SPFL Trust

CashBack

Off the Bench

Phase 6 Final Report

2023 - 26

spfl.org.uk/cotb

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Welcome

At the SPFL Trust, we believe strongly in the power of football to connect with young people in unique and impactful ways.

CashBack Off the Bench reflects that belief, creating a trusted, inclusive space where young people can access support, build confidence, and take meaningful steps toward a positive future.

Funded by the Scottish Government's CashBack for Communities initiative, the programme offers a blend of education, physical activity, accredited learning and wellbeing support. Delivered through our network of ATCs, young people aged 16–25 gain qualifications, develop life and employability skills, and build supportive relationships with staff and peers..

Across Phase 6 (2023–2026), this programme has made a real difference. We've witnessed first hand young people reduce their risk-taking behaviours, strengthen their resilience, and move into volunteering, training, education and employment. Their achievements highlight both their determination and the dedication of the teams who work alongside them throughout their journey.

My sincere thanks go to all delivery staff, ATC's, partner organisations, and to the Scottish Government for their vital role in delivering the programme. Their commitment has helped create supportive, meaningful opportunities for young people to take charge of their own futures

Most importantly, I want to thank every young person who took part. Your progress, hard work, and belief in what's possible are what defines CashBack Off the Bench.

Nicky Reid
CEO, SPFL Trust

Throughout this document, you will see us refer to ATCs - this means SPFL associated trusts and clubs

Phase 6 Final Report (2023 - 2026)

What is ***CashBack Off the Bench?***

Funded by the Scottish Government's CashBack for Communities programme, Off the Bench works to provide young people aged 16-25 with an opportunity to access education, physical and mental health support to build better futures.

Young people work on the programme towards achieving accredited awards, including in First Aid, a SCQF Level 4 Employability Award and Scottish FA Level 1.1 Coaching Badge.

The programme is also supported by a network of partners to enable young people to build a better path going forward.

Who is off the bench for?

Off the Bench is for young people who:

- Are aged 16-25
- Want to gain new qualifications and build new skills
- Want to power their potential and take the next step to a positive destination

CashBack objectives

- Support young people most at risk of antisocial behaviour, offending or reoffending to move into education, employment or training
- Provide person-centred support for young people, parents and families impacted by adverse childhood experiences and trauma
- Support young people to improve their health, mental health and wellbeing
- Support people, families and communities most affected by crime

What do participants gain from the programme?

- New skills and qualifications
- Access to support to secure further education and career support
- Increased knowledge to support and improve their physical and mental health
- Build connections within their local community
- Opportunities to volunteer at their local SPFL club or ATC
- Access to education, physical and mental health support to build better futures
- A chance to get behind the scenes at their favourite football club

COTB in numbers **2023-2026**

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
Participating clubs	4	5	4	13
Participant total	41	73	63	177

* The Killie Community delivered twice in Year 2 and Year 3

SIMD Profile	**2023/24**	**2024/25**	**2025/26**	**Total**
SIMD profle 0 - 20%	20	41	44	105
SIMD profle 20 - 30%	8	15	16	39
SIMD profle 30 - 40%	6	5	3	14
SIMD profle 40 - 50%	6	3	0	9
SIMD profle 50 - 100%	1	7	0	8
Did not disclose	0	2	0	2

* SIMD is the Scottish Government's official tool for identifying areas of high deprivation. SIMD categorises individuals into segments based on their social grade, demographics and lifestyle characteristics, with a lower percentage referring to more disadvantaged groups.

Participant ages	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
16-18	20	20	37	77
19-25	21	48	25	94
Over 25	0	1	0	1
Didn't disclose	0	4	1	5

Gender	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
Male	35	59	56	150
Female	6	9	7	22
Non-binary	0	1	0	1
Prefer not to say	0	4	0	4

Disability	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
Disability identified	20	21	12	53

Sexual orientation	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
Straight/ heterosexual	36	63	56	155
Homosexual	1	0	2	3
Bisexual	0	6	0	6
Prefer not to say	4	4	5	13

Ethnicity	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
White Scottish/ other	32	58	57	147
Black Scottish/ other	0	2	2	4
Asian Scottish/ other	1	5	0	6
Other ethnicity	7	5	2	14
Prefer not to say	1	3	2	6

Overall ***programme performance***

Looking Back

Across Phase 6, CashBack Off the Bench has grown in reach and impact, supporting 177 young people over three years. This progress has been made possible through the commitment of our delivery partners and stakeholders, whose dedication has shaped the success of the programme and the achievements of its participants.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Participating clubs	4	5	4
Number of Participants	41	73	63

The numbers below are based on the participants who completed our exit survey

82%

participants secured a positive destination

90%

of participants reported improved mental health and a more positive outlook on life

96%

of participants report positive changes in their behaviour

Outcome one

Young people are diverted from antisocial, criminal behaviour and involvement

Throughout CashBack Off the Bench, young people learn about the risks involved in antisocial behaviour and criminal involvement. ATCs work with several partners such as Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland* to better understand the effects of risk-taking behaviour.

Participants engaged meaningfully with activities designed to raise awareness of antisocial behaviour and its consequences.

Support from both ATC staff and our community of partners has helped build confidence, significantly reducing risk-taking behaviour and building resilience.

Police Scotland contributed 45 hours of time to support programme delivery across phase 6.

81%

of participants report that their own participation in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour has reduced

81%

participants report that they feel less inclined to participate in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour

Outcome Two

Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment opportunities

Support is provided for young people on the programme to gain qualifications and work towards securing a positive future. Participants are supported to complete the SQA employability award, supporting their skills development and helping establish their next steps and journey to employment or education.

Through the qualifications, skills and confidence gained on CashBack Off the Bench, young people are supported to reach their potential and move into education, training, or employment

162

of participants gained an accreditation for a new skill

31

participants achieved a college or university placement following the programme

45

participants achieved a modern apprenticeship or employment following the programme

34

participants gained training or work experience opportunities following the programme

36

participants gained volunteering opportunities following the programme

Outcome Three

Young people's health, mental health and wellbeing improves

Participants engage in physical activities during each session, accompanied by nutritious breakfasts and lunches. These activities foster confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities.

To ensure this support goes beyond physical health alone, the programme draws on the Scottish Government's national wellbeing framework. This approach helps us understand each young person's wider needs and progress, using eight SHANARRI indicators, Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included, as the foundation for measuring overall wellbeing.

In addition, practical support played a key role in reducing barriers to participation, with each young person receiving programme kit, toiletry packs, and food provision throughout their time on the course. Discretionary funds were also available to assist with interview clothing and personal circumstances, and tailored food packs were provided for participants observing religious fasting.

Many reported that prior to joining, they felt they had lost their way, but involvement in COTB gave them renewed structure, purpose, and motivation towards achieving their personal goals

Over 7000

hours of physical activity were completed by participants during their time on the course

Over 8500

meals were provided to participants during their time on the course

90%

of participants reported their mental health has improved and they have a more positive outlook on life

97%

participants reported they are more aware of the risks and impacts of harmful substance use

91%

participants reported increased confidence

Outcome Four

Young people contribute positively to their communities

We know how much of a positive impact young people can have in our communities throughout Scotland, and with CashBack Off the Bench, participants are encouraged and supported to do so.

Participants acquired valuable team working and problem-solving skills, while also raising awareness in their local communities about the issues affecting them.

All participants were also supported to register for the Saltire Awards and to log their volunteering hours throughout the programme, ensuring their contribution was formally recognised.

"I really enjoyed the activities and being involved and listened to"

1,547
hours of volunteering completed

80%
of participants report a heightened sense of belonging to a community

79%
of participants report they have increased motivation to positively influence what happens in their community

73%
of participants report that their perception of their neighbourhood has improved

79%
of participants report feeling their contribution, links with communities and social interaction are improving

Outcome Five

Young people build their personal skills, resilience and benefit from strengthened support

Mentoring is a central part of CashBack Off the Bench, offering young people consistent one-to-one guidance from fully trained coaches. These relationships help participants feel supported, understood, and equipped to navigate challenges both within and beyond the programme.

With increased delivery time across Phase 6, staff were able to build stronger, more meaningful connections with each young person. This allowed for tailored support, boosted morale, and created an environment where participants could grow in self-belief, develop healthier routines, and strengthen their decision-making skills.

84%

of participants report feeling more resilient

97%

of participants report an increase in positive, supportive networks, including improved relationships with family, friends and peer mentors

75%

of participants report increased access to appropriate services

96%

of participants report positive changes in their behaviour

650

one-to-one mentoring sessions were provided to participants through Progressive Pathways.

Scottish Government
Policy Areas in Focus

Best Start, Bright Futures

CashBack Off the Bench was designed considering the Scottish Government's 'Bright Start, Bright Futures' strategy.

Aimed at people aged 16-25, we believe the programme can positively influence their long-term prospects - as well as the lives of those around them.

Research indicates that living within 10 miles of an SPFL football club makes you three times more likely to experience poverty. This is why ATCs are uniquely placed to drive meaningful change within our communities.

Throughout the programme, participants receive the following:

- Breakfast each morning, to help support a healthy start to the day
- Lunch every day and surplus food to take home
- Support to secure their free bus travel
- Support to achieve SQA awards
- Support to prepare for employment, including mock interviews and CV support
- Free use of electronic devices to support them on the programme
- Kit provided as their uniform, which can be washed on site if required
- Signposting to external stakeholders
- Pathways into other ATC projects that may benefit them
- Physical activity each day, delivered by trained coaches
- Support and signposting for mental health provided by Progressive Pathways

Children's Rights

Scotland should be a fantastic place for all children and young people to grow up and learn in. For many it is, but to make it that place for everybody, young people need to have all of their rights respected at all times

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) lists all the things that children are entitled to as they grow up.

This includes having the chance to live and develop healthily, the right to primary and secondary education, and the right to rest, play and take part. You can read more about UNCRC on our website.

At each CashBack Off the Bench delivery partner, staff have completed training to make sure all key points are met, complying with the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA).

Tasks were implemented throughout the programme to allow young people to have their own choice and options on their learning.

Fair Work ***Framework***

In application of the Fairwork Framework, we do the following:

- We are an accredited Living Wage employer
- Staff receive annual pay reviews
- We have undertaken a review of our staff handbook and implemented new policies: Equal Opportunities policy, Anti-harassment and bullying policy, phased return to work policy, Parental Bereavement policy, Carers Leave policy, Neonatal policy and Enhanced Shared Parental policy
- We have a development budget to allow for training to support staff in their roles
- We deliver a three-year monthly programme of training directly to ATCs on identified subjects such as fundraising, marketing and communications, governance, sustainability, poverty and peer engagement sessions to upskill and support our delivery partners

Supporting Scotland's Climate Change Plan

To support Scotland's 2018-2032 Climate Change Plan, CashBack Off the Bench participants worked on a citizenship project specifically targeting climate change within their community.

Young people worked alongside their peers to research and investigate a local climate issue. Learning skills and gaining experience in project management, groups identified and supported areas such as greenspaces, recycling, drainage, air pollution and wildlife.

- Participants at The Killie Community undertook their local investigation award at Dean Park, maintaining the woodland, tidied the gardens, cut back overgrown hedges and planted fresh bedding plants
- Falkirk Foundation supported a local Mental Health organisation with updating the outdoor space used by those benefitting from the services. Helping tidy the garden space, painting fences and maintain the area helped create a welcoming and usable space whilst the young people learned more about the community, the environment and long term impact.
- At Morton in the Community participants worked closely with ground staff, assisting in the cleanup, restoration and maintenance of the pitch at the club's Cappielow Stadium

Powerful partnerships

During Phase 6, five ATCs delivered CashBack Off the Bench, using the unique power of football to engage young people.

As well as ATCs, CashBack Off the Bench is supported by a range of both local and national partners who offer expertise on a range of issues including mental health, racism, gambling, alcohol and drugs.

Progressive Pathways Ltd

Progressive Pathways provided crucial one-to-one mentoring across all clubs. Their tailored support helped young people build confidence, develop personal resilience, and make informed decisions about their next steps.

Scottish Fire & Rescue Service

Scottish Fire & Rescue Service delivered workshops focused on fire safety, the risks surrounding pyrotechnics, and first aid. Participants also visited local stations, learning about firefighting careers, community safety and the consequences of risk-taking behaviour.

CPD Training Solutions

CPD Training Solutions delivered comprehensive first aid training to all participants, ensuring they developed practical, confidence-building skills they can use in everyday situations, the workplace, and within their communities.

Fast Forward

Fast Forward delivered interactive addiction awareness sessions on gambling, alcohol and drugs, raising awareness of harm, highlighting support routes, and helping participants understand how risky behaviours can affect their lives and future opportunities.

Scottish Football Association

The Scottish FA delivered the Introduction to Coaching course to all participants. Through these workshops, participants gained coaching badges and developed foundations in communication, session delivery, player development and safeguarding. Participants also completed accredited learning modules in mental health and child wellbeing and protection, contributing to the overall accredited learning outcomes achieved across the programme. Some participants have even begun coaching within their local communities since completing the programme.

Police Scotland

Police Scotland Community police team and Football Liaison Officers were in attendance across all clubs on a regular basis, delivering workshops which helped to raise the awareness of policing issues and how crime can have a negative impact on many.

Saltire Awards

Through the Saltire Awards, participants completed and logged at least 10 hours of volunteering, earning nationally recognised certificates signed by Scottish Government Ministers in recognition of their contribution.

Special guests

Graeme Armstrong , Show Racism Red Card , Second Chance , John Loughton (Dare2Lead), Stuart Cochrane 'Scooby'

Throughout Phase 6, several guest contributors supported the programme by delivering specialist sessions, sharing lived experience, and inspiring participants. We are grateful for the time and insight they provided

PERRY ELLIS

Perry Ellis Europe

Corporate partner

Perry Ellis is one of our key corporate partners, supporting our mental health work in Scotland. They supported participants' wellbeing by generously donating a winter jacket to every young person on the programme.

EmilyTest
Tackling Gender Based Violence in Education

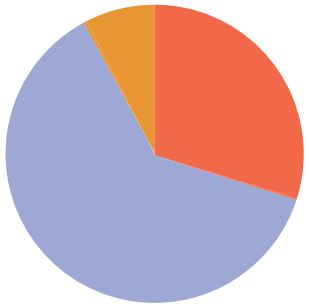
Emily Test

Training partner

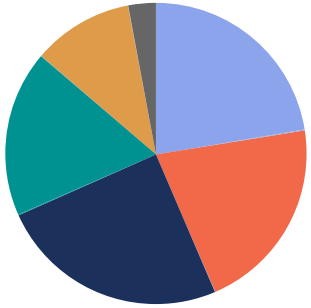
EmilyTest delivered training to all delivery partners on gender-based violence, ensuring staff were confident and equipped to support participants who may have experienced or been exposed to harm.

Financial breakdown

Phase 6 total CashBack grant £624,507



Here's how we've spent our budget:	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Staff delivery cost	£193,590	£59,806	£66,892	£66,892
Project delivery cost	£375,049	£93,219	£156,120	£125,710
Management cost	£55,868	£18,622	£18,622	£18,624
Total	£624,507	£171,647	£241,634	£211,226



Local authority breakdown	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
City of Edinburgh Council (Spartans)	£139,492.45 (44 participants)	£40,976.25	£56,271	£42,245.20
Falkirk Council (Falkirk)	£132,872.45 (38 participants)	£40,976.25	£49,651	£42,245.20
South Ayrshire Council* (Kilmarnock)**	£157,131.40 (46 participants)	N/A	£72,641	£84,490.40
Inverclyde Council (Morton)	£107,751.45 (32 participants)	£35,536.25	£29,970	£42,245.20
Renfrewshire Council (St Mirren)	£68,637 (17 participants)	£35,536.25	£33,101	N/A
Glasgow City Council (SPFL Trust)	£18,622	£18,622	N/A	N/A

***Kilmarnock delivered the programme twice in Year 2 and Year 3

Achievement and Learnings

The programme has contributed to stronger, more connected communities, with participants demonstrating increased confidence, purpose, and a more positive contribution to society.

A strong focus on supporting mental health, building self-esteem, and increasing confidence has been integral to Off the Bench, providing participants with a solid foundation to establish their own pathways to success.

The outcomes highlight the depth of this progress:

- ***90% of young people reported improved mental health***
- ***96% reported positive changes in behaviour***
- ***82% secured a positive destination.***

The programme continued to evolve through participant feedback and strengthened partnerships. A consistent network of support was delivered over 144 hours across eight weeks, enabling the development of strong, trusting relationships. This person-centred approach, underpinned by empathy and continuity, had a clear impact on confidence and self-esteem. Alongside additional support from ATC coaches, integrated 1:1 mentoring created further opportunities for reflection, resilience-building, and sustained support, allowing each individual to thrive.

Overall, a consistent, relationship-based model of delivery has proven critical in supporting young people facing barriers to employment, education, or training. The combination of intensive engagement, trusted adult relationships, and integrated mentoring has strengthened confidence, resilience, and wellbeing, providing a strong foundation for progression into education, employment, and wider life opportunities.

Throughout the past three years, ATCs have built upon partnerships with their local further education establishments, helping to raise awareness of opportunities, break down barriers, and support those attending Off the Bench who choose to progress into further education. This has resulted in 31 young people (against a target of 17) gaining a placement at college during their time on Off the Bench, with many more applying and considering this route as part of their next steps.

Off the Bench was, where possible, led by the needs and interests of the young people attending. Being adaptable and flexible in our approach to programme design, training, and support meant this person-centred approach was easily adopted by those delivering the programme. Reflecting the interests of the young people resulted in higher attendance and retention, with an average attendance rate of 85% across all clubs over the three-year period. This, in turn, has positively impacted the pathways they are now progressing along.

By supporting ATCs with delivery during Phase 6, we contributed to the development of a sustainable and legacy-focused employability model. Embedding a staff member within the ATCs enabled us to build strong working relationships, gain valuable insight, and provide targeted support to both the ATC and frontline delivery staff. We were also able to take these learnings and offer additional support and guidance across those delivering independently. This approach allowed us to work both proactively and responsively to ensure the successful delivery of the programme

Case study

*Stephen's story**

Aged 16, Stephen joined Off the Bench at a time of significant uncertainty. After struggling with low attendance at school, challenging behaviour, and pressure from home, he returned to school in August with the intention of trying again, but ongoing difficulties led to him being expelled shortly after. Feeling directionless and spending most of his time "kicking about the park" with friends and drinking, he recognised he needed something different.

When Stephen began the programme, he was hesitant. Past experiences in education made him wary of the SQA coursework, and he questioned the structured nature of the programme, initially saying he wanted to "come and go" as he pleased. With consistent support from staff, he gradually adapted, understanding that mutual respect and effort would benefit him. As his confidence grew, so did his relationships with peers, positively impacting his mental wellbeing.

Early in the course, Stephen was involved in an antisocial behaviour incident that gained online attention. After sessions with the police and Fast Forward, he acknowledged this as a turning point, saying, "I need to keep myself away from that stuff now." From then on, his engagement was unwavering.

Stephen achieved 100% attendance across the eight weeks and completed his SQA award, Scottish FA 1.1 coaching qualification, and First Aid certificate. He spoke openly about changing how he spent his spare time and began considering a future he previously felt shut out from.

Despite previously "hating" school and having a negative view of education and public services, he applied for and was accepted into a Uniformed Services college course starting January 2026. This is a path he would not have considered eight weeks earlier. His journey reflects a transformation in confidence, decision-making, and belief in his own potential.

The club will continue to support Stephen as he moves forward, ensuring he knows he has a place to turn for guidance whenever he needs it.

**Not the participant's real name*

Year on year comparison*

Outcome one

Young people are diverted from antisocial, criminal behaviour and involvement

	Year 1 target	Year 1 achieved	Year 2 target	Year 2 achieved	Year 3 target	Year 3 achieved	Total target	Total achieved	Target %	Achieved %
Young people report that their own participation in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour has reduced	32	19	52	39	52	34	136	92	77	81
Young people report that they feel less inclined to participate in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour	32	19	52	41	52	32	136	92	77	81

**114 of 177 (64% of participants completed survey at end of the programme)*

Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment opportunities

*based on total participants (177)

	Year 1 target	Year 1 achieved	Year 2 target	Year 2 achieved	Year 3 target	Year 3 achieved	Total target	Total achieved	Target %	Achieved %
Young people gain an accreditation for a new skill	32	45	52	59	52	58	136	162*	77	92
Participants gaining a modern apprenticeship/ employment	10	12	16	18	16	15	42	45	37	39
Participants gaining training opportunities or work experience	10	14	16	15	16	5	42	34	37	30
Participants gaining a place at college or university	5	7	6	12	6	12	17	31	15	27
Participants gaining volunteering opportunities	10	8	16	18	16	10	42	36	37	32
SCQF Accreditations	N/A	10	N/A	50	N/A	48	N/A	108	N/A	N/A
Non-SCQF awards	N/A	0	N/A	240	N/A	144	N/A	384	N/A	N/A
Total positive destination	N/A	41	N/A	63	N/A	42	N/A	146	N/A	N/A

Outcome three

Young people's health, mental health and wellbeing improves

	Year 1 target	Year 1 achieved	Year 2 target	Year 2 achieved	Year 3 target	Year 3 achieved	Total target	Total achieved	Target %	Achieved %
Young people report an increase in feelings against SHANARRI indicators	32	19	52	53	52	36	136	108	77	95
Young people report their mental health has improved and they have a more positive outlook on life	32	19	52	47	52	37	136	103	77	90
Young people report they are more aware of the risks and impacts of harmful substance use	32	18	52	55	52	38	136	111	77	97
Young people report they are less inclined to engage in harmful drugs and/or alcohol use	32	18	52	42	52	31	136	91	77	80
Young people report their confidence has increased	32	19	52	49	52	36	136	104	77	91
Young people report evidence of participation in physical and sporting activities	32	21	52	51	52	37	136	109	77	96

Outcome four

Young people contribute positively to their communities

**Lower number of participants going into volunteering reflects the high number securing a positive destination*

	Year 1 target	Year 1 achieved	Year 2 target	Year 2 achieved	Year 3 target	Year 3 achieved	Total target	Total achieved	Target %	Achieved %
Young people report their perception of their neighbourhood improves:	32	19	52	27	52	37	136	83	70	73
Young people report a heightened sense of belonging to a community	32	19	52	34	52	38	136	91	70	80
Young people report feeling their contribution, links with communities and social interaction are improving	32	19	52	35	52	36	136	90	70	79
Young people report increased motivation to positively influence what happens in their community	32	19	52	36	52	15	136	90	70	79
Young people go on to volunteer, coach, mentor, support or take a leadership role in community organisations	32	13	52	32	52	15	136	60	70	53*
Hours of Volunteering contributed by participants	375	460	600	454	600	633	1575	1574	N/A	N/A

Young people build their personal skills, resilience and benefit from strengthened support

	Year 1 target	Year 1 achieved	Year 2 target	Year 2 achieved	Year 3 target	Year 3 achieved	Total target	Total achieved	Target %	Achieved %
Young people report feeling more resilient	32	19	52	38	52	39	136	96	77	84
Young people report positive, supportive networks including improved relationships with family, friends and peer mentors	32	19	52	54	52	38	136	111	77	97
Young people report increased access to appropriate services	32	19	52	29	52	38	136	86	77	75
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	32	19	52	52	52	39	136	110	77	96

Scottish Professional Football League Trust

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