



REFLECTIONS

APRIL 2023

**MAKING JOB SCHEMES WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:
OUR APPROACH TO THE KICKSTART PROGRAMME**



SUMMARY

'Kickstart' was part of a government scheme aimed at fostering employment for young people aged 16 to 24. Through the three organisations that make up the Hastings Commons[1] and two further partner organisations[2] we employed 16 young people between June 2021 and September 2022. We also provided them with weekly employability training to ensure these participants could learn crucial skills and increase their likelihood of employment going forward. Our success was largely down to our flexible needs-based approach, tailoring roles to individual participants aimed at building both confidence and capability. We have since directly employed 3 of these 'Kickstarters' and continue to engage with others, each of whom contribute to the life and vibrancy of Hastings Commons. Though the government scheme ended in March 2022, its impact was such that we have decided to restart a version of this programme ourselves with the aid of funding from the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). We learnt a lot over the course of this programme and through participant feedback which will ensure the new programme brings more impressive results.

"I truly feel I know so much more now about what to do when seeking work and analysing what employers are looking for now [...] Overall, I would recommend the Kickstart scheme to anyone who hasn't yet had any experience in work, if the scheme still existed." (Robert, Kickstarter)[3]

- 16 'Kickstarters' were hired in additional positions that wouldn't have existed without the programme. These positions were across 5 teams and several community-focused and local organisations either within or partnered with Hastings Commons.
- All participants were local to Hastings. At least 75% are now employed or studying. We are still in contact with 10 participants, inviting them to events to encourage their continuing social inclusion and contribution to the Commons. We have since hired and provided meaningful work to three of our Kickstarters.
- A conservative estimate of 75% of our participants moving onto other endeavours is markedly better than other job programmes such as the Future Jobs fund (40-50%) and the Work Programme (~37%). The impact of this is multiplied when considering that most of our participants were far from the labour market when they started with us, not having been in paid employment for at least 12 months (due in part to COVID-19).
- Along with significant and visible confidence boosts, we nurtured transferable skills that could be taken into other jobs and sectors, such as marketing and administration.
- Our success was based on setting ourselves conditions, including committing to a flexible needs-based approach. These commitments were informed by our emphasis on social inclusion and impact, and our research on what makes an effective employment scheme that really helps young people.

INFO BOX 1: KICKSTARTERS

- Local to Hastings = 16
- Employed or studying = at least 12 (75%)
- Still in contact with us in any capacity = 10 (62.5%)
- Presently employed by us = 3 (18.75%)

[1] White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures Ltd, Leisure & Learning, and Heart of Hastings CLT Ltd.

[2] Hastings Advice & Representation Centre (HARC), and Hana Clode Marketing (Rock House tenant).

[3] Kickstarters' actual names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

DOING JOB SCHEMES RIGHT

While Kickstart was intended as an emergency COVID measure, we believe employment schemes for young people should be considered the norm rather than an exception. We argue that well designed job schemes pay off for hirers, for participants, and for the local economy, especially if they are run by businesses and organisations with a community focus. Those organisations require funding to facilitate this so they don't take the brunt of the risk, and this gives public or charitable funders the opportunity to set careful conditions to ensure schemes aren't exploited. This article reflects on our experience with the Kickstart programme and the experiences of its participants, recommending a few conditions and commitments to take forward into similar programmes.

Community-focused organisations can provide meaningful and transferable work to young people who are transitioning from school or otherwise having difficulties finding rewarding employment. In addition to lasting employment impacts, this would involve wider social impacts through their work and promote social inclusion among participants, strengthening social cohesion and participation in the community. As well as in themselves being public goods, participation and cohesion can be related to further local economic impacts[4].

The DWP has insufficient data on the overall success of the Government scheme, but we can compare our figures to past schemes such as the relatively successful FJF scheme. Around half of participants were not claiming unemployment benefits following the FJF programme, compared to a conservative

[4] Dayton-Johnson J. Social cohesion and economic prosperity. James Lorimer & Company; 2001.

[5] Radiven, C. & Prideaux, S. Boris and Rishi's 2020 'Kickstart' for the UK Economy: Same Old, Same Old Youth Employment Policies?. Academia. 2020: 1-15.

[6] Department for Work and Pensions. Impacts and Costs and Benefits of the Future Jobs Fund. London: DWP. Nov 2012.

[7] Ibid.

INFO BOX 2: HISTORIC JOB SCHEMES IN THE UK WHAT WORKED AND WHAT DIDN'T?

Youth Training Scheme - '80s

- Open to 'substitution effect' - used instead of normal hiring to save employers money rather than creating additional jobs
- Anecdotally the most successful element was the community placement route within YTS

New Deals & Employment Zone Programmes - Late '90s/Early 2000s

- 'Capital' was real beneficiary rather than those in need[5]
- Low rate of employment following programme
- Meritocratic nature of scheme alienated those in need based on traditional performance metrics

Future Jobs Fund (FJF) - 2009

- Targeted young people furthest from the job market
- Found to have significant net economic benefits to employers, participants, and society[6]
- Assumed young people wanted to engage with opportunities
- Conditions for employers partially negated displacement and substitution effects, including checks that the jobs were 'additional' and of benefit to the local community
- Economically successful - DWP conclusions; estimates a net financial benefit to employers, participants, and wider society

Work Programme - 2011

- Fewer conditions, markedly worse performance. 37.5% employed following participation (Post-FJF employment was around ~ 50-60%[7])

estimate of 75% of our participants now employed or studying. Less effective employment schemes like the Work Programme of 2011 had post-programme employment rates of around 37.5%.

At least 75% of our participants are now employed or studying[8]. However, there are comparably more job openings in the current market and this figure says little of the quality of the roles our participants are now in. On the other hand, we have since hired and provided meaningful work to three of our Kickstarters, and we know from the participants' reflective reports that taking part in the programme has helped shape their ambitions. It has provided them with crucial experience and knowledge, enabling them to make decisions more easily such as what/whether to study, whether to stay local or move elsewhere, and to be more broad-minded about what industries they consider when looking for employment.

Overall, the Government's Kickstart programme was vulnerable to the same issues as the YTS and New Deals/Employment Zone approaches: benefiting private interests and capital above those in need, and the 'substitution effect' among hirers causing local job displacement. The Kickstart scheme dropped FJF's 'community benefit test' based on the rationale that funded jobs should resemble so-called 'real jobs'[9]. This implies that jobs which benefit communities are somehow invalid. The scheme may have acted instead as a profit incentive for large companies, enabling exploitation of young people hired as publicly-subsidised cheap labour. This could

"Kickstart brought a change in participants' lives from 'stuck in Covid' to 'out in the world', leading to huge growth in confidence and capability." (Jess, CEO)

have lasting negative motivational impacts on participants who would have been more valued and been doing more meaningful work elsewhere[10].

A more carefully constructed employment programme with community-focused organisations can be a highly effective tool for change. Community businesses are much more likely to employ people far from the labour market, such as those having no previous paid employment in past 12 months, making them ideal for targeted funds aimed at maximising social and economic impact[11]. Rewarding work, perceived by employees as contributing to the wellbeing of others, may further contribute to the productivity of the hirer organisation[12]. This means that targeting funding for jobs schemes run by community businesses and organisations may lead to both higher economic and higher social benefits.

OUR APPROACH

The Government scheme included several aims of helping young people with their CVs, with their literacy and numeracy skills, and with their long-term employability. To get more impact from the programme, we also made several elective commitments based on our understanding of what makes an impactful employment scheme. All our collaborative employers were committed

[8] This is a maximum estimate as we are not still in touch with all Kickstarters.

[9] Department for Work and Pensions. DWP Employment Support: Kickstart Scheme. London: HC 655. 25 Feb 2022. 39th Report.

[10] Simmons, R. Kickstart – another false start. Post-16 educator. 107: 9-10.

[11] Community businesses are defined by Power to Change as businesses 'run by local people and trading for the benefit of a community to which they are accountable' (para 7); Power to Change. Community Business Market Report 2022. 2022. <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/market-reports/market-report-2022/>

[12] Allan BA. Task significance and meaningful work: A longitudinal study. Journal of Vocational Behavior. 2017. 102:174-82.

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to community benefit and all posts were 'additional' to avoid a substitution effect. We provided meaningful and challenging work, providing space for participants to work out and share their solutions to build their lasting confidence. We also provided comprehensive and varied employability sessions, and based on our learning we made an additional commitment to participant-led sessions to develop basic competencies.

We were committed to keeping in touch with Kickstarters following their engagement with the programme, inviting them to participate in Hastings Commons to further promote social inclusion. As a result, 10 of the 16 ex-Kickstarters have chosen to stay in touch with us in some capacity. Two of them, though not employed by us regularly attend social events such as Christmas parties and potlucks in the Common Room, and have contributed to our Gardening Our Streets community garden project. This shows the potential inclusion benefits of employment programmes being run by organisations with a focus on community. We hoped we would be able to hire some of the Kickstarters who had worked with us through the programme, and we able to do this even though it wasn't an initial commitment.

"I wasn't expecting to get placed in a position where I felt so comfortable and genuinely excited to work." (Heather, Kickstarter)

In addition, we took a non-traditional recruitment approach. We didn't assess interviewees based on traditional metrics, judging applicants' suitability to fixed job roles. We developed both job roles and employment sessions to suit the needs of our participants, coupling an accommodating and supportive recruitment strategy with a flexible needs-based approach to learning on the job.

This was particularly important because there

was a high level of neurodivergence within our Kickstart cohorts, with a large proportion of participants with ADHD and autism diagnoses. As one of our priorities was to build the confidence of our participants, we worked with them to shape roles and employability sessions around their needs and strengths whilst still challenging them. For example, the role of copywriter was created around one of our participants who was most comfortable working at computers and had a strong attention to detail but could become overwhelmed in highly stimulating environments. In the later more participant-led employability sessions, the Kickstarters chose to have regular movement breaks to help them stay focused.

KICKSTARTER EXPERIENCES

We asked our Kickstarters on a voluntary basis if they would write brief reports to give them a chance to reflect on the programme and supply us with crucial feedback. However, as this was a later idea, these reports only speak for the final cohort of Kickstarters who finished in August 2022. We will likely build this into the next programme from the start. The themes that emerged across these reports will inform our design of the new programme which will be funded by the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). Here are some signal excerpts from these reports and how they relate to our themes:

"When I was searching for jobs, I felt hopeless about it, I felt like I was constantly hitting a brick wall with no responses towards anything I had sent out [...] Kickstart felt like a lucky break" (Joshua)

This idea of needing a chance emerged across several accounts and points to the impact of our open and supportive approach to recruitment. Rather than judge suitability, we trusted our participants by giving them the benefit of the doubt, had a fluid attitude towards the roles they would be doing, and balanced ongoing support with providing space and autonomy for Kickstarters to work things out and develop their capabilities. This was also intended to build the

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confidence of our participants, which is perhaps the most stand-out theme from our Kickstarters.

Most of these reports began with descriptions of anxiety and nervousness and told of gradual improvements in confidence throughout the programme:

"I was very shy when it came to new people and places, and the unexpected really made me a lot less talkative and intimidated, but with spending time here I've grown to be a very talkative and more involved person, bringing ideas forward and coming out of my shell." (Rachael)

Another example is Callum who began to engage in technical discussions and share what he thought in meetings, taking a leading role in overcoming challenges, displaying developments not just in confidence but in expertise, leadership, and perseverance.

"Not everything is smooth sailing and being able to think of a workaround on the spot and carry on is something that is challenging to come up with as well as stick to." (Callum)

Callum labelled himself as 'disruptive' in school which - now that we know him - we know means that he wasn't given the opportunity to show what he is capable of in a way that works for him. One of our primary learning points is, therefore, to avoid 'schoolishness' in our employability sessions, which we redesigned on our participants' recommendations part way through the programme.

John oversaw the rest of the programme, working with participants as young adults and asking them what they wanted from the sessions. We also invited more experienced staff members such as Amanda, our Finance Coordinator, to host Q&A sessions which our Kickstarters really engaged with. Soon after,

these sessions became some of the participants' favourite aspect of the programme.

"The employability sessions and Kickstart as a whole were very understanding of my mental health which I found to be a big stress reliever [...] All of it actually helped with my ADHD." (Adam)



One of our Kickstarter-led employability sessions

We took a non-coercive approach not only to consider the diverse needs of our Kickstarters but also because we believe that young people want to make the most of opportunities when met with flexibility.

"My line manager had a meeting with me and my co-worker to discuss where our interests and strengths lie, and allocated us fluid roles that would accommodate to our knowledge but also challenge us further down the line." (Heather)

However, this was not implemented uniformly across cohorts and partner organisations, resulting in a problematic lack of flexibility in a couple of cases. This taught us that we should be more explicit about our values and approach at the beginning of the programme, formally agreeing these with our partners and programme runners.

Whilst our Kickstarters shared some constructive critical feedback which partly informed our learning points, the values of the programme

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seems to have had a lasting impact on our participants and given them an important taste of the road ahead.

“Learning the importance of transferable skills and being able to identify which aspects of my skill set can be applied in other roles has helped me be a little more openminded, given that the industry that I want into isn’t an easy one to get into.” (Callum)

LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

We have chosen to restart a version of Kickstart which incorporates all we learnt from the original programme (see info box 3). As outlined in this report, we also know why the programme was overall a success – primarily because we did our research about what makes a successful employment scheme – and will carry forward these aspects into the new programme. Therefore, we recommend to policymakers ahead of any new scheme, or any organisation running a similar scheme, to follow these guidelines in addition to thinking critically about how add to and improve them.

These constitute a series of conditions and solid commitments from employers to participants. An ill-thought-out employment programme can have minimal or even negative impact on local young people and the community. These conditions and commitments are necessary to avoid the substitution effect or further diminish the confidence of young people.



Four of our Kickstarters in the Alley, ready to go

INFO BOX 3: LEARNINGS & COMMITMENTS

- **State your values** – make sure managers and project deliverers’ values align more closely with organisational values and programme goals. ‘Partnership’ approach delegating control to other parties can otherwise be problematic – either need more control over management or more careful selection
- **Be radically flexible** – Be radically open and flexible to individual needs and strengths of participants; don’t go in with laden with expectations
- **Treat as young *adults*, not children** – Challenge participants and promote autonomy with meaningful roles, encourage them to share opinions, and allow them to make meaningful decisions. This is how confidence is built!
- **Ensure positions are additional** – All positions should be in addition to regular job positions with your organisation to avoid the substitution effect and maximise social and economic impacts. This entails additional risks and resources, which is why funding can help to increase the scope of the programme
- **Think about hiring some** – Whilst it might not be realistic to hire all participants following an employment programme, and some move onto other endeavours, think about hiring some on a temporary or permanent basis following the completion of the programme
- **Stay in touch with others** – This will promote social inclusion and feelings of belongingness in participants, and will help to keep up-to-date on how the programme has affected them. If participation in the programme was enjoyable, this should happen naturally, but do what you can to encourage this

They are also necessary to ensure the programme brings lasting social impact. However, there is no 'one size fits all'. Some of these conditions we shaped along the way by listening to our Kickstarters. Whilst careful planning is important then, the exact form of the programme should be fluid and made to fit those people it aims to benefit.

Conditions are also necessary to ensure the organisation running the programme gets the most out of it, and to make it an enjoyable experience for everyone involved. Our flexible needs-based approach paid off by giving our Kickstarters space and support to become committed and enthusiastic employees and community members. This includes lasting participation in the community from some, continuing employment for others, and generally meaningful relationships being built and maintained.

"We learnt that teacher-style mentoring does not work. In addition, we need to make sure employers we collaborate with understand the needs of the young people and share our flexible needs-based approach. The participants also need a mentor that can stick the full length of the programme." (John, General Manager and programme runner)

INFO BOX 4: KICKSTARTER ROLES

- Development Assistant
- Café Assistant
- Retail Assistant
- Digital Marketing Assistant
- Digital Events Assistant
- Copywriter
- Operations Assistant

CONCLUSION

We hired 16 local young people, mostly 'far from the labour market', with markedly higher success rates in employment after the programme than previous jobs programmes. It is a shame that the Government doesn't have good data on Kickstart because the job market is very different today. However, we can measure the success of the programme in other ways by looking at its lasting social inclusion, confidence building, and skill-developing effects for the young people involved. The reflective reports provided by the Kickstarters were overall very positive and it is indicative of our approach that they were comfortable sharing constructive criticisms about how the programme could be (and has been) improved.

All of this was achieved because of our focus on social impact and therefore the conditions we set ourselves. Above all, a commitment to a flexible needs-based approach helped us tailor the programme to the people involved. The main learning points we will take forward are to emphasise the autonomy of participants from the start so they know we see them 'as adults', and to work more closely with partners to ensure they share our fluid and understanding approach. We have highlighted several commitments that should be made for any organisation running an employment scheme for young people, based on our research of employment programmes and of our experience with the Kickstart programme.

We invite policymakers to consider these conditions when designing future employment programmes. We also encourage charitable and/or public funding to enable community businesses and other social organisations to take the leap in implementing their own employment programmes. There are myriad benefits if the right conditions are set and the programme is run with a bold flexibility, tailoring sessions and roles around the individuals involved. As our own experience and research

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suggest that participants are likely to be more creative and productive when they feel like their work is helping others, we argue that investment in programmes run by community businesses and organisations may lead to both more economic and more social benefits.

This funding would represent, besides any altruistic motivations, a sound investment in young people struggling with the transition into employment. By funding and supporting similar programmes with local community groups and businesses, the scale and social impact can be multiplied above what these organisations can achieve on their own, with the possibility of significant net benefits. It really can pay off.



Kieron, Bradley and Michael (left to right), each a key part of Hastings Commons following participation on the programme

Hastings Commons is delivered and supported by a group of organisations including:

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 Leisure & Learning (Hastings) Ltd
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