North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF)

Final Programme Report, March 2024
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**NEERSF Evaluation**
Aberdeen City Council Co-Leader Foreword

The opportunity to deliver a funded programme designed and developed by partners across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire was one which we eagerly grabbed.

The Scottish Government’s North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF) programme was created to support the recovery and growth of the region following the triple whammy of economic shocks resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the exit from the European Union, and a drop in the oil price, resulting in a downturn in the oil and gas sector.

While Aberdeen City Council acted as the lead accountable body responsible for ensuring the overall delivery of NEERSF as well as individual projects, this was a true partnership effort involving Robert Gordon University, ETZ Ltd, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire Council, Opportunity North East, Skills Development Scotland, and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

NEERSF rapidly brought together organisations with a clear focus on successfully delivering 29 projects to support business development, recovery, and growth, and in doing so protected and created jobs, training courses, and opportunities for people across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Not only that, but it also enabled us to get hundreds of people, including those furthest from the labour market, job ready and into work, supporting people, employment, and businesses across the area.

NEERSF made a tangible difference to the lives of a huge number of people. To truly succeed, it was essential to reach as many people as possible, ensuring an inclusive approach with no one left behind. The number and range of beneficiaries is testament to that success – from under-16s who had disengaged from education, all the way through to business leaders.

And the results speak for themselves, more than 3,900 individuals directly supported, almost 1,000 businesses, and more than 1,500 university and other courses provided.

The outcomes of the NEERSF, many of which will continue to benefit the region for years to come, and the strength of the partnership formed to deliver it, make a solid case for the delivery of future delivery of government priorities, taking a place-based approach to address needs and opportunities.

I would urge the Scottish Government to adopt this approach for delivery of future initiatives to ensure a mixed economy of delivery and expertise from across sectors to drive positive outcomes for the North-east. And, of course, I would welcome any future investment in the area by Scottish Government to ensure its continued socio-economic health and strength as a driver of the Scottish and wider UK economy.

Christian Allard
Aberdeen City Council Co-Leader
Ministerial Foreword

The North East of Scotland was particularly hard hit by the combined impact of the downturn in oil and gas, the Covid-19 pandemic and our exit from the EU.

In response, the Scottish Government has committed to boosting the North East economy to ensure it not only recovers but also thrives as part of efforts to ensure a just transition to net zero.

In August 2021, my predecessor Jamie Hepburn announced over £14 million investment in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire through the North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF). Across 29 varied projects the Fund aimed to boost job creation, create opportunities for upskilling and reskilling of individuals, and aid business growth and innovation. From the outset we worked closely with local partners to ensure the fund was targeted in ways that best met the region’s aims of recovery and diversification. This funding aligned closely with existing support for the region, including through the Aberdeen City Region Deal, and has paved the way for a lasting legacy across a variety of sectors, from food and drink to renewable energy.

I am delighted to see the incredibly positive impact that NEERSF has had on the region, having succeeded in supporting over 4,000 individuals and over 870 local employers since the Fund’s inception. Perhaps aside from the numbers of individuals and employers supported, what has struck me the most is the individual stories highlighted which demonstrate the enormous impact that the various projects have made to people’s lives and future prospects. This report demonstrates that the Fund has provided meaningful opportunities to individuals across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, boosted entrepreneurial spirit and start-up growth across the region, and supported businesses at a critical time for the local economy.

I am extremely grateful for the support and dedication of the partners committed to making this Fund as successful and impactful as possible. I urge all partners to continue this excellent work and build upon the learning provided by NEERSF.

Looking to the future we are continuing to invest in the region through the Just Transition Fund amongst other initiatives.

And in a national context, learning from NEERSF will be integrated into upcoming work to transform Scotland’s post-school education and skills system to ensure that going forward, it fully meets the needs of those accessing it and the country’s economy.

Graeme Dey
Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans
The North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF) was introduced to support Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, areas which were particularly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic the downturn in oil and gas and subsequently, our exit from the EU. NEERSF provided funding to support a range of projects aimed at helping local individuals and employers. The Fund was led by a group of regional partners with projects designed to suit specific economic and social requirements of the region.

Projects were operational for up to twelve months from October 2021 until September 2022. Collectively these projects provided support to 4,032 individuals and 875 employers. Projects varied greatly, with some including longer-term work placement or training programmes and others including short courses or intensive programmes.

The first theme which the Fund supported was supporting entrepreneurs and businesses. Projects included accelerator programmes for start-up businesses and entrepreneurial training and short courses. Overall 440 individuals and 311 businesses were supported by the five projects.

Three projects supported the development of digital skills and digital capability. This included the rollout of a digital pilot licence and a project aimed at increasing the adoption of digital technology and stimulate new innovation within the primary agriculture sector. Overall 168 individuals and 18 businesses were supported by these projects.

Supporting the development of skills required for the future within a range of different sectors was another theme which NEERSF focused on. Nine projects related to tourism, hospitality, food and drink, health and social care and life sciences were supported within this theme. 757 individuals benefited from these projects in addition to 237 businesses.

A further theme of NEERSF included focusing in on the net zero transition and the green skills required to achieve this transition. A range of projects were included within this theme including some which worked to support SMEs to consider their net zero plans as well as projects directly supporting the upskilling requirements of renewable energy companies. 1,490 individuals were supported within these six projects and a further 241 businesses.

Finally NEERSF also focused on widening access and targeting skills and employability support on those most in need. These seven projects included fee waivers for upskilling short courses, work placement programmes and funds aimed at reducing barriers. 1157 individuals and 68 businesses benefitted from these projects.

This report summarises the individual and collective impact of NEERSF support, demonstrating the variety and diversity of projects across these different themes. NEERSF has demonstrated the value of place-based initiatives which are both catered to the specific requirements of a region and designed and delivered by organisations who understand these requirements and the local context.

Collectively provided support to:

4,032 individuals
875 employers

Executive Summary
1. Background

In 2021, the Scottish Government allocated £14.3 million to the North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF) in recognition of the particular challenges the North East was facing as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the downturn in oil and gas and our exit from the EU.

The overarching aim of the Fund was to aid economic recovery and the just transition to net zero in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, boost job creation, upskill and re-skill individuals to enable them to capitalise on emerging opportunities, and reduce existing inequalities through a range of targeted support across key groups and communities.

A group of regional partners were brought together to co-design the Fund. A larger group of partners were involved before projects were taken forward with:

- Aberdeen City Council (accountable body)
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Opportunity North East (ONE)
- Energy Transition Zone (ETZ)
- Robert Gordon University (RGU)
- University of Aberdeen
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
- Aberdeen & Grampian Chambers of Commerce (AGCC)
The funding aimed to provide over 3,000 training opportunities in addition to supporting hundreds of local businesses at a critical time for the local economy.

Building on the aims of the NEERSF programme the Fund was created with three core objectives:

• to support entrepreneurship, accelerated business start-up, development and growth across the region;
• to build the foundations for a step change in digital skills and confidence, ensuring that the North East workforce is ready to respond to new opportunities, and;
• to upskill and reskill individuals to enter or remain in work and/or take advantage of jobs as the region delivers on UK and Scottish energy transition objectives.

In addition to these three objectives there was an additional overarching objective to place inclusion and equality at the heart of the fund with a number of projects focusing on this.

Following the 2021/22 budget announcement, partners submitted proposals based on these objectives. Work with partners ensured that the funding added value to, and went beyond, existing national and local employability, skills, and economic development support. A place-based approach to investment was taken when developing the Fund, ensuring that it was aligned to the specific skills requirements and economic needs of the region. Proposals also aligned to the City Region economic priorities¹ of diversification and the transition to net zero. Proposals also had to ensure alignment with the aims of the Regional Economic Strategy Action Plan 2024².

Projects placed significant focus on inclusion, education and employment, supporting individuals to upskill and reskill, and helping them access new opportunities. Several projects within the Fund were tailored specifically to addressing inequalities, offering additional support or funding for those that needed it.

The support provided through NEERSF spanned a wide range of sectors. These included tourism and hospitality, food and drink, health and social care, renewable energy, oil and gas, and digital. Funding was also provided to boost support already available to those looking to start their own businesses, with a particular focus on helping businesses prepare for the transition to net zero.

¹ City Region Deals - Cities and regions - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
² Regional Economic Strategy 2024 (aberdeencity.gov.uk)
2. Promoting Entrepreneurship and Supporting Businesses

A key objective of the Fund was to support and promote entrepreneurship and accelerated business start-up, development and growth across the region. Within the Scottish Government’s National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) we outline our commitment to creating a culture in which entrepreneurship is encouraged, supported and celebrated, and where Scotland is recognised as one of the best countries in the world to start and grow business. NEERSF projects exemplified these ambitions by supporting local businesses and local entrepreneurs to develop and grow their ideas. Projects within this theme were developed and delivered by Robert Gordon University (RGU) and Opportunity North East (ONE).

Entrepreneurial Short Courses

RGU developed a suite of entrepreneurship short courses to support micro-businesses and SMEs in key regional sectors to sustain and grow their businesses. Three new entrepreneurship programmes which focused on supporting organisations that had been particularly impacted by the pandemic and economic downturn were developed and delivered. These focused on food and drink, tourism, and female entrepreneurs who have been impacted disproportionately and continue to be under-represented. The development of these programmes was based on the success of RGU’s Creative Entrepreneurship programme. It was also delivered as part of this project to support creative businesses in the region which have been significantly impacted by the economic downturn. All courses offered academic credit and all participants who completed and submitted the final assessment, and passed, were awarded 15 Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) academic credits. Overall, across the four programmes 92 individuals enrolled on short courses and were supported to start, sustain or grow their own business.

“Greater awareness of entrepreneurial skills and tools. Confidence that I am actually a businessperson already and to really appreciate that. A lovely networking group I would otherwise not have had. Some very valuable discussion about the nature of women-led businesses and how to pace ourselves appropriately along with bringing up children and other multiple responsibilities. I’m extremely grateful for the opportunity to take this course and will very highly recommend to others.”

Enterprising Women Participant
Regional Start-Up Accelerator

RGU’s Regional Start-Up Accelerator was a six-month structured programme focused on creating innovative and scalable businesses. The project targeted early-stage innovators and entrepreneurial teams in the North East who were looking to enhance their entrepreneurial skills, validate their business ideas, and get practical insight into the steps to starting a business (including strategy, finance, legal, operations, and marketing). The competition received nearly 200 applications which were evaluated by a judging panel who selected 40 teams to attend a full-day bootcamp. Of those, 37 teams secured entry to the main programme with 33 teams (comprising 68 founders) completing the programme. This resulted in 11 new businesses being created with 14 dormant companies revitalised. The final start-up showcase was held in May 2022 and was attended by over 200 people. Nine teams had the opportunity to pitch on stage for the opportunity to win prize money and all teams had an exhibition stand to display their products, meet the audience and share their journey. Whilst it is still early stages for many of these businesses, 19 full time jobs have already been created and a number of businesses have been successful in gaining early investors.
Entrepreneurial Summer School

The intensive two-week Entrepreneurial Summer School was the final enterprise-support project delivered by RGU. It targeted graduates of 2020, 2021 or 2022 living in the region, who were considering starting their own business and wanted to validate their idea. 35 individuals enrolled onto the 10-day programme which was delivered via a hybrid model mixing theory and practical elements. The programme concluded with an ‘Apprentice’ style weekend of activities which included the participants competing as teams to sell a basket of products in a City Centre shopping centre. The teams raised £560 for Charlie House charity as a result of this activity. Following the programme, 16 participants went on to submit a start-up action plan for their ventures.

“The course provided me clarity and better understanding of how best to sell the problem my start up solves and the solution it provides to prospective team members and investors. I gained clarity and confidence that I now know what I need to do in order to move my start-up from just being an idea in my head to reality, a real product in my hands that is selling in the market.”

Entrepreneurship Summer School participant

Accelerator Start-Up and Innovation Funds

An additional project delivered by ONE was the Accelerator Start-Up and Innovation Funds. The objective was to increase the number of new jobs in the region by creating an environment of entrepreneurship and innovation that supported business start-up and business growth. ONE delivered nine separate accelerator programmes supporting early-stage entrepreneurs and established businesses, working with delivery partners. The programmes included two digital tech programmes; four food, drink and agriculture programmes; one tourism programme; one life sciences accelerator; and one regional accelerator. The 10-week industry programmes targeted at early-stage entrepreneurs covered topics including value proposition and customer discovery, funding, and investment. The programmes for established businesses included one-to-one coaching and planning for growth.

To further support the next-stage development of businesses on the accelerator programmes, two funding awards were established by ONE. Pioneer Awards enabled start-ups to embark on projects they identified as key to launching their businesses, raising brand awareness or building market intelligence. Innovation Awards supported projects to drive innovation and accelerate business growth in scaling and established businesses. Overall, 210 participants completed one of the nine accelerator programmes, with 49 Pioneer Awards and a further 36 Innovation Awards made.

“The programme taught me a great deal about the fundamental aspects of running and growing a business. It also provided me with an invaluable opportunity to network with other like-minded businesses, which I have already started making plans to work with moving forward. The tuition and support offered really opened my eyes to the opportunities available and encouraged me to think and plan on a larger scale.”

Tourism Gamechanger Participant
Entrepreneurial Training

The Entrepreneurial Training project, delivered by ONE, aimed to increase the scale and number of business start-ups in the North East by providing world-class entrepreneurial teaching to individuals from nine leading entrepreneurship-supporting organisations in the region. The project resulted in 35 individuals completing the Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP+) delivered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The course is a world-renowned training programme for the accelerated development of skills and methodology to take an idea from nucleation through to a fully prepared business plan. Following the project, work is ongoing to create a shared strategy for implementing the learning from MIT through the region’s entrepreneurial communities and programmes.
3. Increasing Digital Capability in the Region

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that we have a strong, digitally-skilled workforce to meet future skills needs and ensure that Scotland can reach its potential in an increasingly digital world. An objective of NEERSF was to build the foundations for a significant increase in digital skills and confidence, ensuring that individuals and businesses in the North East are ready to respond to new opportunities. The following projects were progressed to meet this objective, in conjunction with partners including ONE and SDS. Many projects within the entrepreneurship and business support objective also had digital aspects, such as the ONE digital tech accelerator programmes.

Supply Chain Technology Agriculture

The ONE Supply Chain Technology Agriculture project aimed to increase the adoption of market-ready digital technology in the primary agriculture sector to drive efficiency, productivity and sustainability. Overall, this project succeeded in supporting 116 delegates from farms in the region. As part of the project, a highly successful Agri-tech Exposition was run in partnership with Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) and the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, which facilitated multiple workshops and demonstrations.

Course participants attended workshops and heard from technology experts who had been invited to demonstrate and speak about their technologies. Of the 18 businesses selected to attend a technology training webinar, two exemplary agri-tech farms were selected to become demonstration ‘Focus Farms’. These digital demonstration farms are carrying out trials to assess the impact of available technology, develop best practice and demonstrate how data can best be utilised to enhance the performance of farms of all sizes and types. Learning from these trials is being shared with the regional farming community and supply chains through a regular programme of engagement, including webinars and open farm visits.
Digital Pilot Licence

The Digital Pilot Licence project was introduced by SDS to upskill and reskill individuals to enter or remain in work and/or take advantage of jobs as the region delivers on UK and Scottish energy transition objectives. The Digital Pilot Licence aims to secure online certification, improve job prospects and equip people to advance their careers. The project provided upskilling in a range of digital areas such as data analytics and blockchain technology. 114 individuals engaged with digital training at SCQF level 7 with 51 individuals receiving certification for completion of a full digital pilot licence.

Expansion of the Digital Start Fund

An additional project aimed at boosting digital skills was SDS’s Expansion of the Digital Start Fund. This project was introduced to target a specific cohort for the region, supporting those on low incomes or with other barriers, into roles in the digital sector. The Digital Start Fund is a tried and tested approach for developing job-ready digital skills, but due to labour market conditions and limited timescales for recruitment, this particular expansion lacked the anticipated demand. As such, despite six applicants being recruited only one individual was able to fully complete the course, with other participants leaving early to move into full-time employment or due to personal circumstances. Four of the six candidates secured full-time employment during the project and so withdrew from the course, one completed, and one had to leave to due personal circumstances.
4. Developing Future Skills in the North East

In a constantly evolving world, it is essential that we develop our skills system to deliver for the future. Through the sector-specific support offered through NEERSF, we aimed to upskill and reskill individuals to enter or remain in work and take advantage of emerging jobs, as well as supporting businesses to adapt. Sectors targeted through the Fund included tourism and hospitality, food and drink, health and social care, and life sciences. Partners involved in delivering this support included ONE and RGU.

Tourism and Hospitality

Hospitality Apprenticeships North East

To increase quality and service levels in the hospitality sector, ONE expanded the existing Hospitality Apprenticeships North East (HANE) project to employ additional hospitality apprentices. The project provided them with employment and accredited training gained in a variety of hospitality roles. Seven leading hospitality businesses in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire supported 14 apprenticeships. Apprentices completed training and development rotations in at least two of four departments, namely food and beverage, housekeeping, kitchens, and front of house. This exposed participants to all sides of the business, helping them to develop a more complete understanding of the hospitality industry. HANE inspires, nurtures and develops young people to shine by equipping them with recognised qualifications and skills for life that will help them stand out in the sector. Of those starting the programme, ten completed with a SVQ level 5 qualification. The NEERSF support of HANE came at an important time given the challenges faced by hospitality businesses following the pandemic and the labour shortages resulting in part from EU exit.

“I am getting the best of both worlds. You are getting an education but also getting the skills and working at the same time. And with the work schedule, the masterclasses, and the learning bites, the opportunities on this apprenticeship are amazing...I feel so lucky to be in this position, and I am 100% certain my apprenticeship has opened a whole new chapter in my life.”

HANE apprentice
Adventure Tourism Training

To support the tourism sector, ONE delivered the Adventure Tourism Training project, which aimed to increase visitor numbers and spend on adventure tourism in the region by providing excellent service for visitors. An online training module was developed in collaboration with VisitAberdeenshire. This training module supported those working in hospitality and customer-facing roles to gain further knowledge and understanding of the North East adventure tourism sector, enabling them to promote it to visitors. 50 individuals from 32 businesses undertook this training. Additionally, a core skills training programme was developed and delivered in partnership with Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland. 29 individuals from 16 companies participated in the training, which consisted of digital marketing skills, first aid and working with children and vulnerable persons training.

“It’s been brilliant to do some training which is so specific to what we do as coaches and guides. For example, it has allowed us to up our social media game by taking short clips for reels without disrupting the clients experience. It has also allowed me to get qualified in the highest British Cycling standard in mountain bike leadership. It means I can take clients out in more remote areas and provide a greater variety of services.”

Adventure Tourism Training participant

Best in Class Hospitality

ONE introduced the Best in Class Hospitality project to radically improve hospitality/food and drink producer links and the ability of staff to promote the local food and drink sector. This project underpinned other initiatives such as the Open Doors Festival. Overall, 20 businesses participated with 30 front of house staff participating in an online training module supporting them to learn about the North East food and drink industry and becoming potential ambassadors for the sector. 50 individuals took part in a trial of the platform. This module is now being further developed to be more widely implemented in the industry. In addition, three ‘learning journeys’ were delivered with 23 participants and 14 local tourism businesses attending sessions at exemplar food and drink companies within the region. Feedback from attendees at the events was very positive and the project resulted in several collaboration opportunities that are to be implemented in the near future.
Food and Drink

Food and Drink – Tomorrow’s Leaders Management Training

ONE worked with Seafood Scotland to deliver the Food and Drink – Tomorrow’s Leaders Management Training project. It aimed to grow confidence and ambition within the food and drink sector in the North East. The project involved delivery of three leadership workshops and four international learning journeys. Nine individuals attended the leadership workshops with 20 individuals benefiting from the learning journeys to Boston, Denmark, Iceland and Norway. Five of those individuals are now undertaking individual coaching to implement personal development plans. Early feedback indicates participants have greatly valued the relationships established through the project and the learning gained, particularly about leading people.

Gourmet Food Open Doors Festival

The Gourmet Food Open Doors Festival was delivered by ONE to develop the skills and capabilities of local food and drink producers to host events and enter the food tourism market. A gourmet food festival, ‘Provenance Festival’ was piloted in 2021 and continued in 2022 with support from ONE. 36 businesses received support through their participation in at least one of the project activities – Provenance Festival, learning journey, marketing support, customer excellence training, storytelling, and sustainable food tourism training. As part of the project, 61 individuals from the 47 businesses were supported on sustainability and customer excellence on a one-to-one basis depending on their needs. The Sustainable Food Tourism award was also accessed by seven businesses to support preparations for the continuation of Provenance Festival in 2022.

“What a privilege to get up close with so many inspiring and dynamic businesses both start up and established. It proves it is never too late to take that leap and that every corner of Scotland has so much to offer from a foodie perspective. It stuck with me that you can always develop and adapt, and that one should be versatile and open to new opportunities. Reassuringly it made me feel that every business has to navigate the ups and the downs.”

Gourmet Food participant

SeedPod

SeedPod is a multi-million-pound Aberdeen City Region Deal food and drink project to create an innovation hub for manufacturing and production that will deliver regional and national growth ambitions. SeedPod is led by ONE who utilised NEERSF funding to support a range of activity: a food and drink start-up accelerator for people coming out of other sectors; support for social media and digital marketing skills; support to embed sustainability within business plans through creation of net zero action plans; and a programme of chef training. In total 106 individuals and 76 businesses were supported. SeedPod has been successful in gaining Just Transition Fund support and the Hub, located on SRUC’s Craibstone campus, is due to open in 2024.
Health and Social Care Short Courses

To support a broader range of activity to tackle the challenges of recruiting into the health and social care sector, in particular adult care, RGU developed a suite of online Health and Social Care Short Courses which aimed to address skills gaps in areas where there are significant vacancies in the sector. Four short courses were developed:

- Principles and Concepts – Health Promotion and Public Health
- Managing Health Inequalities
- Influencing Individual Health and Wellbeing
- Digital Literacy in Health and Social Care

95 individuals enhanced their skills through undertaking the short courses which each lasted 10-12 weeks and resulted in 15 stackable academic credits. Eight individuals completed all four courses and were awarded a Post Graduate Certificate in Professional Studies (Public Health). A peer support network was developed, establishing a learning community within each of the short courses. Course participants shared knowledge, experiences and practice as well as supporting, motivating, and encouraging each other in their studies.

“I felt this course really cemented my knowledge and provided me with opportunities to think more broadly around health promotion and which models to use - why they are good and why they may be not so good in particular situations. It has increased my confidence in practice and certainly given me more things to consider. I enjoyed their collective online sessions with other learners and I felt the course materials where very good and easy to access.”

Short course participant
Careers and Workforce Development in Health and Social Care

A further intervention by RGU targeted at the health and social care sector was the Careers and Workforce Development in Health and Social Care. The objective of this project, which was delivered in partnership with Skills Development Scotland, was to review gaps in current provision and develop new courses to both upskill existing care staff and provide training opportunities for people to transition from other sectors, with the overarching aim of addressing the skills gap in health and social care, filling vacancies, and increasing employment in the region. The following five courses were designed and developed through consultation with key stakeholders, including: Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership; Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership; Bon Accord Care; Cornerstone; Scottish Care; Scottish Social Services Council and Voluntary Service Aberdeen.

- Personal and professional development
- Digital skills
- Concepts of health and wellbeing
- Health through the lifespan
- Quality improvement

325 participants participated in the courses across two phases. Alongside the courses an interactive online resource was developed for use by practitioners or employers to navigate the existing career development opportunities available to them in the region. The Care to Learn portal\(^3\) will be a lasting legacy of the project.

A recommendations report was also developed which has been shared with the Scottish Government for consideration of continued support for workforce development within the sector.

“It has given me the ability to think rationally, clearly, a new set of skills and also new-found knowledge in health and the functioning body which has given me more insight into what I do and how I go about my role and the procedures I carry out.”

Short course participant
Life Sciences

BioHub Manager for Hire and Technical Training

The BioHub Manager for Hire and Technical Training project was delivered by ONE to increase the growth rates of life sciences businesses by providing access to commercial and technical skills. The project was delivered in two workstreams: commercialisation manager, and technician training. The first aimed to provide pre-starts, spin-outs and SMEs with expert support to accelerate commercialisation, innovation, and market development. Specialists worked with the companies to challenge thinking, set strategic objectives, and make valuable introductions outside the academic environment. The technician training workstream completed skills needs assessments of life sciences businesses and then arranged a learning journey to a leading UK innovation facility, the Biologics Centre for Process Innovation (CPI) located in Darlington. Finally, this workstream identified open access training courses to increase the skill levels of their employees in specific areas such as nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, flow cytometry and clinical trials development. Across the project 11 businesses were supported and 18 individuals were upskilled as a result.

“The training has directly benefited our in-house R&D activities as well as our staff’s own understanding by learning new software and techniques.”

Project participant
5. Supporting the Transition to Net Zero and Green Energy

Recognising the need for a just transition to net zero in the North East as the region continues to diversify, a key ambition of NEERSF was to upskill and reskill individuals to enter or remain in work and/or take advantage of jobs as the region delivers on energy transition objectives. A series of projects were introduced to support individuals and businesses in this transition, in conjunction with a variety of partners, including the Energy Transition Zone (ETZ), RGU, ONE, Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce (AGCC), and SDS.

Regional Energy Workforce Demand and Skills Review

As part of NEERSF, the RGU Energy Transition Institute conducted a Regional Energy Workforce Demand and Skills Review to determine energy transition requirements in the North East of Scotland between 2021-2030. A report called ‘Making the Switch’ led by Professor Paul de Leeuw was published in May 2022. The report forecasts different investment scenarios and the implications for the workforce. It highlighted the region’s potential to become a global energy hub and attract thousands of jobs. Findings from the report have been presented and shared at various events including the Offshore Energies UK Annual Conference and a special Parliamentary Reception. The report has been widely disseminated and has been used by stakeholders to support with investment requests such as the Just Transition Fund and Aberdeen’s Green Freeport Bid. The report is also helping to set the future direction of the National Energy Skills Accelerator and its skills development project, which is being funded through the Just Transition Fund.

Energy Transition Pathway Programme

The Energy Transition Pathway Programme was a series of projects delivered by ETZ to address the combined impact of the pandemic and the downturn in the oil and gas sector. A total of eight sub-projects were run through this programme, covering a variety of skills areas including offshore renewables, low-carbon energy, digital skills and LGV driver training.

Fit for Offshore Renewables

This project supported the diversification of supply chain companies into the renewables sector. Its ambitions were to increase the competitiveness, capacity, and competence of the offshore renewable energy supply chain, support cost reduction in offshore renewables and secure long-term economic benefits for the participating companies. 19 companies participated in this cohort of the ‘FIT4OR’ programme.

Making the Switch: The future shape of the offshore energy workforce in the North East of Scotland
**MCERTS Accreditation**

MCERTS is the Environment Agency’s monitoring certification scheme for environmental permit holders. This project created a streamlined accreditation programme using hand-held monitoring devices for the Offshore Energy sector. 26 individuals from eight energy companies were trained to become certified offshore monitoring specialists. This activity has greatly improved the ease and effectiveness of offshore monitoring, thanks in part to the portable devices used.

**CCUS Training**

This project facilitated the development and delivery of an introductory carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) training course to upskill and reskill individuals in preparation for the growth of the CCUS sector in Scotland. The course covered the full CCUS life cycle and how it applies to areas such as heat decarbonisation, transport, electricity and industrial processes. The course was delivered online during three sessions, with 19 attendees from the North East and a further 50 from across Scotland.

**LGV Driver Training**

This project was designed to help individuals in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire who faced barriers to employment by providing Lorry (Class 2) licence training and by doing so, link work opportunities in the transport sector with individuals’ need for sustainable employment. 23 delegates took part in the programme, although some withdrew at varying stages with 16 continuing. 12 have fully completed the training and have secured employment. A further four remain with the programme.
**Offshore Recertification**

Following a competitive tendering process, RelyOn Nutec were contracted to deliver fully-funded training to support individuals who have had their certification lapse because of a loss of employment or to support those keen to retrain for offshore wind opportunities. The project supported 445 individuals, 65% of whom trained in offshore wind and 35% in oil and gas. Two employer days were held to support those individuals trained to gain further employment opportunities in the sector.

The certifications achieved will enable those trained to secure employment in the energy sector as the energy transition intensifies. After three months, 71% of participants who took the offshore wind training route were employed, while 89% of participants who took the oil and gas training route were employed.

**SME Future Energy Skills**

This project was designed to enable SMEs prepare for the energy transition by funding relevant skills training for their employees. The scheme was designed to be accessible, particularly for smaller SMEs. The project supported businesses to access 34 different types of training courses. 16 companies took part with 49 individuals completing training.

**X-Academy**

X-Academy is a professional development programme aimed at upskilling graduates and those looking to reskill for positive change in the energy transition sector. NEERSF funding helped to establish X-Academy, run by consultancy Xodus and supported a cohort of 24 individuals to participate in the first year of the two-year programme. These individuals were provided with experience working on real-life projects alongside the skills and on the job training necessary to maximise their career progression in the transitioning energy sector. X-Academy has won multiple awards during its inaugural year and is widely regarded as a vital catalyst in the delivery of transferable energy transition skills and talent into the supply chain. Additional private sector funding has been secured to maintain the programme for future years.
**Transition Pathway**

ETZ delivered a range of sub-projects aimed at supporting businesses with energy transition challenges:

- A greenhouse gas emission reduction programme helped oil and gas companies reduce greenhouse gas emissions by seeking solutions from across the supply chain;
- An energy supply chain and digital supply chain collaboration project to help energy companies find ways of working more effectively;
- Three events were held for companies looking at international energy transition opportunities, exploring access to new markets;
- Masterclasses were held to help North East supply chain companies understand the opportunities in low carbon energy markets;
- Focused energy transition workshops were held to support senior leaders to develop their strategies for gaining future business in renewables markets.

Across these five sub-projects, 723 individuals and 142 companies were supported to increase their knowledge and skills related to the emerging opportunities offered by the energy transition. Due to the success of the programme, building on the sub-projects delivered under NEERSF, ETZ have gone on to produce the Supply Chain Pathway and Energy Transition Challenge Fund which will be supported by the Just Transition Fund.
Green Leadership for Low Carbon Business Growth

To provide targeted support to businesses, ONE introduced the Green Leadership for Low Carbon Business Growth project to increase company growth and sustainability by providing leaders with the skills and knowledge to prepare their businesses to be competitive in a low carbon environment. This pilot development programme was open to business leaders from all sectors, with a focus on energy transition, digital, food and drink, agriculture and tourism. The programme was developed by ONE working with Entrepreneurial Scotland and comprised of webinars, facilitated group discussions, guest lectures, best practice visits and a learning journey. 11 senior managers completed the pilot project, produced a net zero assessment, and are now implementing a tailored action plan.

“We are accelerating our Net Zero programme, investing in digital and encouraging more staff to take up challenging leadership courses.”

“We have accelerated our focus on decarbonisation, this has resulted in a newly formed business stream and three new hires.”

Project participant

Climate Emergency and Carbon Literacy Training

A further project targeting businesses in the area was AGCC’s Net Zero North East Programme, which provided climate literacy training to SMEs to build resilience and enable them to adapt to the impacts of climate change and operate in a net zero environment. AGCC developed a bespoke training programme for SMEs to give them the skills and confidence to start developing their net zero programme and understand the implications of net zero for their business. The training programme consisted of four half-day workshops covering:

- Background and terminology relating to climate change
- How to calculate a carbon footprint
- How to reduce emissions
- How to develop a net zero plan

Experts contributed to specific workshops and all participating companies were offered a one-to-one session with the course lead at the end of the training, which was completed by 45 companies. Each organisation completed a before and after survey which demonstrated significant improvements in both knowledge of net zero concepts and confidence in progressing a net zero strategy for their company.

“This is genuinely the best programme I have ever attended. The tutors were clearly carefully chosen and who would have thought an agricultural overview regarding Net Zero would have such an impact on me going forwards.”

Participant from Net Zero North East
Climate Solutions Accelerator Secondary School Programme

With the aim of inspiring the next generation to engage with climate solutions, SDS supported delivery of the Climate Solutions Accelerator Secondary School Programme. The objective of this project was to inspire and empower young people and embed climate emergency as a key component of education. The Climate Solutions Accelerator offered a simple and quick way to gain significant understanding about climate change. The course was practically oriented and delivered flexibly online.

Access to the digital platform was provided to 11 participating secondary schools in Aberdeen. Due to the impacts of Covid-19 and Storm Arwen, schools in Aberdeenshire were unable to engage with the training offer. Through SDS liaison with Aberdeen City Education leads, the original training delivery plan was adapted with their guidance to reflect increasing, unexpected additional capacity challenges facing city schools at that time. 90 pupils successfully completed the module and received SQA Credits and a project certificate. The ongoing effects of Covid-19 on secondary education and the impacts of Storm Arwen on schools, alongside the proximity of the project to exam season, meant that the number of learners able to participate was significantly less than had been hoped for. However broad awareness raising activities took place regarding the availability of the first SCQF accredited course which could be accessed as part of future school activities.
6. Widening Opportunities for Individuals to Upskill and Reskill

A key priority for the Scottish Government is reorientating the economy towards wellbeing and fair work, delivering higher rates of employment and wage growth, and significantly reducing structural poverty. Ensuring that those most in need of assistance were included in and able to access the Fund was a shared ambition of local partners and the Scottish Government. All proposed projects were scored by partners before being submitted for approval by the Scottish Government, and the scoring criteria included weighting for projects not only supporting community wealth building, fair work and inclusive growth, but also those who supported those most impacted in the area. To increase the accessibility and inclusivity of NEERSF, projects offering general support for skills and employability were introduced, as well as fee waivers for individuals needing additional support. These projects were run in conjunction with RGU, ONE, the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen City Council (ACC), and Aberdeenshire Council.

Graduate Internships and Job Creation Scheme for 25+

The Graduate Internships and Job Creation Scheme for 25+ was a project introduced by ACC. The project aimed to create paid internships and work placements to provide valuable industry experience to college and university graduates, and to people aged 25 plus who face barriers to employment. The programme aimed to form a pipeline of opportunities for people across a number of sectors. 46 graduate internships were completed and a further 20 work-based placements were completed. Placements were for up to six months within a variety of the region’s private, public and third sector employers. Interns had a chance to develop their employability skills and gain valuable work experience. The work-based placements for those aged 25 and over meant that upskilling could be linked to support roles in sectors which are currently struggling to recruit such as social care and hospitality. From those that provided equality data 51% of graduate interns and 42% of work-based placements were from ethnic minority groups. 54.5% of participants reported securing an employment opportunity either with their placement employer or with another employer.

Upskilling Short Courses

RGU developed and delivered a series of Upskilling Short Courses to address regional priorities and support people to gain employment, protect jobs, and/or grow companies within the region. The following suite of online courses was available to individuals in the region to benefit from fee-waiver places:

- Resilience and Change Management
- Strategic Leadership
- Introduction to Data Science with Python
- Data Analytics for Business Decision Making
- Strategic Digital Marketing
- Energy Data Management
- Energy Transition for Engineers
- Introduction to Energy Transition for Business
376 individuals enrolled on the upskilling short courses with a completion rate of 94%. Each course lasted 10-12 weeks and carried 15 stackable academic credits. Of the 376 learners, 39% identified as female, 32% were from ethnic minority groups and 21% were from SIMD decile 5 or less.

“Due to my personal circumstances with a young family I have not attempted any taught courses previously but completing this has given me a lot of confidence to attempt further learning.”

Participant from one of the upskilling short courses

Graduates into Business

The Graduates into Business project was introduced by ONE to support business growth through the employment of graduate-level skills. This supported employment and skills development programme was developed for recently qualified graduates who were adversely impacted by Covid-19 during their studies and while seeking relevant employment after graduation. The programme provided participants with employment, participation in an off-the-job graduate development programme, mentoring and coaching, and on-the-job employer specific skills training. The programme provided SMEs in key growth sectors the opportunity to employ graduates where they had no previous experience or resources to do so. A total of 35 graduates were recruited to 33 companies. Workshop sessions on leadership, team working, negotiation skills, understanding finance, project management, and sales and marketing were completed. Additional workshops were delivered based on updated training needs analysis throughout the programme. These included digital marketing, project management, presentation skills and energy transition. All graduates completed an online level 5 SVQ in climate change solutions.

Fee Waivers on Relevant and Focused Short Course Provision

The University of Aberdeen offered Fee Waivers on Relevant and Focused Short Course Provision to provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities for individuals in the region. These included short online postgraduate courses (SCQF level 11) across a range of upskilling disciplines in energy transition, leadership and management, nutrition, health and wellbeing, and in-demand skills. Additionally, course provision was offered for Maths at SCQF levels 5 (National 5) and 6 (Higher) and English at level 6. Across the 24 different upskilling and reskilling courses in the academic year 2021/22, 444 individuals were supported by this project.

“I applied for this course when I was facing redundancy and believe that being able to say I was undertaking professional personal development by attempting this course helped me retain my position, further to that it allowed me to go on and secure one of the new promoted roles within the organisation. It couldn’t have come at a better time.”

Participant from the ILM Level 5 in Leadership and Management Course
NEERSF Access Support Funds

RGU and the University of Aberdeen used the NEERSF Access Support Funds to provide additional support to those who were distant from the workplace or requiring additional help to undertake the development programmes funded through NEERSF. The two institutions took different approaches to how they utilised the funding. The University of Aberdeen allocated laptops to students signing up for fee waiver courses, particularly targeting maths and English short courses. RGU offered a wide range of support to its upskilling students through the RGU Inclusion Office. The University of Aberdeen supported 47 students and RGU supported 51 students.

“[Participant’s quote]

Participant supported by RGU’s Inclusion Office

Fund to Address Additional Barriers

The Fund to Address Additional Barriers was administered by ACC to support people to overcome financial barriers to employment and/or training, to ensure that a lack of money would not prevent people from taking up opportunities offered via the projects across the NEERSF programme. The fund was used by a handful of employers to meet costs of taking on people in paid work experience placements and internships. The majority of those accessing the fund used it to pay for IT equipment, but it was also used to support with, for example, the cost of driving lessons. Nine individuals accessed the additional support. While uptake was limited, it was crucial in supporting those who received funds through it.

Employment Support for Under 16s

Two partner projects focused on supporting those who have disengaged from education, but who remain on the school roll and are too young and not yet ready to benefit from employability support offered by the Scottish Government’s Young Person’s Guarantee and No One Left Behind funded programmes. ACC and Aberdeenshire Council catered their approaches to suit each area.

Aberdeenshire Council launched the Deens Project to support this cohort of young people by providing additional employability support. The intention of the project was to create a bespoke innovative curriculum using a partnership model that would deliver accredited qualifications and develop skills to ensure future work-based learning and increased employability skills. Each partner delivered different aspects for each learner: schools delivered literacy and numeracy qualifications; Community Learning and Development provided opportunities for outdoor learning, Dynamic Youth Award and Bronze Youth Award; and Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust ensured that young people honed their interpersonal and confidence skills by focusing on health and wellbeing, leadership skills, employability and skills for life and work.
The cohort of 33 young people had previously withdrawn from education, had poor attendance and were on a potential trajectory of not entering the workplace or formal education post-school. The project was transformational with 93% of participants going into positive destinations, 86% achieving N3 literacy and numeracy qualifications and 80% of young people showing higher attendance during the project than their previous school attendance.

“It has been a pleasure to see Pupil A’s confidence increase which in turn has allowed them to engage and participate in all learning activities. Due to Pupil A’s increase in confidence this has now allowed them to be more active in discussions and activities, and is consciously making positive decisions inside and outside of school.”

Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust Project Officer

ACC developed the **Edge of Care pilot** using multi-disciplinary teams to support vulnerable young people who were in care or on the edge of care, and their families. Activities were delivered one-to-one or in small groups and included a range of outdoor activities facilitated by Sport Aberdeen and the Fit Like outdoor education team. Data shows that the percentage of qualifications has increased following the pilot and there has also been a reduction in negative destinations for young people leaving education, while a number of pupils on flexible timetables have seen increases in their time at school following support from the team. Other pupils have also been able to increase the levels of re-engagement through increased attendance and positive participation in school. This has also had a positive impact on the parents and carers, and the attitudes towards schools and ACC they often present.

Overall, 96 young people were supported within Aberdeen City, 47 working with the Outdoor Team, 26 with Sport Aberdeen, and 23 with the Edge of Care team. The focus of the pilot was on ensuring young people were given a voice, building trusting relationships, being adaptable and flexible, building resilience, confidence and a sense of achievement. The project is now being expanded with additional funding and links to employability provision are being explored for those who are preparing to move onto their next steps.

“What a difference! He’s happier, more confident. He’s out and about and out of the house, which used to be hard for him. He’s thinking about his future and qualifications. He’s made real progress.”

Grandparent of participant
7. Conclusions

NEERSF was introduced as a place-based intervention aimed at supporting economic recovery in the North East, an area particularly impacted by Covid-19 and the oil and gas downturn. It was designed to support the people and businesses in the region most in need of support by catering specifically to local needs.

Taking a place-based approach to this investment allowed the funding to be catered to the unique requirements of the region. Partners were involved in the design of the Fund from the outset and close partnership working continued throughout the entirety of the programme. This ensured that NEERSF was designed by the region, for the region. One of the key successes of NEERSF has been this collaborative working and the further strengthening of already well-established regional partnerships.

This report has demonstrated the breadth and variety of projects delivered. What is clear is that NEERSF has made a significant difference to business in the region, raised the profile of local universities and provided life-changing opportunities for individuals of all ages. Businesses have been created, helped to grow, and diversify. On an individual level NEERSF gave people the confidence to get back into work, widened access to opportunities and provided career opportunities for young people. Some projects were one-off interventions aimed at testing new ways of working or timebound activities, however many will now be mainstreamed either within core activity or through continued funding from new income streams.

The delivery of NEERSF was not without its challenges. The Fund was created at pace and partners had to move quickly to develop projects and then deliver these within a short timeframe. The strong working relationships between partner agencies ensured that a diverse suite of projects were delivered, bringing significant benefits to the region. Given this was a one year non-recurring fund it is difficult to evaluate the long term benefits of NEERSF at this stage.

Looking ahead

As noted above there will undoubtedly be a lasting legacy of NEERSF as many projects are continuing in some form. Where projects are not continuing, the Fund has provided an opportunity to try new innovative approaches of which learning can be embedded throughout future work regionally and nationally.

The support made available through the NEERSF has been a welcome addition to the investment by the Scottish Government and partners through the Aberdeen City Region Deal.

The Deal runs until 2026 but remains very active in terms of delivery on the ground. Close alignment of the Fund to the Deal has ensured the North East has a greater skills base to support sustainable employment opportunities and a just transition to net zero.

NEERSF has supported projects in the region beyond the lifetime of the Fund, with three organisations in receipt of NEERSF funding securing further Scottish Government support through the Just Transition Fund. The success of these projects will accelerate the North East and Moray’s transition to net zero, helping the region to capitalise on the opportunities the transition will bring such as jobs and prosperity.
Scotland faces a significant challenge to upskill and reskill our workers to adapt to and succeed in a rapidly evolving economy. NEERSF has provided opportunities to test new ways of delivering upskilling and reskilling programmes with significant learning for local and national policy.

Moving forward the Scottish Government is committed to reimagining and reforming Scotland’s post-school education, research and skills landscape, working alongside employers, institutions, learners, and other partners. In December 2023, Graeme Dey, Minister for Higher Education and Further Education set out his priorities for reform to the Scottish Parliament. In addition to announcing an Independent Review of Community Learning and Development, this included the intention that:

- the Scottish Government will take the lead on national skills planning and will strengthen regional approaches;
- there will be simpler, more impactful funding for learners and providers;
- there will be changes to apprenticeships to better reflect economic and learner needs, with Scottish Government leading policy development;
- there will be improvements in the quality and clarity of our careers offer; and
- there will be a clear role for employers throughout.

The learning from NEERSF as well as other programmes such as the National Transition Training Fund and North East Regional Tertiary Pathfinder will be used to inform future approaches.
Annex A: Case Studies

ONE Food and Drink Accelerator and Innovation Fund

Burnside Brewery in Laurencekirk is a family-run brewery that sells craft beer to both trade and non-trade customers. In 2021/22 Burnside took part in the Opportunity North East (ONE) food and drink accelerator programme and were supported with an innovation award, both supported via NEERSF funding. The innovation funding has allowed the addition of a non-alcoholic range of beers using primarily local ingredients. The project included the sourcing and installation of three main components – a bottle rinser, bottle filler/capper and a pasteuriser.

Outcomes

- Two new jobs have been created.
- 90% increase in capacity and competitive gain by entering a growing market sector which has limited artisanal products.
- Three new products will be released initially in the non-alcoholic line – an IPA, a red ale and a wheat beer.
- With this increase in capacity and improved equipment, an application for SALSA (Safe and local supplier approval) accreditation can be made, allowing for greater UK growth as well as entering export markets.
- Production will be maintained in house with no need to outsource for packaging or pasteurisation, thus reducing transport and carbon emissions. Sourcing of British ingredients contributes to a sustainable supply chain.

Next steps

Now the new alcohol-free range is launched the team at Burnside are looking to optimise factory output with a view to relocating to larger premises soon to accommodate the growth in volume.

“The ONE business growth programme enabled us to think more concisely about our business, where we are at the moment and how we’re planning to move forward. It was also a great way of networking with other businesses in the North East.”

“With the innovation award, we were able to move into a market that is completely new for us - producing alcohol-free beer. We needed new equipment to do this safely and, with the award, have now got this in place. We have now released the first in our alcohol-free range, Right to Roam - Alcohol Free IPA. This has made a massive difference to our business, as it’s something that we’ve wanted to do for a while but couldn’t have realistically achieved without the award.”

Steven Lewis, Head Brewer at Burnside
Lauren started the LGV programme in the hope of improving her skills and knowledge to progress to more sustainable work as a driver. This career change would enable her to secure a new job to fit in better with her home and family life as a single mum. In addition, due to Lauren not having her own CV when she started the course, employability support was identified as something which would help her for future job applications.

During her time on the course, Lauren was supported through the LGV training. She took additional time to re-sit two of the modules, but was very engaged throughout the process and successfully managed to complete the full licence.

Lauren also attended training sessions within Aberdeen Foyer with her key worker which resulted in her creating a new CV which highlighted her new qualifications. She was eager to link in with local employers within the Aberdeen area, and successfully spoke with recruitment companies regarding various contract jobs.

Outcomes

- Lauren decided to continue looking for a permanent job, but these interviews built her confidence in holding professional conversations and enhanced her interview skills. Both were areas which she initially mentioned that she would like to develop further at the start of the course.
- Soon after the initial meetings with potential employers, Lauren had an interview for a permanent job with a local driving company and was offered employment. Lauren was delighted with this opportunity, and in particular the hours which suited her childcare arrangements.

Next steps

She has now managed to maintain employment with the company and is picking up additional hours as well as gaining the hands-on experience she needs to improve her skills and knowledge and potentially progress to HGV training in future.
Chamber of Commerce Net Zero North East Programme

Established in 2006, Blaze Manufacturing Solutions are a leading provider of fire safety protection, detection and loss prevention solutions for harsh and challenging environments, providing solutions to the oil and gas, renewable energies, mining, commercial and industrial sectors.

Although the company has very well established HSEQ systems they were unsure how to tackle the net zero agenda as there was limited support and information that placed the agenda in layman’s terms suitable for an SME. They therefore took part in the NEERSF funded net zero literacy programme for SMEs in September 2021 to help build an understanding of how they should integrate net zero into their wider environmental plans.

Outcomes and next steps

Following the programme Blaze set itself the ambitious challenge of becoming net zero by 2026 and discovered the workforce was keen to support them. An environmental committee of staff volunteers is currently being formed to support Blaze’s quest to be net zero. Blaze’s commitment include:

- Striving to use innovation to make its services greener for its customers
- Managing and reducing its own emissions
- Supporting the workforce to become more environmentally aware in their daily lives to reduce their carbon footprint
- Auditing the supply chain to ensure they are as environmentally friendly as possible.

The year one action plan includes:

- Undertaking a detailed measurement of Blaze’s carbon footprint
- Forming an environmental committee of staff volunteers
- Creating a programme of actions to reduce emissions to meet the target
- Review all our vehicles to assess if there are more environmentally friendly options
- Review our travel plans for the year and assess for optimum efficiency.

“I have found the sessions to be essential to Blaze’s future, so much so I have just changed my role in the organisation from Commercial Director to a Sustainability and BD Director (quite the mix!!)”

Ann Johnson, Sustainability and BD Director
Malcolm received a funded place on the Access Course in Maths at the University of Aberdeen. Malcolm, an English graduate with a decade of experience in communications had always wanted to become a teacher. However, his school grades prevented him from accessing the PGDE (Postgraduate Diploma in Education). "In the back of my mind, I was always a bit concerned because I knew I didn’t have the requisite Maths qualifications to get into teaching here in Scotland. And so that’s why I started on the course.”

Outcomes

The University of Aberdeen offered NEERSF funded access courses which helped individuals such as Malcolm get to their desired level. The courses were online and flexible, and as such were compatible with working full time.

Malcolm knew that the University of Aberdeen had been offering online access courses in English and Maths. The online factor was decisive: “I couldn’t have committed to doing something that was in-person, especially if it meant travelling and so forth. That would have been quite difficult and just quite expensive as well. But having the course online is brilliant, I could just log on anytime and access materials anytime.” “The funding was a great help,” he adds. “Especially now with the cost of living, that’s been a huge benefit for me.”

Next steps

“Going from almost ten years of different jobs and returning to university – for anyone in that similar situation where they’re looking to change career – is daunting. But the day that I started that course was the day I was just like ‘Right, this is the first proper step to a career change’. “I’ve actually made that first step. Knowing that really gave me a boost. And now I can’t look back because I’ve got to complete this course, I’ve got to get into university, everything has lined up. You have to take the necessary steps, and this was just one of those steps.”

Malcolm passed the course with an A and was accepted into the PGDE Secondary programme at the University of Aberdeen. He has gained a liking for maths and is prepared to get on with his career change.
ETZ Offshore Recertification

Continually working offshore and onshore for the past 12 years, Lukasz found himself unemployed for seven months in 2021 due to a combination of the turbulent oil industry and the pandemic.

Outcomes
Despite being fully certified in oil and gas safety training, it proved difficult to secure a new position. He was confident that completing the NEERSF funded Offshore Wind (GWO) safety training with RelyOn Nutec would help him to transition from oil and gas to renewables as the industry grows.

Having moved to Aberdeen from Poland sixteen years ago, it was the first time he had been out of work. With a partner and four children to support, it was crucial that he secured a regular income. The timing of the Scottish Government funding through ETZ was ideal for Lukasz, who signed up for the GWO certification with a desire to improve his qualifications and learn more about the renewables industry. He hoped that extending his certification would offer more job opportunities, as he has a strong interest in renewables and is eager to learn more.

Next steps
After completing the course, Lukasz secured a new role with Wood, as Deck Crew on the Gannet platform. Although this is still in the oil and gas sector, he is keen to move into renewables when the opportunity arises. The majority of the places taken up under the Scottish Government funding was for Offshore Wind, showing a real appetite in the region for work in the renewables sector.

Lukasz was previously a German teacher in Poland and helped to run his father’s shoe factory. When he got to Aberdeen, he worked as a hotel kitchen porter, a bakery sales assistant, a painter and a cleaner. One of his first industry roles was a crane driver at Aberdeen Harbour. He is confident the Offshore Wind course has given him new skills, with the electrical and mechanical knowledge set to be useful throughout his career takes him.

“I was very grateful to get a funded place on the course at RelyOn Nutec and I thoroughly enjoyed it, with a good mix of classroom and practical teaching. The instructors were very interesting, and we learned a lot from them. I have no doubt the course will help me transition across from oil and gas. I enjoy learning, so it was brilliant to have the chance to certify in renewables, to add to my employability.”
RGU Upskilling short courses

A Development Officer from the North of Scotland Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) Centre completed the Strategic Digital Marketing upskilling course with RGU at the end of 2021.

When the learner undertook the course, the KTP Centre did not have a digital marketing strategy. Historically, activities were reactive and ad-hoc rather than using a schedule of planned activities tailored to specific projects. There was no central knowledge or data repository for capturing digital marketing information or storing content assets. There had not been a team champion to coordinate digital marketing activities, largely due to a lack of knowledge of the systems and tools that are available to gather data and analyse effectiveness.

Outcomes

Since completion of the course, the learner has developed a digital marketing strategy for the KTP Centre and has also implemented key elements of the strategy, including the creation of a knowledge repository. The learner also led on a rebrand of the Centre which was successfully launched on 1 June 2022. The new branding was positively received by internal and external audiences and will allow the KTP Centre to forge its own identity as a KTP service delivery partner going forward.

Next steps

The learner is planning to use their knowledge gained from the upskilling short course to redevelop the KTP Centre’s website and develop other promotional materials. They have successfully secured funding from Innovate UK to deliver a programme of capacity building activities starting in January 2023.

“I thoroughly enjoyed the course and would definitely recommend it. It has given me solid grounding in digital marketing and the confidence to apply my knowledge practically. I felt fully supported by my tutor (Josh Bircham) and the RGU team, who I knew were there if I had any problems. The feedback from my team and beyond on the rebrand has been amazing and it has given me an enormous sense of pride that something I created is now out in the world for everyone to see! I’m sure that once the other elements of the strategy are implemented, we will raise the profile of the KTP Centre and the KTP funding scheme in general to a wider audience.”

Laura Dee, KTP Development Executive, North of Scotland KTP Centre
ONE Graduates into Business

Energy technology firm Fennex Ltd. was part of the ONE Graduate into Business Programme, which supported SMEs to recruit recent graduates to accelerate their growth with 50% funding available for the first year of employment. Fennex recruited two graduates into software development roles through the programme.

The graduates benefit from a minimum of 12 months of employment, a development programme, mentoring and coaching, and role or sector-specific skills training.

The programme included:

• Funding to the business for a maximum of 50% of employment costs, insurances and other on-costs for the graduate post for 12 months.
• Support to the business for job-specific or sector-specific off the job training to a maximum of £5k per graduate.
• Support through the recruitment and employment process if businesses do not have dedicated in-house HR resource.
• Support for participating businesses to deliver an on-the-job training programme, including an induction programme and role-specific training.
• A cohort-based graduate development programme for core business skills, including leadership, teamwork, negotiation skills, understanding finance and project management.
• Individual monthly mentoring and coaching sessions for the graduates.

Outcomes

Fennex saw an immediate positive effect on business output and the support funding improved the recruitment and employment cashflow position, which had a domino effect increasing business output. Since recruiting the two graduate developers, Fennex has already recruited four more employees to handle the increase in business. Participation in the programme de-risked the graduate hires and allowed breathing space to train the new staff. The business had not previously recruited graduates.

The development programme for the graduates was particularly beneficial in relation to confidence and communications. One graduate was very shy. The team dynamic was developed as graduates talked about their learning. From being very introverted, that graduate has now been promoted to Team Leader and is involved in training the new graduates. He has recently developed an especially important software programme to facilitate large company mergers. The development programme also rounded out many of the soft skills which are difficult to develop in a small team. Specific software training courses were also provided for both graduates.

Next steps

Fennex will consider taking on graduates in the short term with similar support.

Aberdeen City Council, Lead Accountable Body
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Introduction

The North East of Scotland faced a series of economic shocks in quick succession, the impacts of which were felt from 2019 onwards, with the region topping the PACE (Partnership Action for Continuing Employment) redundancy tables by a huge margin, business failures, and increasing levels of unemployment and poverty.

The Covid-19 pandemic, alongside a drop in the oil price, and the UK’s exit from the EU hit the region hard, raising serious concerns for the people, place, and businesses in both the short and long terms.

The announcement by Scottish Government of the multi-million pound North East Economic Recovery and Skills Fund (NEERSF) was therefore welcome news, met with excitement and optimism, albeit with a healthy dose of apprehension about the tight timescales for rapid programme and project development, with only six months for delivery.

Existing strong partnerships, a willingness to work together to achieve the best results for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, and a shared vision of what success would look like, set the stage for the successful delivery of a varied suite of projects designed to support the economic recovery and ongoing economic health and growth of the region.

These relationships enabled the NEERSF partners to agree roles, responsibilities, and work together to propose, develop, and prioritise within a matter of weeks. Aberdeen City Council acted as the lead accountable body responsible for ensuring the overall delivery of NEERSF as well as individual projects, but this was a true partnership effort involving Robert Gordon University, ETZ Ltd, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire Council, Opportunity North East, Skills Development Scotland, and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

This report provides an evaluation of the overall NEERSF programme, highlights the lessons learned, and makes recommendations based on the experiences of delivering the programme.
The Partners

Aberdeen City Council: the local authority responsible for the Aberdeen City area and the lead accountable body with responsibility for NEERSF.

Robert Gordon University (RGU): delivers a high-quality vocational education and relevant curriculum which provides learners with the skills they require to thrive throughout their careers.

ETZ Ltd: has a pivotal role in establishing the North-east of Scotland as a global leader in energy transition to net zero and a net exporter of products, services, technologies, and skills.

University of Aberdeen: one of the UK’s oldest universities with a long history of academic success and research excellence, combined with a modern approach to teaching and learning.

Aberdeenshire Council: the local authority responsible for the Aberdeenshire area.

Opportunity North East: the private sector driver diversifying North-east Scotland’s economy; developing and delivering projects to accelerate entrepreneurial growth, innovation, and increase productivity.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS): the national skills agency for Scotland.

Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce: a private sector, member-focused business organisation operating throughout the Grampian region.
Programme Requirements

NEERSF had clear aims to deliver a programme of activity which supported a just transition and move to Net Zero, enabling skilled workers to move across from oil and gas to renewable roles, as well as to accelerate business growth, particularly in the region’s key sectors, support the region’s key sectors, provide opportunities to those distant from the labour market, and tackle poverty. The money was to be spent locally or within Scotland as far as practicably possible. A suite of inclusive project proposals was requested by Government and put forward by the partnership.

Challenges

As with any major programme, challenges were faced, most of them foreseen. Due to the breadth of the type of projects in the programme, the challenges were varied, and many are detailed in the Appendix.

The challenges listed below were programme-wide:

Time

The Fund was announced in late April 2021, with projects to be developed, delivered and completed by 31 March 2022. With time taken, albeit at rapid pace, to gather partners, agreeing priorities and governance, finance, the legalities of the grant funding and alignment with Scottish Government priorities, this allowed fewer than six months to deliver a large and varied programme of socio-economic benefit to the North-east.

This was an incredibly tight timeframe, particularly given recruitment needs, including for a programme manager, project launch and development, and there were resultant concerns at all stages of the programme about the risk and impacts of any delays. In ordinary circumstances, some contingency time is built into projects as a mitigation against any potential delays which may occur for a variety of reasons. Contingency time was an unavailable luxury through NEERSF and an ongoing concern which dogged the programme throughout, with concerns about vital funding for the North-east being lost due to lack of time.

Scottish Government officials successfully negotiated a three-month extension for some projects to the end of June, enabling the completion of several projects which may otherwise have lacked the necessary time to achieve their intended outcomes.

The public sector is bound by tighter controls than the private sector and it therefore has less flexibility than the private sector. However, the appreciation of the urgency of need, alongside the opportunities to strengthen the region’s recovery, prevailed, enabling swift progress.

That said, all members of the partnership were concerned about the delivery timescales and the ability to fully succeed in the face of a fast-ticking clock.
Breadth of Opportunity and Ambition

The NEERSF partners were informed by Scottish Government of a total budget for the programme and asked to propose a suite of projects within that budget, providing additionality and expansion of existing support, while adopting a place-based approach to identify initiatives to address local need.

While the partners had a shared vision, the volume and range of identified need and potential opportunities significantly outstripped the fund.

Partners developed 64 project proposals, which were then collaboratively scored based on the following criteria and weighting to create a full co-designed NEERSF programme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Scoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Deliverability (resource in place, deliverable within financial or academic year) | 25%    | 1 = Does not meet criteria  
|                                                                           |        | 2 = Partially meets criteria  
|                                                                           |        | 3 = Mostly meets criteria  
|                                                                           |        | 4 = Fully meets criteria                       |
| 2. Supports key regional or volume sector / contributes to RES (Regional Economic Strategy) vision | 25%    |                                             |
| 3. Supports those most impacted by economic crisis (those at risk of/lost job or those further from labour market) | 20%    |                                             |
| 4. Supports community wealth building / fair work                          | 15%    |                                             |
| 5. Ensures additionality / long-term value (LTV), building on employability / skills delivery in place | 15%    |                                             |

This process was used to prioritise the proposals and identify those which the partners felt should be taken forward, maximising the available budget. 45 were put forward to Government, with 29 approved. Those 29 projects are detailed in Appendix One.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment to short-term contracts is always challenging and this was true for NEERSF as for every other project, with the recruitment process taking up to two months for some roles. Qualified and experienced programme and project managers are in high demand in the North East of Scotland, and attracting the right people to the role was difficult, with two rounds of recruitment attempts and interviews to get someone in place. One of the biggest risks with recruiting on a short-term basis is losing people early as they almost inevitably leave the role early for a more secure, longer-term job, and this was our experience in delivering NEERSF.
Funding Arrangements
While Aberdeen City Council was the lead accountable body for NEERSF, with responsibility for onward distribution of grants and reporting, the allocations to SDS and the universities were managed separately, with SDS being a direct recipient and the two universities receiving their monies via the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

While this was far from an insurmountable challenge, it did mean that there was not an overall view of the Fund finances at partner level, resulting in the universities and Skills Development Scotland having to report twice – to the SFC or in SDS’ case through internal governance, and to the programme manager.

Local Spend
The Scottish Government’s position was the Fund should be spent, as far as practicably possible, in the local area or elsewhere in Scotland. This was not entirely possible; however the vast majority of the funds were invested locally and only by exception, and with the agreement of Scottish Government, were they spent outwith the country.

Common Themes
The most common theme, which recurred throughout the programme, was timescale and ongoing concerns about the ability to not only deliver, but also deliver well, the suite of projects within the timescales permitted. Not all projects met their targets, and the main reason for that was time.

Partnership
Collaboration and a willingness to work together to achieve the best results for the region shone through. High-level working relationships were already well established at a strategic level through the City Region Deal, Regional Learning and Skills Partnership, and other activities, NEERSF brought together delivery teams across the organisations, broadening the network and knowledge base of regional issues – so much so that some individuals have since moved between organisations into new roles.

Variety
It is said to be the spice of life, and variety was certainly the spice of NEERSF. This was a broad-ranging, far-reaching programme touching areas, communities, and a variety of sectors across the North-east. That variety makes for an interesting and challenging evaluation due to the sheer range of activities, target groups, and outcomes. Taken as a whole, the NEERSF programme meets all of the requirements set by the Scottish Government.

The programme took in a broad range of sectors and groups, including oil and gas, agriculture, hospitality, health and social care, energy transition, innovation, the circular economy, graduates, digital skills, vulnerable school children, entrepreneurialism, business development and growth, logistics, transport, leadership, tourism, culture, and more - with 50 additional sub-projects spawned.
Job Creation

As noted earlier in the report, the Fund itself created fixed-term jobs in the programme and project delivery teams across the partnership. Several projects specifically targeted job creation, with individuals supported into employment via training programmes or paid work experience. At this stage it has yet to be determined how many have secured long-term, permanent employment, but as the appendix demonstrates, there are strong indications that businesses and individuals have benefited in the short-term from this activity, with good numbers being retained by the employers. We continue to receive requests from local employers, particularly SMEs, for more funding for this type of activity. All jobs and paid work experience placements offered through NEERSF offered payment of at least the Real Living Wage.

Equalities and Inclusion

The recording of equalities data is inconsistent across the programme, largely due to the varied activities delivered. What is clear from the evaluation of activity (see Appendix) is that NEERSF benefited a very broad range of people across the region, ranging from some of our most vulnerable young people, through those furthest removed from the labour market, to individuals transitioning from oil and gas to renewables, and industry and business leaders.

The lack of equalities data available makes it difficult to fully determine which groups could benefit from more targeted support. From projects with a wealth of equalities data available, we do however get a glimpse into some disparities that seem to emerge. Although it is clear that the NEERSF programme did indeed extend itself to reach and support a wide range of people, more could be done to support certain marginalised groups including minority ethnic individuals, people living with disabilities and those who fall into the first and second quintiles of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Transition to Net Zero

NEERSF boasted several projects designed to support the area’s just transition to Net Zero. These include:

- an earn-while-you-learn project designed by ETZ Ltd to train people in newly created jobs to move onto more senior and developing roles in the renewables sector;
- Professor Paul de Leeuw’s Making the Switch report;
- SDS’s Digital Pilot’s License project

COVID-19

Recovering from the severe socio economic impacts wrought by COVID-19 presented a further challenge to the successful delivery of some of the projects, particularly in terms of the recruitment processes. On the flipside, the NEERSF initiative presented valuable opportunities for workers to network and integrate in the aftermath of COVID restrictions, particularly those who had been out of work for a lengthy period or those who were embarking into the world of work perhaps for the first time, such as the graduate interns.
Long-term Impacts

Given the short-term nature of NEERSF, and the proximity of this evaluation report to the programme end, it is not currently possible to evaluate the long-term impacts of the investment. No budget has been made available for longer-term monitoring and evaluation. That said, some of the upskilling and reskilling projects reported promising longer-term outcomes, albeit it is too early to confirm those outcomes. For example, the University of Aberdeen surveyed participants in their upskilling and reskilling courses and the results reported promising outcomes including percentages on job retention, job acquisition, and career changes through both upskilling and reskilling.

It would also be fair to say that other activities and plans, including Just Transition Fund bids, and the ETZ Jobs and Skills Plan have been informed by the NEERSF programme, setting a longer-term approach around skills and employability linked not only to the energy transition, but also the broader economy.

Lessons Learned

Timescales

As stated elsewhere in this evaluation report, the biggest challenge faced in delivering the NEERSF programme was the exceptionally tight, six-month, timescale. This created several issues, not least recruitment to posts to deliver the programme and associated projects largely caused by the short-term nature of the programme and associated short-term contracts, and limited ability to fully scope out projects. This programme was more bullet train than steam engine, with impressive delivery at speed, but could have produced greater outcomes and benefits with longer development and delivery times.

The timescales also dictated the nature of projects put forward – as demonstrated elsewhere in this report, delivery within timescale was one of the scoring criteria used to whittle down the proposals.

External Organisations’ Limitations

Related to the above, external organisations which were additional beneficiaries of the funding, also struggled with the delivery period. Partners, notably SDS, ONE, and Aberdeen City Council noted that the short timescales threatened the ability of external organisations to deliver or entirely deterred them from participating. This did negatively impact on the delivery and outcomes of at least two projects.

Relationship Management

Regular and frequent partner meetings ensured that the programme activity was delivered in a land of no surprises. Verbal updates were shared alongside the monthly written reports, while challenges, difficulties, good practice, and opportunities could be shared. This fostered positive working relationships throughout the life of the programme and beyond.
Promotion and Communications

A promotional budget would have been a useful addition to the programme budget. In order to be truly inclusive, we cannot rely on digital or paid-for media communications, as those who cannot afford to access these channels will have no way of knowing about them. Information sharing at community level, particularly in the priority areas, would have been beneficial and should be considered for future activity.

Duplication

There was some duplication of effort, or competition, particularly in those projects which aimed to support graduates into employment. While they were designed with particular groups in mind, there were crossovers and projects were at risk of competing for employers. A clearing house approach to identify the most appropriate support for the individuals would have been beneficial, ensuring the right opportunity for the right person, taking account of their particular needs.

Competing Schemes and Incentives (following on from the above)

Some employers were engaged in initiatives like the Kickstart scheme which offers a lucrative financial incentive of £1,500 per placement start towards set-up and training costs – this deterred some employers from offering work opportunities under NEERSF (see project 6). The offer of a similar financial incentive as Kickstart may help to encourage employers to recruit individuals who have been out of work for any similar projects run in the future.

Demand vs Supply

As stated elsewhere in this report, the raft of project proposals had to be whittled down to meet the NEERSF budget. Even after the programme was agreed, approaches were made by organisations and sector representative groups seeking funding to address their particular needs and priorities. It would be advisable that announcement of any new investment is accompanied by an announcement of the programmes, or the contact details of the lead agency, to ensure all interested and appropriate parties have the opportunity to participate.

Equalities and Inclusion

For future projects, it is important to consider ways of implementing a cohesive, consistent method of gathering equalities data across projects and organisations where possible. Without this data available to us, vulnerable groups risk falling further through the gaps when we cannot acquire a complete nor accurate picture of who is being positively impacted and who is notably absent from receiving the crucial support on offer through the NEERSF partnership.
Conclusion, with Recommendations

The NEERSF outcomes show a strong return on the Scottish Government’s investment. Anecdotal evidence shows us that it costs approximately £6,000 to support an individual along the employability pipeline and into employment, albeit this varies subject from person-to-person. NEERSF provided more than 3,900 people with opportunities throughout the life of the programme. If we rely on the employability pipeline estimate of £6,000 per person, the value of those opportunities alone equates to £23.4million, which is far more than the total NEERSF programme budget.

Long-term benefits of the fund cannot yet be seen, however it is clear from the activities delivered that NEERSF has put the North-east on a stronger footing and will result in a significant number of long-term benefits in general economic development and employment terms.

One example of this is Professor Paul De Leeuw’s Making the Switch report, delivered as part of the NEERSF programme, highlights current issues in the energy sector, future potential, and the steps which need to be taken to successfully secure Aberdeen and the broader region’s ongoing position as an energy capital, moving into renewables and anchoring jobs in the North-east.

Others include:

• The health and social care courses delivered by the universities to upskill workers and train people new to the sector to address not only recruitment gaps in the sector, but also progression barriers to those already working in health and social care, creating opportunities at lower levels.

• Two distinct, but related, projects developed by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils respectively to provide intensive support to young people of statutory school age who had disengaged from education and were at risk of leaving school with no qualifications or positive destination. It is notoriously difficult to engage such young people in employability activity post-school, and so only time will tell the longer-term impacts of these projects. However, as the appendix shows, the results for the majority of these young people were both positive and impressive, and will not only put them on a better footing for their education and employment prospects, but also towards healthier, happier, and better lives. The projects have also provided education and youth workers with essential experience and learning.

• AGCC’s circular economy training programme, which was in such high demand that it secured additional funding from elsewhere in the programme to double the provision.

The short-term benefits are numerous and illustrated throughout the Appendix.

Future Investment

The NEERSF outcomes clearly demonstrate the benefits of a place-based approach to investment, and we believe make the case for future investment of this nature in the region, enabling local partners to identify areas of opportunity and need based on informed local knowledge and data, and to deliver on these activities.

Such an approach would support a number of Scottish Government priorities, including but not limited to tackling child poverty, community wealth building, Fair Work First, a just transition to Net Zero, equality, and inclusive economic growth. Such an approach would be in the spirit of the Verity House Agreement and welcomed by NEERSF partners and others beyond.
# Recommendations

1. A place-based approach to investment, which enables local knowledge and expertise to address recognised needs in the area should be adopted, in the spirit of the Verity House Agreement.

2. Realistic timescales for programme and project development and delivery, taking account of recruitment needs, financial approvals, including agreement of grant conditions and any necessary committee timescales.

3. The ability to take local decisions to move money between projects to ensure as full spend as possible, particularly in instances where it is clear that a project could expand or deliver more than had been anticipated, with additional budget, or where a project is underperforming or significantly under budget to enable, should sit with the programme manager.

4. Uniformity should be applied to the gathering of participant data to ensure that equalities and other data is consistent across any programme and that conclusions can be drawn from clear and complete data sets, not only for reflective purposes, but also to inform the development of future activities. Scottish Government should be clear on what they consider to be the key/minimum criteria to be complied with in terms of reporting.

5. A Lead Accountable Public Body with programme management capacity should be in place for any future investment involving multiple partners to bring consistency to the programme and project development and delivery, ensure ongoing and quality delivery, including of activity and financial reports, and to identify opportunities, threats, interdependencies, and manage emerging risks throughout the programme.

6. It was helpful to establish a communications protocol at an early stage and to have the buy-in of all partners. This ensured the sharing of key messages, a consistent approach to communications, and a planned approach to communications activities, avoiding partners issuing information on the same days and thus diluting the impact. This should be replicated in future partnership programme activities.

7. Inclusion should be factored into every project and programme, ensuring that those further removed from the labour market can benefit from any future activities, and care should be taken to ensure that information sharing about these opportunities is accessible – i.e. it is actively promoted within the regeneration areas and not only by digital means.

8. Fair Work Principles should be adopted as a condition of funding - where practical and reasonable to the employer - with payment of the Real Living Wage, employee voice, and flexible working as a minimum to ensure not only that people are appropriately rewarded for their work, but also that the work is accessible by all, including parents, those with caring responsibilities, and people with disabilities or health issues which may otherwise prevent them from taking up opportunities. These principles should be a condition of grant to all beneficiaries of any funding, not just the lead organisation.

9. Revenue as well as capital spend should be permitted in future investments. Opportunities realised through NEERSF could have been expanded upon through initiatives such as the Just Transition Fund (JTF). The intention locally was to use the experience and learning from NEERSF activity to develop JTF proposals, however this has been a missed opportunity due to JTF being restricted to capital projects only.
10. **Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIA) should be a requirement of funding for any funding beneficiaries. A simple guide or handbook for writing EHRIAs (Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessments) would be useful, particularly to support those operating outwith the public sector.**

11. **A requirement of any future investment should be to ensure that the monies are, as far as practicably possible, spent in the local area to boost the local economy and support local business and jobs.**

12. **Acknowledge that the traditional school setting is not the best place for all young people and provide local authorities with dedicated funding specifically to provide early educational interventions offering intensive support to young people of statutory school age who have disengaged from education. In doing so, provide alternative learning and qualification opportunities to them, as both a supportive and preventative measure, recognising that this would save money in the long-term and improve their short and long-term prospects. The knowledge and best practise from the NEERSF education projects should be integrated and shared with other local authorities if this recommendation is taken forward.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Businesses Supported</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Equalities</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial Training</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Male 0 Female 0 Prefer not to say 0</td>
<td>Trainers pass skills and understanding to students</td>
<td>COVID Challenges – MIT relationship crucial here – impact on budget spend and targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Accelerator Start Up and Innovation Funds</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Male 0 Female 0 Prefer not to say 0</td>
<td>100 new businesses started, 10 new products/processes developed, 10 new markets entered, 20 businesses demonstrating growth</td>
<td>Need to build a more systems approach to entrepreneurship across the region, providing a shared common language and methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial short courses</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>25 64 3 8 13 16 17 23 11 4 0 52 77 13 2</td>
<td>92 individuals supported to start, sustain, or grow their own business</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial Start Up Accelerator</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University Entrepeneurship and Innovation Fund</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68 28 4 10 6 6 3 1 0 21 8 0</td>
<td>33 teams with enhanced entrepreneurial skills and validated business ideas, increased confidence and entrepreneurial mindset amongst all participants</td>
<td>More helpful to have more feedback on pitches and applications to understand our areas of improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Enterprise School</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University Entrepeneurship and Innovation Fund</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39 61 0 21 5 5 3 0 0 10 25 0</td>
<td>35 graduates participated in the programme, increased confidence and entrepreneurial mindset amongst participants, 16 individuals with start-up action plans reviewed by the EIG team</td>
<td>Timescale for funding outwith optimal timing for Graduate Summer school, recruitment needed more time. Future consideration should be given on how to convert sign-ups to attend the sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## NEERSF Evaluation Appendix

### Project Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>Project Name and Job Creation Scheme for 25+</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Businesses Supported</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Internships and Job Creation Scheme for 25+</td>
<td>Aberdeen City Council</td>
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</table>

### Equalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender (%)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Prefer not to say</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>&lt;25</th>
<th>25-30</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>70-79</th>
<th>Non-BAME</th>
<th>BME</th>
<th>Prefer not to say</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Most deprived</th>
<th>Quintile 2</th>
<th>Quintile 3</th>
<th>Quintile 4</th>
<th>Least deprived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Internships</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-based placements 25+</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outcomes

- 86 opportunities (46 graduate internships, 20 work-based placement trainees) for a 6-month term achieved.
- 42 participants (83.64% success rate) secured permanent/suitable employment after completion of this project.

### Lessons Learned

- Some employers overestimated their capacity to recruit suggested numbers within the timescales which led to several employers withdrawing their applications.
- The project was competing against the Kickstart scheme which offers financial incentives/support to employers who take on new trainees.
- Individual testimonial: “I have already secured a full-time role as a Graduate engineer after this internship. The work experience and trainings provided through the internship played a vital role in securing this full-time job.”
- Business testimonial: “It is a fantastic scheme to help both businesses and job seekers. The funding allowed us to support a new employee to learn and develop work skills that was (sic) connected to their field of studies and interests, to integrate them into the business and become a valuable member of the team.”
- Insufficient timeframe - many employers require months not weeks to recruit.
- Direct targeting of employers via an engagement officer would have been beneficial, rather than relying on marketing activity, and may have resulted in greater uptake of the scheme.
- Strong partnerships were key to the delivery of this project, particularly with public sector partners.
- Employers favoured paid graduate internships over work-based placements. If this project were to be repeated, the inclusion of an incentive similar to that offered by Kickstart may make it a more attractive option for employers to encourage them to provide opportunities for people who had been out of work for a lengthy period.

### Additional Notes

- Insufficient timelines - many employers require months not weeks to recruit.
- Greater lead in and delivery period required for future projects to enable meaningful engagement with employers and jobseekers, and to support the recruitment processes. Much more could have been achieved with more time.
- Matching prospective applicants with suitable employers was time-consuming due to limited resources in the ACC project team and some employers only recruiting from recommended applicants.
- Direct targeting of employers via an engagement officer would have been beneficial, rather than relying on marketing activity, and may have resulted in greater uptake of the scheme.
- Insufficient timelines - many employers require months not weeks to recruit.
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- Direct targeting of employers via an engagement officer would have been beneficial, rather than relying on marketing activity, and may have resulted in greater uptake of the scheme.
- Keeping things as clear, concise, and simple as possible for all stakeholders in the project, particularly around timescales, may have helped to mitigate some early challenges and resulted in more people securing opportunities.
- Greater use of additional channels and ‘trusted’ voices to promote the opportunity to people who were long-term unemployed would have been beneficial. A reliance on social media and digital routes risks missing those people with limited digital skills or access.
- Strong partnerships were key to the delivery of this project, particularly with public sector partners.
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- Strong partnerships were key to the delivery of this project, particularly with public sector partners.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Businesses</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Equalities</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Supply Chain Technology</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Male Female Prefer not to say</td>
<td>21-30 31-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 Non-BME BME Unknown No Yes Unknown</td>
<td>Productivity increase in the agriculture sector, efficiency translates to carbon emissions reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Digital Pilot Licence</td>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77 41 0 7 44 48 19 0 0</td>
<td>103 13 2</td>
<td>110 8 0</td>
<td>140 individuals supported, 6 months flexible online learning, cross sectoral and NE pilot</td>
<td>Must ensure sufficient time to bring people onto program, good partnership engagement for promotion is vital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Expansion of the Digital Start Fund</td>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 40 people supported into roles in digital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>HANE</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enabled businesses to attract new employees and address skill shortages</td>
<td>Perceptions of the sector (hospitality) were hard hit during the pandemic, hard to find participants especially given the schemes time frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Adventure Tourism Training</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td>The business has also continued to promote the significant and growing adventure tourism sector in the region</td>
<td>Course provided valuable training and skills for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Best in Class Hospitality</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 businesses improved connectivity, improved marketing, improved customer ongoing engagement, able to build e-commerce route to market</td>
<td>Busy staff need easy and fast ways to learn about local food and drink – the platform meets this goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Food &amp; Drink - Tomorrow's</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 individuals, 20 businesses, 20 emerging business leaders with global mindset and leadership tools 20 individual development plans</td>
<td>Experienced, established leaders have benefited from external expertise, input, peer-to-peer support and visiting and learning from international business leaders and their leadership styles and business practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gourmet Food Open Doors</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td>A Pioneer award for equipment and pathways enhanced visitor experiences on the farm - enabling them to have permanent experiences on offer with additional tools for “pick your own” and farm tours</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project No.</td>
<td>Project Name</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Equalities</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Lessons Learned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Businesses Supported</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>31-39</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>50-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Seedpod - Food Hub for Innovation</td>
<td>ONE, SDS</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Regional Energy Workforce Demand and Skills Review</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University Transition Institute (ETI)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Energy Sector Transition Accelerator</td>
<td>Energy Transition Zone</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1304</td>
<td>Data not found</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Green Leadership for Low Carbon Business Growth</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Climate emergency and carbon literacy training</td>
<td>Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Increased productivity, adoption of new technology, low carbon leadership, increased innovation**
- **Digital marketing knowledge and skills development are key requirements across the whole sector, sustainability has risen to the top priority over the course of the NEERSF project due to the surge in utility costs**
- **Highlighted that the future of energy jobs in the North East is directly linked to level and timing of new investment in the region**
- **Following the completion of the review, it is apparent that the methodology and approach has wider application for other clusters/regions and there has also been interest from individual companies to do a similar exercise at a company level**
- **Longer recruitment period could have seen all 15 places filled, delivery of net-zero lectures would have had greater impact if delivered in advance of the Babson College input**
- **Course showed when organisations fully understand net-zero agenda and the implications for their company. Recommends Scottish government look at how they can provide further support for SME training in Scotland**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Equalities</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Climate Solutions Accelerator Secondary School Programme</td>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Up to 6300 5th and 6th year pupils receive opportunity to complete module. CSA ran across up to 32 NE Secondary schools. Early discussions with schools would have enhanced their ability to plan to deliver this module in, what turned out to be, a very challenging year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Health and Social Care short courses</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Data not found</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Careers and workforce development in Health and Social care</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>Data not found</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Biohub Manager for Hire and Technical Training</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>2 people appointed into specialist roles, 2 new markets entered. 5 businesses accelerate rate of product development. Time is required to build trust and relationships before commercially sensitive projects can be progressed. Future projects should take account of commercial sensitivities at the earliest opportunity when scoping and developing the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Upskilling short courses</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>58 38 4 79 164 96 33 4 0 245 120 11 336 31 9</td>
<td>355 individuals developed with the skills which will support them to secure employment, start their own business or contribute to the sustainability and growth of companies in the region. Market early and clearly enabling applicants to make informed decisions at point of application including more detail on the time required to complete the course, consider making the assessment optional for learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Graduates into Business</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>30 graduates in newly created roles within the food and drink businesses. Development of 30 new products for new markets by 2025. Programme successful in helping graduates integrate and network after COVID era restrictions. More sector engagement will help graduates realise the value of their place in the North East economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project No.</td>
<td>Project Name</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Job Type</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Fee Waivers on Relevant and Focused Short Course Provision</td>
<td>University of Aberdeen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-444</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>NEERSF Access Fund</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Data not found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Access to Training and Employment</td>
<td>Aberdeen City Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Data unavailable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case Study:** Completing the initial funded short course has given me the confidence to undertake three further courses from the Renewable Engineering/Masters this semester. The course cemented my decision to undertake a shift away from the oil and gas sector when I return to full-time employment. - Gwinnie Garvey-Hall, Energy from Biomass course learner

Of the 78 responses gathered (88% response rate), 53% of NEERS funding recipients said that they had retained their job as a result of upskilling received on the funded course.

24% had an interview for a new job.

23% said the skills learned gave them the confidence to start their own business or become self-employed.

31% replied that the funded course had given them the qualifications needed to enter further or higher education.

18% reported they had gotten a new job with an existing or new employer.

Of the 76 responses gathered (88% response rate), 53% of NEERS funding recipients said that they had retained their job as a result of upskilling received on the funded course.

24% had an interview for a new job.

23% said the skills learned gave them the confidence to start their own business or become self-employed.

31% replied that the funded course had given them the qualifications needed to enter further or higher education.

18% reported they had gotten a new job with an existing or new employer.

It should also be recognised that had uptake of that Aberdeen City Council-led project to provide graduate internships and paid work experience placements Project 6 been higher, that the use of this fund would likely have been higher.

Greater clarity was required in the communications to help employers understand that the fund was to support individuals and was not to support businesses. This was managed through delivery of projects and the fund, but clearer messaging throughout may have avoided that confusion and reduced the workload of the project team.

Aberdeenshire Council’s early withdrawal from the scheme put full responsibility for delivery on to the city council, and it would have been preferable if that decision had been taken ahead of the project proposal being submitted and approved.

It is recommended that a support fund to remove barriers to employment should be made available alongside any future upskilling, reskilling, internship, and work experience placement opportunities to ensure that such projects are as inclusive as possible and are open to people with barriers to employment, including financial barriers, such as childcare, lack of suitable work clothes or equipment, and more.

It is also recommended that to ensure the best use of public funds that close collaboration with DWP is illustrated here is replicated to ensure that all available support mechanisms are used to remove financial barriers to opportunities.

It is recommended that spend through this type of support fund should, as far as possible, be made locally to support the local economy, businesses, and jobs.
### NEERSF Evaluation Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No.</th>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender (%)</th>
<th>SIMD Quintile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Support for under-16s who have disengaged from education</td>
<td>Aberdeen City Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Data unavailable</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>The Deens Project</td>
<td>Aberdeenshire Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Data unavailable</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Aberdeen City Council
- **Participants:** 0
- **Gender:** Data unavailable
- **Age:** <25
- **Ethnicity:** Data unavailable
- **Disability:** Data unavailable
- **Most deprived quintile:** Data unavailable

#### Aberdeenshire Council
- **Participants:** 0
- **Gender:** Data unavailable
- **Age:** 25-30
- **Ethnicity:** Data unavailable
- **Disability:** Data unavailable
- **Most deprived quintile:** Data unavailable

**Key challenges/barriers identified:**
- Recruitment of staff to deliver the project – the timeframe for this meant progress was limited for the first part of the academic year and data provided is for a limited period.
- Greater impact may be seen as we continue to develop the project and provide support for identified young people.

**Further links**
- Further links are to be established with the early intervention service through Aberdeen City Fit Like Hubs and linking with the Council’s employability service, ABZWorks.

**Learner Pathways advocates**
- Learner Pathways advocates are also being established in all secondary schools in the city and will consider how a personalised curriculum which includes outdoor activities and skills development can support re-engagement and pathway planning.

**Consistency of approach**
- A consistency of approach, including by not limited to: giving young people a voice in the support they receive; building trusting relationships; being adaptable and flexible; building resilience, confidence, and a sense of achievement should be built into any future projects supporting this target group.

**Longer lead in and development time for project**
- A longer lead in and development time would mitigate recruitment processes impacting on delivery time, and so enable earlier discussions with partner agencies and services.

**Longer term funding**
- Long term funding would also allow for the time needed by staff to be better able to develop the relationships with young people, in turn building resilience, confidence, and a sense of achievement.

**High levels of positive destinations**
- High levels of positive destinations (76% of all participants achieving 3rd annum/29% of all participants achieving 4th annum), with nearly half of those achieving a positive destination having taken part in the project for two or more years.

**Dynamic Youth Award:**
- 79% of participants achieved a Dynamic Youth Award.

**NICAS climbing award:**
- 50% of participants achieved a NICAS climbing award.

**Attendance:**
- 80% had higher attendance on project than previous school attendance.

**Exclusions:**
- 63% had no exclusions.

**Testimonial from the grandfather of a participant:**
- "What a difference! He’s happier, more confident. He’s out and about and out of the house, which used to be hard for him. He’s thinking about his future and qualifications. He’s made real progress."
### NEERSF Evaluation Appendix (Compiled)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No</th>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Equivalents</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial Training</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Transmits pass skills and understanding to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Accelerator Start Up and Innovation Fund</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>100 new businesses started, 10 new products/processes developed, 20 new markets entered, 20 businesses demonstrating growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial short courses</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>25 individuals supported to start, sustain, or grow their own businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial Start Up Accelerator</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>32 teams with enhanced entrepreneurial skills and validated business ideas. Increased confidence and entrepreneurial mindset amongst all participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Enterprise School</td>
<td>Robert Gordon UniversityEnterprise Acceleration Fund</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Internships and Job Creation</td>
<td>Aberdeen City Council</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Productivity increase in the agriculture sector, efficiency translates to reduced emissions reduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Supply Chain Technology Agriculture</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>66 opportunities (46 graduate internships, 20 job-based placement trainees for a 6-month term achieved. 42 participants (63% successful) secured permanent/suitable employment after completion of this project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Digital Pilot Licence</td>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Expansion of the Digital Start Fund</td>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Allowingsufficient time to effectively plan and deliver projects going forward is vital, must be careful of crossover - targeting the same people at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Habitat</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Grateful businesses to attract new employers and address skill shortages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Adventure Tourism</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>The business has also continued to promote the significant and growing adventure tourism sector in the region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Startup Clinic Hospitality</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Fuse staff need and fast learn to learn about local food and drink – the platform meets the goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Food &amp; Drink - Tomarone's Leaders Management Training</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>20 individuals; 20 emerging business leaders with global mindset and leadership tools; 20 individual development plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gourmet Food Open Dinner, Fendalton</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>A Pioneer award for equipment and pathways enhancedistor experiences on the farm - enabling them to have permanent experiences to offer with additional tools for ‘pick your own’ and farm tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Seedpod - Food Hub for Innovation</td>
<td>ONE, SDS</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Increased productivity, adoption of new technology, low carbon leadership, increased innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Regional Energy Workforce Demand and Skills Review</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Highlighted the relevance of energy jobs in the North East is directly linked to level and timing of new investment in the region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Energy Sector Transition Accelerator</td>
<td>Energy Transition Zone</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1324</td>
<td>Did not found</td>
<td>Following the completion of the review, it is apparent that the methodology and approach has wider application for other clients’ regions and there has also been interest from individual companies to do a similar exercise at a company level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Green Leadership for Low Carbon Business Growth</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Trained managers completed the pilot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Climate emergencies and resiliency training</td>
<td>Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>45 individuals with responsibility for addressing climate change within their organisations. A resource copied to any individual looking to support their company in the transition to net zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Climate Solutions Accelerator Secondary School Programme</td>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Up to 600 5th and 6th year pupils receive opportunity to complete module. CSLA run across up to 32 NS Secondary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Health and Social Care short courses</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Early discussions with schools would have enhanced their ability to plan to deliver this module in what turned out to be a very challenging year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Careers and workforce development in Health and Social Care</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>Did not found</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Skills Manager for Inno and Technical Training</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>2 people appointed into specialist roles, 2 new markets entered, 5 businesses accelerator rate of product development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Upskilling short courses</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Graduates into Business</td>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>30 graduates in newly created roles within the food and drink businesses. Development of new products for new markets by 2025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Farm Futures on relevant and focused short course provision</td>
<td>University of Aberdeen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>NEERSF Access Fund</td>
<td>Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Did not found</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Fund to address additional barriers to access to training or work</td>
<td>Aberdeen City Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Target for no. of people engaged with, entering work etc 54. Actual Total fixed figures. Target for jobs created; no. of people entering work etc 40. Actual 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Employment support for under 25’s</td>
<td>Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Council</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>30 young people in Aberdeen re-engaging in education or moving on to a positive destination. 100% aware of support available to them through local authorities/partner agencies, in Shire, 52% positive destinations in 54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COVID Challenges - MT relationship crucial here – impacts on budget and targets**

**Stronger collaborations amongst partners and individual project managers across the programme may have led to greater uptake of the support via this project. Aberdeenshire Council’s early withdrawal from the scheme put full responsibility for delivery onto the City Council; preferable if decision had been given with notice. It is recommended that a support fund to remove barriers to employment should/could be made available alongside any future upskilling, matching the current level of expenditure placement opportunities to ensure progression to employment increase as possible and are open to people with barriers to employment.**

**A longer lead in and development phase can reduce processing impact on delivery times. Further links to be established with early intervention services.**

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**Participants: Male Female Prefer not to say 21-30 31-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 Non-**

**Outcomes:**

*Participants Equalities Outcomes Lessons Learned*
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