

Year 1 Interim Evaluation of  
the Somerset Education  
Business Partnership's project  
to connect local employers  
and local education providers.

## Introduction

In October 2022 Somerset Council received a 4-year grant from the Magnox Socio Economic fund. This grant supports Somerset Education Business Partnership's (SEBP) aim "to connect local employers with local education providers to ensure young people are aware of local career opportunities and equipped to access these."

SEBP had the following objectives for the project:

- To increase education outreach activity among local employers so they are better able to meet their future skill needs.
- To ensure young people are aware of quality local employment opportunities and equipped to access these.
- To increase the opportunities available and accessible to young people facing the greatest barriers to progression.

To achieve the project aim and objectives, SEBP planned the following annual activities:

- 1 X large scale engagement event showcasing local employment and study opportunities.
- 10 X sector specific workplace insight events.
- 10 X influencer briefings.
- 2 X workplace experience opportunities for 6X vulnerable learners.

SEBP contracted with the University of the West of England (UWE) to evaluate the outcomes associated with the project activities and provide an assessment of the extent to which the project aim and objectives have been met. The evaluation combines the existing SEBP assessments of each activity (e.g. the numbers of young people who attended, and their experience of the event) with longitudinal assessments each year for the 4 years of the project. This evaluation report covers only those SEBP activities where there is a possibility of assessing impact and during the first year of the project.

## What the evaluation is for

The evaluation aims to provide evidence to:

- The Magnox socio economic fund about whether their desired outcomes have been achieved.
- Somerset Council (which employs the SEBP team) about whether SEBP activities have had an impact on the people of Somerset.
- SEBP to maximise the impact of their activities.

## What we did in the evaluation

To manage the evaluation and ensure its ethical conduct, UWE and SEBP signed a contract, which included provision for data sharing, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> September

2026. The evaluation received full ethics approval for the additional data collection from the Faculty of Business and Law Ethics Committee (reference number FBL.23.02.021).

SEBP collected survey responses at large scale events and sector specific insight events. Attendees answered questions online about whether the event had caused improvements in their levels of awareness and information and whether they intended to carry out any new activity as a result. At small scale events SEBP gave attendees information about the evaluation and sought consent to invite them to focus groups or later interviews to understand the impact of the event.

## What we found and the action we recommend

### Two Somerset Careers Fairs November 2022 (large scale events held in Yeovil and Bridgwater )

The Somerset Careers Fairs were held in Yeovil and Bridgwater and showcased post-16 employment and study options for learners from years 9-11. The fairs featured over 40 exhibitors who discussed future opportunities with over 3,000 students.

Out of 322 **students** who completed the survey across the two events, over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that:

- as a result of visiting the careers fair, they were aware of more places to work in Somerset (90%)
- as a result of visiting the fair they had better information to choose what to do after Year 11.

In addition, 80% of the students said they would probably or definitely consider applying to one or more of the companies at the fair in the future.

Out of the 15 **teachers** who completed the survey, 86% agreed or strongly agreed that:

- As a result of the careers fair, they felt better informed about choices for their students after Year 11.
- As a result of the fair, they felt more confident to discuss post GCSE choices with their students.

Out of 30 **employers** who completed the survey, over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that:

- As a result of the careers fair, they have raised the profile of their business with young people (90%)
- As a result of the careers fair, they have shared opportunities with young people (92%)
- As a result of the careers fair, they had informed young people of the skills they needed.

In the free text answers, one company's reason for attending was to "give something back to the community" and to network with other organisations. Other employers made

suggestions for SEBP to consider: ending at 3pm when the attendance dropped off, including more universities, providing a map of exhibitors and scheduling a lunch break for sole exhibitors.

Only 3 **parents** completed a survey, too small a sample size to include in the evaluation.

#### Recommendations:

1. Consider options to increase participation by parents to solicit their views.
2. SEBP to explore the extent to which the fairs allow companies to give back to the community and whether they would like any follow up with any additional ways they can give back (e.g. supported learning).
3. In the employer evaluation section, assess whether the aim of networking with other organisations has been met.
4. Consider the suggestion to end the event at 3pm as attendance dropped off.
5. Consider the suggestion for more universities at the event.
6. Consider the suggestion for a map.
7. Consider a lunchbreak for sole exhibitors.

### STEM Summit (sector specific workplace insight event)

The summit brought together employers from the science, technology and engineering sectors with school curriculum leads and careers leads. The event reviewed the challenges to employers and schools working together, explored potential solutions and identified future actions to improve joint working.

All the 9 **educators**, 11 **employers**, and 8 **wider network partners** agreed or strongly agreed that they had made new contacts among the other groups and that they had generated new ideas to inspire young people about STEM careers. The 28 participants all consented to follow up from SEBP to understand the future actions and impact arising from the new contacts.

#### Recommendations:

8. Improve the evaluation to capture behavioural change intentions, especially for the employers, i.e., as well as 'I understand how to engage with education' add 'I intend to begin or to change my engagement with education.'
9. Follow up with consenting participants to remind them of the commitments they made at the event and to understand what action they have taken since. The results to be included in the Year 2 report.

### Heritage Construction Event (sector specific workplace insight event)

The key contractors at the [Toneworks Conservation Site](#) delivered a workshop with carpentry and construction students at Bridgwater & Taunton College. Careers and skills

explored included architecture, construction planning and engineering and heritage trade skills.

The 26 **students** who completed the survey provided evidence of their learning about the construction sector when over 87% agreed or strongly agreed that at this workshop:

- They have learned about construction roles they didn't previously know about.
- They have learned how different professionals work together to deliver a project (91%).
- Over 53% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider a career in conservation construction.

In the free text sections, the students gave mixed reviews of the material and the presentation format, but in looking for improvement for future events the twin themes of improving the interactivity and making them 'young people friendly' are evident.

Recommendation:

10. Improve coaching for employer representatives so that presentations are more interactive and 'young people friendly'.

## Supported employment summit (influencer briefing)

The Supported Employment (SE) Summit brought together key partners who influence the potential employment outcomes of young people with learning disabilities.

This included:

- Young people with learning disabilities
- Parents
- Employers
- Education providers
- Support agencies

The aim of the summit was to understand the perspective of each partner, understand perceived and actual barriers to employment and highlight the support available on the journey.

The perspectives, concerns, ideas and solutions shared by participants were collected on a Padlet. The Somerset Supported Employment Coordinators have summarised these and outlined current activity and next steps in response to this.

15 employers, 28 education providers, 2 young people and 2 carers completed the pre-event survey. Of the employers and education providers 88% agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what Supported Employment is; and 78% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident they could contribute to delivering a Supported Employment placement. Only 2 young people and 2 carers completed the survey and this provided insufficient data to contribute to the findings.

The most common reason given for attending the summit in the free text boxes was knowledge and understanding of the Supported Employment programme in Somerset. Many attendees also wanted networking and engagement with other involved organisations. Smaller minorities wanted to support their SEND students; understand how to support SE; increase SE opportunities; promote SE or connected initiatives or to reduce NEES at their school.

6 employers, 10 education or training providers and 1 parent/carer completed the post-event survey. Of these 100% (up from 88%) agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what supported education is. 92% agreed or strongly agreed that they could contribute to delivering a Supported Education placement. 69% of the educators who participated said they were likely or very likely to take part in delivering SE. The single employer response about support required asks for information on how other employers have made SE work, the measures they have put in place and advice on getting buy-in. The single education provider response asked for a more local SE for Frome. In the final free text box, the most common response was that the event met their needs for improving knowledge and understanding and provided the welcome opportunity for networking. Other diverse comments included one offer to help encourage other employers to come forward to offer SE opportunities; concern for children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), and the need for initiatives that go beyond the transition from school.

#### Recommendations:

11. Consider why the difference in pre and post survey response numbers.
12. Consider how to target more carers and young people.
13. Some questions went unanswered, consider survey redesign in the light of this.
14. Consider which pre-event needs after learning and networking can be met.
15. Consider taking up the offer of an employer who can offer their experience to promote to other employers (especially as one employer asked for expertise like this – can these 2 be linked up?).
16. Consider other support needs in free text boxes.

## Engaging with education workshop (Influencer briefing)

This workshop equipped Somerset businesses to devise and implement an education outreach plan. Topics addressed included:

- The benefits of education outreach.
- The role of careers activity in schools.
- Designing a deliverable education outreach plan.

All 9 attendees who completed the survey agreed or strongly agreed that after attending this workshop they:

- they understand the world of education better.
- They understand how engaging with education can benefit their business.
- They believe they can develop an education outreach plan for their business.

### Recommendation:

17. Improve the evaluation to capture behavioural change intentions, especially for the employers, i.e., as well as 'I understand how to engage with education' add 'I intend to begin or to change my engagement with education.'

## SEBP awards (influencer briefing)

The Somerset EBP awards celebrate businesses and education providers who have inspired the next generation - and the young people who have taken key steps towards a successful future. The awards showcase the importance of business and education engagement to developing the skills Somerset needs for a thriving economy. This helps Somerset EBP maintain strong stakeholder support for its work.

### **Inspiring the next generation award**

The finalist companies talked about the award providing thanks, reward and recognition for staff members involved in initiatives that build links with students to provide experience, apprenticeships, insight, and learning into what workplaces in Somerset can offer and what they are looking for from future employees. The employers talked about the importance of the partnership work they do with students as offering them the building blocks for future expansion of their businesses, of reinvigorating their companies, and a way to make a contribution to their local communities.

### **Careers leader of the year award**

The finalists spoke of the award as rewarding the school's achievement in exploring work, and recognising the work of careers leaders in sending students out with skills, abilities and understanding of the role they can play in the world.

### **Young person of the year (KS4) award**

The finalists said that the award proves that you can come back from a tough start in life and helps establish you as a role model that you can change your life and achieve more than anyone expected.

### **Young person of the year (KS5) award**

The award showcases to everyone what autistic young people can do.

### **Supported Employee of the year award**

A finalist said the award may help to inspire other young people with autism and learning difficulties into employment and showcase what is possible.

### **Supported employer of the year award**

The award provides external validation that their approach has been appropriate and to inspire other similar employers to think about support employment traineeships. The award acts as recognition for the mentors in the organisation for the work they have done to include young people with SEND requirements in their teams.

### Recommendations:

18. Secure consent to do follow up interviews to write case studies exploring the impact that successful supported employment experiences have had on the young people and the employer.

## Conclusions

The year 1 interim evaluation shows that SEBP activities in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the 4-year term have led to improved understanding and knowledge of each other's requirements amongst students and teachers on the one side and employers on the other side. Furthermore, the activities have led to new connections, new behavioural intentions and have given Somerset's employers avenues for their community outreach schemes.

The complete list of recommendations fall into several categories:

- A. Recommendations to improve data collection in future
- B. Recommendations for changes to the activity itself
- C. Recommendations to collect longitudinal data to show any ongoing impact from SEBP's activities.

The complete list of recommendations is presented below, and the category of each recommendation is indicated:

1. Consider options to increase participation by parents to solicit their views. (A)
2. SEBP to explore the extent to which the fairs allow companies to give back to the community and whether they would like any follow up with any additional ways they can give back (e.g. supported learning). (A)
3. In the employer evaluation section, assess whether the aim of networking with other organisations has been met. (A)
4. Consider the suggestion to end the event at 3pm as attendance dropped off. (B)
5. Consider the suggestion for more universities at the event. (B)
6. Consider the suggestion for a map. (B)
7. Consider a lunchbreak for sole exhibitors. (B)
8. Improve the evaluation to capture behavioural change intentions, especially for the employers, i.e., as well as 'I understand how to engage with education' add 'I intend to begin or to change my engagement with education' (A)
9. Follow up with consenting participants to remind them of the commitments they made at the event and to understand what action they have taken since. The results to be included in the Year 2 report. (C)
10. Improve coaching for employer representatives so that presentations are more interactive and 'young people friendly'. (B)
11. Consider why the difference in pre and post survey response numbers (A)
12. Consider how to target more carers and young people (A)
13. Some questions went unanswered, consider survey redesign in the light of this (A)
14. Consider which pre-event needs after learning and networking can be met (B)



15. Consider taking up the offer of an employer who can offer their experience to promote to other employers (especially as one employer asked for expertise like this – can these 2 be linked up?) (B)
16. Consider other support needs in free text boxes. (B)
17. Improve the evaluation to capture behavioural change intentions, especially for the employers, i.e., as well as 'I understand how to engage with education' add 'I intend to begin or to change my engagement with education' (A)
18. Secure consent to do follow up interviews to write case studies exploring the impact that successful supported employment experiences have had on the young people and the employer. (C)

The aim of the Year 2 Interim Report will be to build on this report through improved data collection at the year 2 activities and by demonstrating where behavioural intentions by participants in SEBP activities have translated into impact for young people and employers in Somerset.