

Summary of results for survey of London borough employment and skills services

Background and methodology

In December 2020, London Councils surveyed London boroughs about their employment and skills services, and how these have changed since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The results are compared where applicable with a similar survey conducted in November 2019, prior to the coronavirus outbreak. In addition, five London boroughs were interviewed about their employment support services to examine their responses in more depth.

The 2020 survey has 26 responses by a total of 27 boroughs¹ – a response rate of 81%. Therefore, while it provides a good indication of boroughs' employment and skills services, it does not provide a complete picture of these services across all London boroughs.

Executive summary

This survey shows that the majority (88%) of London boroughs continue to be offering an employment support service in 2020. Over half (54%) deliver this service in-house and 15 per cent commission it. The remaining boroughs offer a combination of in-house and commissioned services or signpost to local provision.

On average, boroughs' estimated annual budget for employment services was £949,103, but it varied largely in the range between £150,000 and £3m. In terms of staff, on average boroughs employ 16 people, with one borough employing three and another employing 50 staff members. The number of people using borough employment services annually also ranges significantly between 100 and 2,700, with an average of 996. In total, London boroughs spend £23,727,564 on their employment services, employ 387 staff members and support 24,910 Londoners.

The most common services offered by the vast majority (92%) of boroughs include access to local vacancies, help with CV and job applications, employment advisors and support around apprenticeships. Interestingly, while there is a weak correlation between boroughs' budget for employment services and the number of people accessing the service each year, the size of the budget is correlated to the number of staff employed by boroughs. This suggests the intensity of support offered to service users varies.

Response to the Covid-19 pandemic

The vast majority (92%) of the boroughs surveyed said they had to change their employment service in response to the pandemic, with many boroughs (79%) providing more online access and support and two-thirds (67%) changing their service offer.

Most of London boroughs are also engaging with the government's Plan for Jobs in response to the pandemic. The most common elements of the Plan adopted by boroughs included Kickstart (as a gateway organisation, 77%), apprenticeships support (65%), DWP Flexible Support Fund (62%), Kickstart (as a direct employer, 58%) and WHP JETS (50%).

¹ Richmond and Wandsworth responded to the survey together as Richmond is currently using Wandsworth's employment and skills services. For analysis purposes, Richmond and Wandsworth will be counted as one borough throughout the summary of the findings.

No Wrong Door and top priority services

The vast majority (88%) of boroughs surveyed have been involved locally or sub-regionally in developing a 'no wrong door' approach. Examples include closer interaction with adult learning providers and employers (78%), multi-agency employment and skills hubs (70%), digital platform to guide people to the right services (61%) and co-location with JCP (52%). This suggests that work to expand the 'no wrong door' approach across London should build on existing local activity.

Four in five (81%) of the boroughs surveyed said that their Adult and Community Learning Service (ACL) is linked to their employment service, while three quarters (77%) said they provide skills support to residents in addition to the ACL service. These links between employment and skills services appear strong but may need to be strengthened further given the impact of the pandemic and the structural changes within some sectors of London's economy.

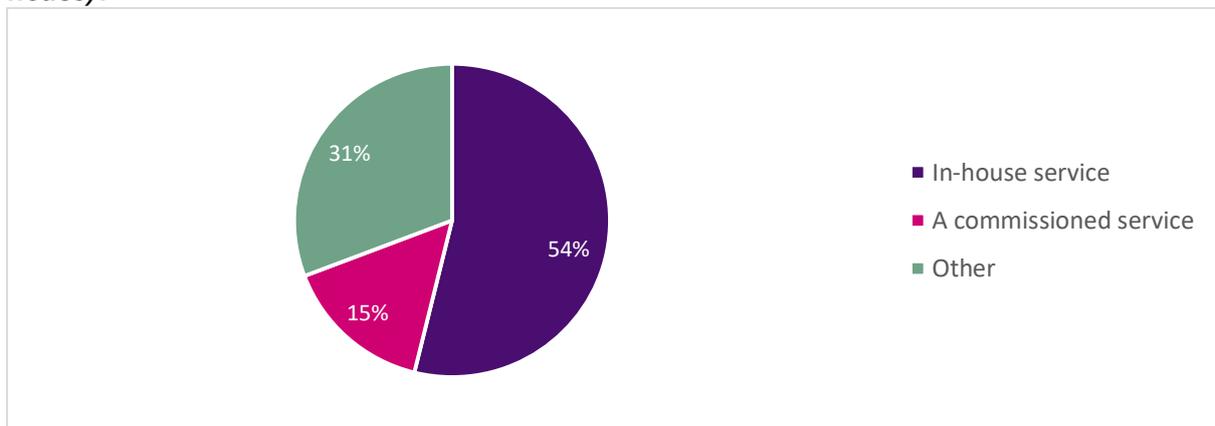
In terms of key priorities to support residents into employment, almost two-thirds (65%) of boroughs prioritised providing employment and skills support to their most vulnerable residents. Others focused on improved IAG and personalised support (35%), building skills for growing and resilient sectors (35%) and supporting digital access and skills (31%).

Providing an employment service

Almost nine in ten borough respondents (88%) provide a local employment service – a very similar proportion to what boroughs indicated in 2019 (87%). Of the three boroughs that do not provide a local employment service, all signpost to other employment services. Of the boroughs that provide an employment service, over half (54%) deliver it in-house. This is a lower proportion than the number of boroughs that indicated they deliver in-house employment services in 2019 (78%).

One in seven boroughs (15%) also commission out their service to another organisation, while close to a third (31%) selected ‘other’ options such as combining in-house and commissioned services and signposting to externally funded programmes.

Figure 1. Does your borough provide a local employment service, (commissioned or in-house)?



Base: 26 responses.

Funding

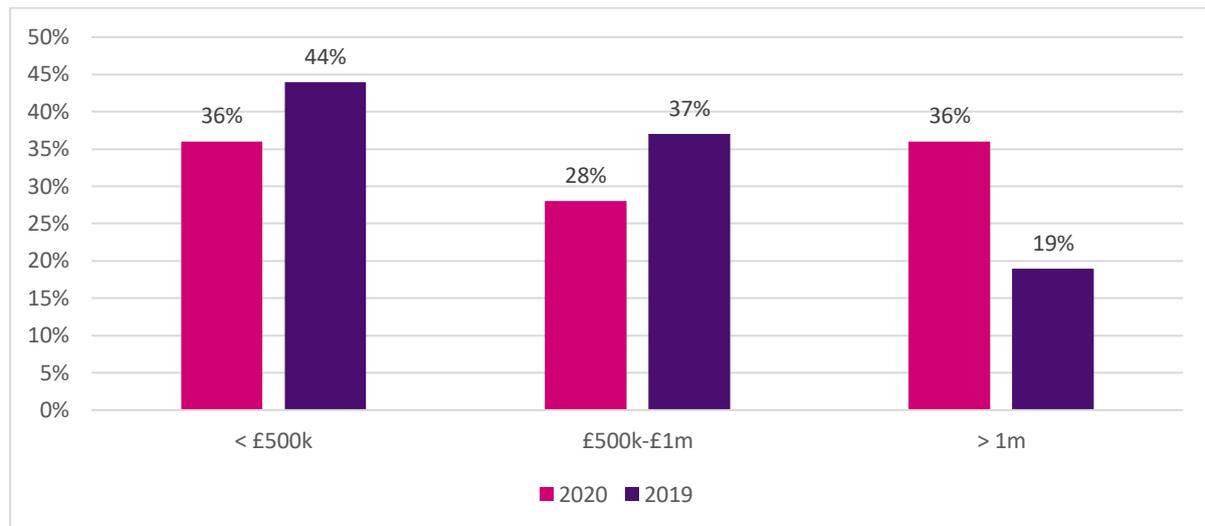
On average, boroughs’ estimated annual budget for employment services was £949,103 in 2020. However, this varied largely with a range of between £150,000 and £3m – very similar to what boroughs indicated in 2019, when their funding ranged between £171,760 and £2.5m. In total, London boroughs spent £23,727,564 on their employment services in 2020.

Approximately a third of boroughs (36%) spent more than £1m for their employment services in 2020, compared to 19% in 2019. Another third spent less than £500k and over a fifth (28%) spent between £500 and £1m, showing that the boroughs are largely evenly divided in terms of their employment services spending.

Looking back to the 2019 survey, boroughs identified Section 106 (76%) as the most common source of funding for employment services, followed by core council spending (41%) and the European Social Fund (18%). Therefore, the government’s proposals to replace Section 106 with a national Infrastructure Levy system could have a severe impact on many councils’ ability to fund an employment service.

Interviews with boroughs conducted in early 2021 confirmed that Section 106, council spending and ESF remain key funding sources in London. Other examples included DWP’s Flexible Support Fund, MOPAC funding, Community budgets, the Strategic Investment Pot and grants that have gone to local authorities during the crisis.

Figure 2. What is your estimated annual budget for your employment services?



Base: 25 responses in 2020 and 16 responses in 2019.

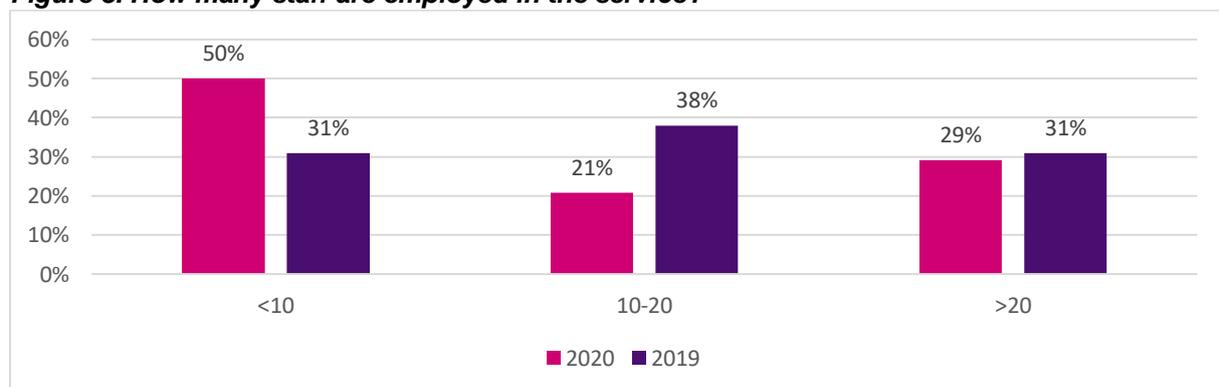
Employment services size and scope

On average, boroughs employ 16 staff in their local employment services. However, this ranges widely with one borough employing 50 staff members, and others employing three. Half (50%) of the boroughs surveyed employ less than 10 people, compared to only a third (31%) employing this many staff members in 2019. Another fifth (21%) employ between 10 and 20 staff members, and close to a third (29%) employ over 20. In total, boroughs employ 387 staff members across London.

Qualitative interviews with boroughs showed that different members of staff employed in the local employment services often specialise in different employment areas. Some examples include supporting:

- People to enter construction jobs
- Young unemployed people
- Those furthest away from the labour market
- Care leavers
- Those at risk of being involved in a criminal activity
- Employer engagement
- Disabled residents or those with special needs

Figure 3. How many staff are employed in the service?



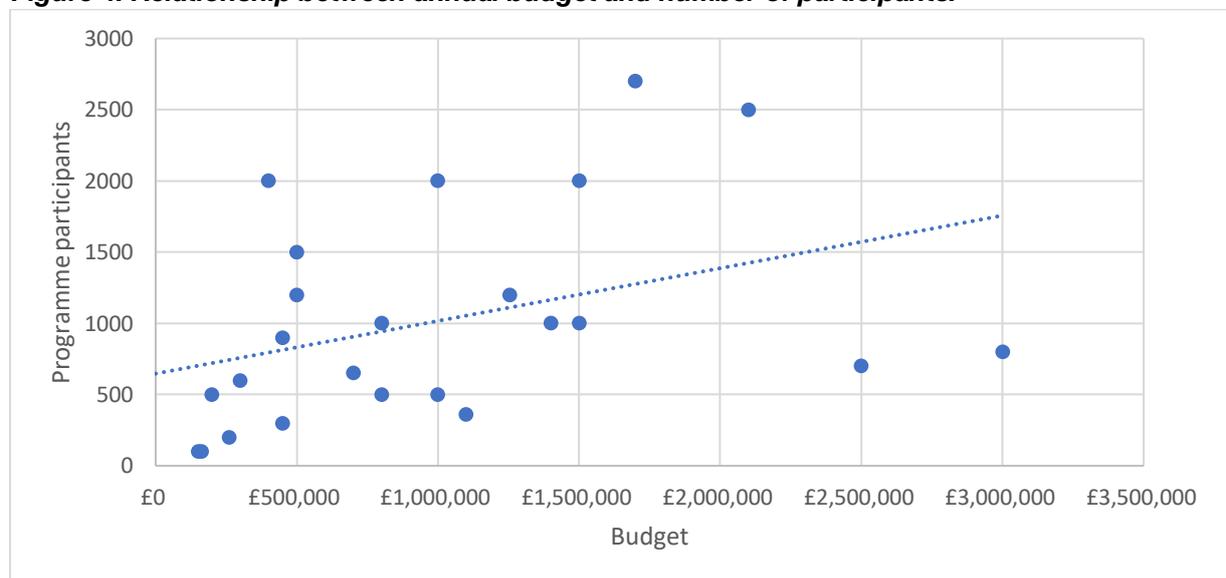
Base: 24 responses in 2020 and 16 responses in 2019.

Boroughs were asked to estimate the number of people using their service every year. This ranged significantly from 100 and 2,700. On average, boroughs' employment services had 996 people accessing them in 2020 – a slightly lower number than the average for 2019 (1,075). In total, boroughs support 24,910 Londoners annually.

Similarly to what London Councils' survey found in 2019, there is a fairly weak correlation between the annual budget for boroughs' employment services and the number of people accessing them every year. For instance, the borough with the largest budget (£3m) helps around 800 people a year, while one of the boroughs with the smallest budgets (£400k) helps 2,000 people a year.

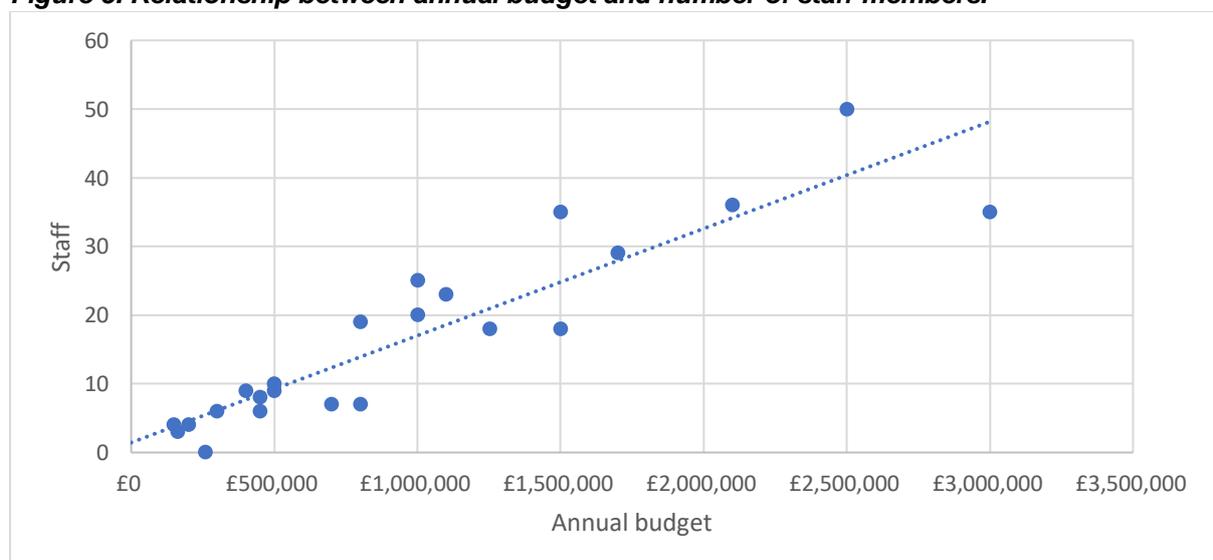
Less surprisingly, there is a stronger correlation between the level of annual budget for a borough employment service and the number of council staff employed to work in it, with higher spending services employing far more members of staff.

Figure 4. Relationship between annual budget and number of participants.



Base: 25 responses.

Figure 5. Relationship between annual budget and number of staff members.



Base: 24 responses.

Services provided

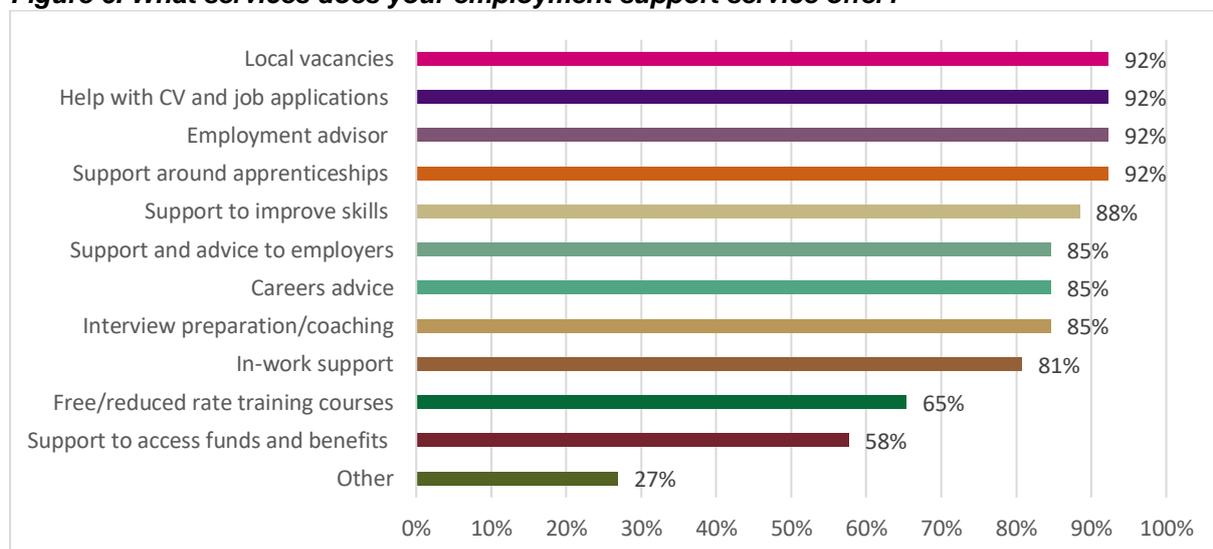
London Councils asked boroughs what range of help they provide as part of their employment support services. The majority of boroughs surveyed offer most of the services listed in the survey, suggesting that they offer a flexible approach for people with different needs.

The most common services offered by the vast majority (92%) of boroughs include access to local vacancies, help with CV and job applications, employment advisors and support around apprenticeships. A substantial proportion of boroughs also offer support to improve skills (88%), support and advice to employers (85%), career advice (85%) and interview preparation (85%).

Over a quarter (27%) of the boroughs surveyed also offer services beyond those suggested in the survey, including:

- Networking and support
- Paid work experience programmes
- Temporary housing
- In-work benefit calculation
- Construction skills training
- Volunteering signposting and support
- Access to funds to address financial barriers

Figure 6. What services does your employment support service offer?



Base: 26 responses.

Response to the Covid-19 pandemic

The vast majority (92%) of the boroughs surveyed said they have changed their employment service in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, while only two boroughs said they have not.

Unsurprisingly, four in five (79%) of the boroughs that changed their employment services in response to the pandemic, did so by providing more online access and support. Two-thirds (67%) also changed their service offer and a half (50%) increased the capacity of their service.

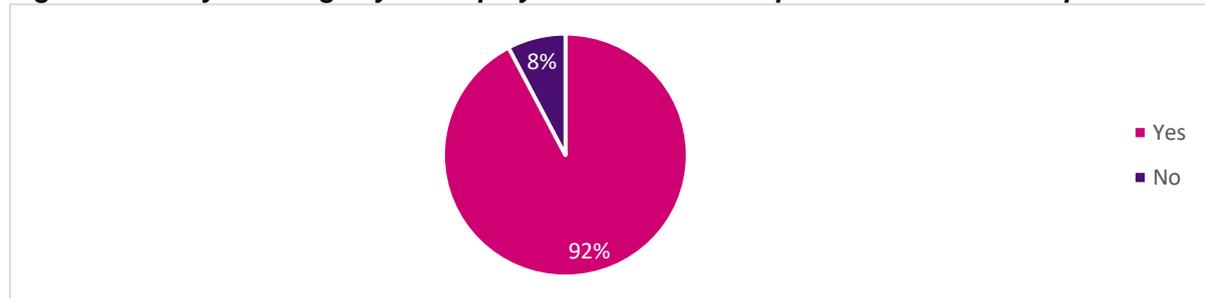
A third (33%) indicated that they responded to the pandemic in another way, including providing additional employer-led training courses, online workshops for employers and residents, joint work with their benefits team to provide integration of services, recruiting additional members of staff, reviewing recovery needs and long-term impact of the crisis, dedicating additional resource to the Kickstart scheme and Youth Hubs.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, qualitative interviews with boroughs revealed that demand for support has been driven by residents working in the most severely affected by the crisis sectors, such as retail, hospitality and tourism. In line with this, there are also increased borough efforts to link up their employment and skills services during the crisis in order to retrain and upskill residents and encourage them to enter resilient (e.g. construction) and growing (e.g. social care, digital) sectors.

For example, one borough is delivering joint online workshops with both the local social care employer and the local adult community learning provider to drive growth in that sector. Another borough created an online forum for the local employment providers in order to allow them to share best practice during the pandemic.

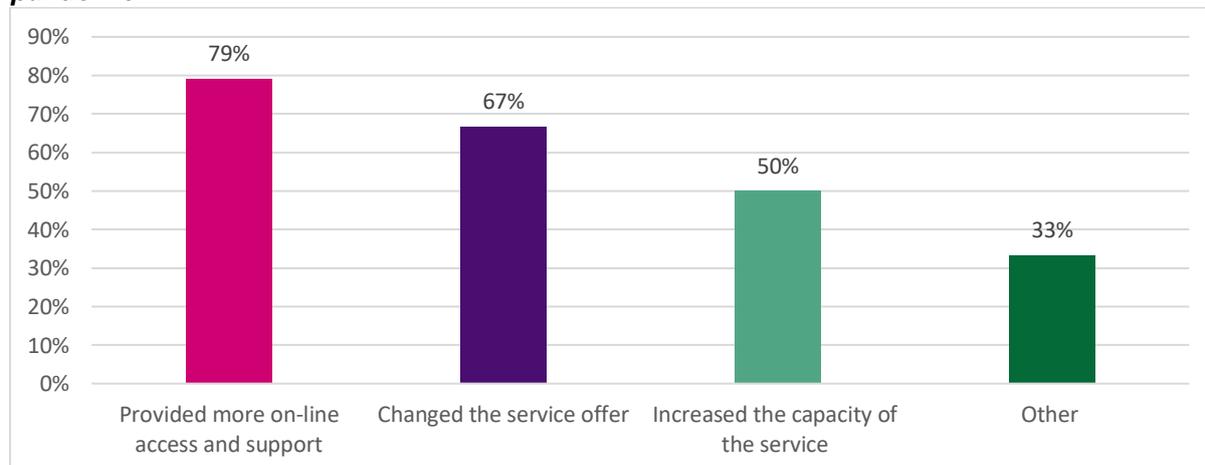
Most of the boroughs surveyed had to transfer their employment provision online and provide digital support to residents. One borough built a digital employment and skills hub to direct people to the right services. Another borough trained volunteers as digital ambassadors to help digitally excluded residents and gave out laptops to help job seekers. Overall, boroughs seem to anticipate delivering a mixture of both online and in-person support when the national lockdown comes to an end.

Figure 7. Have you changed your employment service in response to the Covid-19 pandemic?



Base: 26 responses.

Figure 8. How have you changed your employment service in response to the Covid-19 pandemic?



Base: 26 responses.

Westminster – Impact of the coronavirus crisis case study

The Westminster Employment Service (WES) is an employment coaching and job brokerage service provided by Westminster Council. The aim of the service is to transform the lives of residents through employment, targeting those furthers away from the labour market. The service has been operating since 2017 during which time, over 2,000 residents have been supported into employment.

During the pandemic the service has continued to deliver support for clients in need through regular welfare and check in calls and at a time of increased levels of anxiety. Recruitment activity by most employers the service works with has been significantly reduced – advertised vacancies have fallen by 50 per cent and unemployment in Westminster has risen by 173 per cent since March 2020.

Based on need and feedback from local employers that want to support borough efforts in the community, the service has focussed on three priorities:

1. **Focus on growth sectors and providing short training and re-skilling courses designed and delivered with local employers.** New courses have commenced working with the Westminster Adult Education Service and other stakeholders to train residents for roles in health, social care, tech, construction and green jobs.
2. **Harnessing volunteers from the Westminster Connects programme as mentors and to support clients.** The focus has been expanding existing mentoring programmes to provide support for young people in the City.
3. **Strengthening support for young people not in education, employment or training.** This has included re-allocating coaching support, setting up new training courses including Westminster Wheels, which provides training and employment for unemployed young people as Bike Mechanics. Old and disused bikes are transformed and sold from a shop in one of the City’s regeneration areas – Church Street – and 20 per cent of bikes offered to the community for free.

Engagement with Government’s Plan for Jobs

In July 2020, the Chancellor presented his Plan for Jobs aimed at supporting UK’s economic recovery post-Covid-19 by introducing a number of new programmes to retain, create and support jobs in the country.

Some of the policy decisions in the Plan for Jobs include: introducing the Kickstart scheme to create job placements for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit, introducing the Work and Health Programme (WHP) Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS) to support Londoners who have been unemployed for three months or more, providing funding for traineeships, apprenticeships and sector-based work academies and increasing the funding for the Flexible Support Fund.

London Councils asked boroughs whether their employment service engaged in delivering any elements of the Plan for Jobs, and the vast majority (96%) said they did, while only one borough said they didn’t.

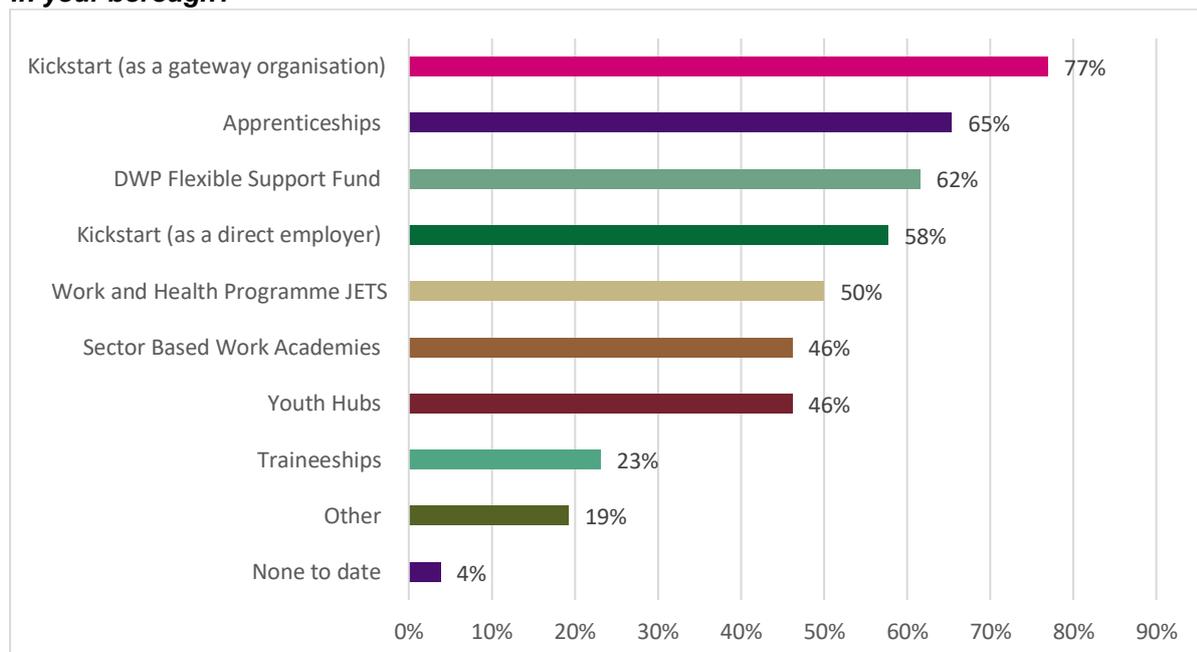
The most common element of the Plan for Jobs boroughs engaged with was facilitating Kickstart as a gateway organisation, selected by two-thirds (77%) of all boroughs surveyed.² Over half (58%) also indicated that they engaged with Kickstart as a direct employer.

Two-thirds (65%) of boroughs provided apprenticeships, and a similar proportion (62%) took advantage of the increase in the DWP Flexible Support Fund, which aims to help people claiming unemployment benefits to find a job, by covering some of the extra costs associated with this.

Half (50%) of the boroughs surveyed also engaged with the delivery of the WHP JETS, which provides light touch, personalised support to people who have been out of work and in receipt of benefits for at least 13 weeks.

Finally, close to half (46%) of the boroughs surveyed worked on the delivery of sector-based work academies, designed to help prepare unemployed people to apply for jobs in a different area of work, and Youth Hubs, providing advice and support to young people to find lasting work.

Figure 9. Is your employment service engaged in delivering any elements of the Plan for Jobs in your borough?



Base: 26 responses.

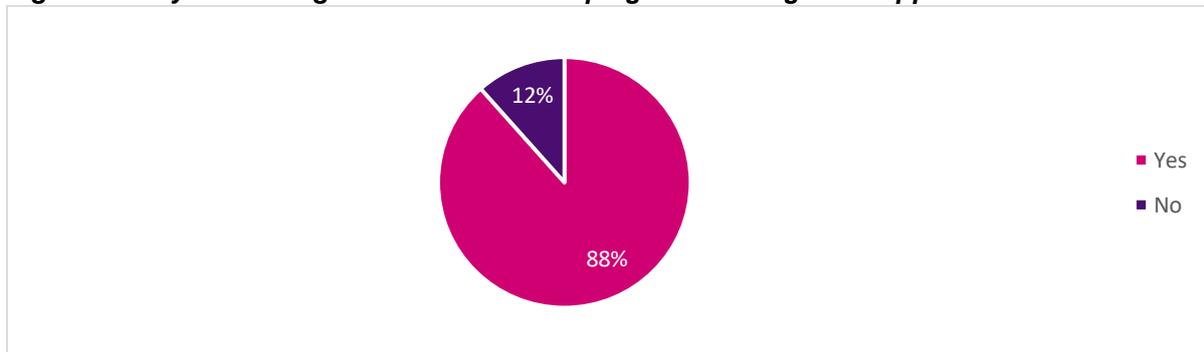
No Wrong Door approach

The 'Good Work' mission, which forms part of London's economic recovery work will be focusing on developing a 'no wrong door' approach for employment and skills provision. This is about helping Londoners find the support they need by making it easy to navigate the different service offers and joining up services locally.

² Originally the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) decided that there were two methods of applying for Kickstart - directly if an employer had 30 or more placements, or through a Gateway if an employer offered fewer. In late January DWP removed the limit, allowing all employers to apply directly instead of through a Gateway, the rationale being that it will be easier for all employers.

London Councils asked boroughs whether they have been involved in developing a ‘no wrong door’ approach locally or sub-regionally, and the vast majority (88%) said they have while only three boroughs said they haven’t.

Figure 10. Is your borough involved in developing a ‘no wrong door’ approach?



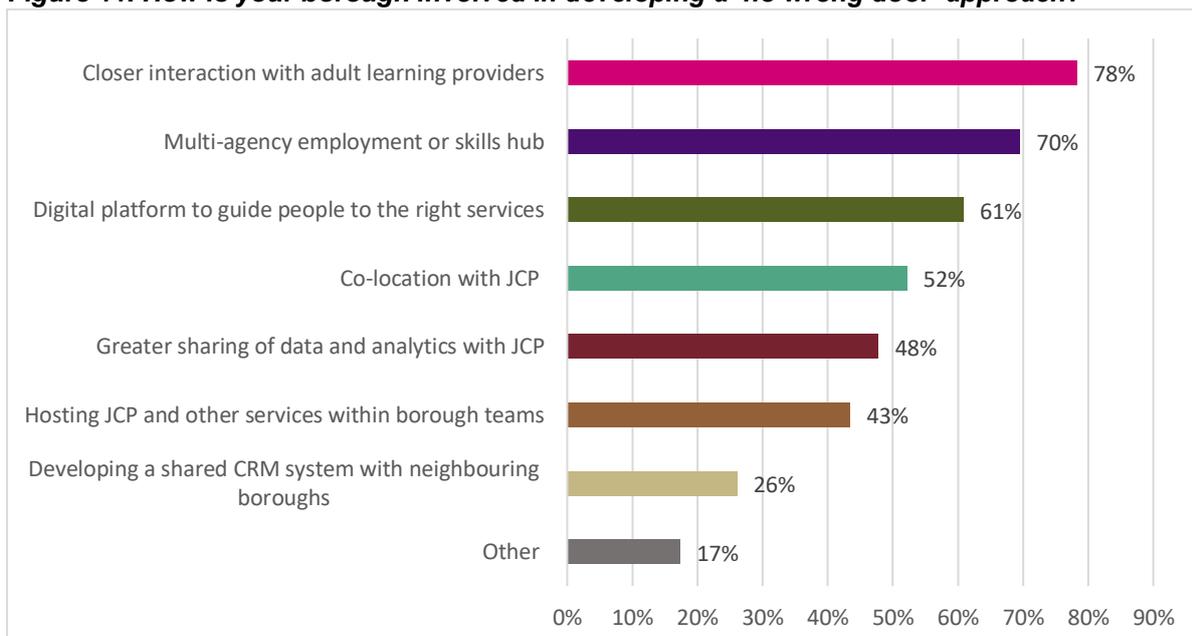
Base: 26 responses.

Of the boroughs who were involved in developing a ‘no wrong door’ approach, four in five (78%) did so via closer interaction with adult learning providers and employers, while over two-thirds (70%) developed a multi-agency employment or skills hub. A substantial proportion (61%) also worked on a digital platform to guide people to the right services.

Many boroughs also indicated working closely with Jobcentre Plus, including via co-location (52%), greater sharing of data and analytics (48%) and hosting JCP and other services within borough teams (43%). Over a quarter (26%) also work on developing a shared CRM system with neighbouring boroughs.

Other examples provided by boroughs included integration with other Council teams such as housing and children’s services, coordinated internal team to support new Universal Credit claimants and supporting integration of services on a regional level.

Figure 11. How is your borough involved in developing a ‘no wrong door’ approach?



Base: 23 responses.

Most of the boroughs interviewed highlighted the importance of joining up their employment and skills services with other borough services such as housing, youth and family services and welfare in order to provide better and more coordinated support for residents during the crisis. In one borough, for instance, the employment and skills division is working with borough officers from other departments in order to suggest employment support as a solution for wider issues, such as debt and housing. Another borough is aiming to develop area-based interventions by linking up JCP, the local college, the local WHP employment provider and the borough's employment brokerage to develop a mechanism for addressing localised unemployment.

When it comes to co-location and service integration with JCP, the boroughs interviewed were divided in their experiences. One borough involved in co-location with JCP highlighted the advantages of this, including sharing of opportunities and increased efficiency by checking eligibility for programmes on the spot. Another borough, however, mentioned that agreeing on data sharing and wider integration with JCP seems to be very challenging and time consuming. One common challenge mentioned by most boroughs was having to continuously sustain their relationship with JCP, as positive experiences are often linked to good relationships with individual staff members, but staff turnover is high.

Ealing – ‘No wrong door’ approach case study

The London Borough of Ealing has transformed the way they deliver their employment and skills services by aligning local activities with their overarching recovery strategy – a [Greenprint for Recovery and Renewal](#). Ealing’s ultimate aim is to tackle entrenched disadvantage by adopting a partnership approach to jointly secure public and private investment and optimise spend. This will manifest in a ‘single front door’ approach, an easier pathway to find jobs, and a reskill and retrain offer for growth sector jobs including green skills, health and social care, and the creative, digital and film sector.

Looking at employment and skills provision, Ealing’s adult learning, apprenticeships, and job brokerage services were merged together to ensure that every resident who comes on board will be provided with a wraparound support. They are also working with developers, strategic companies and small businesses to support recruitment activity, as well as with local training and employment providers. Ultimately, this approach aims to provide a better coordinated customer journey into employment via training for residents, by putting emphasis on good quality work, upskilling and earning well.

Ealing set up the Southall Jobs Partnership to bring partners together to tackle the unemployment and skills challenges faced by local residents and businesses. Southall has been disproportionately impacted by Covid and faces new challenges related to the impacts on Heathrow and its supply chain businesses and jobs. The council, Jobcentre Plus, West London College, Shaw Trust, Southall Community Alliance and local faith groups are working together to develop a plan for the area.

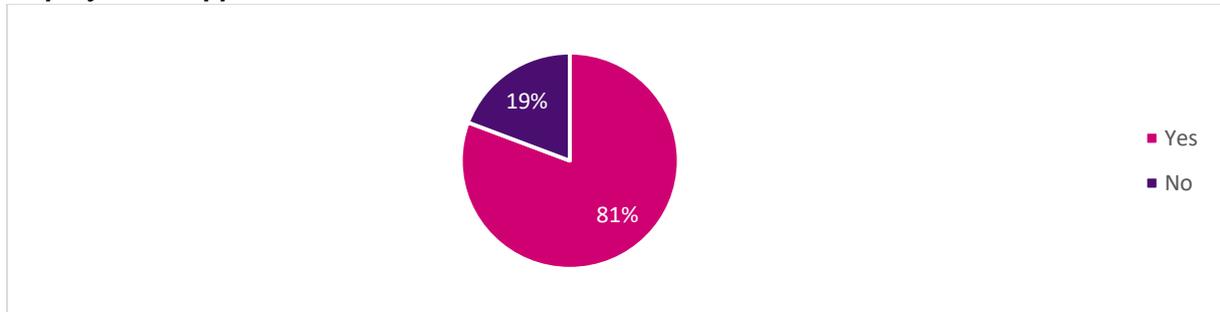
In response to the pandemic, Ealing is also bringing together a wider Recovery Skills Partnership between their employment and skills services and other borough services, such as local welfare, families and children’s services and housing, and involving the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The partnership aims to help vulnerable residents who are furthest away from the labour market and are facing multiple barriers to work by shaping the organisation around residents’ needs.

Efforts for coordination transcend borough’s borders. Ealing is piloting a shared Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system with three neighbouring boroughs. The borough’s recovery work is also aligned at a sub-regional level with the West London Alliance’s [Build and Recover](#) strategy and at a pan-London level with the GLA and London Councils’ Good Work Mission which is part of the [London Recovery Programme](#).

Adult and Community Learning Service

Four in five (81%) of the boroughs surveyed said that their Adult and Community Learning Service (ACL), which provides a range of courses, professional qualifications and other support, is linked to their employment service.

Figure 12. Is your borough's Adult and Community Learning Service linked to your employment support service?



Base: 26 responses.

In most instances, boroughs indicated that their ACL and employment services are placed within the same division, sometimes sharing a joint Matrix accreditation, and the link is mostly operational around cross-referrals between the services and sharing of the ACL provision. This allows boroughs to leverage better job outcomes for learners and refer those seeking better employment or a job to skills support.

Some boroughs outlined that the ACL team sits on partnership meetings, as well as numerous project groups focusing on specific employment initiatives, sharing practice and offers.

Other boroughs explained that the joint commissioning of pre-employment, employability, basic skills, and job-specific training helps them meet local employment opportunities in growing sectors such as construction.

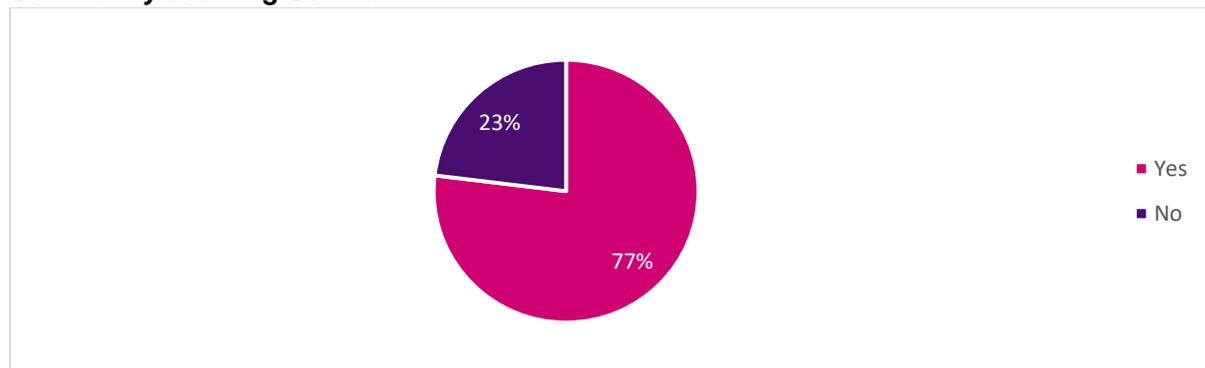
Other examples of how ACL service has been linked to boroughs' employment services include:

- Through Youth Hubs
- Via JETS integration
- Joint funding bids
- Co-location between the two teams
- Via the job brokerage service
- Sector Based Skills Academies
- Data sharing
- Integration with mental health support services
- Language cafes run with Council and community volunteers

Skills support in addition to the ACL service

A substantial majority (77%) of the boroughs surveyed said they provide skills support to residents in addition to the Adult and Community Learning Service, while only six boroughs did not.

Figure 13. Does your borough provide skills support to residents in addition to the local Adult Community Learning Service?



Base: 26 responses.

However, the type of and intensity of skills support provided by boroughs varied substantially. For instance, while one borough focused only on vocational qualifications, another one provided access to a range of skills services such as scholarships, apprenticeships, construction skills training, STEAM and start-up training.

This finding was also supported by the additional interviews conducted with boroughs. While one borough was involved in delivering apprenticeships, construction training and short-accredited courses, another borough provided a wide range of skills training via the local college including ICT, vocational qualifications, health and social care training and sector skills academies.

A common feature between many of the boroughs surveyed was that they were providing skills training linked to specific local growth and emerging sectors, such as construction and social care, as well as training supporting residents to enter specific in-demand roles such as bike mechanics and horticulture roles. A few boroughs also mentioned providing ESOL courses, apprenticeships support, as well as ICT and digital skills support.

To deliver skills support to their residents, boroughs partnered with a variety of stakeholders, including Jobcentre Plus, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, FE colleges and universities, local training providers and employers. Different funding sources were also mentioned by boroughs including the Adult Education Budget (AEB), the Apprenticeship Levy, and the European Social Fund (ESF).

Top priority activities/services to support residents into employment

London Councils asked boroughs what their top three priority activities/services to support residents into employment would be, if they had the funding.

Interestingly, while boroughs were given the opportunity to mention any priority areas related to employment and skills, there was a lot of commonality in their answers.

For instance, almost two-thirds (65%) of the boroughs surveyed prioritised providing employment and skills support to their most vulnerable residents, as well as those most affected by the Covid-19 crisis. Some of the groups boroughs identified as most in need of employment support included young residents, those aged 50+, disabled residents, BAME groups, care leavers, homeless people, furloughed residents, LTU and those with multiple barriers to employment.

Over a third (35%) of boroughs also prioritised improved careers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), as well as more personalised support. Examples included better job search

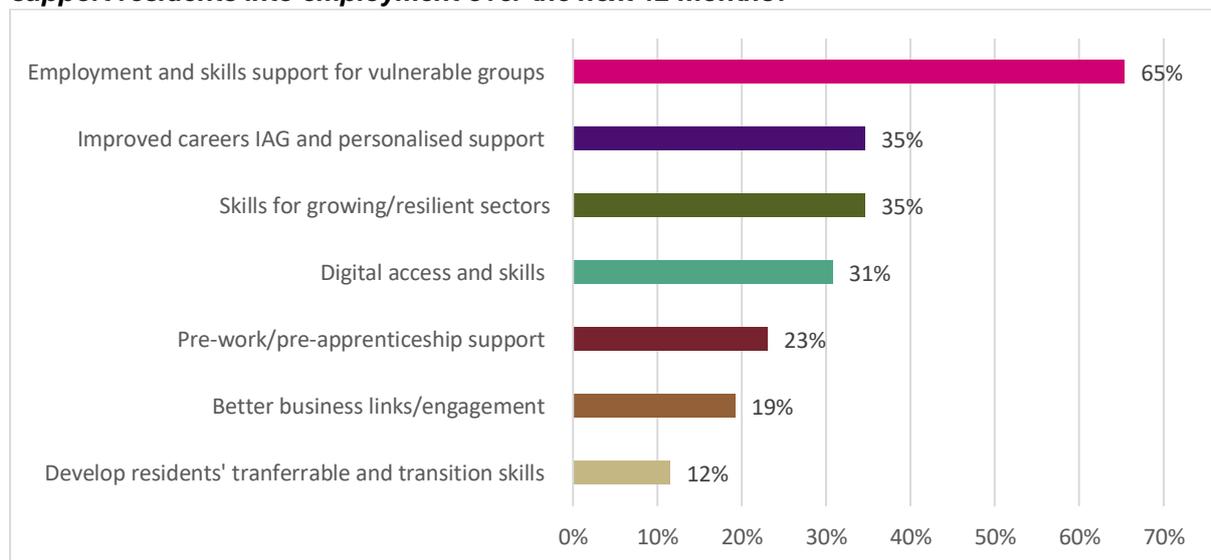
support, better careers advice, more personalised support from work coaches, developing a digital platform for signposting support and building a ‘no wrong door approach’ via a universal employability and skills offer.

Another third (35%) of the boroughs surveyed highlighted the importance of building skills and employment support for growing, emerging and resilient sectors, such as tech and digital, creative, life sciences, health and social care, green and construction.

Close to a third (31%) emphasized on developing digital access and skills among their residents, via not only training and skills development, but also better infrastructure and broadband connectivity, as well as access to digital devices.

Almost a quarter (23%) of the boroughs surveyed explained the need for wage subsidies, as well as pre-work and pre-apprenticeship support for all the groups that are not eligible for Kickstart. Finally, small but significant proportion of those surveyed prioritised better links and engagement with local businesses (19%) and developing transferrable skills among their residents (12%).

Figure 14. If you had the funding, what would be your three priority activities/services to support residents into employment over the next 12 months?



Base: 26 responses.

Discussion

This survey shows that the majority of London boroughs continue to offer an employment support service in 2020, despite it being a very challenging year for boroughs finances and having no statutory duty to provide this service.

This a positive finding, given the extent of reductions to local government budgets since 2010 and the additional financial challenges boroughs have been facing since the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis in early 2020. Boroughs have no statutory obligation to provide such a service. Yet boroughs remain committed in providing employment and skills support to their residents, specifically those most affected by the crisis.

While the funding of boroughs’ employment support services remains within similar brackets as in 2019, the survey showed that a greater proportion of boroughs have higher employment budgets in 2020 in comparison to the year before.

The higher budgets, however, do not correspond to an overall increase in the number of staff employed by boroughs in their employment services. In fact, a larger proportion of boroughs

have smaller sized staff in 2020 than in 2019. The increased budgets do not correspond to a higher number of participants using the boroughs' employment services either, with that number remaining almost unchanged between 2019 and 2020.

Therefore, it seems that boroughs have been using the increase in their employment budgets to enhance the services provided to residents. In fact, the majority of the boroughs surveyed offer most of the services listed in the survey, suggesting that they offer a flexible approach for people with different needs.

Response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Since the Covid-19 outbreak drastically transformed the way boroughs deliver their services, it is likely that a significant proportion of the boroughs' increased budget was spent to accommodate this change. For instance, most face-to-face services were unavailable during lockdown, and many boroughs had to adapt their services and deliver a digital offer.

Most of London boroughs are also engaging with the government's Plan for Jobs in response to the pandemic, which is a positive finding. It seems that boroughs are working to ensure these mainly national schemes are embedded and work well in their local communities.

For instance, the Kickstart scheme targeted at young people (16-24) seems to be the most popular scheme boroughs engage with, which is in line with many officers highlighting that this group has suffered disproportionately during the pandemic.

However, while engagement with the Plan for Jobs was high, it will be interesting to see the progress of the various schemes over the course of the next year as challenges have already been identified around the low number of placement starts on Kickstart, comparatively low JETS referral to start rates and insufficient funding for some boroughs' Youth Hubs.

While these measures are welcome, future research should also aim to identify the gaps in support and how these can be addressed. For instance, a substantial proportion of the boroughs surveyed said that their residents who are not eligible for Kickstart need a similar support scheme, while those eligible need more pre-work/pre-apprenticeship support.

No Wrong Door and top priority services

While ideas about a 'No Wrong Door' approach towards careers, skills and employment support have been around in the last 20 years, the survey showed that the specific employment and skills challenges arising from the coronavirus crisis have made the approach ever more appealing to London boroughs.

In fact, the majority of them are already working locally or sub-regionally on a better integration of services via closer interactions with different stakeholders, by developing employment and skills hubs, as well as digital platforms for directing residents to the right services.

Moreover, when asked about the top priority activities for supporting their residents, many boroughs mentioned aspects of a NWD approach such as improved careers IAG and personalised support and building better links between stakeholders.