNC
UWW12	Fine Art Textiles BAH

Code	Course
U206C	Fitness Health and Exercise HNC
U105D	Forestry HNC
U005D	Forestry HND
UQP59	Gaelic and Communication CertHE
UQ505	Gaelic and Development BAH
UQP53	Gaelic and Media Studies BAH
UQ506	Gaelic and Related Studies DipHE
UQW53	Gaelic and Traditional Music BAH
UQ530	Gaelic Language and Culture BAH
U094D	Gamekeeping with Wildlife Management HNC
UN290	Golf Management BAH
U015L	Health Care HNC
UL450	Health Studies (Health and Welfare) BAH
UL510	Health Studies (Rural Health) BAH
UL511	Health Studies BAH
UVL12	History and Politics BAH
U522N	Hospitality HNC
U042N	Hospitality Management HND
U105G	Information Technology HNC
U005G	Information Technology HND
U154G	Interactive Media HNC
U054G	Interactive Media HND
UF710	Marine Science BSCh
UH300	Mechanical Engineering BEng
U31WN	Music Business HNC
U103W	Music HNC
U003W	Music HND
UF800	Natural and Environmental Sciences BSCh
UB750	Oral Health Science BSc
UW310	Popular Music Performance BAH
U122N	Professional Cookery HNC
U005W	Professional Stage Dance HND
UC800	Psychology BSCh
U182K	Quantity Surveying HNC
U082K	Quantity Surveying HND
UV900	Scottish Cultural Studies BAH
UVV24	Scottish History and Archaeology BAH
UV212	Scottish History BAH
U045L	Social Care HNC
UL300	Social Sciences BAH
U143L	Social Sciences HNC
U316W	Sound Production HNC
U16XC	Sports Coaching with Development of Sport HNC
U1X6C	Sports Coaching with Development of Sport HND
UD500	Sustainable Forest Management BSc
UD453	Sustainable Rural Development BSCh
UV600	Theological Studies BAH
UNN28	Tourism and Hospitality BAH
U108N	Tourism HNC
U712W	Visual Communication HNC

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## Annex 2 Participant Characteristics

**Total Participants: 2074**

### Age Characteristics

Group	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
14 and Under	0	0	0	0
15 to 17	124	216	152	151
18 to 19	308	416	228	288
20 to 24	120	248	138	188
25 to 40	184	267	171	364
41 to 50	128	48	64	190
51 to 54	20	12	13	36
55 to 64	24	21	22	51
Over 65	4	1	5	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>1,229</b>	<b>793</b>	<b>1,281</b>

### (a) Number of Participants on Entry

Level	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
No Qualifications	24	16	122	165
Level 1	76	100	20	17
Level 2	34	64	87	153
Level 3	388	636	421	594
Level 4	192	204	77	145
Level 5	184	196	54	175
Level 6	14	4	12	32
<b>Totals</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>1,220</b>	<b>793</b>	<b>1,281</b>

*(Split by Qualification Level)*

### (b) Number of Participants on Exit

Level	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
No Qualifications	0	0	4	7
Level 1	0	0	0	1
Level 2	0	0	3	4
Level 3	0	0	16	22
Level 4	522	816	402	559
Level 5	376	400	356	656
Level 6	14	4	12	32
<b>Totals</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>1,220</b>	<b>793</b>	<b>1,281</b>

### (c) Number of Participants Gaining a Full Qualification

Level	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
No Qualifications	0	0	0	0
Level 1	0	0	0	0
Level 2	0	0	0	0
Level 3	0	0	0	0
Level 4	304	488	326	456
Level 5	248	240	283	469
Level 6	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>925</b>

*(Split by Qualification Level)*

### (d) Number of Participants Gaining a Partial Qualification

Level	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
No Qualifications	0	0	27	43
Level 1	0	0	0	0
Level 2	0	0	0	0
Level 3	0	0	0	0
Level 4	204	333	98	182
Level 5	156	159	59	131
Level 6	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>356</b>

### Ethnic Origin

Group	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
White(Scottish)	572	896	464	750
White(English)	96	140	70	90
White(Welsh)	4	4	4	2
White(Irish)	6	0	0	0
White(Other)	204	164	236	407
Black(Caribbean)	4	0	0	2
Black(African)	0	0	3	2
Black(Other)	4	2	0	2
Asian(Chinese)	6	0	0	1
Asian(Indian)	0	2	0	1
Asian(Pakistan)	0	0	1	2
Asian(Bangladesh)	0	0	0	0
Asian(Other)	4	4	1	2
Gypsy/Traveller	0	0	0	0
Mixed background	4	4	3	5
Other Ethnic background	8	4	11	15
<b>Totals</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>1,220</b>	<b>793</b>	<b>1,281</b>

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## Period of registered unemployment

Group	Application				Final Statistics			
	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
	Under 25	25 and over	Under 25	25 and over	Under 25	25 and over	Under 25	25 and over
Up to 6 months	15	12	40	31	2	1	1	1
6 to 12 months	59	46	93	59	7	7	6	7
13 to 24 months	24	21	57	18	3	2	2	1
25 to 36 months	12	18	22	56	0	1	0	1
Over 3 years	13	19	6	20	0	1	0	3
Workforce Returners	0	12	0	7	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>

## Period of worklessness

Group	Application				Final Statistics			
	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
	Under 25	25 and over	Under 25	25 and over	Under 25	25 and over	Under 25	25 and over
Up to 6 months	12	9	40	12	0	0	0	0
6 to 12 months	12	19	91	15	3	2	1	1
13 to 24 months	22	12	93	6	0	2	0	1
25 to 36 months	8	14	20	14	0	0	0	0
Over 3 years	7	16	7	2	0	1	0	4
Workforce Returners	0	9	0	4	0	0	0	0
In education/training	231	82	165	31	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>

## Secondary Target Group

Group	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Homeless	0	0	3	3
Lone parent	160	40	1	47
History of substance abuse	0	0	0	3
History of alcohol abuse	0	0	1	3
Literacy and Numeracy	0	0	12	39
Disabilities	144	136	102	153
Mental health problems	0	0	11	47
Physical illness	0	0	20	40
Family/caring responsibilities	16	4	49	194
Young people leaving care	0	0	0	1
Economically inactive	0	0	8	8
Lack of work experience	0	0	0	0
Unemployed	198	410	34	36
Criminal record	0	0	6	5
No qualifications	24	16	122	165
EU migrant workers	0	0	7	14
Non-EU migrant workers	0	0	11	5
Self-employed	0	0	12	40
Voluntary worker	0	0	4	22
Ethnic minority	14	6	9	21
Young people (NEET)	0	0	0	0
Asylum seeker	0	0	0	0
Employed	0	0	13	25
In full-time or part-time education	37	30	215	277
Young people at risk of becoming NEET				
on leaving school	24	16	3	2
Long term unemployed	107	179	5	3
Seasonal worker	0	0	5	26
Part-time worker	0	0	0	0
Refugees	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>837</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>1,179</b>

## Primary Target Group

Group	Application		Final Statistics	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Lack of work experience</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>1,220</b>	<b>793</b>	<b>1,281</b>