



NATIONAL LEP PARTNERS EVENT

Collated Feedback

December 2025



COLLATED FEEDBACK FROM NATIONAL LOCAL EMPLOYABILITY PARTNERS EVENT – Wednesday 3rd December 2025

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AGENDA for the day

09:00	Networking soft start – come when suits!
10:00	Welcome – Ruth Cooper, Chair of SLAED People Group National Context - Claire Renton, Scottish Government
10:25	Exploring the impact and enablers of partnership working
11:15	<i>Comfort break</i>
11:30	Thematic table discussions - Part 1
12:30	<i>LUNCH and networking</i>
13:30	Welcome back
13:35	Thematic table discussions - Part 2
14:35	<i>Comfort Break</i>
14:50	Panel: Key Stakeholder Reflections on the Day
15:45	Final thoughts
16:00	Event close, but feel free to stay and chat until 5pm

INTRODUCTION: Purpose and overview of event

A PPROXIMATELY 140 employability colleagues from across a range of partners delivering employability in Scotland, came together at the recent National Local Employability Partners (LEP) Event, held in Glasgow on Wednesday 3rd December 2025.

The event, organised on behalf of the **Local Employability Partnership Chairs' Group**, was designed to bring together LEP members from all key partners, from all local authority areas across Scotland, to share good practice, discuss opportunities and challenges, and strengthen local and national networks.

The day was hosted by **Ruth Cooper**, Chair of the Scottish Local Authority Economic Development (SLAED) People Group, Economic Development Manager in Renfrewshire Council and Chair of the Renfrewshire LEP.



Ruth welcomed partners to the event and laid out the agenda and ambitions for the day. She urged colleagues to use the day to their best advantage, by **choosing the discussion areas** they were most interested in, **sharing experiences and asking questions of colleagues**, and above all by **reflecting on the journey we have all been on to strengthen the employability system across the country**.

Ruth welcomed **Claire Renton, Deputy Director for Employability at Scottish Government**, who helped set the scene for the day: Detailing how far we had come since the launch of No One Left Behind in 2019, current labour market challenges, Employability Strategic Plan activity and the outcomes and progress we have all made.

Claire was delighted to announce that the **refreshed LEP Framework** had been published that very morning and commended the work of all partners who had been involved in updating the very valuable tool. The publication of the document was perfectly timed to coincide with the event.



WORKSHOP: Strengthening Partnership Working

Exploring the impact and enablers of partnership working

Ailsa Clark from Inspiralba led an Appreciative Inquiry session where participants worked in threes to explore the question:

‘When have you experienced collaboration that truly made a difference in your life, your community, or your work?’

Each triad then selected the three ‘golden nuggets’ in terms of enabling factors and these were grouped and themed on a wall.

The following themes emerged and can be applied to collaboration in our home lives, in frontline services and in our strategic partnerships:

TRUST was the most common and important theme. Elements related to this include the importance of **TIME**, **TRANSPARENCY**, **GOOD COMMUNICATION** (including managing expectations), **SAFE SPACES** and **STRONG RELATIONSHIPS of RESPECT**.

Having **SHARED GOALS** and **VALUES** (a **GOLDEN THREAD**) and a **partnership** mindset was seen as critical. Engaging with people’s **PASSION** and **POSITIVITY** to make a difference. Having the *‘right people at the table’* matters: Sometimes these are people in leadership roles and sometimes these are people just up for making change happen.

On which note, **MINDSETS** noted as supporting collaboration included being willing to be **HONEST**, **BRAVE**, **CURIOUS**, and **CREATIVE**; *‘willing to question and change’* AND *‘to try things and get it wrong sometimes’*.

Shared purpose was balanced with the importance of respecting and valuing **MULTIPLE & DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES** and taking **community/place-based approaches**: *‘Don’t undervalue small contributions’*. It is important that we understand each partner’s unique **STRENGTHS**, their **ROLE**, and their **CHALLENGES**

STRUCTURES which were noted as supporting collaboration included: a ‘chartership’ partnership agreement, collective action plans, collaborative data sharing, collective understanding of knowledge and data gaps (e.g. employers and service users), co-location of services, and investing in structures *‘that exist to bring people together’*. *‘Celebrating SUCCESS – gives motivation to continue’*

Ensuring **leadership involvement** and getting the **political will** makes a difference.

Whilst **funding and sharing resources** were mentioned by some the focus was *‘Collaboration not driven by funding but driven by need’*

And finally, whilst structures and processes support collaboration, as one group noted: *‘Swan/Duck! - all the work behind the scenes’*



THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

Throughout the day participants had the opportunity to participate in two thematic discussions as listed below using the framing: What? So What? and What Now?

The notes from the combined discussions are summarised in the following pages.

TOPICS FOR BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS
How do we grow trust and positive relationships?
How are we measuring success, ensuring value for money and continuous improvement?
What does a mixed economy of provision actually look like?
How might we improve our use of local and national data and evidence to inform future planning?
How might we improve our engagement and learning from people who use our services?
How can we improve our employer engagement?
How can we better connect with the Tackling Child Poverty/Fair Futures Partnership Agendas
How might regional working and partnership help us locally?



Thematic Discussion 1: How do we grow trust and positive relationships

What is happening?
<p>Challenges to growing trust and positive relationships included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication from LA to LEP/from LEP to providers • LEP too Council heavy/controlled and/or LA feels LEP partners are not fully engaging. • Lack of transparency in funding decisions.... Lack of change in funded programmes • Third sector feeling undervalued • Chairperson with 'own agenda', generating lack of trust in LEP members <p>Positive experiences included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEP Members are strategic and old existing partners (comfortable shoes). • Openness to including wider partners, willingness to focus on the 'bigger picture', engaging with diverse members as equal partners. Encouraging challenge • Having a shared brand (e.g. Glasgow Futures) to coalesce around • Sharing information: data and opportunities openly • Having LEP induction and sharing info on structure, membership widely (e.g. via website) • Hosting Thematic Summits • Having a history of working well together helps! And seeing that your voice has influence so you are more active
So What? What impact does this have?
<p>Impacts when things are challenging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of balance in the partnership, frustration by those involved AND by other partners and services. When challenged people get defensive so problems not resolved. Lack of planning collectively on funding, and ultimately clients are let down. <p>Impacts when things work well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge is seen as an opportunity for change, improved integration between services, reduced duplication of effort, reduced frustration, improved value for money and ultimately better services and outcomes for clients.
What Now? What actions can partners take to improve things?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make time for relationship building as individuals (formal and informal) AND for team building such as through LEP Development Days • Invest in support for marginalised partners e.g. third sector. Link partners to share learning and expertise • Set shared vision, values and ways of working. Understand each other's roles and responsibilities. Be willing to call out inappropriate behaviour sensitively • Focus on values of honesty, transparency, respect and ownership • Have the 'right' Chairperson who can host welcoming, collaborative meetings • Have clear sub-group structures, open to relevant partners not on the core LEP • Focus on Communication: induction for new members, info on LEP available publicly, structures to communicate with wider sector (e.g. local Forums and newsletters)

Thematic Discussion 2: How are we measuring success, ensuring value for money and continuous improvement?

What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of methods to gather feedback- text messages, surveys, case studies, filming events, feedback from employers • Carrying out self-assessment and evaluation – using Shared Measurement Framework, asking partners to evaluate themselves, reviewing LEP maturity assessment report • Using data and evidence – Own MIS/Hanlon, SG presenting stats comparing LA against national, DWP Labour Market Pack is useful, skills analysis, • Mixed bag of funding impacts reporting - measuring outcomes of LEP funded provision, how do we measure external provision, challenge of annualised funding • LEP Relationships – transparent sharing of performance data, informs planning days — all working together
So What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEP partners work better together when open and transparent – share info and challenges – work to mitigate impact and build solutions • Understanding gaps in service delivery – to understand what else do we need for economic inactivity, health, specialist support • Using performance data to support improvement and guide commissioning – difficulty in identifying baseline • DWP funding still a mystery – what is available, what is it for • Starting to focus more on feedback from lived experience – more responsive, quality assurance, identifying gaps and understanding emerging needs • Challenges in relation to the almost definite loss of UKSPF – and late award of SG funding.
What Now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understand who offers what – funding, provision and wider offer outwith LEP • Consider social value - ‘Social Return on Investment’ - to evidence cost/value • Volunteering – refine definition for this – can be an important pathway to work • National and local capacity building – for all partners – sharing tools, showcasing innovation, funding, different provision, consortia models, visiting other LEPs • Ensure sub-groups meet local needs – specific themes or groups – and partners take ownership

“We need better discussions with DWP to understand what funding is available and how we can better use it to support better outcomes.”

“A bank of case studies and more opportunities to share what is working in other areas would be useful for others looking to develop services.”

Thematic Discussion: What does a mixed economy of provision actually look like?

What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics differ – some areas have lots of jobs available but low unemployment, with many on health journeys (Western Isles) whilst others struggle to meet demand • Structure of provision is different in every area – some deliver most of their services internally/ through an ALEO, sometimes due to lack of third sector activity – others have a mix of internal and procured providers – whilst some rely heavily on external providers • Transparency - in funding pots, allocation policies and decision making vary – can be confusing for some partners and providers – especially smaller providers • Recruitment processes for big employers such as NHS can be challenging – how can this be simplified at a local level
So What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different provision is offered at different places, for different needs, by different organisations – and differs whether rural or urban. • There are challenges that come with LEP funding – sometimes the funding doesn't meet all the demands that come with it. We need to work with SG to prioritise. • NOLB funds are meant to come through LAs to support a mixed economy of provision - not to LAs for their own purpose. • Employability support changes lives – many different organisations are involved in the delivery of these services.
What Now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to agree that young people are still the core service! • More transparency in local processes and funding parameters are required – some decisions still being made behind closed doors • ALL Partners need to bring resources/funding to the table – not just SG/LG. • Better reporting on the overall provision of activities – not just funded activities, LA delivery too. We need more consistency in reporting on activity across all areas, and across all provision. • Consider whether regional working would support a better, more mixed delivery model – less postcode lottery, more person focussed. • Offer more support to third sector organisations around applying for funding and understanding the administration required to manage and report on the funding. • Consider how we work with national or bigger employers to simplify recruitment and on-boarding processes to drive better outcomes for all.

“A mixed economy of provision is where we are all using our strengths and resources – whether public, private or third sector – for the best outcomes for people who need our services.”

Thematic Discussion: How might we improve our use of local and national data and evidence to inform future planning?

What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of data being gathered – too much, inaccurate, measuring the wrong things or can be out of date or missing – are we measuring the wrong things? • Data sharing issues - held centrally, may not be accessible and/or usable by all partners – SDS/DWP data • Data gathering and narrative reporting for SG is cumbersome and purpose of some data collected isn't clear – doesn't feel proportionate or relevant for some providers • Difficult to get economic inactivity data – particularly by reasons and geography • Potential disconnect between local data and decision-making • Some areas have good data which is being used to map, plan and review activity
So What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unreliable data doesn't help to inform resources or practice, or help identify gaps – sometimes deliver service to meet data but demand isn't there/is misunderstood • Better data supports more effective delivery – how do we drill down to what's important • Rural poverty can be hidden and therefore difficult to address • (lack of) Data sharing is holding partnerships back and impacting on relationships • Not collecting data that would be valuable - on unmet need, to target underrepresented needs, showing soft skills outcomes and other progress that makes an impact • Can get too caught up with data – need to focus on addressing issues and not just gathering more data! • Feedback from employers and labour market data could be really useful – but there is a lack of this
What Now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support national ask to SG for a national database that can be used by all – and provides local and national feedback • In the meantime, find a way to better align data, share systems or at least join up with other data sets • Review what data sharing agreements are in place or required – locally and nationally • Map and rationalise the data we have so we better understand what we have and what it tells us – we don't need to collect any more that says the same thing • Create a data dashboard with a small number of KPIs to measure impact and track progress – local and national? • Establish an operational data group to share best practice of how LEPs are accessing data and developing practical solutions • Better understand the link of how health inequality data feeds into employability data and vice versa • Understand how we get better data from employers to support better employment outcomes • Consider whether AI can help interpret data

Thematic Discussion: How might we improve our engagement and learning from people who use our services?

What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different areas at different stages with embedding user voice. Some areas have established co-production and Lived Experience (LE) Panels, and LE Groups feeding into sub-groups or with space on LEP Board. Others just on the journey. • Significant range of ways of engaging from: informal conversations to more formal activities using art, story gathering, film-making, surveys, exit interviews, engaging with re-referrals or early leavers, award ceremonies, home visits, ESOL activities, case review panels and customer insight (DWP). Online and in-person. • Peer Support Forums are a good way of discovering new challenges and solutions • Important to engage with range of partners and target groups which is challenging. Methods of gathering voice need to be accessible/appropriate to the target group. • Feedback can be from one extreme to another which is hard.
So What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are on the right track but there is a LOT more to be done. • When done well it helps inform, shape and develop plans,. It means the LEP knows what is working and what isn't. It is not all about the good news stories. Also important to note that feedback can be unreliable or skewed (positively or negatively) • Allocation of resource is better, more targeted & person-centred, with greater buy-in from word of mouth and ultimately more successful • Learn that the language we use to talk about our services does not always make sense to people who are using them. Too jargony. 'Do people even know what employability means?' • To reach clients we need to reach further into communities. Third Sector providers often have better trust than Councils & DWP. We can leverage this to get honest & constructive feedback.
What Now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of questions around: how to share feedback & with whom; when to consult (before commissioning?); how to have sensitive conversations; how to reach the ones who don't engage at all? • Recognise it won't be 'pretty' - we need to create space for the good and bad. • Use things like Listening Circles, surveys, local and community-based spaces, a VARIETY of ways for different needs/audiences. Make it natural; no one-size fits all. • Make it meaningful: Think about what is in it for the participants; establish clear route for feedback into LEP, to inform commissioning and oversight • Think about peer-to-peer and how we can use previous participants as advocates? • Celebrate every achievement, not just a job, but the whole journey.

"If we only collect good news stories, we don't find opportunities to improve."

Thematic Discussion: How can we improve our employer engagement?

What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers include public and third sector as well as business. This is important in context of Community Wealth Building and Anchor Institutions • Approaches vary significantly across Scotland. Some areas have established employer engagement groups, host employer-focussed events, partner with employers to host work placements, fund bespoke academies, do targeted work on childcare and have good partnerships with DYW, Chambers and DWP • Challenges include different partners contacting the same employers with different offers and asks, difficulty getting employers on board, lack of a 'carrot' to offer, and coordinating partner activity • SMEs have unique challenges e.g. affordability, wages and equity, recruitment processes, payment and job readiness of young people • Key partners mentioned as: DYW, DWP, Chambers of Commerce, Business Gateway and large employers, e.g. NHS • Employers are affected by related challenges such as childcare and transport. • In-work poverty is hard to get on employer's agenda
So What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts are not informed by data and the needs of employers and so do not consider key gaps and priority sectors • Funding is siloed and support remains fragmented • The curriculum (schools and FE/HE) does not meet employer needs • In rural areas (lack of) transport acts as a significant barrier • Employers disengage/don't get involved and there are less meaningful jobs for local people
What Now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get help from Scottish Government to influence and connect at national level? • Share successes e.g. with national/big employers. Use videos to show value of engaging with employability providers and participants • Joint Strategy and branding – between DWP, LEP, and others with common outcomes • Understand and articulate employer needs, tailoring support and signposting • Coordinate – fund post coordinating work? Grow awareness of multi-agency support, improve comms, focus on upskilling/training • Provide funding for smaller employers through incentives and free training • Connect to new employers via networks such as Chambers of Commerce, DWP Business Breakfasts & Sectoral Summits • Engage with Healthy Working Lives- focus on SMEs, HR, creating healthy workplaces • Grow flexible recruitment. Provide guidance on supporting health needs (incl. Voc rehab) • Use responsible local procurement to extend reach. Consider role of anchor institutions • Go back to basics – help employers understand what 'we' can do to help. Personas can be helpful to think through Comms.

Thematic Discussion: How can we better connect with the Tackling Child Poverty/ Fairer Futures Partnership agendas?

What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some areas report difficulty in engaging with parents – or when they do, the progress is slow because the participant isn't ready to progress to work • There is a range of internally delivered and externally commissioned support for parents being delivered • Childcare is an enduring issue - good test and trial work going on around childcare provision and work experience opportunities in early years • Examples of where whole family support links in with employability key worker support to offer health and wellbeing and other support to drive better outcomes • Local Authority and NHS demonstrator programmes for parents – paid placements allowing access to redeployment register and employment opportunities • More income maximisation support on offer for parents – and ensuring that they are aware of what they stand to gain through working
So What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept that working with parents takes longer and is more resource intensive than you would imagine • Entry level jobs rarely take anyone out of poverty – need to look at skills training and in work support to develop skills for faster progression • Where there are difficulty filling jobs in NHS/LAs – they could guarantee outcomes if successful completion of paid placement • Employers are highlighting vacancies but not always supportive of individual's barriers
What Now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission more smaller/hyper local organisations to engage with harder to reach communities • Ensure the right people, from the right organisations are involved at all levels and focus more on shared resources • Streamline funding pots – single pot of funds with input from all partners – and co-commission services (Glasgow, Falkirk) • Consider best practice and the experience of other areas to identify how to offer better support to help parents remain in work • Better use of data to identify specific geographic areas to target with whole family support – create dashboard • Make better use of peer support and lived experience to grow confidence in those who aren't engaging

“Focus more on shared purpose and resources - ‘pooling’ of funds.”

“Ensure the right people are on the right sub-groups – don’t duplicate!”

Thematic Discussion: How might regional working and partnerships help us locally?

What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local working is still the most appropriate – but can give great benefit in smaller LAs to link in with their neighbours • Whilst there is some consideration of regional working – majority still value local approach • Some good examples of regional approaches – Forth Valley, the Ayrshires, City Regions – although sometimes focussed on funding rather than delivery • Community wealth building approaches are often regional and college partnerships work when across smaller areas rather than cities • NHS would prefer to work on Health Board area approach – some good practice being developed where LAs work together and use same processes/paperwork etc
So What?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint events for staff/ organisations are a good approach to building knowledge and understanding, sharing good practice and inspiring others to consider different methods of delivery • More effective voice when areas join up and deliver shared opinions and messaging across stakeholders and regions • Understanding regional labour market intelligence and using wider data sources supports better outcomes for participants • Regional approaches to funding activities means that more participants can access support that may not be available in their own LEP area
What Now?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider where the easy regional wins are – Tayside? – and encourage a more regional strategic outlook • Use more regional data and wider good practice to shape conversations and planning at a local level • Support more experience across the sector – for teachers, careers advisors, whole family support – especially in career management and workplace skills development • Consider how we engage more with the regional economic partnerships, better link up around sectors and support a regional employer engagement approach • Identify where a flexible approach, working with some LAs within a region – may be useful for some specific projects

“Local is still best, but we need to make the most of regional opportunities when they present themselves.”

“Having the ability to deliver in a wider geographical area allows all sectors to participate in delivery.”

Evaluation Summary

Menti Poll from the event:

From the menti poll carried out at the beginning of the session around what participants wanted to get out of the day, the key themes were:

Good practice and learning from other areas and organisations, networking and connections, ideas and understanding about how other areas have tackled challenges.

At the end of the session, participants were asked for their reflections on the day, and the key messages were:

A great event, sharing and shared good practice, confirmed priorities, partnership is key to success, a very inspiring day, great networking event and a good opportunity to reflect and to look forward.

At the end of the event, participants were asked to share how they felt about partnership in their LEP going forward? This is shared in the word cloud below:



Smart Survey Evaluation Summary:

The evaluation was sent out after the event and received 63 responses – 61 of whom had attended for the full day. Responses noted below.

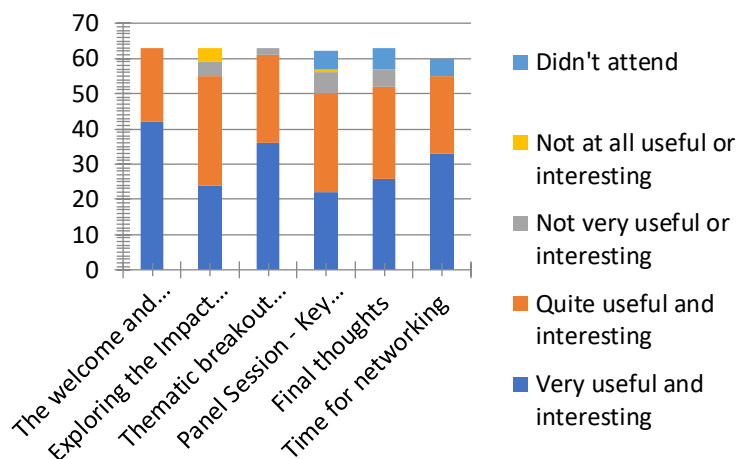
How would you rate the following:					
Answer Choice	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
1 Communication and preparation prior to the event	40	22	1	0	63
2 The venue - accessibility, comfort, facilities etc	40	22	1	0	63
3 The catering - refreshments and lunch	36	27	0	0	63
4 The event arrangements overall	45	17	1	0	63
answered					63

Participants were asked to rate the different sessions held throughout the day, from very, to not at all useful or interesting. **The welcome and scene setting were deemed the most useful and interesting.**

Almost all who attended the event felt that they were able to take part in discussions, with only 2 out of the 63 not feeling able to contribute.

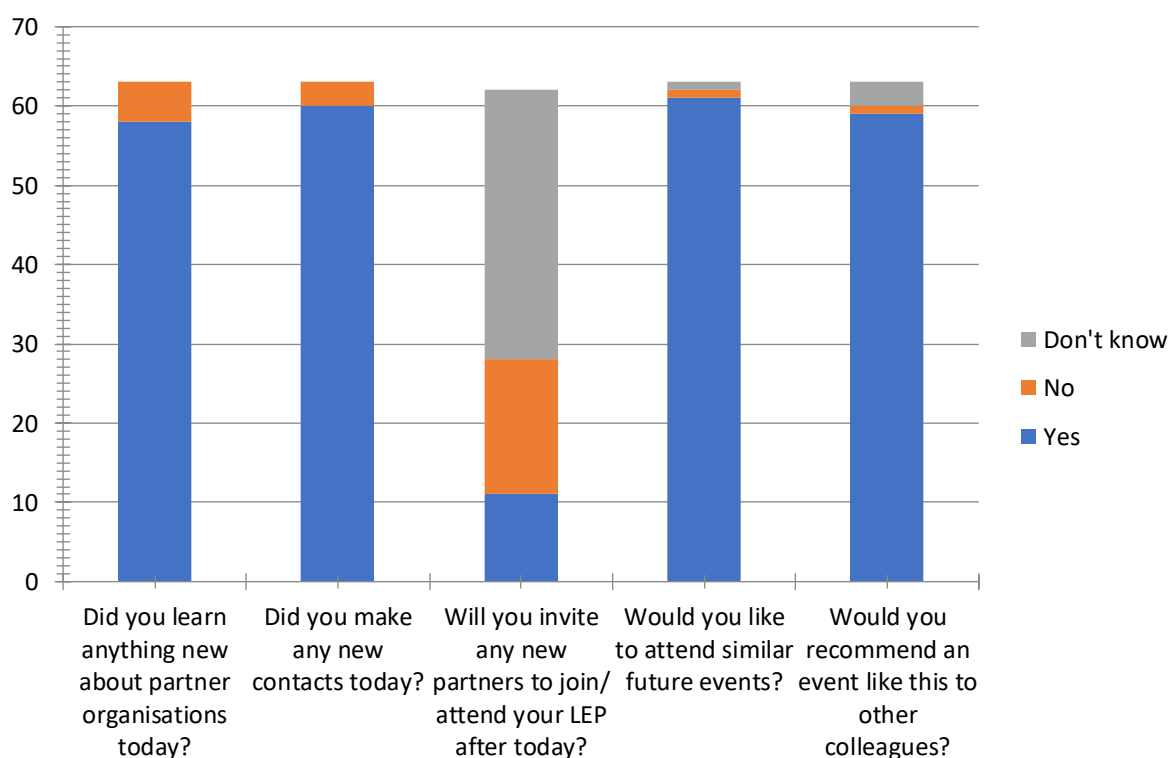
A total of 61 out of the 63 responses felt that the discussions they took part in on the day would **influence their approach to partnership working** when they returned to their LEP.

How useful and interesting did you find the different sessions?



The majority, 58 of all respondents, agreed they had **learned something new** about their partners organisations, with 60 participants saying that they had **made new contacts** during the event and 61 confirming that they would **like to attend similar events in future**. See below chart for further feedback.

Please tell us about your experience of today:



Finally, there was free space for comments and suggestions. Below is the AI (Copilot) summary of both positive, and not so positive, feedback:

✔ **Positive Themes**

- **Networking Opportunities**
 - Great space for discussion and networking.
 - Excellent engagement and enthusiasm from partners.
 - Opportunity to connect with a wide range of stakeholders.
 - **Event Organisation**
 - Well-organised and well-run event.
 - Appreciated the structure (not “death by presentation”).
 - Good instructions for parking and logistics.
 - **Content & Format**
 - Useful discussions.
 - Interesting to contrast different approaches across LAs.
 - Appreciated the focus on interaction rather than presentations.
 - **Overall Experience**
 - Many attendees described the day as “great,” “brilliant,” and “very worthwhile.”
 - Strong appetite for repeating the event.
-

✘ **Negative Themes**

- **Workshop Structure & Timing**
 - Sessions were too long (60 mins); suggestions for 30 - 40 mins for more variety.
 - Limited ability to attend multiple sessions.
 - Discussions sometimes lacked focus and went off-topic.
 - Suggestions for low level facilitation/ expert leads, to support parity in participation.
- **Content Depth**
 - Desire for more strategic discussions (policy alignment, best practice sharing).
 - Some sessions perceived as too “soft” or lacking actionable insights.
 - Requests for case studies or presentations from high-performing regions.
- **Logistics & Venue**
 - Glasgow location challenging for travel (especially winter); preference for Central Scotland (Stirling, Perth).
 - Room acoustics were poor, even with microphones.
 - Lunch break felt too long for some.
- **Additional Suggestions**
 - Seating plans to mix attendees.
 - Attendee list for targeted networking.
 - More tables or shorter time to increase session variety.

FINAL THANKS:

With many thanks to everyone who made the day a success. From the planning group to our workshop facilitators, through to our expert panel and our knight in shining armour who donated the stationery and resources for the day, to all the volunteers who supported registration, setting up, clearing up and capturing the discussions from the tables, you very all very valued and appreciated.

And thank you to all who attended and shared their good practice, asked questions and spoke about the opportunities, challenges and work that was underway in your own areas. See you next year!