



The impact of moving employability training online:
A review of EY Foundation programme delivery
during lockdown

Learning and Work Institute
October 2021

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Published by National Learning and Work Institute
4th Floor Arnhem House, 31 Waterloo Way, Leicester LE1 6LP
Company registration no. 2603322 | Charity registration no. 1002775

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Executive summary

Introduction

EY Foundation are an independent charity working with young people from low income backgrounds, employers, and social entrepreneurs to help young people realise their career ambitions. As part of this, they deliver youth employability programmes, including Our Future and Smart Futures, which offer young people a paid work experience placement, employability training and mentoring. These programmes were moved online in response to Covid-19.

Learning and Work (L&W) were commissioned to review the impact of the move to online delivery on different groups of young people and provide feedback on 'what works' to inform future delivery. The review was conducted between October 2020 and June 2021 and involved interviews with employers, staff, and volunteers, focus groups with young people and analysis of learner survey data. A team of peer researchers who were graduates of Smart Futures contributed to the research.

Characteristics of participants

EY Foundation programmes attracted a diverse range of young people both before and during the pandemic. The proportion of young people from ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) households, and Black and Asian young people increased slightly during the pandemic. **This suggests that EY Foundation's programmes are continuing to engage the types of young people who are most in need of support.**

Young people who participated in the programme during the pandemic were experiencing more challenges in their lives than the pre-pandemic cohort. For example, they were more likely to experience racism or be the victim of bullying.

Delivery of activities

EY Foundation quickly transitioned in response to Covid-19, adapting their delivery from face-to-face to online, and giving young people the technology they needed to participate.

Some aspects of online delivery worked particularly well. Employers developed **innovative online work experience tasks**. Some **less confident young people found it easier to contribute** and participate. **Mentoring** transferred well online and was more convenient for young people and volunteers. Young people **learnt the skills they needed for online working**. The programme was **more accessible for young people and employers**.

However, some aspects were more challenging. It was **hard to keep young people engaged**, and online delivery was tiring for everyone. Stakeholders found it challenging that **young people did not use their cameras**. It was **more difficult to see who needed feedback and support**. It was **more difficult for young people to learn about organisational culture and to build networks online**. Some felt it was **harder for young people to form friendships**. Some young people had **challenging working environments**; they had **problems with Wi-Fi**, their homes **did not have a private, quiet place** for them to work or they **did not know how to use the digital tools** they needed.

EY Foundation responded to these challenges with a number of changes to the second round of delivery. Young people were kept engaged with **shorter, more interactive, and more varied activities**. Young people were **encouraged but not forced to use cameras**. Instructions on **how to use relevant digital tools** were included in induction packs.

Outcomes

The most important outcomes for young people were **improving their skills, increasing their confidence, and gaining insight** into the workplace and their future careers. **The outcomes for young people who completed their programme online were broadly similar to those who completed their programme face-to-face**. The pandemic cohort generally started their programmes with lower confidence in their skills, and experiencing greater barriers to accessing employment, than pre-pandemic participants. By the end of their time with EY Foundation, their distance travelled in how they felt their skills had developed was generally the same or better than pre-pandemic. However, their confidence in addressing barriers had not improved as much. **Some groups seemed to benefit less from online delivery, particularly Black young people, and those who were ESOL speakers.**



Key lessons and their implications for the future

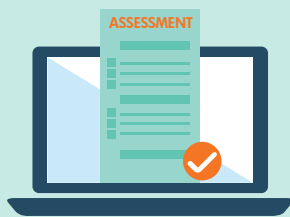
EY Foundation should:

- develop flexible models of delivery that range from wholly online to wholly face-to-face with the expectation that most young people would experience a hybrid model. This would vary according to the needs and preferences of young people and employers.
- deliver the first day of the programme, some elements of business experience and the graduation ceremony face-to-face, as these were seen as more difficult to transfer online.
- use online delivery to improve inclusivity by moving mentoring online, adopting a wholly online model for groups of young people who cannot attend face-to-face and by using it as an opportunity to help young people develop the skills they need for future online workplaces.
- reduce the barriers to online delivery by providing young people with the technology they need for the whole of their programme, providing physical space for those without a suitable home environment, teaching young people the skills and behaviours they need for online working, and monitoring the impact of online delivery on different groups.
- create a flexible offer for employers of high quality work experience placements that can be delivered face-to-face, online or hybrid.

Top tips for delivering hybrid youth employability programmes

Evidence from L&W's review of EY Foundation's employability programmes for young people suggest that hybrid models of delivery can be particularly effective. These tips can help providers considering hybrid delivery make decisions about when to use online or face-to-face, as well as ensure that online delivery is high quality.

Setting up



Use the **initial assessment** process to get a full picture of every young person's access needs and confidence with digital tools.



Provide clear and accessible instructions, support, and encouragement for young people on how to use the digital tools they need. This could include videos, factsheets and drop in sessions.

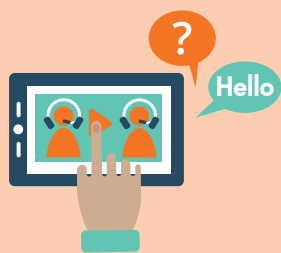


Brief young people on how to behave in an online workplace to ensure they understand what behaviour is expected of them before they start.



Provide all the technology young people will need, for example laptops, Wi-Fi dongles, software, and headphones.

Identify when face-to-face matters



The first day of the programme could be an opportunity for people to get to know each other face-to-face, pick up equipment, ask questions, learn how to use technology, and establish ground rules.



Part or all of a work experience placement might be better face-to-face depending on the type of business.



A graduation ceremony or certificate evening could provide a good chance to meet in person.

Work experience

- **Sequence work experience activities** to give young people experience of working both online and in a face-to-face environment, and gradually build upon the responsibilities they are given.
- **Make online work experience tasks real** and show young people what will happen with the work they have done.
- **Provide clear guidance for employers** on best practice in designing and delivering online elements of business experience, include example case studies of what works, and a forum for sharing resources.
- **Use hybrid possibilities to the full**, for example, employees could dial in from international locations to meet young people who are based in a physical workplace.
- **Make sure young people have access** to, and are familiar with, the digital tools that are used in the organisation where they will do their work experience. Consider how this could be extended beyond the work experience placement, for example, using social media tools such as Twitter and LinkedIn.
- **Use online networks to link young people** with, for example, Black or LGBTQI* people, in their work experience organisation.



Value digital communication

- **Invest equal time and money in online delivery;** it should not be seen as a cheap alternative. Ensure that the approach is person rather than technology centred.
- **Avoid using terms like 'real life' versus digital.** Recognise digital relationships and communications as significant, important and an integral part of modern working practices.
- **Young people need to learn how to work in an online environment.** Explicitly teach them these skills and behaviours.
- **Recognise that teaching and learning online is a different specialism** and invest in training for staff and volunteers.



Inclusivity



- **Let young people communicate in the ways that suit them.** This might be chat, using a microphone, or liking other people's comments. These preferences may change over time.
- **Keep sessions short and interactive,** with a range of different activities such as polls, quizzes, group activities, and paired discussions.
- **Be as flexible as possible:** if a young person does not have a quiet safe place to work, then consider whether face-to-face delivery might be better for them, or whether they can be given a co-working space.
- **Establish blurred backgrounds and headphone use as standard** for staff, volunteers, and young people so no one feels uncomfortable about their home environment.
- **Keep mentoring online** and match young people with mentors using lived experience and interests rather than location.

Keeping young people engaged online

- **Encourage but don't enforce camera use.** Work on building confidence and encourage young people to turn cameras on for specific activities.
- **Keep track of young people's learning** in different ways, for example scheduled 1-2-1 meetings, group discussions, drop in sessions, and online journals or learning logs.
- **Keep sessions simple**, for example, choose a smaller number of speakers so they have a chance to get to know all the young people.
- **Schedule more breaks** than you would expect in a face-to-face environment.
- **Give young people the chance to prepare in advance**, for example, think of questions to ask speakers, or an experience they might want to share.
- **Create social bubbles** of small groups of young people who can support each other and socialise together through the whole programme.
- **Link activities**, for example support young people to develop an online CV and then use it in a mock interview.



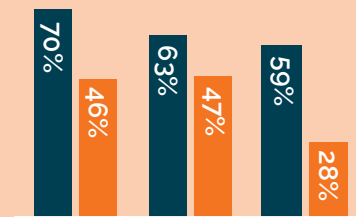
Getting feedback and improving



Collect data about how well different groups of young people do in different models of delivery.



Regularly ask young people what they think about the programme and how they want it to be delivered. Use varied methods to capture feedback and be creative.



Evaluate the impact that different elements of the programme have upon young people and the value for money that they provide in contributing to employment-related outcomes.

Section 1:

Introduction

This report explores the lessons learnt during EY Foundation's transition to online delivery as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and identifies effective practice to inform the future delivery of youth employability programmes.

EY Foundation is an independent charity established in 2014 which works with young people from low income households, employers, and social entrepreneurs. Its purpose is to help young people, whatever their background, realise their career ambitions and transfer into employment or higher education. They deliver programmes across the UK and work with high profile employers including EY but also extending to a wide range of sectors.¹ As part of this mission EY Foundation deliver pre-employment and work readiness training programmes for young people, including Smart Futures and Our Future.

- **Smart Futures** is a 10-month programme for people in Year 12 (or fifth year for Scotland) who have been eligible for free school meals within the last two years, or are eligible for the 16-19 college bursary or Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). It includes a two week paid work experience in school holidays, Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) accredited training² delivered by EY Foundation staff supported by volunteers, and 10 months of mentoring by a volunteer who works in industry.

- **Our Future** is a 6-month programme which supports young people (aged 16-19) who face significant barriers to entering the labour market.³ It includes paid work experience, ILM accredited training delivered by EY Foundation staff supported by volunteers, and 6 months of mentoring by a volunteer who works in industry.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 caused widespread disruption to the delivery of education and training across the UK. It occurred at a time when significant numbers of young people were about to begin participating in EY Foundation's programmes. Following a short suspension in delivery, the programmes re-started online in July 2020, and remained online for the next 12 months.

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) explored the effects of Covid-19 on the delivery of EY Foundation's Our Future and Smart Futures programmes and the implications for future delivery. The key aims of the research were to:

- Identify the effectiveness of the transition to 100 per cent online delivery in summer 2020.
- Understand the impact of the transition on different groups of young people, delivery staff, volunteers, and employers.
- Provide feedback on 'what works' to inform future delivery.

¹ https://www.ey.com/en_uk/corporate-responsibility/ey-foundation

² Prior to 2021 young people studied the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Level 2 qualification

³ Young people with two or more of the following risk indicators: at risk of becoming NEET when they leave education; less than 5 GCSE's grades A-C; poor attendance/behaviour record; have special educational needs (SEN); are young parents; are young carers; live in a deprived area; have difficult family circumstances; from a low-income household.

The research took place between October 2020 and June 2021 and involved analysis of learner and volunteer surveys, interviews with staff, volunteers, and employers involved in design and delivery, and focus groups with young people on the programmes.

An important feature of the research was the involvement of a team of peer researchers. They brought their insight and experience as graduates of the programmes to inform all stages of the research. They received training and support from L&W to enable them to conduct focus groups, contribute to the analysis and inform the recommendations.

This report draws together the key findings from all research activities. It highlights the effectiveness of different activities and support delivered by EY Foundation and how challenges were overcome, the outcomes achieved by different groups of young people, and concludes with the key lessons learned for ongoing programme delivery for EY Foundation and other youth employability programmes.



Box 1: Peer research reflections

'I enjoyed gaining experience in leadership through conducting the focus groups'
(Peer researcher)

'I loved being able to work with different young people and help gather research'
(Peer researcher)

'I really enjoyed hearing the different experiences of young people throughout the pandemic' (Peer researcher)

'I found getting the perspective of young people who were much closer to the focus group participants helped us design the research in a way that was more accessible to participants' (L&W researcher)

Section 2:

Evidence review

This section of the report explores wider research on how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected young people and worsened pre-existing inequalities. It also focuses on the shift to online learning during the pandemic, and finally considers the potential of online learning to overcome or worsen inequalities.

Young people have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic; both in terms of experiencing disruption to their education and entering a weak labour market. The latest Office for National Statistics data for March-May 2021 shows that while unemployment for all age groups was 4.8 per cent, the rate for 16-24 year olds was almost three times higher at 13.5 per cent. Three in five jobs lost during the pandemic were amongst under 25s, with employed young people more likely to lose their job or be furloughed than to shift to online working.

The impact of the pandemic on young people is not evenly distributed but instead is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities. Analysis shows that Black young people and young people with no or low qualifications have been most affected. The decline in working hours for young people with no qualifications (34 per cent) has been five times higher than the decline for those with a degree level qualification (7 per cent); and the decline in hours worked by Black young people (49 per cent) has been three times higher than for white young people (16 per cent).

Looking ahead, the outlook for young people's employment is worse compared to the outlook for older workers, with long term youth unemployment forecast to rise

further still, even as the economy recovers. In addition to being over-represented in the sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, young people tend to be over-represented in the sectors that are forecast to see lower employment in the long term and under-represented in occupations which are likely to see the strongest job growth.

This suggests that, in addition to the greater risk of unemployment for young people during the pandemic, their employment opportunities are also likely to be reduced in the longer-term. Those young people at greater risk of long term unemployment are most in need of support as the economy begins to recover. Alongside this, while more young people are in education, young people have seen the biggest drop in work-based training compared to other groups, particularly driven by a fall in the number starting apprenticeships.⁴

This means that existing inequalities are now worse for some groups of young people. The Social Market Foundation found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were much less likely to feel hopeful about the future and able to achieve their ambitions and this has worsened since Covid-19.⁵ Savanta report how 87 per cent of young Black people see their ethnicity as a barrier to succeeding in the workplace and that 22 per cent have experienced racism in the workplace.⁶ Young people from different regions also have very different opportunities to access training and employment.⁷ Post pandemic support for young people must therefore consider how to address these inequalities.

Covid-19 meant that learning providers across the world, including those delivering youth employability programmes, had to adjust to online delivery and find new ways to support learners. Online delivery can benefit young people. It has the potential to develop young people's digital skills, and so address the skills gap that young people themselves recognise as a problem.⁸

The online delivery of youth employability programmes has other potential benefits of improving access and reducing barriers, as well giving learners greater autonomy.⁹ However, it also comes with challenges around keeping young people engaged, ensuring their well-being, and managing their interactions with employers effectively.¹⁰

More broadly, there is evidence to suggest that many young people from disadvantaged groups were also disadvantaged by the switch to online learning.¹¹

In order to make sure all young people benefit from online delivery, people rather than technology must drive delivery, and online learning needs to be part of a coherent learning strategy and philosophy.¹² Disadvantaged groups also need to have access to training and technologies if online delivery is to be inclusive.¹³

Some groups of young people may therefore need more support to thrive in new ways of working and learning. Hybrid models that include the accessibility of online delivery blended with in-person support may provide one way to do this. This report will therefore consider how the transition to, and delivery of online models of employability programmes impacts on different groups, and whether the adoption of hybrid models may have the potential to feed into wider inclusivity and diversity strategies.

⁴ Learning and Work (2021) <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/learning-at-work-employer-investment-in-skills/>

⁵ Social Market Foundation (2021) A matter of perspective? Outlook inequality and its impact on young people <https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/a-matter-of-perspective/>

⁶ Savanta ComRes (2021) Workplace barriers for young, Black people in the UK <https://info.savanta.com/workplace-barriers-for-young-black-people-in-the-uk>

⁷ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/what-we-do/social-justice-inclusion/youth-commission/youth-opportunity-index/>

⁸ Learning and Work (2021) Disconnected: Exploring the digital skills gap <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/disconnected-exploring-the-digital-skills-gap/>

⁹ Learning and Work (2020) Blended learning on pre-apprenticeship programmes <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Blended-learning-on-pre-apprenticeship-programmes-A-guide-for-providers.pdf>

¹⁰ Shepherd and Moy Limited (2021) London Youth Future Talent Evaluation Future-Talent-Summary-Evaluation-Report-Feb-2021-2.pdf (londonyouth.org)

¹¹ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-student-equity-and-inclusion-supporting-vulnerable-students-during-school-closures-and-school-re-openings-d593b5c8/>

¹² CIPD. (2021) Digital learning in a post-COVID-19 economy: a literature review. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

¹³ International Labour Organisation (2020) Distance and Online Learning during the time of COVID-19 edmsp1_259827.pdf (windows.net)

Section 3:

Characteristics of young people

This section of the report looks at the experiences and backgrounds of young people who take part in EY Foundation's Our Future and Smart Futures programmes. We refer to the 'pre-pandemic' cohort, which is the 49 young people who engaged in Our Future and the 248 who engaged in Smart Futures in 2019 and 2020; and the 'pandemic' cohort which represents young people who engaged from July 2020 to June 2021.

This report covers analysis of survey data for 380 young people who completed the pre- and post-programme survey between April 2019-Dec 2019 and 345 who completed the survey between January 2020-June 2021.¹⁴ Young people are also asked to complete a mid programme survey which asks about their background and challenges,

360 young people completed this pre-pandemic and 296 during the pandemic.

Diversity of participants

Smart Futures and Our Future attracted a diverse range of young people before and during the pandemic. The move to online delivery did not result in any groups of young people becoming excluded (Infographic 1). It is not clear from this research why the numbers of participants from ESOL households or ethnic minority backgrounds increased. The data suggests that EY Foundation's programmes are continuing to engage the types of young people who are most in need of support as a result of the pre-existing inequalities that have worsened in the pandemic.

Infographic 1: Diversity of young people who participated during the pandemic



52% of participants surveyed came from a household where English was not their first language (ESOL). This is an increase of 15% when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort.



Almost half (49%) of respondents were from an Asian ethnic background, and 27% were from a Black ethnic background. This compares to 41% and 30% respectively in the pre-pandemic cohort.



Pre-programme 22% of the pandemic cohort felt their soft skills were a barrier to employment (compared to 14% of the pre-pandemic cohort). By the end of the programme 11% still felt they were a barrier (compared to 9% pre-pandemic)

¹⁴ Higher numbers of young people engaged with the programmes during the pandemic than the previous cohort

Impact of Covid-19

Young people who participated in the programme during the pandemic were experiencing more challenges in their lives than the pre-pandemic cohort (Infographic 2). However, it is notable that the increases in loneliness and isolation were not as significant as other challenges.



Infographic 2: Challenges experienced by the pandemic cohort

The pandemic cohort:



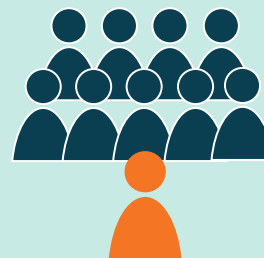
Felt less knowledgeable about where they could access advice on sexual health and wellbeing (-13%).



Were more likely to report being victims of bullying (+9%) Young women are more likely to have experienced bullying than young men (35% compared to 25%) whereas prior to the pandemic there was no difference between men and women.



Were more likely to have experienced racism (+6 %).



Were more likely to feel lonely or isolated (+5 %).

Section 4:

Delivery of activities

From July 2020, all EY Foundation delivery on Smart Futures and Our Future moved from face-to-face to online. This included the employability, work experience and mentoring elements of both programmes. This section brings together the views of stakeholders (employers, staff, and volunteers) and young people on what they thought worked well and what was more challenging in the shift to online delivery, and how delivery was adapted in response to these challenges.

What worked well?

Quick transition to online delivery

The transition to online delivery depended on young people getting access to the technology they needed and EY Foundation adapting how they delivered their programmes. EY Foundation were able to do this relatively quickly with minimum disruption to young people's experience. Overall, stakeholders were impressed with how the employability activities and workshops had been quickly adapted for online delivery.

'I honestly think it's brilliant because if they'd have paused the programme and said, 'No, we can only deliver it in person.' That is hundreds of young people that didn't get an experience, and then they might have left school by the time that we're back in person.'

(Employer, Smart Futures)

Stakeholders commented on the high level of consistency and resemblance to face-to-face delivery that the online programmes maintained. They reported that many activities within the programmes were carried out effectively

using online tools. These included mock interviews, talks with employer volunteers, mentoring and activities such as the Dragons' Den. The young people interviewed were happy with the transition to online and felt they still had the chance to learn new things.

'I was ready to go hands-on into a working environment, but I was able to adapt to the different environment because it was necessary. It was a bit stressful because I'd expected to be in a work environment but then I was capable to do online which showed me I was able to do something that was out of my comfort zone.' *(Young person, Our Future)*

Business case studies

Employers developed a range of creative and innovative models for delivering work experience. These approaches are summarised in Box 2. Employers suggested that the most important elements for successful work experience were that young people were given the opportunity to undertake tasks that were useful to the organisation, and that tasks were grounded in the real world of work.

'We then always made sure that we showed them how we will then use the work that they've produced as an organisation to show that they haven't wasted their time over the last three days... It is stuff that [has] actually made a difference.' *(Employer, Smart Futures)*

Box 2: Online work experience delivery models

- Several employers set case study tasks. These usually involved young people researching a business-related challenge, developing potential solutions, and presenting their ideas to a panel at the end of the week. These tasks were completed alongside attending talks and workshops with employees from across the business.
- Others took a thematic approach to delivering the placement, with each day focusing on a different key business area. This enabled young people to gain a broad overview of the business and to meet colleagues from a range of departments.
- Some employers tailored their projects to the interests and aspirations of the young people they were hosting. For example, one employer was hosting a young person who expressed an interest in economics and research. They set her a task which involved analysing some of their recent survey data and delivering a report to the company board.
- Employers delivering the Tech Futures programme (a tailored version of Smart Futures) developed an 'immersion lab' activity, which involved young people working in groups to build their own robots.

'The things that they did with the young people for those three days of business experience were outstanding, to be fair. They got them involved building robotic process automation in groups and things like that, really, really hands-on stuff, I was so impressed.' (EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures and Our Future)

Mentoring

Mentoring worked well online. It reduced the need to travel, which made it more accessible for both volunteers and young people, and meant young people had access to a wider range of mentors as they were not limited by location. One mentor described how she was able to connect her mentee, who aspired to be a pharmacist, with various professionals in the field, as well as a lecturer at the University he wanted to attend.

She did not feel that this would have been as easy to facilitate had the mentoring taken place offline.

'I think the good thing about it, one of the happy by-products of the whole pandemic last year is there's more mentors that can probably support more mentees more broadly across the UK now because it is remote.' (Mentor, Smart Futures)

Young people valued the process of being matched with a mentor who had similar interests, and thought it worked well as an online activity.

'What I thought was very good about the mentoring was they sent out a form, so you had a say about what you were looking for in a mentor and the stuff that you want your mentor to help you with. So, they matched us with a mentor. My mentor is somebody that's quite similar to me and someone that I know that I can go and confide in.' (Young person, *Smart Futures*)

Supporting less confident young people

Some young people felt more confident to contribute and share their ideas, since they did not need to speak up in front of a group of people. Some young people also felt that online delivery helped their anxiety.

'Yes, I would say for most people now because everything is online and you don't have to worry about going face-to-face, you can develop anxiety when going out in public, to an interview or anything like that. You'd always have that anxiety that's building a barrier to going out and meeting people.' (Young person, *Smart Futures*)

Online tools offered alternative ways for less confident young people to communicate; for example, they could ask questions or share ideas using the chat function. Stakeholders felt that participating in work experience online could be less intimidating for young people who lacked confidence and could help to ease them into the world of work.

'I think the panellist sessions worked really well online... it's probably more daunting for the young people, you know, face-to-face. So, having that, sort of, almost protection of the laptop, I felt like the young people were asking more questions than they may have face-to-face.' (EY Foundation staff, *Smart Futures and Our Future*)

Learning skills for the future workplace

Online delivery supported young people to develop their digital skills as well as the behaviours needed for online working. Stakeholders reflected that online working requires enhanced discipline and time management. The experience was felt to have equipped young people with the skills and confidence to work independently and interact in an online working environment. Young people also developed their digital skills. This included using technologies such as email, video conferencing and online messaging services in a professional environment. For example, online mock interviews and presenting remotely by screen sharing were seen as positive skills development for young people. This is particularly important given that the disruption caused by the pandemic is likely to have an ongoing and potentially permanent impact upon recruitment processes and ways of working. It is therefore likely that young people will be required to attend interviews and work online in the future, so gaining experience and skills in working online is valuable for their future employment prospects.

'If a young person were to come from education, where it is all in person, this, in itself, a placement that is blended, still offers a great opportunity to start to get used to what this online world might look like, for them, even if that's the introduction to that way of working.'

I think it is something that is vital, it's what the young people need, if they are not able to experience that, in education.'
(Employer, Smart Futures)

Some young people identified the programme had given them the confidence to communicate more effectively online.

'Previously I have been very shy [about] being online, I was not confident speaking, or showing my face... It most definitely helped my communication, online skills in particular because I previously didn't really have them, I would remain on mute most of the time because I didn't have the confidence to speak in front of strangers, and [this] has really helped those skills.'
(Young person, Smart Futures)

Greater accessibility

Online delivery made the programme more accessible to some employers, volunteers, and young people.

'I think volunteer and employer engagement is at an all-time high because I think it's so much easier for them just to pop on to a call and not have to travel anywhere or do anything like that.' **(EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures)**

One employer said that they had been able to host more young people for the virtual work experience week since they did not need to consider logistical factors such as finding a space for them in the office. Volunteers could also participate from a range of locations. For example, one of the employers on the Smart Futures programme arranged for contributions from colleagues in the USA, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Germany. This enabled the young people to gain a sense of the scale and diversity of the company.

Online delivery was also more accessible for some young people. However, none of the young people interviewed said they would have been unable to attend a face-to-face programme.

'It was easier as you didn't have to travel anywhere, and the meetings were easily accessible.'
(Young person, Smart Futures)

What was more challenging?

Keeping young people engaged

Stakeholders felt that it was challenging to keep young people engaged with online delivery. Some felt that young people would have taken the business experience element of the programme more seriously had it taken place in an office, since it would have felt more realistic and they would have been removed from other distractions in the home environment, such as their televisions or phones. This was echoed by some young people. Online delivery was described as tiring for everyone. Young people commented that spending all day on their computers was a challenge. Stakeholders said that it was sometimes difficult to know whether young people were engaged, or even present, when delivering sessions online. One stakeholder commented that this had been a particular challenge for the Our Future programme, since young people in this cohort tend to be less keen to participate due to lack of confidence.

'So, engagement levels in terms of the young people, you have to be on 1,000 all the time when you're delivering, because you have to really make sure it's interactive and you're encouraging people, and begging people to come off mute.' **(EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures and Our Future)**

Using cameras

Stakeholders consistently raised concerns about young people not turning their cameras on. As well as this making it difficult to assess their understanding and engagement, some employers reported that they found it challenging to build relationships with the young people in their cohorts, since they couldn't put a name to a face.

While stakeholders acknowledged that there may have been technical issues preventing camera use, this was mainly attributed to a lack of confidence. Stakeholders also recognised that some young people might not have been comfortable turning on their webcams because of potential distractions in the home environment, or because they did not want to share their backgrounds, for example, if they were working from a shared bedroom. One young person talked about the anxieties involved in making sure they were appropriately set up to turn their camera on. It is important to acknowledge and accommodate these anxieties.

'Or if it's online I need a really good place to sit to make the background okay, then [finding somewhere] quiet, it's a lot of stress.' (Young person, Our Future)

Providing feedback and support

Stakeholders felt it was harder to provide feedback and support online. They could not walk around the room to check on progress, provide assistance, or notice those young people who had finished and needed additional tasks. Some stakeholders noted that young people seemed reluctant to ask for help by contacting facilitators directly, and instead waited until formal check-in points. Stakeholders also said that it was more

difficult to provide young people with immediate feedback on their work during online delivery, for example, for the journals that they were completing for the CMI/ILM element of the programme:

'When you're marking the journal, there's a lot of back and forth... and you're relying on the students to then do the changes and send it back to you. Whereas face-to-face you'd be like, 'Right, I think you need to do a bit there,' and they get on with it straight away. It takes up so much time.'

(EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures)

Young people had more mixed views on this, some felt that help was readily available to them online, while others felt they would have been more supported face-to-face.

'I think the main benefit was that no matter how hard it was you could automatically almost go into a call with someone if you needed help, that they were so much quicker. If there had been people on in real life, you would have probably had to plan a meeting in advance within a day or two, but with online you can plan a call or meeting within two hours and be able to do it if that person is free.' (Young person, Smart Futures)

Networking

Employers felt that young people had lost opportunities for informal networking. They worked hard to ensure that the young people in their cohorts were introduced to a range of colleagues but commented that this contact would have occurred more naturally and informally in an office environment.

'It's just very difficult when they're not in that office environment to introduce them to people ... normally they would have opportunities to meet people across lots of different levels, particularly because we are an open office, so the stakeholders aren't in their own offices, they're just there and are available for a chat.'

(Employer, Smart Futures)

Organisational culture

Employers also felt that it was more difficult for young people to gain an insight into their values and ways of working online. Although employers tried to explain their organisational culture to young people verbally, this was not the same as young people being physically in the workplace seeing how people interact with each other.

'I think to get a real experience of what it is like to be part of such a big firm, you need to go into the office, look around the office and be like, 'This is where I could work.' Or 'These are the people that could be my colleagues in the future.' You don't necessarily get that experience I don't think virtually.' *(Employer, Smart Futures)*

Some employers, particularly those working in 'hands-on' or frontline sectors, such as security and the arts, felt somewhat restricted in what they could deliver online. For example, one employer in the creative sector said that they would have liked to do some practical, studio-based activities, while another in the security sector commented that it would have been interesting for the young people to attend an event and learn about the security in place. Employers also commented that they were unable to give young people access to their IT systems due to data protection constraints. This limited the ability for some young people to work on real life projects. Some young

people commented that work experience felt more like school or college work rather than being in a business environment. Others felt that they had missed out on some aspects of the experience.

'Because you're in your own house and you're not in that professional environment, you wouldn't feel as motivated if you're not disciplined in that area. I also feel like you also get a different experience, and you get to learn more and do more hands-on tasks as opposed to doing it from your bedroom or your house. So, hopefully, next year this wouldn't be an issue where we can't actually go in and not have to do it virtually.' *(Young person, Smart Futures)*

Working environment

A challenge for online delivery was that not all young people had everything they needed to work at home.

EY Foundation provided young people with laptops although this came with administrative challenges that were mentioned by young people and stakeholders. Internet connections were also consistently mentioned as a challenge by young people, both losing connections and being worried about losing connections.

'I was moving house during the pandemic and I didn't have Wi-Fi for about 3 to 4 months, so especially when everything's turned to being virtual, it's been very difficult because with people who don't have access to Wi-Fi or even devices to access said Wi-Fi, it's very difficult, even if there are virtual opportunities, to participate in them.' *(Young person, Smart Futures)*

Some young people also reported not being confident in using the digital tools they needed for the workplace.

'The only issue was how we split into groups to have group chats or group talks for our presentation. None of us knew how to work Teams because it was still new to all of us.' (Young person, Smart Futures)

A more challenging issue related to young people's home environments. Several stakeholders commented that young people in their cohorts did not all have access to a quiet place to work. In some instances, this made it difficult for them to focus during sessions. One employer also felt that a lack of privacy could be an issue for young people when participating in mentoring sessions from home.

'This is quite a private time in terms of their mentoring so you could hear in one case it was obviously a busy family house, maybe younger kids, siblings and so on. It sounded a little bit manic in the background. You feel for them because they probably actually want to be in a space where they can just be themselves, nobody is listening, they don't feel like Mum or Dad is listening or someone is listening in at the door.' (Employer, Smart Futures)

Friendships between young people

Online delivery may have meant that young people were not as able to form friendships with each other. Stakeholders suggested that it was less likely that young people would keep in touch with each other in the future, which is considered to be a valuable aspect of the programme.

'One of the things that I really miss seeing from face-to-face is the first day, when they're all a bit shy, they're all alone, and then mid-programme, they're going for lunch together, they've set up a WhatsApp group, they're like, 'We're going to Nando's together after the programme' and so on. It feels quite sad for me that they do all of this and they get great value from it, but they're definitely missing that feel of,

'I'm part of this cohort.' (EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures and Our Future)

The young people interviewed had mixed views on this, some felt they had been able to build friendships while others felt that they had lost opportunities to bond.

'[The best thing] was meeting the other people...because most of us had like-minded ideas and it was more-, they didn't make it seem, 'Oh, it's online, we don't have to talk as much,' or make it awkward. It was still very interactive despite not being face-to-face.' (Young person, Smart Futures)

This young person clearly valued the relationships they had built online, and it is important to not judge digital communication as less important or less real than face-to-face.

How were challenges addressed?

The second round of online delivery saw changes put in place to respond to some of these challenges.

Keeping young people engaged

One of the main changes made for the second online cohort was to adapt the employability sessions to make them work better for online delivery. As shown in box 3 stakeholders re-designed sessions to make them shorter, more interactive, and with more varied activities.

'So, I think the plus side of it is our actual overall week, employability week now, the curriculum is so much more interactive which we can bring to face-to-face delivery. I think that's been the most beneficial part of this.' (EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures and Our Future)

Box 3: Making employability sessions more interactive

- Setting up 'social bubbles': Young people were allocated to a 'social bubble' for the duration of the employability skills week. These were used for group-based activities, including Dragons' Den, and also for socialising.
- Incorporating online polls into sessions. The aim of this was to ensure that all young people felt comfortable participating, rather than just having a few of the more confident students answering questions.
- 'Hour stops'. Facilitators incorporated hourly breaks into the sessions, where young people were encouraged to turn on their cameras and share an idea or answer a question. The purpose of this was to keep young people motivated and ensure that they were still participating.
- Incorporating more group-based activities using breakout rooms to facilitate interaction between students.

Using cameras

For the second cohort of online delivery, stakeholders tried to encourage camera use by:

- Including instructions about how and when to turn on webcams in the programme induction pack.
- Explaining to young people that it was 'expected business practice' to turn on their webcams when speaking to employers.
- Teaching young people how to blur their backgrounds on video conferencing. One employer also blurred his own background during sessions because he felt this would make the young people more comfortable.
- Incorporating icebreaker activities which required young people to turn on their cameras, for example, asking them to show and talk about an object in their room.

Stakeholders wanted to build young people's confidence in using cameras rather than enforce camera use.

'I wouldn't say, 'You have to,' but I'd say, 'This is what you should be doing, it's going to make a good impression.' So, I think having more awareness that they're going to need that extra hand-holding or boost to do it.' (Mentor, Smart Futures and Our Future)

Better preparation for using digital tools

An important learning point was that not all young people knew how to use digital technologies such as email and video conferencing. The second cohort were given instructions on how to use these tools as part of their induction pack.

'So, on the first one there was this unconscious assumption that they knew how to use emails and Microsoft Teams and set up meetings and stuff, so for the second round I created a document that went through how to set up a Microsoft Teams meeting, how to make a second one, how to join one and all that kind of stuff. And that would go out with the induction pack to say, 'This is what you need to read so you can get familiar.' (EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures and Our Future).

Section 5:

Programme outcomes

This section brings together the views of stakeholders and young people as expressed in interviews and focus groups, with information collected in the pre and post surveys completed by young people who completed their programmes before and during the pandemic. This information has been used to understand the difference between the pandemic cohort and those who completed their programme before the pandemic.

Outcomes achieved

Stakeholders agreed the key outcomes for young people on the Smart Futures and Our Future programmes were:

- Achieving the CMI/ILM accreditation.
- Gaining confidence in their own ability to work in a business environment and strengthening their employability skills.
- Gaining knowledge and understanding of the workplace environment; expected behaviour; and a variety of career pathways and job roles through meeting employers.

Overall, stakeholders believed young people still achieved these outcomes through online delivery. As shown in box 4 they felt that young people were provided with similar opportunities to develop their skills, behaviours, and knowledge, and to experience the world of work. The young people interviewed also felt they developed a broad range of soft, employability and business skills as well as developing a clearer idea of their future career goals and how to achieve these.

Formal outcomes such as retention, completion and the CMI/ILM accreditation achievement rates were perceived to be largely comparable with those on face-to-face programmes, although one stakeholder did note slightly higher dropout rates prior to the programme commencing. This was attributed to the uncertainty caused by lockdown, rather than to the online delivery itself.

Box 4: Views of outcomes

'On the Dragons' Den day, in the morning all of them basically refused to speak, by the end of the day they were presenting to stakeholders from EY and doing a whole pitch and handling themselves so well. So, it seemed like a small thing, but then looking at where they started, they came a long way just in five days virtually. So, in terms of outcomes and effectiveness, it's definitely still there from what I can tell and what I can see.' (EY Foundation staff, Our Future)

'We had a lot of team building activities and I feel that I was very skilled in teamwork because you got to work with people, and you got to delegate tasks and it went well to be honest with you. So, I feel like teamwork was a good skill that I learned from the EY work experience.' (Young person, Smart Futures)

'I think overall, it was actually a really good experience for me personally, since prior to the work experience, I didn't know what I wanted to do, so I guess it gave me a better view on what I want to do in the future.' (Young person, Our Future)

Harder to meet outcomes

The outcomes that stakeholders felt were more difficult to achieve through online delivery were less tangible than improved skills or greater confidence. These included gaining insights into the atmosphere and culture of the workplace and learning about workplace norms, for example, what to wear and how to interact with their peers. Employers were particularly keen to see a return to face-to-face delivery for some aspects of the programmes to facilitate young people's growth in these areas.

'For me, one of the main things that students historically have got out of our work experience programmes is that whole thing about being in an adult team, being treated as an adult, in a working environment that is just so different from the one that they would normally be in, and so I don't think you could ever replace being in an office space for a certain period of time.' (Employer, Smart Futures)

Some stakeholders were also concerned that while young people had gained confidence to interact with employers virtually, this might not necessarily transfer to face-to-face interactions. This was seen as a particular issue for more disadvantaged young people, who in some cases have limited experience of interacting with adults besides their parents and teachers:

'That's definitely one of the big important things that I think comes out of the programme face-to-face... so missing that speaking to adults and employers face-to-face. Because it's

going to happen when they're in interviews or go to jobs, they need to be prepared and comfortable and get used to that now.' (EY Foundation staff, Smart Futures and Our Future)

This was reflected in the views of young people to some extent; some of whom identified that they were more confident to interact online than in person.

'I feel like personally I'm not that confident but because it was virtual, and I didn't know the people it was easier for me to actually take the opportunity. I hosted the graduation, which I don't think I would have done. So, it's not an ideal representation of real life, I guess.' (Young person, Smart Futures)

Young people's perceptions of their outcomes

Young people on Smart Futures and Our Future are asked to complete the same survey at the start and end of their programme.¹⁵ They are asked to rate their business, employability and soft skills, their confidence in their careers knowledge, and their perceptions of barriers to employment. These barriers include their own skills, their background, and their confidence in having networks that can help them. It is important to consider that a greater awareness of barriers can be positive, as it shows that young people are more aware of the steps they need to take to access employment. However, the programmes are designed to enable young people to overcome these barriers, so feeling that barriers are reduced is a sign of further progress.

¹⁵ The information provided here comes from EY Foundation's survey of 380 pre-pandemic and 345 pandemic young people.

This section of the report considers the difference in outcomes between the pre-pandemic and the pandemic cohort, looking at differences in young people's assessment of themselves at the start, but also in the distance travelled during the programmes.

Skills

Before the pandemic 63 per cent of young people rated their overall business skills as good or excellent, 54 per cent rated their overall employability skills as good or excellent and 82 per cent rated their overall soft skills as good or excellent. For the pandemic cohort these ratings had dropped to 54 per cent, 48 per cent and 79 per cent respectively.

The drop in confidence about their skills is indicative of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people. As shown in infographic 3 the difference was particularly evident when it came to their business and employability skills.

However, they demonstrated equal or greater improvements in their business, employability, and softs skills as a whole over the course of their programme when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort (table 1). **This suggests that online delivery was as effective in developing young people's skills.**



Infographic 3: Changes to pre-programme business and employability skills for the pandemic cohort



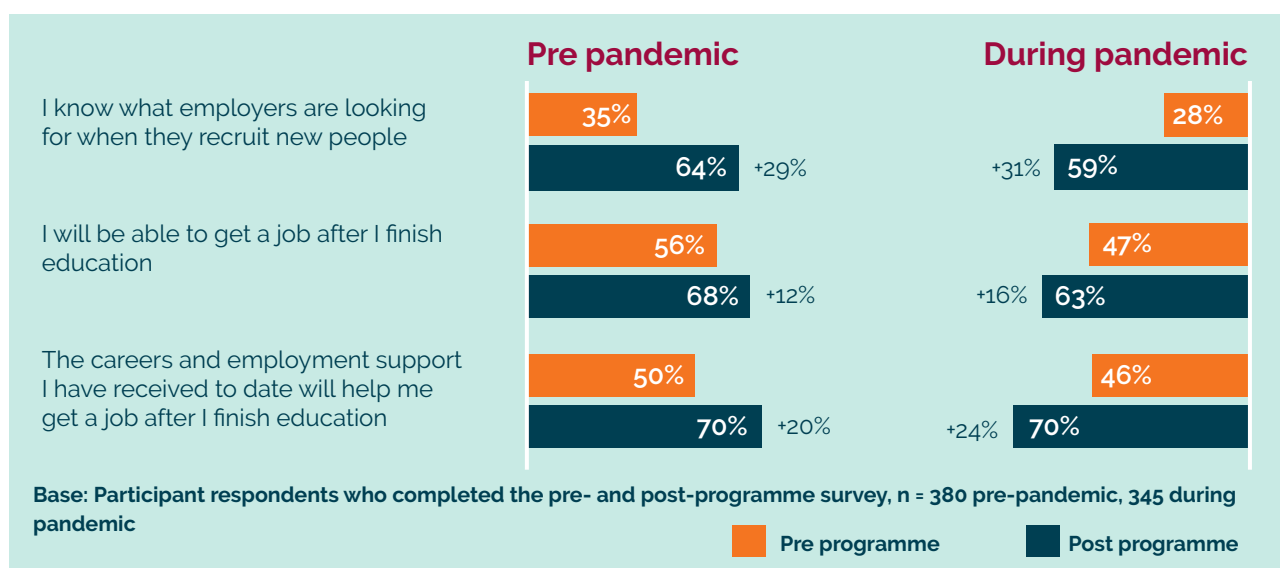
Table 1: Changes to business, employability and soft skills during the programme ¹⁶

Participant views of their skills	Pre-pandemic			Pandemic			Year on year change	
	Pre-prog	Post-prog	Var +/-	Pre-prog	Post-prog	Var +/-	Pre-prog	Post-prog
Overall business skills	63%	87%	24%	54%	83%	29%	-9%	-4%
Overall employability skills	54%	77%	23%	48%	74%	26%	-6%	-3%
Overall soft skills	82%	91%	9%	79%	92%	13%	-3%	1%

Knowledge about careers

The pandemic cohort were also less confident at the start of the programme about their careers knowledge. However, as shown in Figure 1, by the end of the programme, their confidence had increased by as much or more than the pre-pandemic cohort. This suggests that young people accessing the programme online were benefiting from the careers advice they received at least as much as the pre-pandemic cohort.

Figure 1: Proportion of Smart Futures' participants reporting they are 'extremely', 'very' or 'just' confident with careers advice/knowledge

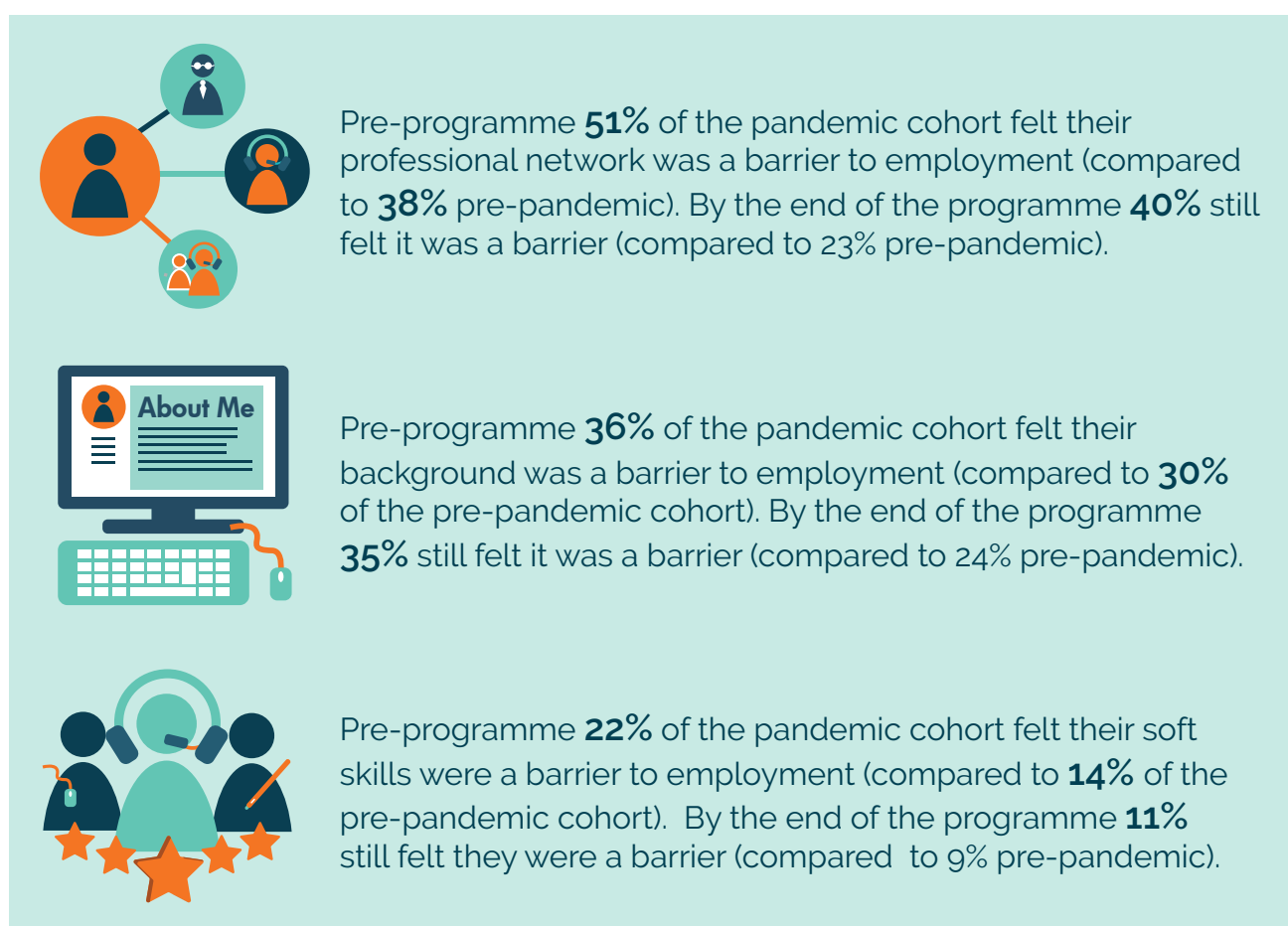


¹⁶ **Business skills** includes self confidence in a business environment, business skills, knowledge of developments and news in the business and commercial world, ability to build productive relationships with people in the workforce, networking skills, how would you rate your awareness of careers in professional services? **Employability skills** includes CV and application writing skills and interview technique. **Soft skills** includes problem solving skills, ability to work in a team, communications skills, presentation skills, time management skills, sharing ideas with a group without being asked and how do you think other people would rate your communication skills?

Addressing barriers to employment

Both the pre-pandemic and the pandemic cohorts of young people participating in EY Foundation's programmes reported a number of barriers to employment. The most significant of these were their soft skills, access to formal training, access to professional networks and their background. **Young people who joined the programmes during the pandemic felt that these barriers were more significant compared to those who joined pre-pandemic** (Infographic 4). In addition, the pandemic cohort were less likely to feel that the barriers they faced had been lowered, except for soft skills.

Infographic 4: Barriers to employment



There was a similar pattern in young people's confidence in their career networks as shown in infographic 5. **The pandemic cohort were less confident than the pre-pandemic cohort that they knew someone who could help their career at the start of the programme, and did not improve their confidence as much over the course of the programme.**

This may reflect **stakeholder views about lack of opportunities for professional networking as one of the main challenges of online delivery.** However, it may also reflect **young people's more general concerns about finding employment in a pandemic.**

Infographic 5: Confidence in networks



Pre-programme, **26%** of the pandemic cohort felt confident they knew someone who could get them work experience (compared to **31%** pre-pandemic). By the end of the programme **49%** felt confident (compared to **58%** pre-pandemic).



Pre-programme, **19%** of the pandemic cohort felt confident they knew someone who could help to get them a job (compared to **22%** pre-pandemic). By the end of the programme **36%** felt confident (compared to **48%** pre-pandemic).

Outcomes for different groups of young people

This section considers the relationship between a young person's gender, ethnicity, and whether they are an ESOL speaker, and their perception of how they changed during the programme. The general trend was that young people from all groups in the pandemic cohort rated their skills and knowledge as lower, and their barriers to employment as higher, at the start of the programme. However, this varied between groups and there were differences in how far young people from different groups were able to make up the difference.

Ethnicity

Young people from all ethnic groups were less likely to rate most of their skills as excellent or good before starting the pandemic programme, compared to the pre-pandemic programme. This difference appears to be most marked for white respondents.¹⁷ **During the pandemic, white respondents demonstrated lower self-confidence in a business environment than any other ethnic group, with just 48 per cent rating**

this as excellent or good before the programme. **Black participants, meanwhile, were slightly more likely to rate their soft skills as excellent or good when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort, although they were less likely to rate their business skills highly.** Both white and Black participants also reported lower confidence in their networking skills and interview technique prior to the programme taking place. In both cases, this change was driven primarily by young white and Black men.

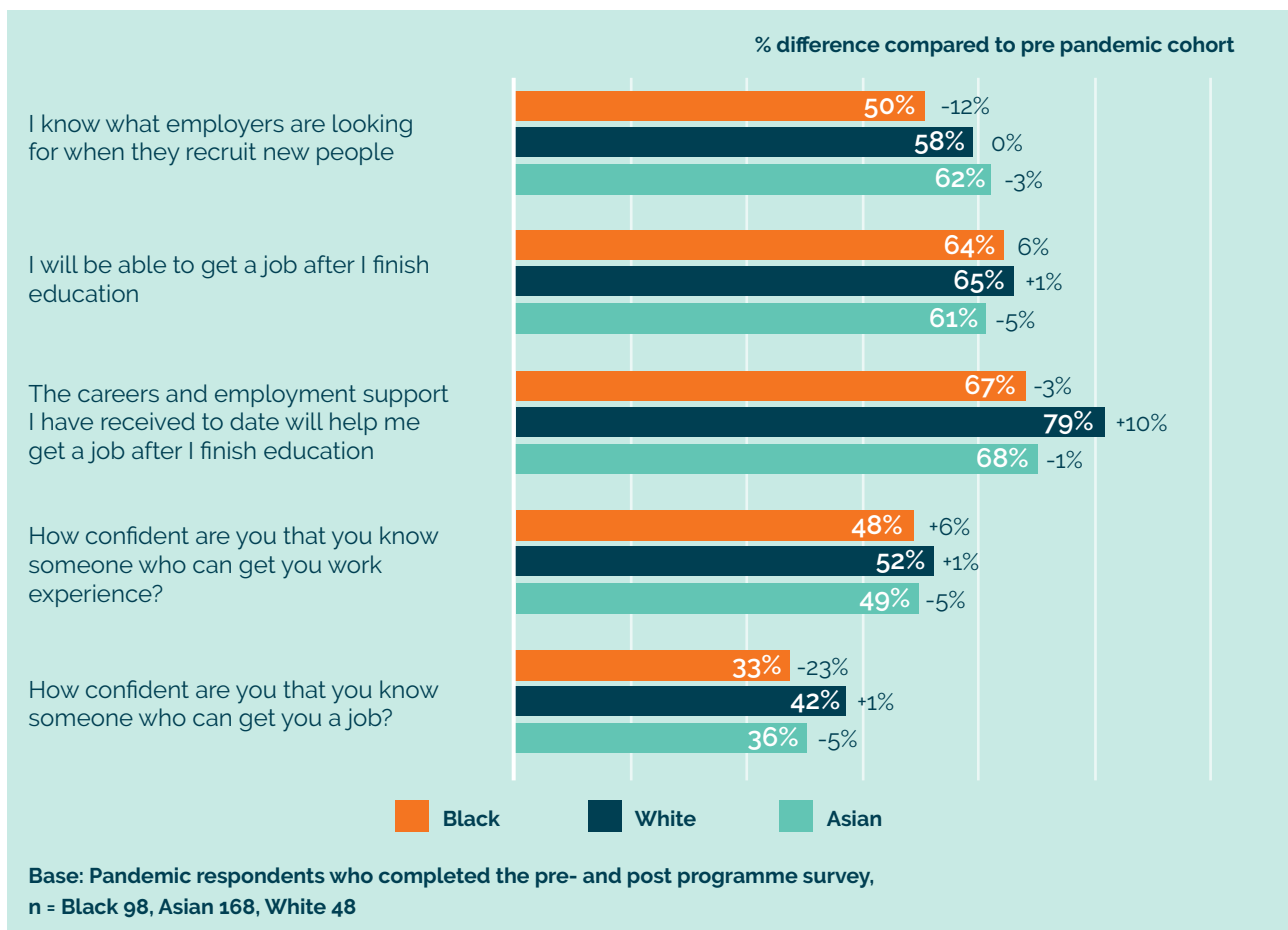
For Black respondents, distance travelled over the course of the pandemic programme was often lower than for their pre-pandemic counterparts. This was the case for all of the soft skills listed, and also for awareness of careers in professional services (-6 per cent), where participants from other ethnic groups showed an improvement in distance travelled. This contrasts with the findings for Asian young people, who demonstrated greater improvements in most of their soft skills when compared to their pre-pandemic counterparts.

¹⁷ However, it should be noted that the sample size for this group is very low when compared to the pre pandemic cohort (48 compared to 84). This has implications for the conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis, and the figures should be interpreted with caution.

Nonetheless, young Black participants demonstrate strong improvements against other business and employability skills, most notably for knowledge of business developments (+14 per cent) and CV and interview technique (+12 per cent). Moreover, the proportion of young Black people rating their presentation skills (+6 per cent), teamwork skills (+12 per cent) and ability to share ideas with the group (+23 per cent) as 'excellent' post programme increased when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort. **It may be that in some cases, the online medium supported young people from Black ethnic groups to feel more confident participating in group discussions or sharing their ideas than face-to-face delivery.**

In contrast, Black young people were much less confident across career related outcomes. Figure 2 shows how young people rated their confidence against career related outcomes after participating in the programme. Here, Black participants showed the biggest decline in post-programme scores against all metrics, with their confidence that they know someone who can get them a job declining by 23 per cent when compared to their pre-pandemic counterparts. Just 33 per cent of Black and 36 per cent of Asian participants felt confident that they knew someone who could get them a job post programme. This may mean they benefited less from online delivery, however, it may also mean that this group feels more vulnerable to the challenges of finding employment in a post pandemic world.

Figure 2: Percentage of young people confident against career related outcomes post-programme - by ethnicity

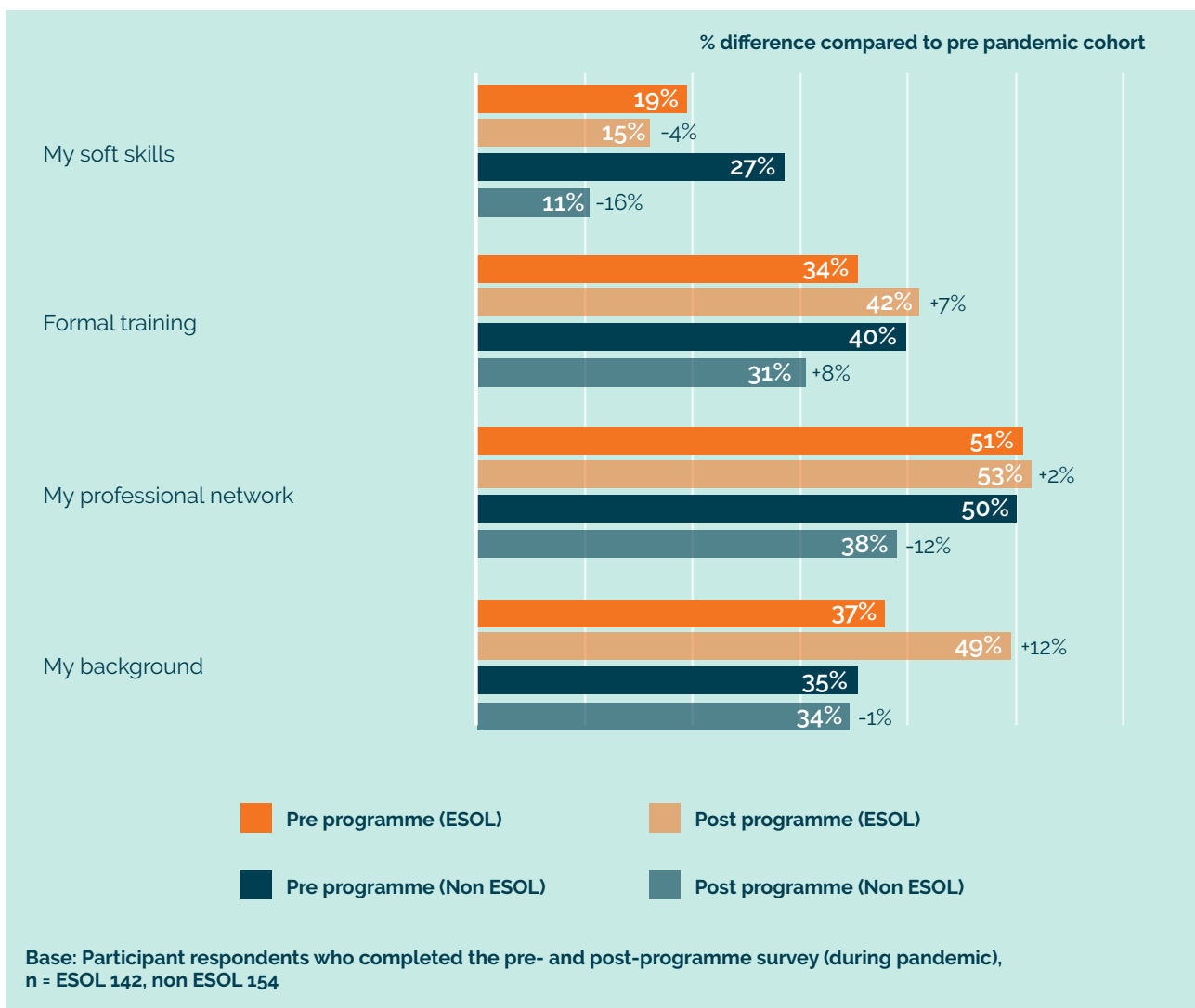


Young people from ESOL households

In the pandemic cohort, all young people reported having higher barriers to accessing employment compared to pre-pandemic participants. **However, the proportion of young people from ESOL households identifying these barriers actually increased after participating in the programme, with the exception of soft skills** (Figure 3). Most significantly there was a 12 per cent rise in young people from ESOL households who felt their background was a barrier to them accessing employment. By contrast, participants from non ESOL households reduced their barriers to below the levels seen in the pre-pandemic cohort.

This may suggest that online delivery was effective in giving young people from ESOL backgrounds a better awareness of what is needed to get into work or employment but did not fully equip them to tackle the barriers that they faced. In this way these young people may have experienced a more intermediate outcome of greater awareness, but had not developed the networks or skills to address these barriers.

Figure 3: Barrier changes during online delivery - ESOL and non ESOL



Gender

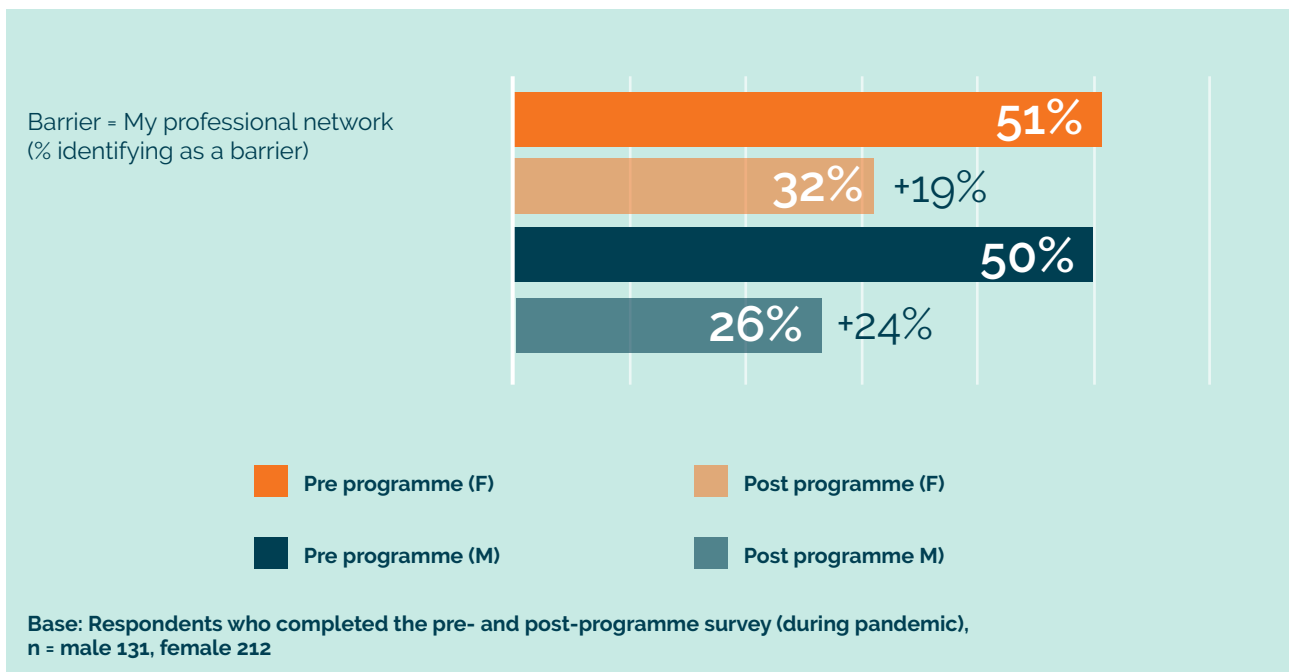
Both male and female pandemic participants were less likely to rate their skills as excellent or good before the start of the programme compared to the pre-pandemic cohort. For young men, this difference was highest for their networking skills (-15 per cent), interview technique (-14 per cent), and awareness of careers in professional services (-13 per cent). For young women, the biggest declines were in self confidence in a business environment (-15 per cent) and business skills (-12 per cent).

Female participants demonstrated significantly higher improvements in their self confidence in a business environment when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort (+33 per cent compared to +20 per cent).

The opposite is true for males, who displayed markedly lower confidence levels post programme when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort (88 per cent compared to 98 per cent).

This suggests that online learning may help young women more than young men when developing certain soft skills. However, the opposite is true when we explore perceived barriers to employment, particularly those related to professional networks (Figure 4). **Women were more likely than men to see their professional network as a barrier post programme (32 per cent compared to 26 per cent), despite equal proportions of men and women seeing this as a barrier pre programme.**

Figure 4: Networking outcomes during online delivery - by gender



Summary

Young people were still able to achieve a range of positive outcomes when the *Smart Futures and Our Future programmes* switched to online delivery. At the start of their programmes, the pandemic cohort as a whole had lower confidence in their skills and knowledge and felt their barriers to employment were greater. By the end of the programme their distance travelled in terms of skills development was similar to the pre-pandemic cohort. However, they did not improve as much in terms of addressing barriers. **Young people from an ESOL background and Black participants appear to have been less able to reduce barriers to employment during online delivery than other groups.**

It would be useful to consider the intersections between groups, for example the experience of a young Black women from an ESOL background, will be different from that of a young Black man whose family speak English as their first language. However, the survey numbers are too small to report these differences with confidence. **It is also not possible to separate the wider impact of Covid-19 from the impact of online learning on these groups of young people. What is more significant is that these groups of young people will need more targeted support to tackle and overcome this disadvantage, whatever its cause.**



Section 6:

Key lessons and their implications for the future

EY Foundation were successful in transitioning their programmes online in response to the disruption caused by Covid-19. Young people still gained valuable experience and developed the skills and knowledge they needed, and no groups of young people appeared to be excluded from online delivery. However, some aspects of the programme, particularly business experience were seen as less effective online. Equally, some groups of young people may have found wholly online delivery less beneficial than face-to-face. **One of our key recommendations is that EY Foundation should develop flexible models of delivery that range from**

wholly online to wholly face-to-face with the expectation that most young people would experience a hybrid model. Box 5 shows how this reflects the views of the pandemic cohort.

Delivery should be designed to ensure that it reflects the working practices of different employers who are also in the process of adopting hybrid working models for existing staff. EY Foundation should also consider how both online and face-to-face models have the potential to increase inclusivity and improve equality of experience and use the two modes appropriately with different groups.

Box 5: The future of the delivery

221 of the pandemic cohort gave their view on how the programme should be delivered in the future:

- **51% thought it should be hybrid**
- **10% thought it should be completely online**
- **29% thought it should be completely face-to-face**

Identify when face-to-face matters

There are some aspects of youth employability programmes where online delivery does not seem to work as well. This includes engaging in the adult world, being independent, and aspiration raising through providing experiences that take place away from the young person's home environment. It is also seen as more challenging for young people to network, build friendships and learn about organisational culture online. In a hybrid model, EY Foundation should prioritise delivering these aspects of the

programme face-to-face, with flexibility to deliver the rest of the programme online.

- **The first day of the programme:** Delivering the first day or two of the programme in person would give young people the opportunity to meet each other and form networks, as well giving EY Foundation the opportunity to set ground rules and expectations about behaviours expected in an online working environment.

From a logistical perspective, this would also allow EY Foundation to distribute and set up laptops, something that was challenging to do remotely.

- **The business experience week:**

Some of the business experience should be delivered face-to-face where possible. This is so that young people can gain a sense of organisational culture, network with employers and their peers, as well as experience a different physical environment that is away from their home.

- **The graduation ceremony:**

This was considered to be less impactful when delivered online. Stakeholders believed that holding the graduation ceremony in person, with friends and family in attendance, was the best way to celebrate young people's achievements on the programme. However, it could also be streamed online for those who cannot attend in person.

Use online delivery to improve inclusivity

Many young people, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, are likely to require intensive support to recover from Covid-19. Evidence from wider research indicates that young peoples' employment opportunities will be affected for years to come, and there is a risk that the ongoing impact of the crisis will reinforce existing inequalities.¹⁸ Hybrid delivery of youth employability programmes can potentially support some of these young people through improving access to support, skills

development, and labour market opportunities. Young people also need to learn both digital skills and online working practices, and online aspects of employability programmes provide an ideal way to do this.

- **Online mentoring should be the standard mode of delivery.**

EY Foundation should further develop how they match mentors and young people to focus on career pathways and lived experience, and not be limited by geography. Previous research has shown the importance of young people being mentored by someone from a similar background, for example a shared disability or ethnicity.

- **At the initial recruitment and assessment stage, EY Foundation should identify young people who may benefit from a wholly online programme** in order to engage and secure the most positive outcomes. For example, those who live in remote locations, have particular health conditions or disabilities, or who are young adult carers.

- **EY Foundation should be explicit about the skills and behaviours that young people are developing that will help them in online or hybrid workplaces,** and should consider how to include this in the data they collect about young people and the outcomes they achieve. Development of such skills should also be communicated clearly to programme participants, so that they are aware of and able to articulate them to future employers.

¹⁸ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/facing-the-future/>

- EY Foundation should consider opportunities to **connect young people with online networks or groups**, for example, Black or LGBTQI* employees.¹⁹

Remove barriers to online delivery

Online or hybrid modes of delivery should not be seen as a cheap or less time consuming alternative to face-to-face delivery. Designing and delivering good online support requires its own skills and specialisms, and needs to be person rather than technology centred. If online or hybrid delivery is to be successful, young people need support in terms of training, technology, and a safe place to work. Some groups of young people will need more extensive or tailored support than others. Further evidence is needed to understand the effectiveness of online or hybrid delivery for young people, however, it is already clear that young people, particularly from disadvantaged groups, need access to technology and high quality specialist teaching if they are to learn successfully online.²⁰

- **EY Foundation should continue to provide young people with the technology they need** and should consider either extending the loan to cover the time they are mentored (as well as the core programme), or even donating equipment to participants to support their ongoing skills development and access to online opportunities.

- The Foundation should also make it clearer that they can provide young people with data plans to address concerns/anxieties about Wi-Fi and access to a reliable internet connection.

- **EY Foundation should provide accessible guides to using all the technologies young people will encounter** during their work experience. This should include fact sheets, videos, and drop in sessions that they can attend.
- **The programme induction should cover the ground rules for home working** so young people know what is expected from them in an online working environment and the support that they can expect to receive from EY Foundation.
- **Young people who do not have a quiet, comfortable place to work should be offered co-working space or a face-to-face mode of delivery.** EY Foundation should consider offering co-working space via stakeholders or supply chains, to ensure good geographical coverage.
- **Further data collection and analysis is needed to understand whether online delivery has more negative impacts on particular groups of young people,** as the immediate impact of Covid-19 diminishes (for example those who are ESOL speakers or come from ethnic minority groups).

¹⁹ EY and EY Foundation identify the importance of networks for Black employers in their recent report Getting In and Getting On https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-for-com/en_uk/topics/diversity/ey-getting-in-and-getting-on-report.pdf?download

²⁰ https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Covid-19_Resources/Remote_Learning_evidence_review/Remote_Learning_Rapid_Evidence_Assessment.pdf

Create flexible offers for different employers

Some of the employers interviewed for this research were keen to return as soon as possible to face-to-face work experience. However, other employers are planning to permanently move to online working for at least some of the time.²¹ Positioning EY Foundation as able to deliver high quality work experience face-to-face, online or hybrid would mean their programme could reach new employers. This might include sectors such as nuclear plants where authorising physical access is challenging, companies with a wide international reach, as well as organisations who may not have the time and space to support young people for a week-long physical work experience.

- EY Foundation should develop a portfolio of business experience offers, including different modes of delivery with flexibility around the length and intensity. This should include case studies showing how business experience can be effectively delivered online, with different employers and different groups of young people.
- EY Foundation should consider whether hybrid models of work experience would enable young people to be hosted at more than one employer. This would benefit young people by giving them insight into different employers, sectors, and job roles, and enable them to interact with a wider range of people and networks.



²¹ Future working practices post Covid have not yet been established, however, early indications are that there will be a rise in the number of people working from home for some or all the time <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/businessandindividualattitudestowardsthefutureofhomeworkinguk/apriltomay2021>



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Charity registration no. 1002775

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