

Adult Education, skills and employment



What did we discover about adult education, skills and employment in Ilfracombe?

THE PROBLEM

- Many individuals facing long-term unemployment, especially those dealing with disability, mental health issues, age-related challenges, and living in detrimental social and environmental conditions, encounter **systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing training, having positive skills development experiences and re-entering the workforce.**
- The existing support systems, like Job Centres, often **fail to provide adequate resources** and can show **a lack of empathy**, leaving **people feeling unworthy, unheard, and unsupported.**
- Additionally, there are **many untapped opportunities for skill development** that are not fully accessible due to financial pressures, fear of how they could affect benefits, health concerns, or lack of flexibility in existing programs.

How did we **define** the problem as a design challenge?

How might we support individuals experiencing long-term unemployment and disability, with a focus on dignity, empowerment, and the development of skills for self-sufficiency. Providing long-term stability, pathways to employment and personal growth opportunities for people who are often overlooked by traditional employment systems.



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How did we develop this?

Our working group included the Academy, Junior school, DWP and Community Commissioners. Petroc, Learn Devon and the Town Council/ One Ilfracombe joined as guests. We considered the types of relevant courses (skills gaps), places to promote courses and how people can be supported to access and progress their learning.

- A connection was made with the One Ilfracombe 'Employment and skills' group to share insights. This group have enabled a local employment hub, are engaging with businesses to increase skills development opportunities and are organising a jobs fair in Feb 2026.
- **New adult education courses** from Petroc and Learn Devon were held in Ilfracombe's junior school (Maths and English for parents and carers) and Academy (Art and Design and Woodwork skills), making access for parents easier. This is the first time in 20 years that free adult learning courses have been held in the Academy.
- We worked with the DCC employment hub to support individuals to access courses
- A letter of support for a transport bid to improve access to offsite courses
- The Library and DCC employment hub offered to **support people to sign up if unable to access online**
- **DWP outreach service extended and connected** with the DCC employment hub

What next?

Short term:

- Produce communications plan to enable access to courses
- Build lived experience involvement into the One Ilfracombe work and skills group

Medium term:

- Enable courses to continue and develop
- Course providers and DWP must work together to build on any successes and understand the barriers that stop people accessing these opportunities to help reduce any fears or concerns and increase access
- Gather feedback (access, experience and outcomes) to build understanding of how attendees can be best supported to progress their learning
- Connect with emerging 'humanise work' (incl. campus model)

Long term:

- An established supported learning programme in Ilfracombe