IMPACT REPORT

VENI Welcome to the Visitor Economy Programme in East Suffolk 2025–26



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Impact Report for the VENI Welcome to the Visitor Economy Programme in East Suffolk 2025–26

Between October 2025 and July 2026, VENI delivered five Welcome to the Visitor Economy programmes across Leiston, Lowestoft, Bawdsey, Woodbridge and Felixstowe. In total, 46 participants took part, completing customer service training alongside practical employability support, employer engagement and activities designed to increase awareness of the local visitor economy.

Attendance was exceptionally strong, ranging from 92% to 100% across the five programmes. The consistently high attendance reflected participants' commitment to the programmes and was noted by delivery partners. Reflecting on the Bawdsey programme, one DWP stakeholder commented:

"The proof is in the pudding. People vote with their feet. If something's good, they'll turn up. If it's not, they won't."

At the time of follow-up, 11 participants had secured employment. Five of the fourteen Lowestoft participants had found work, representing an employment rate of 36% within four months. Three Bawdsey participants, two Leiston participants and one Woodbridge participant had also progressed into employment.

Four Bawdsey participants successfully completed PGL's recruitment process and received job offers, although not all offers resulted in starts because of factors including pre-employment checks, seasonal timing and personal circumstances. One participant progressed into further training, while two Felixstowe participants began progressing towards volunteering with Landguard within days of completing the programme. A former VENI participant had also moved into paid employment with Eastern Education Group and returned to support delivery of the Felixstowe course.

Employment outcomes were still emerging for the more recent Woodbridge and Felixstowe programmes. Nevertheless, early evidence already showed participants securing work, preparing for interviews, submitting CVs directly to employers and accessing volunteering opportunities.

Across all five locations, the wider impact was consistent. Participants reported increased confidence, improved interview and CV skills, renewed motivation and a broader understanding of the opportunities available within the visitor economy. VENI did not simply prepare participants to apply for existing vacancies. It helped them recognise transferable skills, reconsider what they were capable of and discover local pathways they had not previously known existed.

Impact at a Glance:

- **Five programmes delivered across East Suffolk**
- **46 participants engaged**
- **92% to 100% attendance across all cohorts**
- **11 participants have now secured employment**
- **Five of fourteen Lowestoft participants employed within four months**
- **Four participants received job offers from PGL Bawdsey Manor**
- **One participant progressed into further training**
- **Two participants progressed towards volunteering**
- **One former VENI participant returned to the programme as a support tutor**

While there is no national benchmark for four day employability programmes, evaluations of comparable employment support interventions suggest that success is typically measured over much longer periods and often in terms of improvements relative to a comparison group rather than simple employment rates. Against this backdrop, VENI's combination of exceptionally high attendance (92–100%), employer engagement and early employment outcomes is particularly encouraging.

Employment and Progression Outcomes

The programme generated employment across a varied range of roles and sectors. Participants progressed into work in hospitality, visitor accommodation, education, library services, transport, customer service, land-based employment and the wider visitor economy.

Lowestoft achieved the strongest employment rate. Five of its fourteen participants had secured work within four months, alongside one participant entering further training. The outcomes included a permanent holiday park receptionist role and lecturing work secured through a connection made during the programme.

The impact extended beyond simply helping participants apply for more jobs. In several cases, VENI changed the kinds of opportunities they considered. One Lowestoft participant explained:

"It was only because I had the visitor economy in my head after the course that I even contacted a holiday park. Before that, I was only looking at restaurant and bar work. I would never have considered being a receptionist."

After securing the role, she received direct recognition for her customer service:

"I got a 10 out of 10 review yesterday for my customer service. I was personally named."

At Bawdsey, four participants received job offers through PGL's recruitment process. By the time of follow-up, three participants had secured employment, including one who had joined PGL as a Housekeeper, while two others had found work in teaching and on a golf course. The remaining offers were delayed by DBS and reference checks, meaning they had not progressed to employment. Reflecting on this, VENI and PGL have identified opportunities to strengthen future delivery, including the possibility of running the programme earlier in the year to allow more time for pre-employment checks to be completed before the seasonal recruitment period.

Leiston produced two employment outcomes. One participant secured several roles as an Exam Invigilator, Library Cover Assistant and School Minibus Driver. Another secured work as a hotel Concierge after meeting an employer through the programme. The employer created a role specifically for him after recognising the value of his experience. As Matt Graham from DWP explained:

"That employer really liked somebody and actually made a job for them. I put that as one of our good news stories here actually."

Woodbridge was evaluated just four weeks after delivery, but one participant had already secured local farm work. Another was preparing for an interview with a local hotel, while two participants had submitted CVs to employers they met during the course and were still waiting to hear back. VENI reflected that this presented an opportunity to strengthen post-course employer follow-up, helping to maintain momentum and maximise employment outcomes.

The Felixstowe follow-up took place within days. Even at this early stage, two participants had already pursued volunteering positions at Landguard Fort, with one due to start that week, providing valuable experience and a route into the local visitor economy.

Opening Up New Opportunities

A defining outcome across all five programmes was a broader understanding of the visitor economy. Participants frequently arrived associating it primarily with hotels or seasonal hospitality. Through visits, employer presentations and local activities, they discovered opportunities across heritage, education, transport, retail, visitor attractions and community organisations.

One Lowestoft participant reflected:

"It opened my eyes to how many opportunities there actually are in the visitor economy. I think people often have far more transferable skills than they realise."

Another described a significant change in outlook:

"I think the course made me look beyond what I thought I was capable of. I'd always pigeonholed myself into certain kinds of jobs before."

This pattern was repeated elsewhere. A Bawdsey participant said:

"It was definitely through the course. I don't think PGL had ever really crossed my mind before."

In Felixstowe, one participant explained:

"It definitely did make me consider options in the visitor economy more than I did previously."

Another, who had previously worked in nursing and social care, found that a visit to the local museum rekindled his interest in history:

"When we went round the museum, it rekindled all my old interests in matters historic."

Within days, he had arranged to discuss volunteering at Landguard.

These examples demonstrate that VENI's impact was not limited to teaching employability skills. The programme changed how participants understood their local economy and where they might belong within it.

Confidence as a Foundation for Employment

Increased confidence was the most consistent wider outcome across the five programmes. For participants who had experienced long-term unemployment, low self-belief or anxiety about returning to work, the supportive group environment provided an opportunity to rebuild routines and practise communication before facing real recruitment situations.

A Lowestoft participant captured the impact clearly:

"VENI gave me the confidence to go for a job which I would never have ever thought I was capable of doing."

Another participant who went onto secure a full time visitor economy role that she is really enjoying explained:

"After doing the course and looking at all the things we discussed, and then looking at everything I'd done before, I realised I had a skill set that was much more useful on the front line. The course helped me see that."

In Leiston, one participant described how the programme supported his return after a prolonged period out of work:

"Having been out of work for a long time, it was probably ideal timing that I got used to working and communicating with people on the course before my jobs started."

He added:

"It made it a little less of a shock to suddenly find myself back in a workplace environment again."

Woodbridge participants particularly valued realistic interview practice. One participant explained:

"It helped build my confidence. It showed me what an interview would roughly look like."

Another acknowledged finding the interviews difficult but recognised their value:

"I wasn't very good at them because I was nervous, but it was good experience."

In Felixstowe, one participant felt the benefit was shared across the cohort:

"It sort of built everyone's confidence."

Another similarly described the programme as valuable for his wellbeing:

"It's very good for me and my self-esteem and my confidence."

These gains were not separate from employment outcomes. They were frequently the step that enabled participants to apply, attend interviews and consider opportunities they might previously have dismissed.

Employer Engagement and Place-Based Delivery

Employer involvement gave participants realistic insight into workplaces and created direct routes into recruitment. Participants met businesses, toured workplaces, received interview feedback and explored their towns from a visitor's perspective.

A representative from PGL Bawdsey Manor explained the value of experiencing a workplace before applying:

"For me, that's really important, people seeing first-hand what we're like, where we are and what the work is actually like."

He also recognised that an informed decision not to pursue a role could still be a positive outcome:

"If somebody comes away saying, 'Actually, I don't think PGL's for me,' that's okay. I'd rather they find that out now than after they've started."

VENI's delivery team was also praised for engaging participants with different backgrounds and confidence levels. A DWP representative commented:

"They know how to hold a room, they know how to communicate, they know how to balance. We've had some difficult characters, but they made it so they still engaged."

The local focus was equally important. Participants explored Lowestoft, Leiston, Woodbridge and Felixstowe, met organisations rooted in their communities and gained a clearer understanding of opportunities close to home. This helped make employment feel more immediate, relevant and achievable.

"I didn't realise until after doing the course just how much of an industry Lowestoft itself has."

Creating a Lasting Local Legacy

Felixstowe provided a particularly strong example of the programme's longer-term value. A former VENI participant who had completed the Newmarket programme subsequently secured paid work with Eastern Education Group and returned as a support tutor.

Drawing on their volunteering experience at Landguard, they helped organise the museum visit, supported learners, reviewed CVs, assisted participants requiring additional support and introduced the cohort to volunteering opportunities. Within days, two participants were progressing towards volunteering at Landguard themselves.

This represents more than an individual employment outcome. It demonstrates a developing cycle in which former participants return with new skills and experience, strengthen local partnerships and create opportunities for subsequent cohorts.

Conclusions

Across five East Suffolk programmes, VENI achieved strong attendance, clear employment outcomes and meaningful progression into training, interviews and volunteering. Eleven participants had secured work by follow-up, while four received job offers through PGL. Outcomes from the most recent courses were still emerging.

The evidence also demonstrates why the model works. VENI combines practical employability support with customer service training, supportive group learning, direct employer engagement and a strong sense of place. This helps participants recognise transferable skills, broaden their ambitions and develop the confidence to take realistic next steps.

Overall, VENI is doing more than helping people secure jobs. It is opening doors participants had not previously considered, strengthening relationships between local people and employers, and creating benefits that continue beyond the end of each course.

As one Lowestoft participant concluded:

"I wasn't expecting to enjoy my new job as much as I am, and I honestly don't think I would have applied for it if I hadn't done the VENI course."