

Evaluation of Springboard 2011

Interim review

December 2012

HEA

Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

Contents

	Page
Tables and figures	3
Acknowledgements	4
Executive summary	5
1 Introduction	8
2 Implementation of Springboard 2011 - Update	10
3 Springboard 2011: Academic outcomes to-date	14
4 Employment-related outcomes to-date	21
5 Conclusion and plans for the next-stage evaluation	35
Appendix 1 – Participant survey questions August 2012	36
Appendix 2 – Springboard evaluation approach	39

Tables and Figures

- Table 2.1** Springboard 2011 participant numbers by skills area
- Table 2.2** Springboard 2011 participant numbers by type of course provider
- Table 2.3** Springboard 2011 participant numbers by qualification level
- Table 2.4** Springboard 2011 participant numbers by course duration
- Table 2.5** Springboard 2011 participant numbers by region
- Table 2.6** Average cost per student per 10-credit course
- Table 3.1** Academic outcomes for Summer 2012 graduates (including short courses)
- Table 3.2** Academic outcomes for participants on 1-2 year courses
- Table 3.3** Academic outcomes for participants on 3-year courses
- Table 3.4** Rates of graduation by skills area
- Table 3.5** Rates of graduation by qualification level
- Table 3.6** Rates of graduation by provider-type
- Table 3.7** Rates of graduation by age group
- Table 3.8** Rates of graduation by gender
- Table 3.9** Rates of graduation by length of time unemployed
- Table 4.1** Employment outcomes for participants due to graduate Summer 2012
- Table 4.2** Numbers in employment by skills category
- Table 4.3** Numbers in employment by qualification level
- Table 4.4** Numbers in employment by provider-type
- Table 4.5** Numbers in employment by age group
- Table 4.6** Numbers in employment by gender
- Table 4.7** Numbers in employment by length of time unemployed
-
- Figure 1** Quality of in-college support received by Springboard participants
- Figure 2** Employment-related outcomes for Springboard participants
- Figure 3** Circumstances of Springboard participants August-September 2012
- Figure 4** Relevance of Springboard course for employment
- Figure 5** Impact of job preparation supports on Springboard courses
- Figure 6** Sentiment on career prospects among Springboard participants
- Figure 7** Overall impact of Springboard for participants

Acknowledgements

The Higher Education Authority and the UCD Geary Institute thank Springboard participants; higher education colleges; education and enterprise partners; and colleagues in the Departments of Education and Skills and Social Protection for their assistance in compiling this interim review of outcomes from Springboard 2011.

Executive summary

This interim review presents early-stage outcomes for participants in the 2011 phase of the Springboard initiative. Springboard provides free, part-time upskilling and cross-skilling courses in higher education as a means of helping unemployed people back into sustainable employment. Springboard qualifies participants in areas where there are identified skills needs, based on up-to-date analysis for Ireland by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

Summary outputs for Springboard 2011

Springboard 2011 provided higher education places for 4,952 unemployed people on 204 courses at certificate, degree and post-graduate level. €17.6m was allocated to support provision of Springboard courses by 34 higher education providers.

12% of places were in universities; 39% in institutes of technology and 49% in privately run colleges.

83% of Springboard places were on courses of one year or less.

60% of participants were long-term unemployed at the start of their course, with 20% previously employed in construction.

70% were male, and 70% were between 25-49 years of age.

Data sources for the interim review

The data on early-stage outcomes were gathered during August-September 2012, in the weeks following completion of the majority of Springboard courses. Academic and employment-related outcomes were gathered and assessed using three data sources, as follows:

- Detailed online reporting by Springboard course providers on academic and employment-related outcomes for Springboard participants
- Survey of Springboard graduates/continuing students
- Data scan of the Live Register status of Springboard graduates and of continuing students by the Department of Social Protection

Academic outcomes

As of 25 September 2012 the summary of academic outcomes from Springboard 2011 is as follows:

- 65% of all Springboard participants had either successfully graduated or continued on to a further year of study on their course (3,177 people).
- A further 12% were due to re-sit exams (604 people), while 22% of participants had withdrawn from courses (1,081 people). Graduation and withdrawal rates varied across course areas, by duration, qualification level and by age and duration of unemployment:
- Initial graduation rates were highest on cross-enterprise skills courses¹ (67%), on courses in universities (69%) and amongst people aged over 50 (68%).
- Highest withdrawal rates were from three-year courses (36% of 206 enrolled) by people under-25 on one-year courses (37% of 325 people enrolled) and on one-year courses in institutes of technology (34% of 1,283 people enrolled)
- The data scan by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) indicates that 37% (765) of Springboard graduates are no longer on the Live Register.

Early employment outcomes

Early employment outcomes for Springboard graduates within 12 weeks of course completion are as follows:

- 30% of graduates had secured employment or self-employment. Data from the Springboard online database and the survey of participants underpin this finding, supplemented by the DSP data scan indicating that 37% of graduates were no longer on the Live Register of unemployed people.

¹ Cross-enterprise courses include qualifications in Six Sigma, Lean and Quality Systems, international sales skills and other in-demand skills across a range of industries.

- The highest early employment rates were reported for those who had been less than 6-months unemployed when the course began (44%); those who had graduated from one year courses (31%); participants on Level 8 courses (35%); and participants on courses in the cross-enterprise skills area (38%).
- The lowest early employment rates were reported for participants on Level 6 courses (18%); courses in the medical devices area (14%); green economy (21%); and among people who were more than two years unemployed when they started their course (17%).
- 67% of survey respondents said their Springboard course had helped or was helping them secure employment.
- 86% of respondents said participation in Springboard had had a positive impact on their life.

Next stage of evaluation

The evaluation framework for Springboard includes a plan for six-monthly updates on employment outcomes for Springboard participants. Graduates will be re-surveyed in January 2013, and an update will also be gathered from course providers. These data sources will be compared with a further data scan of the Live Register. Other sources of tracking progression outcomes will also be explored as part of the evaluation framework. The report, which will be published in early 2013, will include this updated information as well as feedback on the interim review and a report on implementation and early outputs from the 2012 phase of Springboard.

1 Introduction

Springboard was initially introduced in 2011 as part of the Government's Jobs Initiative. It was subsequently incorporated into the 2012 Action Plan for Jobs and the Pathways to Work strategy.

Funding of €17.6m has been provided to support 4,952 people participating in the first phase of Springboard 2011. The second phase of Springboard commenced in 2012 with a roll out of a further 6,000 places with a contract value of €24m.

The primary objective of Springboard is to support unemployed people return to employment or self-employment by providing access to free, part-time upskilling and re-skilling courses in higher education. Springboard provides participants with up-to-date qualifications in areas where there are identified skills needs, based on research from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

Evaluation approach

An outline evaluation framework for the Springboard initiative was agreed from the outset between the HEA and the Department of Education and Skills, with a commitment to report systematically over time on the impact of the initiative. This framework was informed by advice and assistance from the UCD Geary Institute. It is planned to further develop the evaluation framework with a particular focus on how to track the progression outcomes for Springboard participants over time.

The Springboard team in the Higher Education Authority has conducted the evaluation work with assistance from the UCD Geary Institute.

The first-stage report, published in February 2012, presented initial outputs from the initiative, including numbers enrolled; the profile of participants versus target cohorts, costs; and the level of demand for courses. It also included feedback from participants, course providers, employers and other stakeholders on their experience of the initiative thus far.

This interim review presents early outputs and outcomes for the Springboard 2011 cohort of students during August-September 2012, in the weeks following completion of the majority of courses. The evaluation methodology for this stage of the evaluation included three data sources, as follows:

- Detailed online reporting by Springboard course providers on academic and employment-related outcomes for Springboard participants
- Survey of Springboard graduates/continuing students
- Data scan of the Live Register status of Springboard graduates and of continuing students by the Department of Social Protection

This review is structured into five sections. Following the introduction, Section 2 provides an update on outputs from the Springboard 2011 initiative, including a range of data on trends in enrolments in 2011 and early 2012, as well as costs allocated by level, skills sector and type of provider.

Section 3 presents details of academic outcomes to-date for graduates from Springboard 2011 and for those continuing with their studies. Information is presented on the numbers who successfully graduated from courses or who completed the first year of their course and those who withdrew before completion.

Section 4 presents information on available employment-related and other post-course outcomes.

Views of stakeholders are invited on the data presented in this interim review and some questions are inserted throughout the text to stimulate comment. Suggestions for further changes which may lead to improved outcomes for participants would be particularly welcome. It should also be noted that the impact of some of the changes introduced for Springboard 2012, for example the provision of a Freephone guidance service, would not be reflected in the outcomes for the 2011 cohort who are the focus of this review.

The final section of the review sets out plans for the next stage of the Springboard evaluation.

2 Implementation of Springboard 2011 - update

The majority of Springboard courses commenced in September-October 2011. A total of 5,875 places were approved for funding – seventeen courses did not proceed due to insufficient demand while other courses were over-subscribed. Places were re-allocated by the HEA between providers and courses in line with demand and an additional 581 places on courses of particularly high-demand were also approved to commence in early 2012.

Tables 2.1 - 2.5 set out details of the final allocated places and courses for Springboard 2011. There were changes in the numbers participating at different levels, for different course durations and across skills areas. For instance, the final numbers participating in biopharma-pharmachem, financial services and cross-enterprise skills courses rose, whereas the numbers on information and communication technology (ICT) and medical device-related courses dropped. The numbers due to participate on two- and three-year courses dropped, and the final numbers on Level 6 courses rose while the numbers on Level 9 courses fell.

Table 2.1 Springboard 2011 participant numbers by skills area

Skills Area	Original numbers recommended by panel	Final numbers
Biopharma-Pharmachem	438	489
Cross Enterprise Skills	1,486	1,293
Food and Beverage	266	247
Green Economy	725	568
ICT	2,084	1,813
International Financial Services	150	180
Medical Devices	726	362
Total	5,875	4,952
Source: Springboard online database		

Table 2.2 Springboard 2011 participant numbers by type of course provider

Course provider	Original numbers recommended by panel	Final numbers
Institute of technology	3,189	1,923
University	770	604
Privately-run/not for profit	1,916	2,425
Total	5,875	4,952
Source: Springboard online database		

Table 2.3 Springboard 2011 participant numbers by qualification level

Qualification level	Original numbers recommended by panel	Final numbers
Level 6 (Higher Certificate)	1,329	1,409
Level 7 (Ordinary Degree)	1,519	1,298
Level 8 (Honours Degree/Hdip)	1,872	1618
Level 9 (Masters/Pgrad Diploma)	1,155	627
Total	5,875	4,952
Source: Springboard online database		

Table 2.4 Springboard 2011 participant numbers by course duration

Duration	Original numbers recommended by panel	Final numbers
1 Year Courses *	4607	4,121
2 Year Courses	1031	625
3 Year Courses	237	206
Total	5,875	4,952

* Includes courses of 1-year-or-less in duration

Source: Springboard online database

Table 2.5 Springboard 2011 participant numbers by region²

Region	Original numbers recommended by panel	Final numbers
Border	522	378
Dublin	3,916	3,534
Mid West	273	231
Midlands	16	5
South East	259	120
South West	665	520
West	224	164
Total	5,875	4,952

Source: Springboard online database

Table 2.6 below presents information on the average cost of a Springboard course by level and by course provider. This is calculated with reference to the average cost for ten credits of any particular course. Credits form part of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which is a European-wide system for quantifying the content and scope of a higher education and training course. The majority of Springboard courses provided between thirty and sixty ECTS credits. The Table also presents the cost data with reference to the qualification level of each course, from Level 6 to Level 9.

² Refers to the region in which the course provider was located, not the region of origin of participants.

Table 2.6 Average cost per student per 10 ECTS credits³

	NFQ Level	Average Cost per 10 credits (€)
University	Level 6 ⁴	233
	Level 7	875
	Level 8	660
	Level 9	1029
University average		€853
Institutes of Technology	Level 6	693
	Level 7	788
	Level 8	786
	Level 9	865
Institutes average		€772
Privately-run/not for profit	Level 6	582
	Level 7	943
	Level 8	791
	Level 9	1021
Privately-run/not for profit average		€842
Overall average cost per 10 ECTS credits		€794

Source: Springboard financial database

³ This table was first published in the February 2012 first-stage evaluation of Springboard.

⁴ There was just one Level 6 course approved in one university, a 30-credit course in Science, Technology and Engineering.

3 Academic outcomes to-date

Data from the detailed online reporting by Springboard course providers and the survey of Springboard graduates and continuing students are used to provide information on academic outcomes for Springboard participants. The data on academic outcomes from the colleges was gathered during July-September 2012, with a final update on numbers recorded on 25 September 2012. Data were returned for 98% of participants.

Academic outcomes for Springboard graduates (Summer 2012)

Table 3.1 below shows academic outcomes for students who were due to complete their course by the Summer of 2012. 61% of the group successfully graduated, while 26% withdrew or were not successful in examinations. For 13% of the group there was still an 'outcome pending', signifying, in general, that these students had to retake some assessments before successfully completing their course. There was no record available for 90 participants.

Table 3.1 Academic outcomes for Summer 2012 graduates (including short courses)

Academic Outcome	Total	as % of Total
Graduated	2,008	61%
Withdrew	866	26%
Outcome pending	444	13%
Total	3,318	100%

Source: Springboard online database

Table 3.2 below shows academic outcomes for students due to complete their course before the end of December 2012/June 2013. The data indicate strong rates of progression by participants on these courses.

Table 3.2 Academic outcomes for students due to complete by end of December 2012/June 2013

Academic Outcome	Total	as % of Total
Continuing students	1077	81%
Withdrew	141	11%
Outcome pending	120	9%
Total	1,338	100%

Source: Springboard online database

Table 3.3 indicates that rates of progression are, however, not as high for those on courses of three-years duration, with 36% of the original cohort confirmed as having withdrawn before completion.

Table 3.3 Academic outcomes for students on 3-year courses

Academic Outcome	Total	as % of Total
Continuing students	92	44%
Withdrew	74	36%
Outcome pending	40	19%
Total	206	100%

Source: Springboard online database

Questions for consideration:

Are there particular reasons for a high withdrawal rate from 3-year courses –for instance, is this time period too long for job seekers to commit to?

Completion rates with reference to the type of course undertaken

Tables 3.4 – 3.6 below present academic outcomes for those who graduated in Summer 2012 with reference to the type of Springboard course taken, including skills area, qualification level and whether the course was offered by an institute of technology, a privately-run college or a university.

Table 3.4 presents information on rates of completion by skills area. The data show that, relatively, there were higher initial rates of completion from courses in four areas: food and beverage, international financial services, the green economy and

cross-enterprise skills. There were higher withdrawal rates from information and communications technology (ICT), green economy and medical devices courses.

Question for consideration: Are there particular reasons which might account for the differential in completion rates by skills area?

Table 3.4 Rates of completion by skills area

Skills Category	Graduated	Graduated as % of all participants	Withdrew	Withdrew as % of all participants	Outcome pending	% of participants with outcome pending	Total
Biopharma-pharmachem	166	51%	63	19%	96	30%	325
Cross Enterprise Skills	539	67%	166	21%	95	12%	800
Food & Beverage	125	65%	42	22%	26	13%	193
Green Economy	206	64%	103	32%	15	5%	324
ICT	741	57%	394	30%	158	12%	1,293
International Financial Services	85	63%	27	20%	22	16%	134
Medical Devices	146	59%	71	29%	32	13%	249
Total	2,008	61%	866	26%	444	13%	3,318

Source: Springboard online database

Table 3.5 Rates of completion by qualification level

Qualification level	Graduated	Graduated as % of all participants	Withdrew	Withdrew as % of all participants	Outcome pending	% of participants with outcome pending	Total
Level 6	535	54%	315	32%	134	14%	984
Level 7	534	57%	224	24%	171	18%	929
Level 8	696	69%	220	22%	92	9%	1,008
Level 9	243	61%	107	27%	47	12%	397
Total	2,008	61%	866	26%	444	13%	3,318

Source: Springboard online database

Question for consideration: What might explain the relatively high withdrawal rate from Level 6 courses?

Table 3.6 presents information on the numbers and rate of completion in universities, institutes of technology and privately-run colleges. Noting that student numbers were smaller, the rate of completion was highest from those universities offering Springboard courses, at 69%. The withdrawal rate was highest from courses in institutes of technology.

Table 3.6 Rates of completion by course-provider type

Sector	Graduated	Graduated as % of all participants	Withdrew	Withdrew as % of all participants	Outcome pending	% of participants with outcome pending	Total
University	312	69%	93	20%	50	11%	455
Institute of Technology	727	59%	424	34%	87	7%	1,238
Privately-run/Not for Profit	969	60%	349	21%	307	19%	1,625
Total	2,008	61%	866	26%	444	13%	3,318

Source: Springboard online database

Completion rates with reference to the profile of Springboard participants

Tables 3.7 – 3.9 below present analysis of academic outcomes for Summer 2012 graduates with reference to the profile of participants, including age group, gender, and the length of time participants had been unemployed at the time they started their Springboard course.

The table below presents a breakdown of rates of completion and other outcomes for participants according to their age group. This indicates higher-than-average initial completion rates for older participants, with the highest rate recorded for those over 50 years of age, and the highest withdrawal rate among 20-24 year-olds, at 37%.

Table 3.7 Rates of graduation by age group

Age group	Graduated	Graduated as % of all participants	Withdrew	Withdrew as % of all participants	Outcome pending	% of participants with outcome pending	All participants
20-24	162	50%	119	37%	44	14%	325
25-29	368	60%	175	29%	70	11%	613
30-34	357	59%	147	24%	99	16%	603
35-39	362	59%	163	27%	84	14%	609
40-44	302	64%	106	22%	65	14%	473
45-49	211	65%	74	23%	41	13%	326
50-54	113	68%	35	21%	17	10%	165
55 – 64	70	68%	26	25%	7	7%	103
Unknown	63	62%	21	21%	17	17%	101
Total	2,008	61%	866	26%	444	13%	3,318

Source: Springboard online database

Question for consideration: Are there particular factors that might explain why 20-24 year-olds had a 37% withdrawal rate?

Table 3.8 presents information on completion rates according to whether participants were female or male. 70% of all Springboard participants were male. The table below does not indicate any major difference in graduation rates based on gender, although there was a slightly higher rate of withdrawal among men.

Table 3.8 Rates of completion by gender

Gender	Graduated	Graduated as % of all participants	Withdrew	Withdrew as % of all participants	Outcome pending	% of participants with outcome pending	Total
Female	527	62%	205	24%	120	14%	852
Male	1,481	60%	661	27%	324	13%	2,466
Total	2,008	61%	866	26%	444	13%	3,318

Source: Springboard online database

Data were also gathered on completion rates with reference to the length of time participants had been unemployed at the start of their course. Table 3.9 indicates that graduation rates were highest at 65% for those who had been unemployed for the least amount of time - six months or less - before the start of their course.

Table 3.9 Rates of completion by duration-of-time unemployed

Duration Unemployed	Graduated	Graduated as % of all participants	Withdrew	Withdrew as % of all participants	Outcome pending	% of participants with outcome pending	Total
0-6 months	400	65%	135	22%	84	14%	619
6-12 months	434	61%	183	26%	96	13%	713
1-2 Years	567	59%	271	28%	123	13%	961
2-5 Years	513	60%	231	27%	112	13%	856
5+ Years	94	56%	46	27%	29	17%	169
Total	2,008	61%	866	26%	444	13%	3,318

Source: Springboard online database

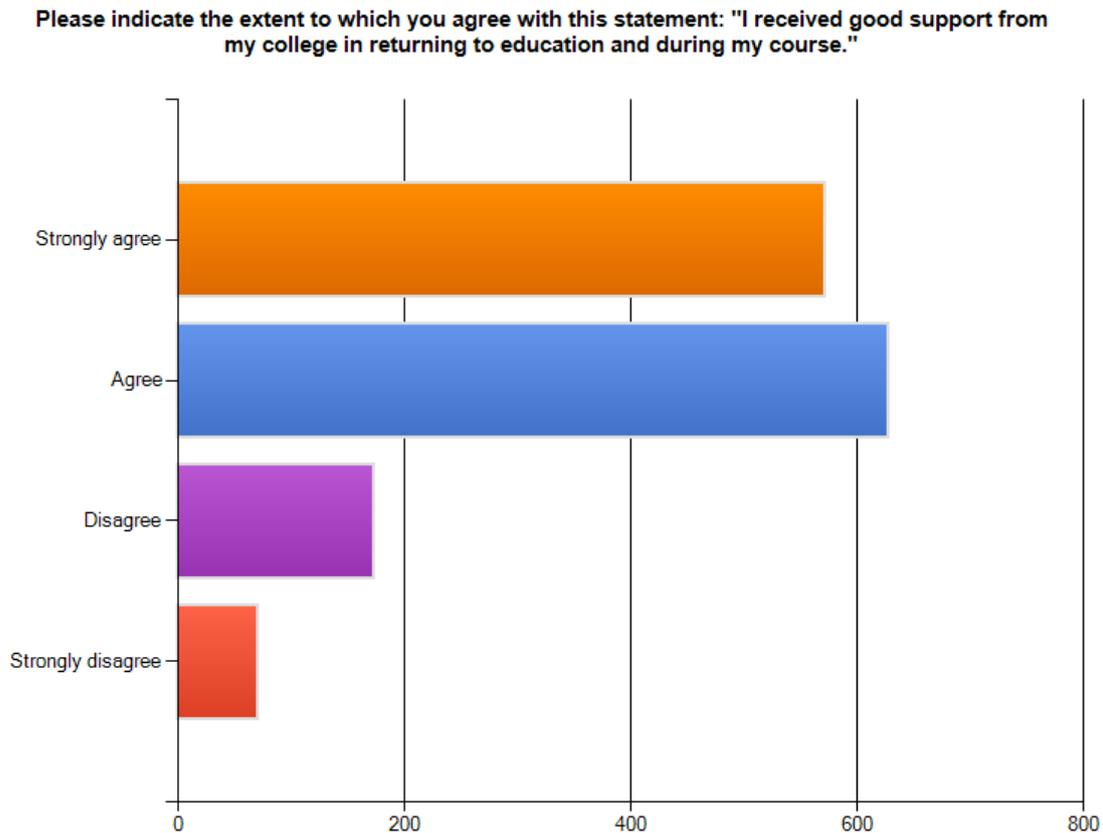
Question for consideration: What might be the reasons why those who were out of work for the shortest period of time had a higher initial completion rate than those who had been longest out of work?

Academic outcomes as reported via the survey of Springboard participants

The information on completion rates and related academic outcomes from the Springboard online database was supplemented by a survey of all Springboard participants who enrolled for a course as part of Springboard 2011. The survey was conducted between 13 August and 10 September 2012. 1,508 of a potential 4,952 participants responded to the survey, corresponding to a 30% response rate.

Participants were asked about their experience in college (see full list of survey questions in Appendix 1), including the quality of support they got on returning to education and throughout their course.

Figure 1 Quality of in-college support received by Springboard participants



Source: Springboard survey of participants

341 more detailed responses were provided by respondents on the quality of support received. 48% of these were positive and 38% negative, with the remainder neutral. Positive comments focused on the quality of lectures; support from the college during and after the course; and a high level of commitment to the Springboard group of students:

Any questions I had were answered promptly and clearly. Also the recorded lectures and notes were extremely helpful when I wasn't able to attend some of the live lectures

I had an amazing time and enjoyed every minute of going back to college.

Negative comments in the main referred to poor communication by lecturers and administrators; a sense that the Springboard group were of less importance than 'full-time or paying students' and a lack of support when illness or other personal difficulties arose:

The teaching staff and quality of the curriculum was excellent. However, the administrative support and communication were very poor and I felt I had to seek out information myself - e.g. where and when to go for induction!

As part of the ongoing evaluation process, anonymised survey feedback from participants has been sent to each individual college. Responses from colleges will be incorporated into the next stage of the evaluation.

4 Employment-related outcomes to-date

Data from the detailed online reporting by Springboard course providers, the survey of Springboard participants and the data scan of the Live Register by the Department of Social Protection are used to present initial information on employment-related outcomes for Springboard participants.

Data returned from the colleges were in response to a set of nine possible outcomes as set out in Figure 2 below. Springboard course providers returned data for each participant via the online system on springboardcourses.ie. Course providers were advised that one or more outcomes could be ticked for each participant.

Figure 2 Employment-related outcomes for Springboard participants

- Has secured employment
- Establishing self employment
- Completing/completed work placement
- Completing/completed internship
- Has been offered progression to Year 2/further study
- Still actively seeking employment
- Went abroad/emigrated

- Withdrew prior to completion of course for personal reasons △
- Withdrew prior to completion of course for academic reasons △
- No information available △

Source: Springboard online system

Employment-related outcomes were reported by the colleges for 2,576 Springboard participants. In some colleges an outcome was available on less than half of the Springboard group. Other colleges provided an outcome for over 90% of their cohort. Three colleges did not return any employment-related information.

Table 4.1 below sets out a summary of the information on 25 September 2012 for 1,709 people who were due to complete their course in Summer 2012. 31% of graduates were reported to be back in employment or self-employment at that point, compared to 23% of those who withdrew early.

Table 4.1 Employment outcomes for those due to complete Summer 2012

Academic Outcome	Total	In employment*	employed as % of total
Graduated	1,115	341	31%
Withdrew	369	86	23%
Enrolled	33	9	27%
Outcome pending	192	61	32%
Total	1,709	497	29%

* Including self-employment

Source: Springboard online database

Further analysis of rates of employment for Springboard participants due to graduate Summer 2012

In the assessment of early-stage employment outcomes, it was decided to focus on rates of employment for Springboard participants who were due to graduate by Summer 2012. The data includes information on those who withdrew before completing their course.

Table 4.2 presents information on rates of employment for this group by skills area, indicating that rates of employment were highest among those on courses developing cross-enterprise skills, and lowest for those on medical devices courses.

Table 4.2 Numbers in employment by skills category

Skills Category	Total	Numbers in employment	as % of total
Biopharma-pharmachem	223	73	33%
Cross-enterprise skills	503	191	38%
Food and beverage	121	41	34%
Green economy	111	23	21%
ICT	531	123	23%
International financial services	98	29	30%
Medical devices	122	17	14%
Total	1,709	497	29%

Source: Springboard online database

Table 4.3 indicates that participants who were on courses at Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications achieved the highest rate of employment to-date, in comparison to those on courses at other levels, in particular at Level 6.

Table 4.3 Numbers in employment by qualification level

Qualification level	Total	Numbers in employment	as % of total
Level 6	429	79	18%
Level 7	542	166	31%
Level 8	571	197	35%
Level 9	167	55	33%
Total	1,709	497	29%

Source: Springboard online database

Question for consideration: What reasons might explain why employment outcomes were strongest for those on cross-enterprise courses and on Level 8 courses?

There are also indications of better employment outcomes to-date for participants who were on Springboard courses in the universities and privately-run colleges, as set out in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Numbers in employment by college-type

Sector	Total	Numbers in employment	as % of total
University	295	95	32%
Institute of Technology	355	89	25%
Privately-run/Not for Profit	1,059	313	30%
Total	1,709	497	29%

Source: Springboard online database

Employment rates with reference to the profile of Springboard participants

Employment rates were also assessed with reference to the profile of Springboard participants. The outcomes are set out below. Table 4.5 indicates that employment rates were strongest for those aged 20-49, with less success reported for participants who were over 50 years of age.

Table 4.5 Numbers in employment by age

Age Bracket	Total	Numbers in employment	as % of total
20-24	154	45	29%
25-29	303	95	31%
30-34	302	90	30%
35-39	315	92	29%
40-44	248	76	31%
45-49	191	54	28%
50-54	84	20	24%
55 – 64	62	13	21%
Unknown	50	12	24%
Total	1,709	497	29%

Source: Springboard online database

There was no significant difference in employment rates based on the gender of graduates.

Table 4.6 Numbers in employment by gender

Gender	Total	Numbers in employment	as % of total
Female	480	145	30%
Male	1,229	352	29%
Total	1,709	497	29%

Source: Springboard online database

Table 4.7 indicates that those out-of-work for the shortest period of time were more successful in achieving a quick return to employment in comparison to those longest out of work. 44% of those who were out-of-work six months or less before the start of their course were back in employment by September 2012 in comparison to 17% of those who had been two years or more out of work.

Table 4.7 Numbers in employment by duration unemployed (on entry to course)

Duration Unemployed	Total	Numbers in employment	as % of total
0-6 months	360	160	44%
6-12 months	367	116	32%
1-2 Years	466	132	28%
2-5 Years	430	74	17%
5+ Years	86	15	17%
Total	1,709	497	29%

Source: Springboard online database

Question for consideration: What reasons could explain why those people who had been unemployed for longer periods of time are experiencing more difficulty in getting back into employment?

Employment outcomes as reported via the survey of Springboard participants

The survey of Springboard participants also provided supplementary information on employment outcomes. 94% of respondents to the survey replied to a question on what their circumstances were as of August-September 2012. Figure 3 below indicates that 675 graduates responded to the survey and, of these, 30% indicated that they were now employed or self-employed. A further 88, or 6%, of respondents who were not graduates had also returned to employment. Some of this group had got a job and withdrawn from their course and others had got a job and were continuing with their Springboard course.

Figure 3 Circumstances of Springboard participants August-September 2012

Response	Number of respondents	% of respondents
I have just completed my Springboard course (July/August 2012) and am seeking work with my new qualification	450	31.7%
I have completed my Springboard course and have got a job	181	12.8%
I have completed my Springboard course and am self-employed	44	3.1%
I have got a job and am also continuing with my Springboard course in order to gain my qualification	47	3.3%
I have further assessments/examinations before completing my course	141	9.9%
I am due to complete my Springboard course before the end of 2012	99	7%
I am due to continue to the second year of my Springboard course	262	18.5%
I am currently completing a work placement	29	2%
I left my Springboard course before it was complete because I got a job	41	2.9%
I left my Springboard course before it was complete due to personal/academic reasons	125	8.8%
	1419	100%
Source: Survey of Springboard 2011 participants		

Employment outcomes as reported via the Department of Social Protection Live Register

The assessment of early employment outcomes for Springboard participants also included a data scan by the Department of Social Protection on the numbers no

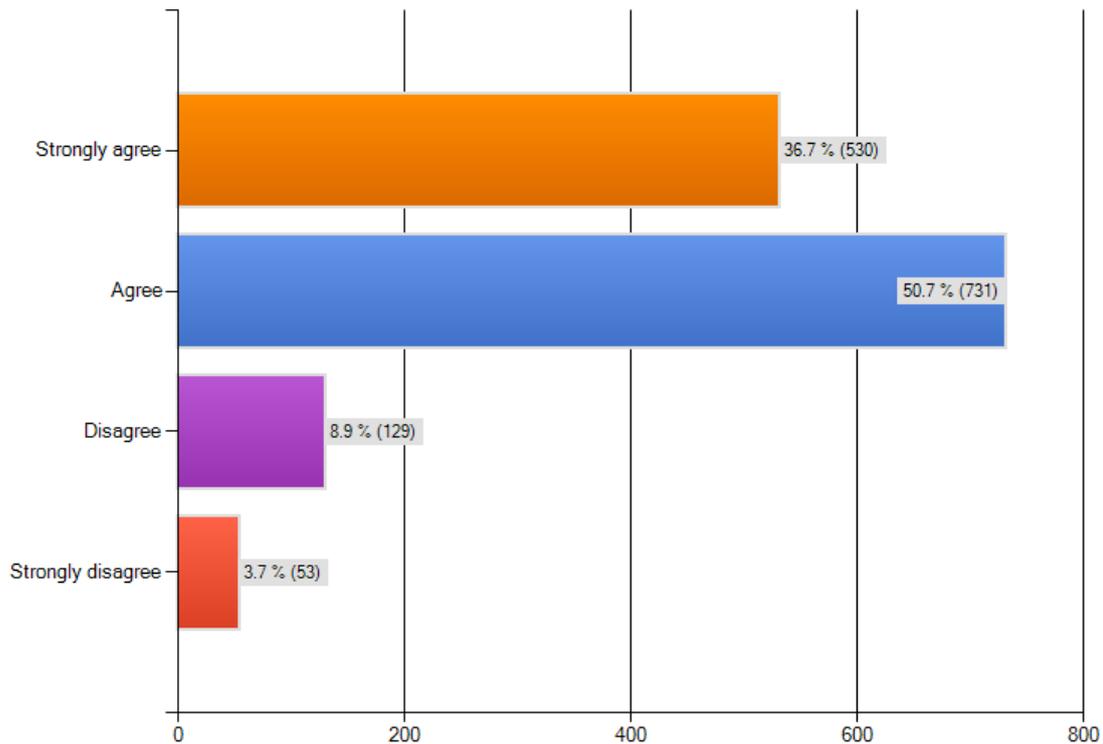
longer on the Live Register of unemployed people. The scan was carried out during the week of 05 November 2012, some six weeks later than the assessments via the online database and the survey. It should be noted that return to employment may not be the only reason why someone no longer appears on the Live Register. Other possible reasons include emigration, no longer being eligible for a payment or a transfer to a different social protection payment that is not linked to the Live Register. The scan indicated that 765 or 37% of Springboard graduates are no longer on the Live Register. Of those who withdrew early from courses, 445 or 42% are no longer on the Live Register. The 37% figure, allowing for reasons other than employment for removal from the Live Register, would seem to correspond with the 31% report on early employment outcomes via the Springboard online database and the results from the survey of participants.

Relevance of a Springboard course for employment

Participants were also asked for feedback on a series of questions about the employment-related benefits of their course (see Appendix 1 for the full list of questions in the survey). One such question was on participants' opinion on the relevance of their course for employment. Figure 4 below presents a summary of the responses, with 84% of respondents reporting that their course was relevant in this core objective.

Figure 4 Relevance of Springboard course for employment

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement: "My Springboard course this year contained up-to-date, relevant and useful skills and knowledge for employment."



Source: Survey of Springboard 2011 participants

There was also an option for survey respondents to provide written feedback on the employment-related relevance of the course; 398 people did so. 46% of this feedback was positive, 37% negative; and the remainder in-between. Positive comments included the following:

[This was] a focused and excellent course for using as a career direction change

There is no way I would have even been considered for my current role without my Springboard qualification

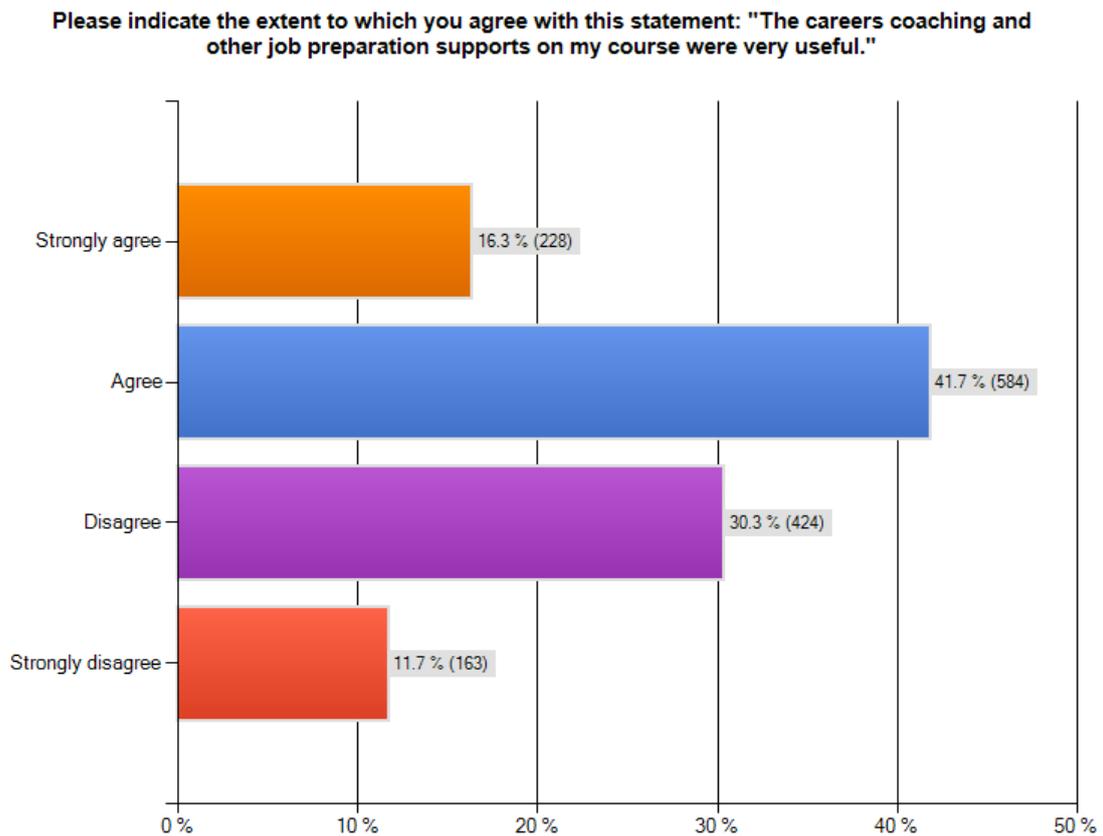
Negative comments tended to focus on a perceived lack of preparation by lecturers, course material that was not as relevant as it could have been, or a lack of work experience opportunities:

Being honest the course was only mediocre and did not have any real life hands-on practice which would have been of use

As noted earlier, the survey feedback has been sent to each individual college, and responses will be incorporated into the next stage of the evaluation.

A further question gathered feedback on participants' experience of the job preparation supports they received in their college, as set out in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 Impact of job preparation supports on Springboard courses



Source: Survey of Springboard 2011 participants

An analysis of the above responses by college shows that, for some, over 80% of the students from that college who responded were satisfied with the supports they received, however, in others, only 24% of responses for that college were positive, suggesting that there was variation in the extent and quality of support provided by different colleges in this area.

388 respondents provided more extensive written feedback on their perception of quality and quantity of in-college job preparation supports. 14% of this feedback was positive, 68% negative; and the remainder neutral. Responses included the following:

I couldn't praise this part of the course highly enough. The careers coaching was excellent and we were provided with a lot of different strategies for job hunting. The [college staff] were very understanding about the personal issues/difficulties unemployment brings and provided real, practical help/support.

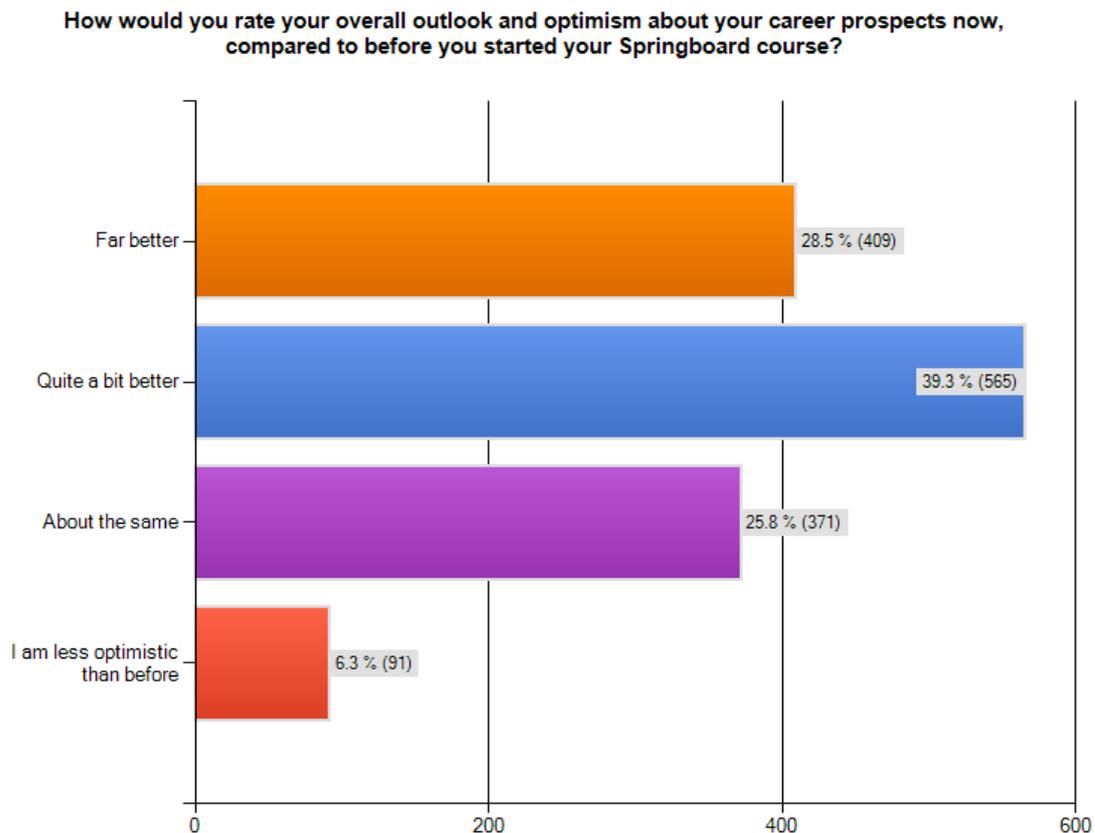
Hardly any of this was done on the course - quite useless. No CV preparation, interview preparation was done. No job placements were made available.

[The] college guidance counsellor told me I was not eligible for assistance as I was not a full time student. The course did not include any assistance in career coaching or job preparation except some comments from some lecturers.

Question for consideration: 42% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that job preparation supports on their course were useful. How can this area be strengthened?

Figure 6 below provides further assessment of participants' overall outlook and optimism on careers prospects currently, as compared with the position before they took up a Springboard course.

Figure 6 Sentiment on career prospects among Springboard participants



Source: Survey of Springboard 2011 participants

More extensive responses from 334 respondents on this question included 49% positive feedback; 32% negative; and the remainder neutral. On the positive side, for some respondents their course was deemed critical in securing employment or establishing self-employment; had helped to build confidence and a renewed focus; and had helped to demonstrate to employers their commitment and motivation to move on from unemployment:

The course gave me excellent skills, highlighted to me the value of my previous work experience and gave me confidence in my abilities and talent. Above all it gave me to opportunity to gain experience in a new industry sector which ultimately led to a job.

So much better, not just from a skills perspective, but from working with peers, pooling knowledge, and the increase to my confidence has been phenomenal. Confidence is a tricky thing, easy to lose in a time of stress and unemployment and hard to do a good interview when lacking at all, (especially in today's market), the return in confidence has been one of the most beneficial aspects to this course, the feeling that I can walk into any

interview and hold my own as much as someone who is currently employed is worth its weight in gold. Employers are not questioning my unemployment and instead are asking about the course, which relieves the pressure and potential stigma of being unemployed.

Negative feedback included concerns about exclusion from the labour market because of potential age discrimination; that emigration would still be an unavoidable outcome; difficulties with securing employment due to lack of sector-specific experience; and, concerns from some participants that their Springboard course was too general and not sufficiently specialized to support progression to employment in a new sector:

My age is a major problem and becoming somewhat more qualified in a highly technical area has not increased the possibility of me finding employment.

There are no career prospects for me. All jobs in pharmaceutical area require 2-6 years experience which I do not have.

Participants' views on the broader impact and benefits of Springboard

The employment-related and other benefits of a Springboard course were also explored in the survey by asking respondents the following question:

'Apart from the aim to assist you with getting your career back on track, were there other benefits for you in participating in a Springboard course?'

A significant majority (over 90%) of the 1,114 respondents to this question identified at least one related benefit (as opposed to answering 'no other benefit'). A review of the responses identified a number of common themes that respondents saw as benefits of Springboard, including meeting new people who were experiencing the similar challenging circumstances of unemployment; relief from feelings of social and professional isolation; a boost in confidence and self-esteem; and access to new support and professional networks. Comments included the following:

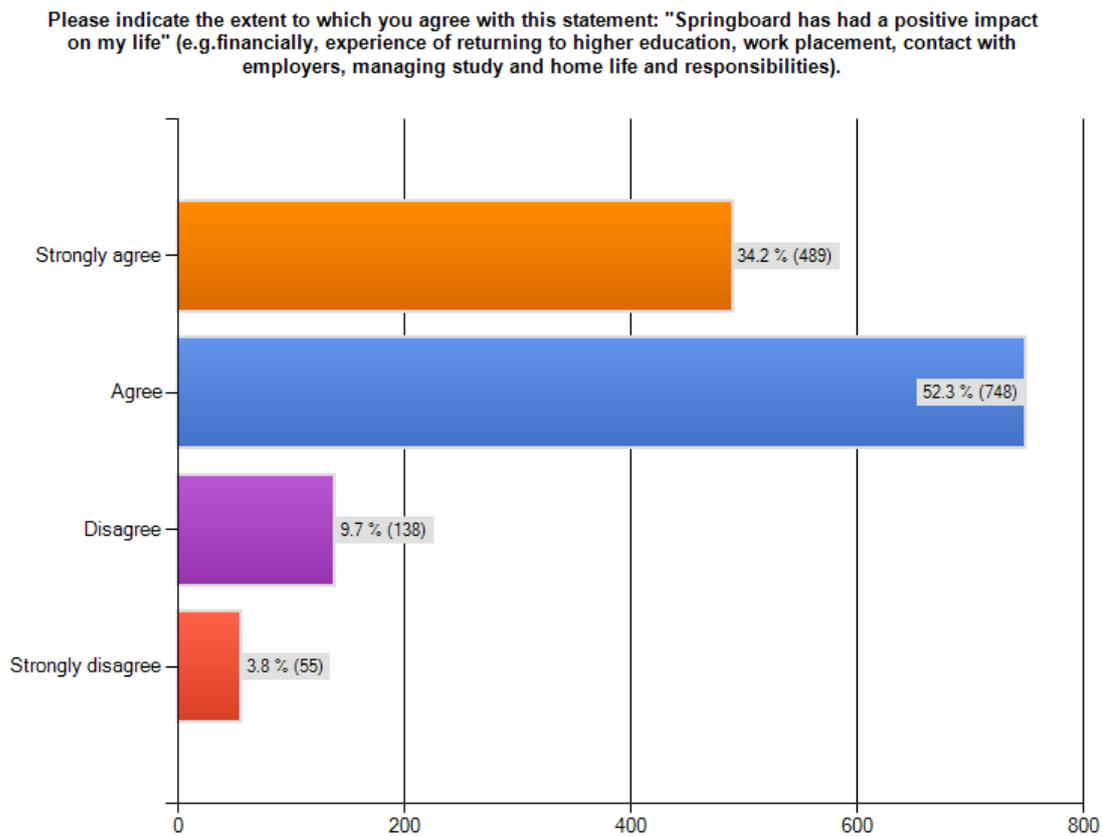
[It was] great to get back into the swing of things, meet like-minded people and get new perspectives. For that alone, the course was of tremendous importance and something which would have been impossible without the support of the course.

As somebody who has previously worked and not used to being unemployed, the Springboard course has helped to keep my morale, self-confidence and hopes for future employment high .

It put me into a valuable network of other people, both participants on the course (graduates in the same boat as myself) and the lecturers and course leaders, that otherwise I would never have been in touch with. I was 6 months out of work when I started the course and was starting to get very depressed that I wouldn't get another job despite having very good work experience and qualifications. The course gave me a really good focus, a range of strategies for getting a job (I had just been using the traditional route of recruitment agencies and getting nowhere) I gained extra qualifications in the process, made new friends and started to believe in myself again.

A further question to survey respondents, presented in Figure 7 below, gave further insight into the employment-related and overall benefits of participation on a Springboard course. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that Springboard had had a positive impact on their life:

Figure 7 Participants' views on the broader impact and benefits of Springboard



Source: Survey of Springboard 2011 participants

317 respondents also provided a text answer, with 55% of these being positive, 19% neutral and 26% negative. Feedback included the following comments:

I have secured a job at least until the end of the year. The part-time course was very accommodating in that I could juggle work, study and being a lone parent without too much stress.

The Springboard experience has been 100% positive for me. The nine month period of the course allowed me to take control and really focus on my career path. Instead of depending on the vagaries of corporate management. I decided to move industry and that then dictated what company placement I should go for as part of the course. It all worked very well and ultimately led to be getting my ideal job.

It has a positive impact on my life overall but not financially as I had to travel and accommodation costs and this was extra expense I couldn't really afford as I'm still repaying my first student loan. The bank was hugely unhelpful in this matter also.

5 Plans for the next-stage of evaluation

Following circulation of this interim review, feedback will be gathered from Springboard colleges, participants and employer representatives on the early outcomes as set out in the document. Another survey of employment-related and other outcomes for graduates and participants will be carried out in January 2013 and updated information will be gathered from Springboard colleges, from the Live Register, and via feedback from employers who have taken on Springboard graduates. This will be presented in the next stage report to be published early in 2013.

This report will also include an assessment of the implementation of Springboard 2012, with a particular review of changes to the initiative which were introduced in 2012 to improve participant experience and outcomes. These included a stronger emphasis on labour market links and work placement as part of approved Springboard courses; more streamlined eligibility criteria for participants; additional steps to brief local Social Protection staff on Springboard; introduction of a Freephone guidance line for potential participants; and an enhanced marketing campaign, including two dedicated roadshow events.

Appendix1

Survey of Springboard participants August 2012

[This survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey]

1 Please tick which of the following most accurately describes your current connection with Springboard:

I have just completed my Springboard course [July/August 2012] and am seeking work with my new qualification

I have completed my Springboard course and have got a job

I have completed my Springboard course and am self-employed

I have got a job and am also continuing with my Springboard course in order to gain my qualification

I have further assessments/examinations before completing my course

I am due to complete my Springboard course before the end of 2012

I am due to continue to the second year of my Springboard course

I am currently completing a work placement

I left my Springboard course before it was complete because I got a job

I left my Springboard course before it was complete due to personal/academic reasons

2 What Springboard course have you been/are you participating in?

Free text _____

3 What higher education college is your course based in?

[drop down list of participating Springboard colleges]

4 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement:

My Springboard course this year contained up-to-date, relevant and useful skills and knowledge for employment

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Comment, if any _____

5 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement:

I received good support from my college in returning to education and during my course

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Comment, if any _____

6 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement:

The careers coaching and other job preparation supports on my course were very useful

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Comment, if any _____

7. For those in receipt of a payment from the Department of Social Protection (DSP), please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement: "As a Department of Social Protection client, when applying for a Springboard course I had to apply for the Part Time Education Option (PTEO) in my local DSP office. This allowed me retain my DSP payment while an entitlement existed while pursuing my course. I found this helpful and in general found the experience to be a good one."

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Comment, if any _____

8 How would you rate your overall outlook and optimism about your career prospects now, compared to before you started your Springboard course?

Far better

Quite a bit better

About the same

I am less optimistic than before

9 Apart from the aim to assist you with getting your career back on track, were there other benefits for you in participating in a Springboard course?

[free text]_____

10. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with this statement: "Springboard has had a positive impact on my life" (e.g. financially, experience of returning to higher education, work placement, contact with employers, managing study and home life and responsibilities).

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Comment, if any _____

11 Which of the following statements most accurately reflects your Springboard experience?

The course is greatly helping me/ has helped me achieve employment

The course is somewhat helping me/ has helped me achieve employment

The course is neither helping nor hindering me in achieving employment

The course was not helpful, and may have hindered me in achieving employment

Comment, if any _____

12 From your experience to-date, what parts of Springboard could be improved, and how?

[free text]_____

Appendix 2

Springboard Evaluation Approach

The first stage evaluation report which was published in February 2012 provided initial outputs from the initiative, including numbers enrolled, the profile of participants against the target cohorts, course and provider details and costs. It also included feedback from participants, providers, employers and other stakeholders on their experience with the Springboard 2011 process. This feedback was used to inform changes to the Springboard 2012 process. These included increased weighting in the selection criteria to labour market links; more targeted marketing of courses in collaboration with employers; information sessions for D/SP staff and the introduction of a temporary Freephone guidance service for potential applicants.

The data sources for the Stage one report included information on the profile of participants collected via the online applications system; online surveys of participants and providers and interviews with stakeholders.

The second stage interim evaluation review presents academic and early employment outcomes (as at end September 2012) for the 2011 Springboard cohort. The outcomes are derived from the following data sources:

- i. Data returns from the Springboard providers which report academic outcomes for 4,862 students (98% of total enrolled),
- ii. Information on employment outcomes for 2,576 students which was available to Springboard providers (52% of total enrolled),
- iii. 1,508 responses from a direct survey of all enrolled Springboard participants (30% response rate),
- iv. Information from a D/SP scan of participant PPSNs to identify current LR status.

The survey of participants also provided further qualitative feedback on their experience of the process and the relevance and quality of the courses and this is being fed back to providers for comment.

The third stage of the evaluation to be completed in early 2013 will include a further survey of employment and other outcomes for the 2011 Springboard cohort and a review of the 2012 Springboard process, with inputs from participants, providers, employers and other stakeholders.