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**FIS BuildBack 17-01 Final Report**

**Background**

BuildBack was a programme to help find the next generation of dryliners, which was run by FIS and funded by CITB. FIS were funded to project manage and help coordinate the initial assessments and training, with some funding available to support the cost of PPE, tools and CSCS applications.

During the design and delivery of cohorts, it was crucial to have support from CITB colleagues to understand the regional landscape of requirements, including training provision and employers in the local areas. This collaboration proved to be valuable as it allowed FIS to use existing CITB networks to promote BuildBack and increase interest in the sector, alongside developing and maintaining good working relationships CITB colleagues.

The BuildBack project was approved for delivery from January 2021 following a revised variation the project value being £193,144 and completed in December 2022.

Build Back 2021 formally commenced on the 1st of January 2021; the project whilst having evolved from a previous format, existed as a unique workstream and which would deliver outcomes through until December 2021. The overall success in attaining the forecasted project outcomes was dependent upon delivering quality pathways programmes across England, Scotland, and Wales. Due to COVID and three lockdowns occurring, this activity had been delayed and all face-to-face training and real work experiences for the purposes of this programme were able to take place from March 2021 and continued to project end in December 2022.

The FIS BuildBack Project helped and supported job seekers and career changers who were serious about developing a career in drylining and plastering.

The programmes approach included recruitment and assessment of candidates before putting them through two or three weeks of introduction training in the skills and competencies required for installing drylining, followed by a two-week work placement on-site with a local employer.

**Highlights**

Buildback was a meaningful project designed to deliver real outcomes to the sector, over the course of the project over thirty cohorts were delivered across the country, where at least 15% of candidates were successful in gaining training and employment.

Early employer engagement was fundamental to the success of BuildBack, as a key part of funding available was to seek out and work with the industry and education providers who were able to support on delivering each cohort, including quality work placements.

Over the course of delivery, we remained confident that employers were starting to become more aware and committed to helping to solve the skills shortages and gaps which were becoming ever more acute.

Buildback provided many benefits to employers, where it supported them to grow their workforce by providing a pool of candidates with a foundation in the skills and competence required for drylining and plastering. As Buildback was fully funded, there was no cost to employers.

Using FIS membership information and wider industry data, it identified hot spots nationally which either had a cluster of contractors and or a robust pipeline of construction works. Employer engagement was crucial to achieve the work experience element of the programme.

Once a project cohort was near as possible to being confirmed, employers located or working in that particular region were contacted to assess their level of interest and help them become ready to offer quality work experience placements. Delivery partners involved in the cohorts also had access to employers who were also brought into the programme.

Despite issues with the pandemic, the project remained committed to delivering quality outcomes and this remained the themed throughout. The project had forecasted a schedule of delivery and quickly identified that project cohorts should be:

1. Distributed across England, Scotland, and Wales
2. Allocated, based on supply of candidates, quality training, appropriate co-funding, and employer demand.
3. Inclusive
4. Flexible to suit the needs of the local employers and aligned with the specific funding criteria.

As added value, training partners were also offering general multiskilling and employability modules as part of the learning experience. There was a positive uptake in initial communication activity to source partners and funding. Our approach to having a mix of funding sources and a mix of cohorts enabled us to benchmark and measure the pros and cons of each style of delivery.

Funding was very different depending upon the area in the UK. DWP Offices had different approaches to allocating their work-based sector academy and flexible support funds. Reaching out to different regions and agencies to identify and build up the banks of potential funding was time consuming yet key to the success of the project. Two funding sources which were explored were the National Community Renewal Fund and the Community Recovery Fund. Access to these funds enabled cohorts in Q4 in particular, to go ahead with a key focus upon increasing the number of diverse candidates.

After delivery of the second quarter, what did start to work better was the confidence of the project to select delivery partners more intelligently. Our wider conversations with members and Tier 1 contractors supported in creating a pipeline of interest, which brought greater diversity, skills and training. This led to partnering with British Gypsum on several projects. Working this way enabled British Gypsum to develop a more sustainable training product and they saw Build Back as being an ideal vehicle to explore wider funding sources and increase their base of new and future customers.

**Diversity – Exploring Opportunities**

The theme of diversity continued with the delivery of the first women only cohort in Q8, in partnership with Women into Construction and Skills Centre London.

The project opened opportunities to bring more diversity into the sector, to do this FIS collaborated with Women into Construction and CITB to create opportunities for women who were unemployed or wished to change careers to join the sector that is a typically male dominated industry. The culture change for experienced workers on site presented challenges with varying levels of experience with the women. They addressed challenges around using new machinery and technology in a male dominated industry and the women showed resilience to learn, gain more experience and adapt to reach towards competence.

FIS and CITB were invited to the celebration event which was uplifting. Despite the women coming across challenges, their resilience and determination really came through and although small, a feeling of making a difference and adding value was the theme of the event.

**Challenges**

Whilst Buildback delivery was successful in increasing awareness of the Fit-Out sector, this also presented some challenges.

The project was struggling to recruit suitable candidates which impacted on quality and quantity of candidates coming through the recruitment process. As BuildBack was driven by KPIs, the issues with recruitment and selection impacted the volume of courses that could have been delivered.

The funding sourced by FIS and delivery partners was only attached to DWP clients and or NEET young people, therefore, the pool of applicants was limited. The sector was and continues to compete against many other more attractive sectors to vie for new entrants.

Another key challenge presented was the follow-on engagement with the students and training partners and the ability to track outcomes.

Timely receipt of information from the colleges could have been greatly improved. We continued to review our internal processes to ensure that FIS could support the movement of students into employment. In addition to working with the college placement teams, we used Talent View as a channel to position the learner CVs and we delivered an online seminar for our members on how they could best use Talent View as a credible source for new entrants.

Even until the last quarter, this remains the underlying risk that learners will progress into nonspecific construction jobs; our sector finds it difficult to recruit for many reasons.

Through responses we have received, we are finding that some students are choosing to work with local construction companies who offer more generic construction skills work. Whilst this is positive for the wider construction sector, for the purposes of reporting – we will count those outcomes as added value rather than financially supported KPIs.

Further work is needed to monitor and measure retention in the sector, of the cohorts delivered approx. 15% of the target have been successfully placed with employers or are now either employed or self-employed within the Fit-Out sector.

**Conclusion and Insights**

Whilst Buildback has ended and did not achieve the volumetrics expected, the project demonstrated there is a need for something across the Fit Out sector to support employers and contractors to recruit and retain new talent.

It is clear from employer interest, certainly over the last 6 months of delivery, that something is needed across the Fit-Out sector to help contractors recruit and retain new talent.

The project highlighted that time needed to be given at the planning phase and scope projects out, making better use of labour forecasts and engage employers at that start. This reliable intelligence on project forecasts would have supported the identification of geographical availability for candidate work placements.

An example of this being Scarborough Construction Skills Village cohort. Due to unforeseen circumstances, much time was taken to source a trainer and assessor, despite delivery planned from October 2022. This led to a delay of three weeks, therefore work placements would be starting after project close. After discussion with delivery partners, we have concluded outcomes will fall short of the project end date, however, FIS will commit to seeking work placements for the students.

Having direct access to a more diverse pool of candidates was also key. Reliance upon existing funding only perpetuated the nature of any existing pathway programmes and narrowed down the opportunity for the sector to recruit efficiently. Training Providers seem to be overwhelmed with funding yet generally speaking did not seem to have the capacity and infrastructure to deliver pathway programmes which incorporated and tracked student placements adequately. This was an observation in particular for cohorts in South Wales and Hampshire, where accessing and applying for DWP low value provision funding took far too long to process, leading to the cohorts not being delivered.

Greater emphasis and consideration in seeking outcomes would have led to more robust reporting of the project as we would have been able to identify, secure and retain candidates in our sector. This could be something to consider for any future projects.

Having identified this, a further push for outcomes proved successful in the last quarter, where we received above the forecasted numbers, which has been great to support the claim.

In addition, there have been several setbacks with the E-Learning Package KPI. This is now progressing, please see ‘E- Learning Package’ section which comes later in this report for a detailed summary.

Overall, this project has been a learning process and along the way has produced some successes despite the challenges of the last three years. It has proved that something is needed the sector and much work needs to be done to attract, recruit and retain candidates into the sector. This project proved that employers, contractors are open to this model of recruitment, with opportunities to be flexible to meet their needs as well as the needs of the candidate.

It also proved that working in partnership with various organisations does help in spreading the word and contribute to the recruitment process.

The final claim that complements this report demonstrates all the financials, KPIs, quarter activity, key highlights and challenges over the course of the project. It is also a good indication of how and where it has added social value.

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