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Pensions



Innovation Fund pilots qualitative evaluation

Early implementation findings

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Summary

The Innovation Fund (IF) pilot initiative, aimed at supporting disadvantaged young people, comprises ten Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) awarded Social Impact Bond (SIB) contracts. The SIB model is widely acknowledged to be groundbreaking in nature. The model is 100 per cent payment by results (PbR) based on the achievement of specified social outcomes including jobs, improved behaviour and attendance at school, and qualifications. Commissioned via two separate procurement rounds, six pilots went live in April 2012 and a further four were launched in November of the same year. As well as testing the effectiveness of early intervention approaches for disadvantaged young people, the IF is designed to help build capacity within the social investment market, especially in the effective development and implementation of SIBs. This report was commissioned to understand and share the lessons learned during the first year of the IF's set-up and delivery, and is the first part of a broader evaluation programme commissioned by DWP. It is based on the results of 210 face-to-face interviews with project managers, staff and key partners, and with participating young people.

After the first few months of delivery, most projects had bedded in after some early teething difficulties. Lessons have been learnt and the projects are progressing well. The findings presented here give an early indication of initial delivery lessons learned. The ten IF pilots have successfully identified and engaged some of the most disadvantaged young people in society. Almost all young people interviewed were positive about the interventions they were participating in and were motivated, enthusiastic and engaged with the programmes on offer. Over 100 schools have bought into the programmes of support on offer and experience of school staff to date is reported as being highly positive, with many reportedly seeking to maintain provision beyond the contract period. The demand for services frequently outweighs supply, suggesting that there is scope to scale-up initiatives of this nature.

Due to the newness of the initiatives, a small number of initial challenges arose for projects working with schools, although many were only 'teething' troubles as new partners got to know each other and the specific context in which they were working. The funding model has been a key driver of behaviours and has focused attention on generating starts and tracking individual participants towards the achievement of outcomes. The interest of all parties in ensuring the projects are successful and the need to generate cash-flow for continued delivery, has led to careful and proactive performance management by intermediaries, investors and deliverers alike. There has been some reprofiling of project starts and outcomes, especially among round one pilots, with a more uniform focus emerging on the engagement of 14 to 16-year-olds, on working with and within schools, and on more time-limited and structured interventions. Overall, projects have seen an increase in targeted lower level qualifications, and in behavioural and attendance outcomes suitable for younger cohorts. Following readjustments, projects are progressing well. Projects most comfortable within the funding model appear to be those undertaking more time-limited, preventative interventions with school pupils, because outcomes and cash-flow can be generated relatively quickly. The projects experiencing the greatest delivery challenges have been those targeted on young people already not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those primarily working towards longer-term outcomes.

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The Authors

Andrew Thomas is a founding partner of Insite Research with more than 30 years qualitative research and consultancy experience in the welfare reform, employment and social policy fields. He has worked in both private and academic research sectors and for a wide range of statutory and public sector clients in the UK and Europe. His 15 years as a partner with Insite, together with work with private research consultancies and research institutes at Liverpool and Manchester Universities, has given him an in-depth understanding of the wide range of employment and social policy issues. Policy research makes up a key area of Andrew's expertise together with the evaluation of policies and programmes targeted on groups disadvantaged in the labour market including: lone and couple parents; people with health conditions and disabilities; and young people not in education, training or employment. During his career he has managed in excess of 50 research and evaluation projects and has authored or co-authored many published government reports and research studies.

Rita Griffiths is a founding partner of Insite Research with 25 years professional experience of applied qualitative research. In the 1990s, Rita worked as a social policy researcher with various UK private research companies, going on to establish Insite with Andrew Thomas in 1999. During her career, she has managed and made major contributions to numerous research and evaluation studies of government policies and programmes, mainly in the field of welfare reform, child poverty and disability, undertaking assignments on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Home Office, Department for Education and Skills, Overseas Development Administration, local authorities, voluntary organisations and the European Commission. With Insite Research, she has authored or co-authored in excess of 25 reports published as part of the DWP Research Report series. From 2007–10 she was a member of the DWP's Parent Policy Research Consortium. In 2011, Rita won a University of Bath research scholarship excellence award to explore the influence of UK means-tested welfare benefits and tax credits on partnering decisions and family structure. She has completed her fieldwork with low income mothers and will submit her thesis in 2015.

List of abbreviations

DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
IF	Innovation Fund
PbR	Payment by Results
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
SPV	Special Purpose Vehicle
SIB	Social Investment Bond
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
KPI	Key Performance Indicator

Executive summary

Introduction

In 2011, the Government announced a package of measures to help address youth unemployment including a new Innovation Fund (IF) pilot initiative aimed at supporting disadvantaged young people aged 14 years and over using Social Investment models. Ten Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) were awarded Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contracts. The model is 100 per cent payment by results (PbR) based on the achievement of specified social outcomes including jobs, improved behaviour and attendance at school, and qualifications. Commissioned via two separate procurement rounds, six pilots went live in April 2012 and a further four were launched in November of the same year.

As well as testing the effectiveness of early intervention approaches for disadvantaged young people, the Innovation Fund is designed to help build capacity within the Social Investment market, especially in the effective development and implementation of SIBs. This report was commissioned to understand and share the lessons learned during the first year of the Fund's set-up and delivery, and is the first part of a broader evaluation programme commissioned by the DWP.

The projects will run for three years, with outcomes monitored for a further six months. They target the most disadvantaged young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) and those at greatest risk of becoming NEET.

This early implementation report is based on the results of 210 face-to-face interviews with managers, staff and key partners in investor, intermediary, stakeholder and delivery organisations, and with participating young people.

There are 15 SIBs in the UK, of which ten are DWP IF SIBs. The IF SIBs have broken new ground and paved the way for future social investment initiatives. The findings presented here give an early indication of the lessons learned and built upon to date.

Key early findings

The ten IF pilots have successfully identified and engaged some of the most disadvantaged young people in society. Almost all young people interviewed were positive about the interventions they were participating in and were motivated, enthusiastic and engaged with the programmes on offer. Particular aspects highlighted by young people as being of most use to them were:

- the one-to-one relationship with a key worker action planning; and
- target setting activities that had increased their self confidence.

Schools have engaged and bought into the programmes of support on offer, and demand for services frequently outweighs supply, suggesting that there is scope to scale-up initiatives of this nature.

Investors, intermediaries and delivery bodies involved view this initiative as making a real difference to the lives of young people. The SIB model is widely acknowledged to be ground breaking in nature. Lessons have been learnt from the first few months of delivery and the projects are progressing well.

The service offer

The IF pilot projects aim to prevent young people from becoming NEET, or support those already NEET to re-engage with education, training and employment. Interventions display a wide diversity in terms of participant age range, in and out of school provision and the balance between one to one and group work. Some programmes are built around participation on a structured programme or course.

Despite these differences, there are also commonalities between projects including: time spent on initial marketing, recruitment and engagement; an intense initial process of working with each participant to achieve a positive shift in 'mind-set'; a more extended period of personal and skills development and the encouragement of mental resilience in dealing with challenges and difficulties faced; and an ongoing process of goal setting and progression facilitation.

Targeting at-risk young people

The projects are recruiting and supporting a broad range of disadvantaged young people with multiple risk factors ranging from truancy and disengagement from school, to learning difficulties and poor literacy and numeracy. Some projects involve a range of specialist delivery organisations with particular expertise in working to support young people with specific or complex needs. The barriers to re-engagement and progression displayed by young people are equally widely spread and range from issues of poor self-esteem and lack of self-confidence through to motivational, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

All projects had been affected to some degree by initial delays in getting fully up and running, and several had found themselves initially falling short of their anticipated number of programme starts. At the time of the research, projects had boosted referral rates and were well on the way to catching up on starts.

Approaches made through schools were found to offer the benefits of highly structured institutions with potentially strong channels of communication. They also held out the possibility of reaching relatively large numbers of at-risk young people through a single source, and with greater support than in other contexts.

Marketing programmes to individual schools took longer than was originally envisaged but, once fully underway, demand for those who wanted help to support the pupils most at risk of leaving school with no or very few qualifications was, in most areas, greater than what projects were capable of providing.

Working with schools

The pilots have secured buy-in from well over 100 schools and the reaction and experience of school staff to date is reported as being highly positive, with many reportedly already seeking to maintain provision beyond the contract period.

Due to the newness of the initiatives, a small number of initial challenges arose for projects working with schools, although many were only teething troubles as new partners got to know each other and to understand the specific context in which they were working. Most frequently mentioned were the following:

- projects had not anticipated the amount of time and resource it would take to market their initiatives to schools and get them involved;
- projects had to tailor their interventions to fit around the school year and the school timetable;
- there were issues of continued and sufficient programme access to some pupils, especially those on the verge of permanent exclusion or in escalating trouble with teachers; and
- projects found they needed to strike a balance between effective integration in schools and the maintenance of a presence and identity that was perceived by young people (often in conflict with school authority) as being separate from school.

Payment by results and re-profiling

The funding model has been a key driver of behaviours and has focused attention on generating starts and tracking individual participants towards the achievement of outcomes. The interest of all parties in ensuring the projects are successful and the need to generate cash-flow for continued delivery to be sustained has led to careful and pro-active performance management by intermediaries, investors and deliverers alike.

Most projects experienced delays in the early months of implementation which had a knock-on effect on the number of starts (and potential outcomes) in the early months of the programme. This had led to some remodelling and reprofiling of starts and outcomes. Initial underestimations in many of the business plans were acknowledged and were being dealt with. In several projects, this involved extensive changes in the types of outcomes to be achieved and the timescales within which they would occur. The most radical reprofiling was undertaken by some of the Round one projects.

Differences between projects in the content and structure of their interventions have tended to diminish as a result of remodelling, with a more uniform focus emerging on the younger age group (14 to 16-year-olds) on working with and within schools, and on more time-limited and structured interventions. Overall there was an increase in targeted qualifications (especially earlier, low-level qualifications) and an increase in behavioural and attendance outcomes, along with a decrease in reliance on projected job outcomes in favour of these early intervention proxy measures for future employment.

Following readjustments, projects are progressing well. Projects most comfortable with the payment by results model appear to be those undertaking more time-limited, preventative interventions with school pupils deemed to be at risk of becoming NEET in the future. This is because outcomes and cash-flow can be generated relatively quickly.

It is notable that those experiencing the greatest delivery challenges have been those targeted on young people already NEET, those offering longer-term support, and those primarily working towards longer-term outcomes such as entry to employment, which affects their ability to get financial returns early on in the programme.

Performance management

All projects acknowledged the need to undergo an active and continuous process of monitoring and performance management, although many delivery bodies, particularly in the voluntary and community sector (VCS) had not anticipated the way in which the funding model would drive delivery. This is not surprising given that the VCS may not have worked in such a way before.

The strong focus on performance monitoring and management was seen to have built capacity among delivery organisations, helping to drive-up performance levels and improve programme efficiency. To maintain this focus, there was a high demand from investors and intermediaries for frequent, detailed and up-to-date information on how recruitment and delivery was progressing. Data handling systems and software had often been found to be in need of strengthening, and in several instances this had been achieved through additional resource brought in using staff and funding outside IF budgets, demonstrating strong commitment to the success of the programme.

Ongoing evaluation

These early implementation findings are one strand of a comprehensive evaluation, including net impact assessment. At an early implementation stage, those projects that appear most suited to the model, and which are seemingly doing best, appear to be those exhibiting some or all of the following characteristics:

- being targeted on a pre-NEET, younger (school-age) group;
- including a high proportion of intermediate outcomes such as improved attitude, attendance and behaviour at school, and entry level qualifications;
- involving a rolling intake and an even spread of outcomes;
- engaging a target cohort with sufficient volume and flexibility to allow expansion if required;
- providing varied intensities of support to a differentiated eligible target group; and
- delivering time-limited and structured interventions.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2011, the Government announced a package of measures to help address youth unemployment including a new 'Innovation Fund' (IF) of approximately £30 million to support social investment projects. The initiative has piloted a range of projects using a 100 per cent outcomes-based Payment by Results (PbR) funding model.

1.2 The pilot programme

Six projects were awarded IF contracts by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in spring 2012 and commenced operation in April of that year. A further four projects were funded from a second round of bidding in late summer 2012, commencing operation in November 2012.

Projects will run for a maximum of three years, with outcomes monitored for a further six months. The projects are targeted on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, and those at greatest risk of becoming long term NEET (not in education, employment or training). Round one pilots are targeted on young people between the ages of 14 and 24 years. Round two pilots are targeted exclusively on young people aged 14 and 15 years.

The IF has three key objectives:

- to deliver support to help young people who are disadvantaged, or at risk of disadvantage, helping them participate and succeed in education or training and thereby improve their employability, enter employment and reduce their longer-term dependency on benefits;
- to test the extent to which a social investment model can generate benefit savings, other wider fiscal and social benefits, and deliver Social Return on Investment;
- to support the development of the social investment market, the capacity building of smaller delivery organisations, and generate a credible evidence base which supports social investment funding arrangements.

1.3 The IF social investment model

Social investment can be defined as the provision and use of finance to generate social and financial returns, where the former is the primary objective and the latter the secondary objective. Social Investment Bonds (SIBs) are funding mechanisms aligning public sector funding with improved social outcomes, and have three elements: monetary investment; a programme of actions to improve the prospects of a particular social group; commitments by local or national government to make payments linked to improved social outcomes achieved by that group (the social value). Three basic types of SIBs have been identified: (1) philanthropic (funds raised from philanthropic sources such as trusts and foundations and invested through a special purpose vehicle); (2) public sector (initial funds from, for example, local government bodies); (3) commercial (where funds are raised from commercial investors who might have varying degrees of social motivation, but who are primarily seeking a financial return on investment, even if willing to consider reduced returns because of the social benefits deriving from the deployment of their capital). In the light of this

categorisation, the individual projects which make up the IF pilot can be seen to be highly diverse, including as they do elements from all three types of SIBs.

The IF set out to break new ground, both in terms of developing the financial model of social investment and by targeting interventions on the most disadvantaged young people. A small number of social investment experiments have been undertaken to date and have all generally sought to attract investment that is 'external' to the commissioning body and repayable through the achievement of specified social impacts. However, they have gone about this in different ways and with significant variation in certain key elements such as defined outcome metrics, eligible cohort specifications, contracting arrangements and payment regimes.¹

The most directly available UK experience that can be referred to has come from the prevention of reoffending pilots. The Ministry of Justice currently has two prison based PbR pilots operating in Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Peterborough and HMP Doncaster. The Peterborough pilot began on 9 September 2010 and the Doncaster pilot on 1 October 2011.² Although these projects are still ongoing, their design has been drawn upon by the IF pilot which has been able to benefit from the growing expertise of some key involved organisations such as Big Society Capital and Social Finance. This said, the IF pilot differs in many ways from the Peterborough pilot which means it would be unwise to directly 'read across' or simply transfer the lessons learned from the one to the other. In particular, IF has a very different eligible target group and a different spread of allowable outcomes on which payment is to be made.

1.4 Outcomes

The IF pilots have been set up to be funded entirely on a payment by results (PbR) basis, and the nature of the outcomes being paid for are an important feature of the programme. Outcomes eligible for funding are based on the individual achievements of the young people being supported towards employability. They include entry to first employment and sustained maintenance of that employment, and also, because of the early intervention nature of the initiative, other measures that are known to be good indicators of improved future employment chances. These 'proxy' measures include verified and sustained improvements in attitude, behaviour and attendance at school, as well as a range of achieved qualifications.

¹ Readers interested in both the practical and theoretical variations on the theme of social investment and SIBs are referred to the following publications in what is a small, but fast growing, body of relevant literature: Brown, A. and Norman, W. (2011) *Lighting the touchpaper: Growing the market for social investment in England*, The Boston Consulting Group and The Young Foundation; Fox and Albertson (2011) *Payment by results and social impact bonds in the criminal justice sector: New challenges for the concept of evidence-based policy*. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 11(5), 395; Loxley, J. (January 2013) *Social Impact Bonds*, CCPA Review of Economic and Social Trends; Shanmugalingam, C. et al. (2011) *Growing social ventures: The role of intermediaries and investors: who they are, what they do and what they could become*, The Young Foundation and NESTA, Policy Paper; Social Finance (January 2013) *A Technical Guide to Developing Social Impact Bonds*, Social Finance Ltd.;

² See Disley et al. (2011) *Lessons learned from the planning and early implementation of the social impact bond at HMP Peterborough*, *Ministry of Justice Research Series 5/11*.

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Payment for outcomes by DWP has been based on the estimated potential benefit savings from preventing at-risk individuals from falling into long-term unemployment in the future. For round one pilots, payments were broadly based on two years of potential benefit savings to HM Treasury. This was increased to three years for round two projects.

Appendix A lists the different outcomes that are eligible for payment in the pilots up to a specified 'cap' for each individual participant, and sets out the rates payable for each of these outcomes in each of the two rounds.

1.5 The ten pilots

The six round one pilot projects are located in Nottingham, Birmingham, Merseyside and Perth, with two in London, one in the Shoreditch area and one in the Newham area of East London. The four round two pilot projects are located in Greater Manchester, South Wales, the Thames Valley area and in part of West London comprising six local authorities.

Most of the projects gave specific names to their IF initiatives for the purposes of bidding. On a day-to-day basis the projects refer to themselves variously either by this name, the name of the special purposes vehicle holding the investment, the name of the delivery body, or the name of the intermediary. For consistency, the pilot projects are referred to in this report by the general geographical location of service delivery and the specific programme title, for example 'Merseyside New Horizons' and 'Newham Links for Life' and 'Perth Living Balance'.

The projects broadly conform to a model in which there are three key types of partner – investors, intermediaries and delivery organisations – although within this there is much variation. The number of investors per project ranges from a single investor through to 11. Only some of the projects have an intermediary. Some projects have more than one delivery body and some involve sub-contractors.

Other differences between the projects lie in the age groups of young people being targeted, the location of service delivery, and the spread of outcomes that they are aiming to achieve. Appendix B includes a table which sets out the key elements of the ten IF pilots.

1.6 The qualitative methodology

This report is the first published output from the qualitative strand of evaluation research into the IF programme. It presents findings from face-to-face interviews conducted, between December 2012 and September 2013, with investors, intermediaries, deliverer managers and staff, together with other stakeholders and project participants in each of the pilots after nine to twelve months of operation.

A total of 210 face-to-face interviews were carried out, spread equally across the ten pilots. Of these, 110 were with staff, managers and representatives of the partner organisations, of which approximately half were with those directly involved in delivery. 'Staff' interviewees were selected to cover key posts and to include managers with a broad overview of activities and well as those dealing 'hands-on' with young people.

The other 100 interviews were carried out with participant young people (ten from each pilot project). Participant interviewees from the round one projects were selected from a data extract provided by DWP which included information on the known 'NEET risk characteristics' of each individual. A range was sought across these characteristics, as well

as an equal gender balance. Participants from round two projects were recruited via their projects workers and coaches, without the benefit of any data extract from which to sample. Projects were asked for names of participants that would include both those doing well and those doing less well.

Participants were selected who had started on the programme sufficiently early to have several months experience of interventions. The great majority had been engaged on projects for between six and nine months at the time they were interviewed.

1.7 The purpose of this report

The findings in this report relate primarily to the reported experiences of those involved in the early months of implementation and delivery of services to young people within the ten pilot projects. A later evaluation report will explore how well the pilots have met their objectives after several years of operation. This report builds upon, and explores further, issues raised in scoping discussions with key respondents in each of the main partner organisations of each pilot, which were carried out within the first few weeks of projects 'going live' (May/June 2012 for round one projects; November/December 2012 for round two projects). The exploratory papers from these scoping discussions were not produced for publication, but provided indications of key areas of interest to be followed up, and helped shape the lines of inquiry embodied in the discussion guides for the subsequent early implementation interviews.

The purpose of this report is to identify, for policy makers in government and other interested parties, the key issues that the pilot projects have encountered in their first year. Many respondents noted that it was still 'early days' and there is currently no quantitative information available that could provide a statistically rigorous measure of impact, either for individual pilots or for the IF programme as a whole. This report, therefore, focuses on the progress of the pilot projects to date as reported by interview respondents. It attempts to identify early outcomes and the processes, and mechanisms which attend the innovative model of social investment under which they were set up, and to explore the range of responses that have been made under the varying circumstances of each intervention.

The most innovative aspect of the IF programme is the funding model itself. Social investment, or the SIB model, for financing public services is universally acknowledged to be in its infancy and still at a stage where there is little evidence as to its effects or its effectiveness. While there is considerable expectation attached to it, and high hopes for an expansion of the investment market on which it will depend, it remains as yet in a 'proof of concept' phase of development. It is in this light that the early months of implementation of the IF pilots have been explored.

Definitive judgements of success, and of impact on the target group of at-risk young people, must await further qualitative and quantitative analysis at the end of the three and a half year piloting period. At this early stage, this report will seek to elaborate upon what the evidence thus far suggests might be the main areas affected by specific decisions, choices and actions taken in the implementation and operation of projects. It is hoped that this and future reports will facilitate the making of informed policy and operational choices in the subsequent development and possible expansion of this approach to commissioning and funding for targeted, specialist employment and employability-related services for young people.

1.8 Structure of the report

The rest of this early implementation report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 describes the service offer being made by the ten pilot projects, outlining the main differences between the individual projects as well as identifying the key shared elements.

Chapter 3 takes an early look at the experiences of a sample of young people who have participated in the pilot programme and at what the young people themselves are saying has worked well for them thus far.

Chapter 4 explores the ways in which the pilots have approached and engaged with the IF's target group of young people who are NEET or at high risk of becoming NEET when they leave school.

Chapter 5 looks at the key relationship that pilot projects have with schools, the ways in which these relationships have been developed, and the 'teething' troubles that have emerged in forging joint working arrangements with the education sector.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarises early findings and draws some preliminary conclusions.

2 The different types of intervention

The pilot projects running under the Innovation Fund (IF) programme show a very wide diversity in the detail of the interventions they are delivering. All are directed towards preventing young people from becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), or supporting those already NEET to re-engage with education, training and employment. While they share a similar funding model, the Department for Work and Pensions has deliberately not imposed uniformity on the design of projects, choosing instead to operate a ‘black box’ approach towards the types of interventions to be deployed, and leaving choice over the precise mechanisms of delivery to the projects. Commissioners’ encouraged and selected projects for their diversity and innovation. A change of emphasis in the specification for project proposals in the second round of bidding compared to the first round has introduced further important differences.

Unlike in round one, second round IF projects were invited to address themselves solely to early intervention measures with year 10 and year 11 school pupils in the years prior to taking their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams. Young people starting on the programme were thus to be 14 and 15-year-olds at risk of becoming NEET on leaving school (although, once engaged, projects could continue to support them post-16). The increased emphasis on early intervention with young people still of statutory school age entailed a shift away from the wide age mix of most round one projects which were recruiting across a broader spectrum of 14 to 24-year-olds.

The differences in age groups addressed by the projects were significant in two key respects. First, those focusing on 14 and 15-year-olds were more likely to be taking their referrals from, and dealing mainly with, schools. Second, their customer base was more homogenous, comprising young people still nominally within the education system who, although displaying signs of being at risk of leaving school with very few or no qualifications and with no clear onward destination, were not yet actually NEET. Projects recruiting young people who had already left school, and who were already NEET, were faced with much more heterogeneous recruitment and referral routes as well as a much broader delivery context without the potentially supporting structures of schools to work within.

In addition to this age-related difference separating the ten pilots, one of which was dedicated to a narrow age group of participants, the other addressing a wide mix of different aged participants, there were a number of other parameters which distinguished them according to the operational details of delivery. Most salient among these were:

- the degree to which interventions were delivered within the school setting or outside schools and school hours;
- the degree to which work with young people was carried out on a one-to-one basis with individuals or on a group basis;
- the degree to which interventions were time-limited and tightly structured or ongoing, open-ended, and variably structured; and
- the degree to which interventions were built around participation on a structured programme or course (which may or may not lead to an accredited qualification) or were

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put together in a more ad hoc fashion to meet the requirements of specific participants, and to take advantage of opportunities and activities as fitted individual needs.

2.1 In-school/out of school

2.1.1 South Wales, Capitalise

Only one of the ten pilots (South Wales Capitalise) operates entirely within schools, with all aspects of support provision taking place on school premises and within school hours. The service offer here, called the 'Capitalise' programme, uses tried and proven cognitive behaviour intervention and support to address poor literacy and academic achievement. Specialist literacy teachers delivering support to pupils with dyslexia and basic skills issues, alongside a team of project workers who provide coaching, motivation and personal development, and interventions to address behavioural and truancy problems. Two delivery organisations are involved, one providing the specialist teacher input and the other the coaching input.

Delivery staff comprise three literacy teachers, covering four schools each, and six project workers who each cover two schools. This allows for each school to have a specialist teacher in for one day per week and a project worker for two days one week and for two and a half days the next, throughout the academic year.

The project workers spend most time with year 10 pupils (aged 14 or 15) addressing the particular issues affecting their behaviour and attendance, and tackling their barriers to learning. The specialist teachers focus on the year 11 pupils (aged 15 or 16) and concentrate more on literacy-related issues. The end goal is to get the young people to achieve their GCSEs or other accredited qualification by the time they reach school-leaving age. However, the interventions do cross over the year groups and are based on the individual identified needs of each participant. A health and safety entry level qualification is delivered to all year 10 project participants (aged 14 or 15) and the possibility is currently being explored for delivering an accredited unit for punctuation.

Project workers each have a dedicated caseload of pupils. For those young people in danger of falling back and disengaging over the summer holiday period, the project ensures that contact with them is maintained by the same known 'trusted adult' contact. This takes the form of weekly or fortnightly informal meetings for a chat over a coffee or a burger, through group activities such as trips to museums, arranged sporting or other events, and visits to other places of particular interest to participants. This keeping in touch over the summer break is the only out-of-school aspect of provision in the South Wales Capitalise pilot.

2.1.2 Perth, Living Balance

By way of contrast, the project run through the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Perth lies towards the other extreme in terms of in-school and out-of-school activities. The pilot programme, called 'Living Balance,' which will support a dedicated caseload of young people over three years, anticipated and planned for the smallest proportion of its participants to be of statutory school age and the largest proportion to be over 18. This was not the only (or main) factor determining the shape of provision. Although referrals of some young people came through schools, in the city of Perth and in the surrounding rural areas, these were either 'refusers' who were not turning up to school at all, or disruptive and disengaged pupils struggling with a school environment that was in turn struggling with them.

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Recruiting these young people and working with them out of school to help them re-engage was the delivery model adopted. This mapped onto an existing mode of working for all age-groups based on community outreach and the use of the YMCA buildings and facilities as a base for activities, along with some youth club facilities in outlying areas.

The service offer in this pilot comprises one-to-one support from a key worker for each participant, based on a tried and tested youth work 'critical friend' model. Regular contact with the key worker varies in intensity according to need and each participant's readiness to move to the next stage in their journey back into education or work, but is typically once a week on average. Youth workers travel to wherever they need to, to maintain contact with the young person. The support is explicitly seen as a 'wrap-around' provision which allows continuous contact and work with young people to take place both alongside and between other courses and activities they may be involved in elsewhere. Many of those on Living Balance will, for example, undertake a Prince's Trust course if a place becomes available at an appropriate juncture. Key elements of provision that all school-aged participants undertake include a 'personal development' course and an 'employability' module. These courses and activities take place at the YMCA and other community venues and deliberately not on school premises.

Because a developmental approach is adopted, participants are not expected to necessarily work through a uniform or structured timetable of activity, but are moved into different elements of support and provision as and when they are deemed ready and most likely to be receptive. Often very small steps are involved. Some participants, for example, are much further away from any recognised outcome when they start than others, with much work being required before they can even effectively begin to take part in (small) groups. Young people, therefore, move at their own pace with their key worker paying close attention to recognising the right moments for progression. There is a strong emphasis on ongoing support into the future and of the key worker being continuously available to young people as and when they need help.

Other aspects of support and provision under the YMCA Living Balance 'umbrella' include: residential activities; participation in an employment mentoring scheme; and opportunities for work experience, and even supported employment via the YMCA-run media unit and shop. An employment consultant initially appointed to provide in-work support for those with jobs was subsequently withdrawn because the young people were not engaging with their approach. Once a youth worker took on this role, engagement went up quite considerably.

2.2 Group work and one-to-one support

Most projects typically involved a mixture of group work and one-to-one support, with the balance between them often determined by practicalities of timetabling and the size of coaches' or key workers' caseloads. As one of the advisers in South Wales Capitalise put it:

'I have a tendency to do ... small group work just because ... we have ... quite a lot of young people to get through in the amount of time we're allocated per school ... So in order to see everybody, it makes it very difficult to do one-to-one work ... When somebody has a specific need and they need a higher level of intervention then of course you would do one-to-one work with that young person.'

(Delivery staff)

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In several of the pilots a similar ‘backstop’ of one-to-one support was being made available to participants on an ‘ad hoc’ and irregular basis, while the majority of time, all scheduled contact, was devoted to group work and group activities. However, in those projects where a ‘youth work’ approach was most in evidence, and where this was the previous strength and experience of the delivery organisation, one-to-one contact was the ‘norm’ and the basis of most support provision.

2.2.1 Newham, Links for Life

A strong example of this latter approach was the pilot project ‘Links for Life’ in Newham, where the service offer is all about individual one-to-one, continuous and holistic support to all participants delivered by a personal coach/link worker. Young people are referred to join the project either through schools, via other agencies and projects, or through outreach work conducted by coaches at youth clubs or ‘on the street.’ Older participants who have already left school can also self-refer. Young people of school age make up about a third of participants and the link workers/coaches provide support by sitting with them in classes, keeping them focused and undistracted, helping them to work on improving behaviour and attendance, reducing exclusion and, as appropriate, supporting them in their college and job applications and other matters in the transition between school and work.

Individual support is also provided outside school, with home visits if necessary and through acting as an ‘appropriate adult’ where required in any dealings with the police and statutory authorities. It is thus a highly resource intensive model and coaches have large caseloads of young people whom they aim to see weekly.

2.2.2 Merseyside, New Horizons

Though also delivered by ‘coaches,’ in contrast to Links For Life, the Merseyside project, called New Horizons, is mainly based around the delivery of group activities and individual support in the context of a programmed course. The project envisaged the majority of its participants as being school students in its original bid – and this preponderance over young people already NEET became even more pronounced with reprofiling in the early months.

Opportunities for one-to-one support were found to be constrained by the ways in which schools were willing to be involved, so a more structured, accredited programme was developed.

‘So if the school ... identify a group of say eight young people, but they’ll only allow them to come out of their [50 minute] PSHE lesson once a week, it means that you can’t really see the young people individually ...’

(Delivery staff)

The offer to young people in school is of a 12-week course in motivation, mental resilience, goal setting and personal development, which (now) leads to an accredited level 1 qualification. This course is followed by regular, but less intensive, contact with a coach to keep on top of issues of attendance, behaviour and attainment up to the time of leaving school.

2.3 Time-limited and ongoing support

The provision of long-term ongoing support to young people was a significant aspect of the specification for round one projects. It fitted well with many delivery organisations' experience of working with NEET young people or those at risk of becoming NEET, and with a model of youth work based upon the building of individual relationships over time. It was further based on the familiar arguments about the difficulties for young people in making the transition from school to work and in bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood, between the ages of 16 and 18.

The exclusive focus of round two projects on early intervention with year 10 and 11 pupils (aged 14 to 16) in school inevitably changed this emphasis on the transition, as did moves to extend the school-leaving age which became Government policy at that time. As a result, the structure and timeframe for round two projects is somewhat less fluid, with a strong focus on supporting young people up to the point of taking GCSEs and with achievement in their GCSE examinations a key goal. Delivery practicalities, including operating in the school environment, have led to a more time-limited approach, especially to round 2 interventions, and this distinction between projects attempting to deliver support over the longer term, including once participants have left school, and those seeking to deliver an intense, but more time-limited, programme up to the point of them leaving, is an important dimension within the pilots.

Most projects retain elements of ongoing, longer term support within them, though to varying degrees, and where this was felt to be of central importance to the work being done with young people, there were some concerns in the early months of operation as to what problems this might throw up at the point the first 'cohort' of participants left school.

2.3.1 Shoreditch, Think Forward

The Shoreditch Think Forward project in offers support services to ten schools across several local authority areas through the full-time presence of a progression manager or coach in each of them. Each coach has a yearly caseload of young people whom they see on both an individual and a group basis as required and as they can manage within their timetable. Coaches each have a budget for buying in external services and activities which can include, for example, mentors for those affected by crime or at risk of offending, activity-based projects for motivation and self-esteem, and residentials in school holiday time. In some of the schools, coaches are also able to make use of mentoring from prestigious employer organisations via scheduled fortnightly sessions at the employers' premises. Some of the activities take place during school hours, others after school and during school holidays. When necessary, occasional home visits are made to students (by coaches working in pairs) but the bulk of the service offer is support in school for employability skills and for communication and 'soft' skills developed in the relationship with the coach.

Because the relationship established between a coach and an individual young person is seen as crucial to the effectiveness of what can be achieved, the managers of the projects were acutely aware of the need to remain in contact when young people left the school where a coach was based. The intention to maintain ongoing support after leaving school was thus intrinsic to the delivery model in Shoreditch, and indeed a commitment of five years had been made to the schools involved (two years beyond IF pilot funding), although the practical and logistical consequences of maintaining contact with the young people had yet to be faced.

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It was recognised that a fine balance needed to be drawn between aiming to achieve the best possible outcomes based on meaningful personal relationships and holistic support, while at the same time recognising the practical limits of that support within a time-bound programme.

'How much are we going to be able to fix of [young people's] massive issues? We're here to offer them opportunities, inspire them ... progress them ... Some staff would say that they feel the only way you're really going to do it is if you unlock all of those issues, and that's quite a challenge ... There's outcomes and then there's totally changing somebody's life.'

(Delivery manager)

Other projects had explicitly restricted the timescales over which they intended to operate. In two of the round two projects, this was reinforced by their decision not to include any projected job outcomes in their business plan. As such, there was no specific requirement for these projects to provide long-term support or monitor participants who had left school.

There was an acknowledged risk in continuing to recruit young people onto the programme if an equivalent number was not effectively 'moving off', as caseloads would become unmanageable.

'If you don't move people off ... you quickly come to a situation where your advisers and project workers are snowed under and they can't then deliver an effective service to anyone because they can't move people off the programme but they're still taking people on.'

(Investor)

The typical pattern of a more time-limited provision was for an intensive initial period of contact and activity, followed by less intensive continued support up to the end of school year 11 (when young people reached 16 and were, at that time, eligible to leave school). The rationale shared by these projects was that an intense period of contact was required to build relationships, gain trust and effect a positive 'shift in mind-set' among participants. Subsequent support could be more explicitly directed towards school activity and attainment, and could be less frequent (even on a needs basis and in response to request).

2.3.2 Manchester, Teens & Toddlers

The service offer from the Manchester Teens & Toddlers project best exemplifies this approach. Here, groups of young people are taken out of school for a half day every week for 18 weeks to participate in nursery-based activity supervising toddlers and for follow-up work with a facilitator which builds to a qualification at the end of the 18-week period. This structured and time-limited intervention is based on a previous long-running tried and tested programme with schools in other parts of the country. For the purposes of the IF pilot programme, the model has been adapted to introduce more explicit elements of school and employment-related issues. A new addition under the pilot was to introduce a second phase of contact with the same facilitator on a monthly basis over the period leading to GCSE examinations in which lessons learned and insights gained from participation in the programme are applied to ongoing behaviour at school as the young people work towards their exams. As part of this second phase there is also the opportunity of academic tuition help in the run up to examinations.

2.4 Courses and activities

The other defining characteristic of IF pilot projects was the manner in which they variously built accredited courses and activities into their interventions. Both the Merseyside New Horizons and the Manchester Teens & Toddlers projects are structured around defined courses delivered to groups of school-aged young people (12 weeks in Merseyside; 18 weeks in Manchester) and which lead to accredited qualifications. The Birmingham Advance project, delivering to young people primarily out of school via a number of sub-contracted delivery organisations, is inevitably much less uniform and varies significantly by provider. The umbrella body, BEST, provides a level 1 accredited course in Key Skills and, depending on the provider, some participants also access maths and English courses, and courses in life skills, as well as a variety of vocational skills courses and pre-apprenticeship programmes. One provider is delivering academic coaching courses in schools.

With younger participants for whom entry level qualifications can be claimed as an outcome, some projects were making courses leading to Health and Safety certificates available. In South Wales the Capitalise project was delivering such a course to all its year 10 students (aged 14 and 15). Newham Links for Life was delivering Level 1 Employability certificates to prepare young people for the world of work, in out-of-school hours for appropriate participants.

All projects were underpinned with motivational and personal development work with the young people, although to varying degrees. The Prevista project in West London, for example uses six delivery partners to run very different programmes in each of six boroughs, ranging from the use of sport to a graffiti art project. Despite their very different forms, all these delivery partners have received training in two key types of methods and materials – a software tool known as ‘My Work Search’ and a psychological training and mentoring programme, YAPP (Youth Applied Positive Psychology). These are used in conjunction with partners’ standard provision to deliver what are referred to as ‘end to end’ services to the young people referred from schools – from engagement through progression to outcomes.

The Thames Valley Energise project, delivered by Adviza partnership, is based on the assignment of a personal adviser to each young person, who maintains contact through a variety of means to deliver a ‘core’ programme of qualifications, support, work experience, mentoring and after care, keeping in contact using a range of different venues (including schools). These advisers coordinate a ‘package’ of activities for each young person which range in length and intensity according to assessed need, and include the possibility of residentials of different lengths which expose them to basic skills training and challenging outdoor activities. The programme also employs a specialist job coach to help young people prepare for and connect with employment opportunities.

2.5 The core of the service offer

Notwithstanding the considerable variability of the IF pilots’ service offer along these key axes, it is possible to discern an underlying ‘core offer’ running throughout both the round one and the round two projects. This core service offer comprises four elements:

- engagement;
- shift in ‘mind-set’;
- individual personal development; and
- goal setting and pathways facilitation.

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The engagement of young people involves the marketing of a support service to them, all manner of recruitment (from self-referral, multi-agency networks, to school selection panels) and the establishment of a support relationship with an adviser, link worker, coach or youth worker. This support relationship provides a new route through which young people can address the difficulties and risks they face, which is separate from the statutory authorities, such as schools, which many of them are struggling with. The aim is to address, more holistically, aspects of their lives which may be affecting their ability to engage with education, training and employment. It is a one-to-one relationship with, as far as possible, the same person over the lifetime of the programme, built on developing trust and with clear principles of consent and confidentiality.

The underlying purpose of this support relationship is to bring about a fundamental shift in the 'mind-set' of the young person, and to bring them to a 'critical point' at which they can align their own personal best interests with a re-engagement in education and training for the purposes of entering employment. It is widely acknowledged that getting a young person to this point does not involve 'solving' all their problems. Indeed, most providers acknowledge that much that is affecting them in their social and family circumstances cannot be tackled directly and lies outside the ambit of the programme. What can be tackled through the support relationship, however, is the young person's approach, understanding and attitude to the problematic aspects of their life, helping them develop the mental resilience to work through them.

Achieving this important shift in mind-set is generally a prerequisite for the success of subsequent activity, as well as the foundation for achieving behavioural outcomes such as improved attendance at school. As such, it is often at the 'front end' of project activity, with subsequent work building upon it. However, the support relationship continues to underpin further activity, even if contact reduces in frequency and intensity.

Developing the cognitive and attitudinal skills of young people is an underlying thread through the pilots and is pursued through both one-to-one and group work, and courses in personal development, motivation and self-awareness. Specific developmental activities reinforce this, forming the backbone of some initiatives and being pulled in on a more ad hoc basis on other projects to meet individual need and circumstances. Thus, for example, work with young children in a nursery setting forms the basis of the Manchester Teens & Toddlers project. Along with time for reflection and learning, this is the continued point of reference for subsequent support which seeks to relate the lessons and insights gained in the nursery back onto behaviour and activity in school. In Perth Living Balance, where interventions are more individually focused, a young person might be encouraged and supported to participate in something like the Tall Ships initiative or Duke of Edinburgh Award at an appropriate stage in their development and progress.

The remaining element of the core service offer involves bringing the learning and motivation to bear upon the progression options for young people. Here, the fundamental processes are the development of individual goals, whether these are long-term aspirations for employment or shorter-term intentions regarding examinations and qualifications. At different points along the journey of transition from school into employment this might involve learning support for dyslexia, help with applications to college courses, or the sourcing of opportunities for apprenticeships, work experience and paid employment.

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These common 'core' elements run through all the projects being piloted under the IF, although each one has its specific shape and character. At its root the service being offered is a personalised, non-judgemental support programme providing developmental and experiential opportunities to young people who, without it, risk continued disengagement and social exclusion through unemployment. As one respondent noted, it is a service which is most needed by those in danger of 'falling through the net' of educational and employment structures, but at its core it could benefit almost any young person at a potentially difficult stage in their life.

'What we do ... could benefit anyone. I mean you could just tweak it a little and it could ... almost be a 'gifted and talented' programme!'

(Delivery staff)

3 What is working for young people?

Interviews with 100 young people participating in round one and round two Innovation Fund (IF) projects were conducted at a relatively early stage of the IF programme in the spring and summer of 2013. At the time of interview, most were still enrolled on the programme and had been participating for less than a year, a few for only a matter of months having recently joined. A few had left the programme and of these, a small number had moved into work.

At such an early stage, it is too soon to be able to assess how effective interventions have been in terms of preventing participants from becoming or remaining NEET (not in education, employment or training). However, virtually all young people interviewed were positive about the project interventions they were participating in and struggled to identify anything that they would change. This chapter describes the initial experiences and intermediate outcomes of young people, presenting their views and perceptions of IF projects and exploring the key elements of support and interventions that seem, at this relatively early juncture, to be having a positive effect.

3.1 Motivation to participate

Young people did not typically describe their involvement in the IF programme in terms of specific 'outcomes' they were seeking to achieve, nor speak of themselves or their situation in terms of 'barriers' to be overcome. They were, however, able to express what they hoped participation would bring, and where appropriate, what they considered had already changed or improved in their lives. Most of them described and appeared to understand some or all of the common elements of the service offer: the relationship with a key worker; recognition of the need for a change in attitude and motivation; the need and a desire to alter behaviour; the setting of clear goals and pathways; and the knowledge they would be supported on that journey.

Depending upon the particular project they joined, young people's perceptions of its rationale were divided between either seeing it as essentially addressing their immediate problems or as starting to focus them upon an alternative and more positive future. In the main, there was understanding and awareness of why they had volunteered or been selected for participation:

'Probably mostly people that are like troubled, like they have problems but then they don't want to speak about or they can't speak about it. And then that would help them to actually speak about it.'

(TV11)

For those still at school, the need to change behaviour not conducive to learning for them and their peers was also recognised:

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'...because in class, some of us might be interruptive and disrupt the lessons - and this basically calms us down and [helps us] think about what we could do beforehand when we go into class.'

(WL07)

Young people linked identifying and addressing these kinds of issues to having a more positive educational experience and thus being more likely to leave school with clearer goals to aim for:

'...you know I think this is the perfect time for like our age, year 10 because this is where people are starting to figure out their future.'

(WL05)

'People that want to get more focused in lessons and don't understand why they have no focus in lessons... you need qualifications to get where you want to be in life and you can't get them if you're not behaving in lessons.'

(WL06)

On the brink of leaving school and young adulthood, the timing of the intervention often coincided with a realisation that they needed to change if they were to succeed in later life:

'...when I got to year 11, I just thought what's the point in getting myself sent home all the time. I've got, I'm leaving this year and I've got to do well in my exams otherwise I'll never get anywhere in life.'

(M10)

A small minority of young people seemed unsure what the intervention was setting out to achieve. Certainly when activities took place out of school, a few could not (yet) directly relate it back to their school life and beyond. Other young people who may have been referred for reasons of low self-esteem, sometimes struggled to grasp why they had been selected as they were not badly behaved in school and attended regularly. It was only when they had joined the project that they began to understand the benefits of participation in terms of boosting their own confidence.

Participants who were already NEET understood that the interventions were there to help them to access employment or to find appropriate training or education that would lead to either apprenticeships or jobs. They were also aware that the support was to help them overcome difficulties that may have prevented them from progressing into training or employment in the past:

'So yeah, she even asked me if I needed help with like housing and information and things like that. So yeah, they don't just help you with courses and things like that, they help you with everything.'

(N04)

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The NEET group were also more likely to have come across Connexions or other agencies during school or afterwards and so were accustomed to the idea of accessing support to help them find training or employment.

3.2 Recruitment to projects

Even though some young people expressed a strong dislike of school, among those of statutory school age most felt that this was the best setting for the intervention. This was because they were honest in stating that if held outside of the school day they would probably not attend:

'If it was outside school it wouldn't really help because it would be more like a chore than a thing I wanted to do.'

(SW06)

Having the interventions based in schools seemed to help both maintain and reinforce the discipline of going to school and formed a strong foundation around which to build their involvement. Nevertheless, in order for the intervention to be successful in sustaining young peoples' interest and commitment, a tangible difference had to be perceived between school and the intervention:

'Because ... school's a bit more formal about it because they like ... want you to do well. They [on the project] do as well but they take more of an interest in you personally, not just in your qualifications, they help you with that but it's more developing you as a person ... The school - they obviously want you to do well and they want the school stats to go up as well. But they [on the project] ... they're not putting pressure on you, it's kind of optional, it's nice to have support in that way.'

(SW04)

A further factor in successful referrals was getting young people to feel they had been selected for positive reasons rather than as a punishment for their poor behaviour or attendance.

Recruitment methods for young people who had left school were more varied. A small number self-referred onto projects through word of mouth or, for example, by responding to an advertisement about the project in their local community newsletter. Others had been referred by agencies including Jobcentre Plus or Connexions. Recruitment had also sometimes been achieved through outreach work, with young people being approached and recruited directly 'off the street' by IF project workers.

For both older and younger participants, the voluntary nature of participation was important as it seemed to help young people feel that they could make positive changes in their own lives, rather than being coerced to do so:

'It made me feel like there wasn't a barrier, it made me feel like I could either take this and try and make a future for myself or I could just leave it and just not bother doing it. But I took the right path and went and chose to do it.'

(M11)

3.3 The form and content of interventions

The precise form and content of interventions seemed to matter less to the young people than receiving one-to-one personalised support with a designated project worker. Even those whose project mainly involved group activities still felt that they were treated as individuals within the group setting and had the opportunity to meet staff on a one-to-one basis if needed.

School-based projects in particular developed their own group dynamic. Many young people explained how they initially greeted the idea of group work with a degree of trepidation, but the efforts of project workers put them at their ease and helped them to gain confidence. Confidentiality and trust from peers in the group setting was also key:

'It helps you like open up about stuff, and if you've got stuff like hiding inside you, what you need to speak about, it's like whatever we talk about in the room, it stays in the room, it doesn't get spread out anywhere. So you can talk about, say for example you had sex with someone, like that, like you'll say that and then that will get stayed in the room, no one will spread it...it will just come out, you don't have to keep it in.'

(MC03)

Group work and trips away from school or away from delivery organisations' premises had the added benefit of enabling young people to forge new friendships and gain a wider social network. Many expressed pleasant surprise that this had happened – especially with fellow participants they would not ordinarily associate with. Other activities such as visits outside the local community, outdoor activities and residentials seemed to provide respite from difficult home lives and help break the cycle of negative behaviour and attitudes. Some who had taken part in residentials explained how time away from home and school enabled them to forget about stressful home life for a short time:

'I had time away from my family and it just made me think like I can actually speak to them now, like I could actually tell them stuff because they taught us how to like trust and like just to speak, like confidence and stuff...'

(TV12)

This raft of activities with their peers also helped young people become aware that that they were not alone in experiencing difficulties, which helped reduce feelings of isolation.

Qualifications offered by interventions varied. For the under 16s, these were often provided directly by the delivery organisation, taking the form of a workbook or accredited module. Qualifications or training for the older group included childcare, customer services and forklift driving either delivered by specialist delivery organisations sub-contracted to the IF project, or via external training providers. Short, well-run training courses with clear outcomes were most appreciated by young people.

Job and careers advice included help with job applications, interview techniques and CVs. For many older participants and those who had not attended school frequently enough to receive careers advice there, the intervention was the first time they had come across such help. Signposting and practical advice for those out of school was also seen as valuable, especially by those who were living away from home or were moving out of care, helping them gain the confidence and skills to live independently.

3.4 The most successful aspects of interventions

Almost all young people interviewed were positive about the interventions they were participating in and struggled to identify anything that they would change. Particular aspects identified by young people as being of most use to them were:

- the one-to-one relationship with a key worker;
- action plans/setting targets; and
- activities that had increased their confidence.

3.4.1 Relationship with a key worker

Regardless of programme structure or content, the one-to-one relationship between the young person and a designated project worker, a key defining feature across all IF projects, underpinned positive responses. The way in which young people described the intervention was generally framed around their (positive) relationship with coaches/advisers/youth workers in projects.

With one-to-one support comprising a key element all projects (even those based in group activities) young people described the way in which coaches and mentors took the time to get to know them, made them feel valued and helped to build rapport and trust. The distinction was made between this more personalised and informal relationship and the more formal, instrumental relationships young people generally had with teachers and other professionals:

'...it's more than just someone who's just working.'

(P01)

The informality of the relationship meant that young people found it both personal and relaxed:

'They make me literally happy and like comfortable. When I'm with my attendance teacher, she just like makes me happy, she don't make me uncomfortable with who I am...'

(SW03)

'...you just sit with [the coach] chilling, talking and it just calms the vibes down, like you're not so angry anymore and stuff.'

(SH03)

A benefit of the easy-going nature of the relationship was that emotional support and practical help could be provided in a more nurturing, even familial way:

'I see [him] as just like, I don't even, like I see him as a mate, if you get what I mean, like a strong mate that I can always go to if I need anything. He's like basically a family member, that I can talk to him about anything I want and obviously if I've done something wrong, I call him, he'll tell me come down, we'll chat about it, get you on the straight and narrow and that.'

(EL07)

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For the young people who were adversely affected by difficulties in their home life, which might include the actual or effective absence of one or both parents, the relationship they had with their key worker was especially important.

'I like the way they're always happy and always smiling and enthusiastic about everything...I think they're like a family because they listen and help with problems we have and advice they give us.'

(MC01)

By the same token, even for those without difficult home lives, having someone they could talk to outside of the immediate family about how to communicate better with parents, for example, was useful.

'I argue with my mum at home as well and like she [project worker] gave me loads of different ways of like handling the situation, rather than just shouting back. And I told ... I went home and told my mum and she like understood more and that, so if I did walk away, she wouldn't come after me, she'd just leave me. So it did really work.'

(SW05)

The role of the key worker – as a 'critical friend' – someone in whom they could confide and could talk through their problems with without risking admonishment meant a lot to young people.

'She's amazing...she's got a personality, yeah, that you know from as soon as you talk to her she can help you out...like I've told her so many things that I wouldn't tell anybody... like I wouldn't even tell my mum and she's like, she helps me through it.'

(TV04)

The confidentiality which formed a cornerstone of such relationships was especially valued.

'Well it was helpful to know that they were there for me and it was nice to know that if there was something I wanted to tell them that they wouldn't tell anybody.'

(P07)

At the same time as providing emotional and practical support, the relationship appeared to help many young people begin to understand the importance of discussing and sharing problems rather than bottling them up.

'I feel like there's people out there that can help you but you just need to look, like you can't just sit around and wait for people to come and help you, you just need to like ask for help, even if you feel like you don't need it.'

(TV10)

For the school-aged group, the distinction between the relationship formed through the intervention and relationships with parents/guardians and school staff seemed to be clearly understood and appreciated:

'Yeah it is, it's just like, you can call him first name, not like Sir, Mr and all that. He's like a normal person talking outside of school instead of like a teacher in school.'

(SW07)

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In London, in particular, frontline staff with knowledge of the local area or who, in the eyes of young people, had 'street credibility' were especially valued. The ability of coaches and project workers to empathise with the problems young people faced in their local community through territorial issues and pressures from gangs for example, helped to both form and sustain relationships. Young people also appreciated the fact that project workers might themselves have struggled at school or experienced unemployment and had overcome such problems to make their lives successful:

[The IF coach] used to like struggle in school, he knows ... the 'hood and stuff like that, yeah, he understood a lot of what we was going through.'

(SH03)

The consistency, continuity and non-judgmental aspects of the relationship appeared to be important. Contact from a key worker to check out why they hadn't attended the provision, for example, was seen as proof that the worker cared about what happened to them, and keeping the same key worker was a crucial aspect of continuity and trust. One young person explained how she had felt let down in a previous project when different workers would appear from one week to the next:

'...it makes me feel weird when I'm seeing someone and then some other random person will just come in the next week.'

(M10)

The prospect of ongoing support was also frequently highlighted as an important aspect of projects, with the majority of all the young people saying that they would turn to their key worker in the future if they needed support or advice:

'You know the people are always there...it's not like they close the door on you, saying you've done your time with us, they shut the door on you, the door's always there and the door's always open.'

(P06)

For a few young people, the support relationship had continued beyond the specific intervention and the transition into work. However, the vast majority had yet to leave the programme or leave school. The extent to which support from a known project worker is provided longer term will be an important test of the programme's effectiveness in subsequent evaluations.

3.4.2 Action planning, setting goals and targets

Although many of the young people did not recognise the term 'Action Plan,' the majority were aware of actions they had agreed with their key worker, including deadlines and targets to help achieve their aims. In this respect, young people showed an awareness of the intervention in identifying where they were starting from and where they hoped to get to with support. They appreciated having the ability to make their own decisions in the action planning process, rather than simply being told what to do:

'...We get to be independent because we tell them what we want to gain out of it, instead of them just telling us what to do...'

(SH06)

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The one-to-one dynamic helped young people to motivate and organise themselves better, making them feel more responsible for their actions. Some reported experiencing difficulties in the past in establishing time-scales and setting targets:

'Well before I was in kind of a limbo... I didn't know where to start really and now, six months on, I'm more aware of that - I need to be a bit more urgent in what I'm doing.'

(EL03)

Most projects had adopted specific techniques and practical tools to help young people reflect on their lives, think longer term and to set targets and goals. There was evidence that those young people who had used such tools were now more aware of how they could manage their behaviours and so make positive changes.

'It makes you concentrate on your goals more. Because in school you wouldn't think, alright well I need to, I'm not doing well at science, you just think I want to improve, you don't look at what I'm not doing, what am I not doing that's right in science, you think just get your head down, don't talk, don't disrupt the teacher. If you don't get along with the person, be adult and just be respectful towards them and then they can't have a go at you.'

(SW04)

'Well we had this little booklet and he made us write why we were behaving like this, why we were talking all the time...I started to realise that it was really getting bad because I was getting sent out every day like because of talking.'

(SW09)

In many respects the action planning process was couched in terms of a 'game-plan' to help young people achieve their longer-term goals. Simply identifying their issues and the steps needed to address them seemed to reduce the worry and stress for many of them about their future. In turn they said that this had given them greater confidence to take the required steps to achieve their aspirations, in the knowledge that continued support would be available to them.

[The action plan included] *what we want to do with our future, stuff that we're doing now, stuff that we're trying to stop, stuff that we don't want to do anymore. Basically just sort of like, basically they'd sort your life out.'*

(M12)

3.4.3 Increasing self-confidence

All but a handful of young people felt that the interventions had helped them gain the essential self-esteem to take the necessary steps towards achieving their goals. Taking responsibility for themselves and for their own decisions appeared to play a major part in increasing their confidence:

'What he's always said is, I'm not a teacher, so I'm not going to tell you what to do, I'm going to tell you what's right but I'm not going to tell you to do it. And he said, I know in yourself, I know that you're smart enough to pick the right decision, but I'm not going to tell you which one's the right decision, you're going to find out for yourself...'

(SH03)

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Praise had been valuable for many because they felt their behaviour and indeed their problems had always previously been viewed purely negatively by their schools, their families or indeed themselves. The praise they now received helped them to stay on the intervention.

'I found it really good, it's like really helpful because every time when like I think of giving up, I just think about this programme and then I'm like, oh these people would not want me to give up. So then I just, I don't give up.'

(WL11)

What seemed to work particularly well was the encouragement young people received to overcome their self-doubt and low self-confidence.

'The staff here are absolutely brilliant ... like pushing me to go further, not too much further, like they're not forcing me to do anything, but they give you prompts, you know, they're good at getting you to do things.'

(P08)

Important small steps, such as having the confidence to answer questions in school or make a presentation to the IF group, helped young people feel more confident, with many reporting improvements in school lessons as a result. When taking part in group activities young people also gained confidence from the encouragement and support of peers:

'... because I didn't like heights, but then these lot cheered me on, they gave me, they helped me build ... like they make you like self-confident to think you can do it, and they kept telling me to say that to myself and it helped. So I went up there and I did it.'

(TV12)

Another important change occurring through taking part in group activities was the realisation that other young people had similar difficulties in their lives and that they were not 'odd' or alone in experiencing them.

'Since doing the courses ... it's kind of like just made me realise that everyone's got the same kind of problems, so I really shouldn't just care what they say and get on with my life.'

(P04)

Confidence had been greatly boosted for some project participants, and their horizons widened, through experiencing the world outside of school and their immediate neighbourhood. Visits to employers and trips to museums and galleries helped to open their eyes to employment opportunities previously considered unrealistic or out of reach:

'We went into one of the Ernst and Young buildings and we got like a tour around the place and we got to sit in meetings and like experience what they do every day, like in an everyday life ... It was really interesting yeah, I found it fun. And yeah, I learnt a lot from that and like it actually like made me open my eyes and see what like I could be doing eventually one day.'

(SH06)

3.5 Effects of participation

The majority of young people interviewed felt they had benefited from participation, with several explaining how their families and teachers said they had noticed a genuine change in their behaviour and attitude since their involvement. As young people tended to frame their experience of the intervention within the context of the relationship with their key worker, it was sometimes difficult for them to pinpoint exactly what had helped them. Certainly, action planning seemed to have been an important step for many in developing practical strategies to help them envisage their future goals, and the process of identifying issues and setting targets had helped to change their perception of the barriers they faced such that they became less insurmountable.

There did appear to have been in many young people a ‘sea-change’ in attitude, be it in those young people who had poor behaviour in school, those with little self-confidence or NEETS (not in education, employment or training) who also suffered from a lack of direction.

‘And I don’t feel like I’m nothing ... Like I have more confidence and more ability to come out for who I am.’

(EL10)

‘I was scared to talk to people at first and now I’m talking to people now I feel happy about myself.’

(M06)

Some young people referred to a change in their mind-set as a whole – feeling that the intervention had helped them to develop practical strategies to cope. In some instances, the interventions seemed to have worked because they had coincided with the natural maturing process of young adults.

‘I told the lads yesterday, I just said, because I was messing about in year 10 because I wasn’t getting much work done and I had like piles in year 11 to do, I’ve done it now like. I just said, get as much done in year 10 and year 11, it will be just fine’...

(M05)

While they still faced pressures and difficulties in areas of their lives, many young people thus appeared to have gained a resilience that was allowing them to adopt a more positive attitude to tackling their studies or searching for employment, through a belief in themselves to keep trying. Whatever the reason for their referral or self-referral onto the programme, among the young people interviewed there was a feeling that projects had begun to provide the support they needed to make the necessary changes in attitude and motivation to enable them to move on in their life. What came through strongly was a growing sense of self-belief born of the realisation that they had been given a chance rather than being ‘written off’.

4 Targeting young people at risk

The Innovation Fund (IF) pilot programme is groundbreaking in that it uses a 100 per cent Payment by Results (PbR) funding model to deliver support to those young people who are deemed to be the most disadvantaged in the population and for whom previous interventions, whether in schools or in the context of the labour market, have not worked well in the past. Using this PbR funding model, investors make equity investments into an intermediary body or special purpose vehicle (SPV) which are used as initial working capital for the delivery of services and interventions. Thereafter, payments earned from the Department for Work and Pensions against achieved outcomes provide the revenue with which to fund ongoing delivery. The financial stability and sustainability of each pilot project is thus dependent on delivery organisations being able to target their provision effectively in order to ensure the timely achievement of claimable outcomes as profiled in their business plans.

This section looks at how well targeted the pilot projects have been at recruiting young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) or at risk of becoming NEET; at how different projects have positioned themselves in relation to the at-risk population of young people; and how operational realities and effects of the funding model in the early months of implementation have affected their approaches to delivery and to selected target groups and sub-groups.

4.1 Programme specification

The context for the IF pilots lies in the broad policy aim of addressing youth unemployment. Within this, there has been a particular focus on the acknowledged precursor to long-term dependency on benefits in that group of young people who, after leaving school, end up for a sustained period neither in employment nor engaged in any educational or training activity (who are described as NEET).

Within the age-range to which the various IF projects are addressed, there are three main groups of young people who are in the target cohort. The categories broadly map onto the respective age-groups of 18 to 24, 16 to 17 and 14 to 15 years:

- Those who have been NEET for a sustained period of time already (26 weeks is typically taken as a marker).
- Those who have recently become NEET having left short-term jobs, dropped out of training or further education provision, or finished compulsory schooling with no onward destination.
- Those who are still at school but are judged to be at risk of becoming NEET when they leave, either because they are not expected to achieve sufficient qualifications with which to progress, or because they have disengaged from the education process.

The IF specification to bidders presented a long list of factors with a known correlation to the likelihood of any individual young person becoming NEET. These included belonging to identifiable 'disadvantaged groups' of young people such as care leavers, young offenders, drug and alcohol misusers, and those with physical disability or mental health issues. They also included more general background factors and circumstances such as poverty, character traits and behaviours such as aggression and rejection of authority, and

importantly the lack of qualifications or low educational attainment. A combination of several of these factors and multiple barriers to learning and to employment was proposed as the basis for programme eligibility.

4.2 Bid aspirations and intentions

Following this specification, projects devised the specific criteria for eligibility through which they would identify and seek to recruit appropriate young people to participate in their programmes. All the projects, across both commissioning rounds, set out the intention in their bids to recruit young people who presented with multiple risk factors and who faced multiple disadvantages.

Beyond this, six of the ten projects stated that they would seek to target the young people most at risk, including those who were the hardest to reach and the most in need of support. The assertion that they would target those most at risk and with the greatest support needs, frequently reflected the mission statements of delivery organisations and their service delivery experience and expertise prior to the IF programme. In three projects, however, it was of particular significance in that addressing this 'hardest to help' target group was also put forward as evidence of additionality, as proof that their services were not duplicating those of other providers **because** they were dealing with the young people that other providers **could not** deal with and therefore would not be supporting.

4.3 Characteristics of participant young people

One hundred young people, across the 10 pilots, were interviewed in the early months of the programme. They were found to be very widely spread across many different disadvantaged groups, including nearly all those identified in the IF specification. Amongst the 100 respondents were young people who:

- had chronic health conditions;
- suffered mental health difficulties;
- were drug users;
- were young carers;
- were young parents;
- had offending histories;
- were care leavers or in care;
- had chaotic/troubled home life;
- were gang members; and
- had been homeless.

The interview sample was not a random sample of participants and is not intended to be representative. Young people from round one projects were selected from a 'long list' of data extract, primarily on the basis of their recorded NEET/risk characteristics, and to obtain a gender and ethnic background balance. Risk characteristics were variably filled in by different projects. Young people from round two projects were selected without the benefit of a data extract to work from, and were thus taken on trust from information from front-line staff

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to cover participants with a range of issues, and also to include some who were not doing so well on the programme in addition to those considered to be doing well.

It appeared from the interview sample that the pilots had successfully engaged with some of the most disadvantaged and most at-risk young people in their areas. The barriers to re-engagement and progression displayed by these young people were widely spread and ranged from issues of poor self-esteem and lack of self-confidence through to motivational, emotional and behavioural difficulties, offending histories and mental health conditions.

4.4 Early recruitment

All the projects were affected to some degree by starting later than anticipated which impacted on the recruitment of young people to provision, and found themselves falling short in relation to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for programme starts. Several projects reported that the number of referrals from within their target group of eligible participants was lower than they had profiled. This was said to be for one of three reasons: because it had proved more challenging than anticipated to identify suitable candidates in sufficient numbers; because partner agencies making referrals had taken longer than anticipated to engage with the programme; or because signing up young people to a voluntary programme was more protracted and complex than expected, requiring, for example, parental consent and action planning. In the case of the Nottingham Futures project, there were also found to be significantly fewer eligible and appropriate potential customers within the population of 'Not Knowns' than had been the working assumption in constructing the bid.

The early shortfalls in projected starts were brought into sharp focus by the funding model under which the projects are financed. In order for such a model to work, projects must achieve payable outcomes quickly enough and in sufficient numbers before the investment of initial working capital is expended, so as not to threaten their financial stability or viability. The first key target that projects faced, therefore, was to recruit sufficient numbers of young people to make achievement of the necessary volume of predicted outcomes possible. Given projected timescales for reaching paid outcomes, there was a pressing need to get recruitment up to planned levels as quickly as possible. As one investor explained:

'The returns of the programme are very sensitive – not just 'does it work or not' but 'can you just get enough people on to it?' ... we now spend a lot of time looking at this sort of volume risk.'

(Investor)

The single most practical consequence of the need to increase recruitment was a high level of demand from intermediaries and investors, for frequent, detailed and up-to-date information on how recruitment and delivery was progressing. The requirement for very tight management of projects through the use of detailed performance data was seen as axiomatic by many investors and intermediaries, but was said to lie at the heart of some cultural differences which emerged between some partners in the pilots.

'... providers that we've worked with ... they are really good at delivering what they do. They're not so good at collecting data, analysing what that data means and then taking tough decisions based on that analysis. Those are the three things that we think need adding in.'

(Investor)

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The intensity of performance management by intermediaries and investors seemed to have come as something of a surprise and ‘culture shock’ to many deliverers initially. However, there was said to be a growing understanding of why it was required, an appreciation that it had indeed driven up performance, and that once everyone was more accustomed to how social investment PbR projects worked and had had time to prove their effectiveness, that the intensity of the early months would diminish.

‘At first it felt a lot – and I get it, I understand – but it’s a new way of working for everyone in a sense ... and I know it won’t be forever ... we need to get through our first year and get some of those firm outcomes in.’

(Delivery manager)

The early need to boost recruitment was experienced by all pilots to varying degrees, and most acutely by those which had set themselves up with narrow and ‘tight’ boundaries to their recruitment ‘pools’. Projects such as Links for Life, which had defined their target group as young people with the greatest disadvantages, including those excluded from school and with criminal records, and requiring intense, long-term, one-to-one support, found that they did not have much margin for extending their recruitment beyond this narrowly defined pool. Furthermore, referrals were being taken from a wide range of agencies, community projects and different kinds of institutions, over which they had no control and none of which alone was able to provide large numbers of potential recruits. The effort required for a marketing push to boost starts substantially and speedily was, therefore, disproportionately large compared to the potential returns in recruitment levels.

This effect was more marked in the case of Nottingham Futures where young people needed to be sought out, often through visits to a home address held on a central database, in order to be recruited onto the programme. As an adviser there described it, one of the biggest challenges they faced was finding the young people in the first place:

‘We do home visits, and a colleague and I spend the day from about 10 o’clock till 4 o’clock just driving around and [last time] I think we managed to see two [young people] ... and that’s in a whole day. So it’s labour intensive.’

(Delivery staff)

Even then, there was no guarantee that an individual, once located and contacted, would be both eligible and willing to participate.

The one recruitment source where projects were able to find greater flexibility, and faster, more direct routes of contact than elsewhere, to meet the need for increased numbers of recruits, was in schools. All but one of the projects set out with the aim of recruiting at least some of their young people from schools and several of them moved more towards schools for referrals as a result of the recruitment shortfalls they faced for older groups of young people. In Merseyside, for example, the focus on 14 and 15-year-olds in their programme became more marked over the course of the first nine months of operation. In Nottingham Futures (the sole project which initially excluded school-aged participants) a solution to low recruitment from the Connexions database ‘not knowns’ group was found through taking a step ‘back’ into schools and seeking to identify in advance of leaving school those young people who appeared to be at risk of having no educational or training destination and

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who were therefore likely to enter the ranks of the ‘not knowns’ if contact was lost over the summer months. By contacting these young people through their schools (and with help from those schools) at the point of them leaving at the end of year 11 having reached the age of 16, the project was able to successfully boost recruitment during the summer break of 2013.

Approaches through schools were found by all projects to be unexpectedly fruitful, offering the benefits of highly structured institutions with potentially strong channels of communication, and to hold out the possibility of contacting relatively large numbers of at risk young people through a single source. This source of greater volumes of recruits helped considerably in assuaging the concerns some investors had in the early months of the IF programme that recruitment levels would be insufficient for achieving the required level of outcome performance.

4.5 Recruitment in schools

It subsequently emerged that demand from schools for support for at risk pupils was extremely high and, in most areas, exceeded not only projects’ expectations, but also what they were able to offer in practice. As one coach put it:

‘You can never give a school enough support I don’t think ...’

(Delivery staff)

So in the context of schools, there were readily available replacements for the older, already NEET young people which some projects experienced difficulties in recruiting, and substitutes for those either judged to be too complex in their needs, or too hard to identify or engage in the timescale available, to fit comfortably within the IF funding model.

A consequence of projects looking more to schools for recruitment was a shift in attention onto the younger age-group (14 and 15-year-olds) and a greater focus on early intervention and prevention. In this way, projects fell increasingly into line with schools’ own priorities and perceptions of need. This was partly as a result of intense marketing efforts designed to bring schools on board, and partly because many of the IF programme’s goals and outcomes regarding attendance, behaviour and educational attainment, particularly of General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs), mapped so well onto those of the schools.

Systems and procedures had been devised for selecting participants from schools which variously included the use of background data, school management information and assessment panels of teachers. Some methods involved parents in their children’s decision to join. There was an emphasis in most projects upon the factors reflecting schools’ priorities (disruptive behaviour, poor attendance and low educational attainment) – which also mapped well onto potential, fundable outcomes within the IF funding model.

It was also clear that the school context assisted recruitment onto some projects because it was able somewhat to blur the voluntary nature of the programme.

‘The letter that the schools send out to parents ... it’s about ‘your child has been chosen’ to take part in this exciting programme’ ... it’s what is called implied consent - if they don’t come back and say ‘no’ then we go ahead ...’

(Delivery manager)

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However, most had not pursued this possibility, feeling that too close an association with 'remedial' school programmes could potentially create a stigma that might put off some young people and obstruct full engagement. In two projects in particular, the voluntary principle had in fact been enhanced and young people invited almost to 'compete' for places on the programme (albeit from a long list of identified eligible recruits) to help generate commitment.

'They fill in the application ... we short-list and then we go in and we interview them ... they have a minute each to say why we should pick them.'

(Delivery staff)

Schools were often particularly keen to refer their most disruptive students for specialist support, and projects described having to resist limiting selection only to this highly visible group, as there were other young people who were deemed to be equally in need of support and at risk of becoming NEET even though they were not necessarily disruptive or troublesome.

'We often get the ones that cause the teachers the most problems, but they're not always the ones that are the most needy.'

(Delivery staff)

The interviewed sample of young people seemed to bear out this view. Participants fell into two broad sub-categories, split between those noticed for their disruptive behaviour and perhaps already in trouble with authority and the police, and those who were more passively disengaged, often with low confidence and poor self-esteem, who were keeping a low profile and were at risk of 'slipping through the net' unnoticed on the way to becoming NEET. Opinion differed on the issue, but some coaches were strongly of the opinion that the majority of those who could end up NEET were among the 'disruptive behaviour' group nevertheless, and that this group therefore represented a greater 'concentration' of risk than was present among other young people.

Although schools were targeted in known areas of deprivation with high levels of young people locally being NEET and unemployed, there was still considerable variation between individual institutions in terms of, among other things, attainment levels and other, already operating, support services. Big differences in these contingent factors meant that each school had the potential to shape its own participant cohort, such that a group of pupils from one school could have very different types of need to a similar sized group from another school in the locality. The greater the number of young people being recruited in a school, the greater the difficulty in maintaining uniformity of target group with other parts of the programme and with other schools. Some schools were found to have twice as many pupils leaving NEET as others, and achievement rates for three A-C grades at GCSE ranged from as low as 40 per cent to as high as 86 per cent.

'So if you've got a group of high needs young people with low support within a school, the Progression Manager coming in can look like a different role to [that in a school with] lower intensity needs young people with quite a bit of support.'

(Delivery manager)

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This variable concentration of eligible young people in schools made for some difficult decisions regarding recruitment and which schools to work with. At high concentrations, coaches could find themselves overwhelmed by the size of their caseload, with too many young people requiring intense, one-to-one support. Low concentrations raised questions of whether locating a coach on school premises would be the most effective use their time.

A coach in Shoreditch Think Forward described his experience of going to recruit into a school with particularly high concentration of needs, but with a relatively low level of existing in-school support.

'In the two weeks I was there, there was a queue outside my office for young people – the ones that I had met – to come back and talk to me about stuff ... what it showed me was that there was a relationship missing.'

(Delivery staff)

At the other end of the scale, another coach on the same project was having to work hard to identify effective gaps in provision that could be filled by the IF project.

'This school is brilliant really, it's got so much stuff going on, they're really open to anything, like you know as much support as possible. So ... there's a massive extra-curricular programme, there's a massive business engagement programme ... and I've got to the point where I was saying, 'well, which ones don't engage on the business engagement programme then!''

(Delivery staff)

Interestingly, in this case, the school saw the added value of the IF programme as lying in its potential to pick up those not reached by all existing provision and 'to help them in the long term.'

These types of issues perhaps came to the fore particularly in schools where a large number of pupils was being recruited. In both the above examples a fixed number of recruits were being sought because the project design was seeking to maximise the advantages of having a full-time worker embedded in, and dedicated to, each individual school, and the number of recruits decided upon was the level at which it was assessed that staff resource could be used most viably and effectively.

'In some ways that's really driven by capacity of the coaches rather than need because undoubtedly some of the schools are more needy than others. ... in a perfect world you'd probably flex sizes of cohorts a bit more.'

(Delivery manager)

It was precisely grappling with issues of this sort that projects were learning to address in the pilots and were actively exploring possible solutions to: how to achieve the best balance between numbers of young people, their level of need, the type and intensity of input required and staff resource allocation and availability. Crucially, the whole balance was being experienced as intimately related to the type of relationship a project had with schools or other referral agencies and the practical and logistical arrangements for delivery.

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In some of the pilots, the issue of variable need within schools had been addressed by formally segmenting the group of participants according to the level of intensity of support they were expected to need in order to achieve programme outputs. The Thames Valley Energise pilot, for example, had identified three 'pathways' for young people through their provision, ranging from 'standard' one-to-one support, through support that included a short residential for developing relationships and motivation, to intense support underpinned by a longer residential period and other activities. Planning assumptions as to the proportions of recruits who would take these different routes were kept as flexible as possible. In the event, approximately three-quarters were being channelled through the basic level of intervention which was rather more than originally anticipated.

In the South Wales Capitalise pilot, while the intervention was split between mentoring support addressing attitudes and behaviours, and learning support to help improve literacy and basic skills, the participants were divided into three groups reflecting different needs and levels of required input from both these sources of assistance.

'The young people are banded into intervention tiers: tier one are the lightest touch (less than two hours per month intervention time); tier two are those requiring between two and four hours per month (the vast majority of our young people are in tier two); and then tier three are those that are four hours plus per month (so the furthest from [outcomes] and the hardest to reach).'

(Delivery manager)

In several other pilots too, a segment of the caseload was said to be 'light touch', though this usually referred to young people who had been through an initial more intensive phase of intervention and who could thereafter be supported and met with less frequently.

4.6 Participant selection

Achieving adequate recruitment numbers also involved making judgements about the likely timescales for achieving outcomes. Practical operational decisions were being made on an individual case-by-case basis about whether taking on a particular young person and continuing to support them, would deliver claimable outcomes and within the required timeframe. For some of the pilot projects selection decisions were made, at least in part, on the basis of the specific type of activity involved in the intervention. In Manchester Teens & Toddlers, for example, where engagement involved the young person spending considerable time in a nursery working with a vulnerable toddler, the selection of participants from a school's long list of possible recruits had to take this setting into account. Any young person who was judged potentially to pose a risk for a pre-school child could not be considered for the programme. The nature of the central activity also meant greater emphasis had to be placed on ensuring that participation was entirely voluntary. Even if a school was pushing for an individual to be taken on, it was imperative that the young person concerned clearly wanted to be involved and was happy to spend time in a nursery environment.

'The school might pick them but it is their choice as well, so if they really don't want to be there it's not good to put them in an environment with a small child ...'

(Delivery staff)

This was equally true of other projects where very specific forms of activity were available in particular areas, such as the sport-based and art-based interventions in West London.

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Judgements about suitability were often made easier by the self-selection of young people, though this could be distorting. In Manchester, knowledge of the programme's prior incarnation as an initiative to tackle high teenage pregnancy rates, meant that some schools (and pupils) needed strong encouragement to see it as relevant to male as well as female students.

The early months of operation were when the full implications of the IF funding model became apparent. Once the initial working capital was expended, the financial imperative from the model was for projects to become self-financing by successfully achieving profiled outcomes targets. Improvement, or part progress towards an outcome with a young person did not, in itself, contribute to meeting this financial imperative and a 'cultural gap' was apparent in some instances between delivery organisations and investors. One example given was of a situation in which a young person not currently attending school might be successfully brought to the point where they were attending for 50 per cent of the time. Frontline staff working with that young person would rightly view this as an important measure of success, but if the average attendance at the school was higher than 50 per cent then it would not count as a claimable outcome. As one of the project's investors said:

'I think some of those subtleties were lost in the design. So the coach would say, 'well I've done a great job' ... but that doesn't fit with the design of the programme ... Coaches will say ... any small improvement is a positive ... but we're not going to get an outcome from that ... [the defined outcome] isn't the only outcome that's valuable but it's the only one we're going to be paid for and so, as an investor, it's the only one we care about.'

(Investor)

Investors were inclined to see the defined outcome metrics of each pilot as the fixed parameters to which they expected projects to be performance managed. Within the relatively broadly defined group of eligible young people, it was thus viewed as both reasonable and prudent to seek recruits who would be most likely to produce those outcomes. On projects with restricted capacity, and especially where there were only a limited number of places on a course or activity, a participant unlikely to achieve an outcome within the specified timescale could affect the achievement of key performance targets because they might prevent another eligible young person from making use of that place. To avoid underperformance against targets, this meant exercising clear judgement in the selection of participants to ensure that projects did not later run into cash flow difficulties. Investors were quite open that this was justified to prevent projects from effectively running out of money.

'We definitely need to make sure we're in a position where ... this thing stays afloat – and actually we need to protect our capital ... I mean we're not going to say, OK fine go and work with the hardest kids ... spend all your time on them ... generate no outcomes – and you know we're bankrupt within a year.'

(Investor)

Some form of participant selection was thus seen by many investors and intermediaries as perfectly legitimate, and indeed as an economic necessity, because their primary focus had to be keeping projects successfully running.

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'What it ends up being – quite frankly there's more cherry-picking ... up front of the ones that are actually going to generate an outcome – and that is very 'counter cultural' to those people ... who choose to be a coach ... they want to help the people who are in most need.'

(Investor)

Some staff in delivery organisations were less happy about these aspects of participant selection.

'I remember I went to a board meeting and ... it was one time when they were talking about, 'well, you're not going to cherry pick are you?' And we said, 'no of course not'. The next meeting was, 'well maybe we need to get some people that we can fast track through'. Well to me [they were] now telling me we were going to sort of cherry pick!'

(Delivery manager)

Such feelings were particularly strongly expressed in pilots where delivery was most heavily targeted on young people who had already left school and were currently NEET. As already discussed, this was partly related to the cultures, explicit missions and experience of delivery organisations. However, it also reflected a concern that the level of funding attached to claimable outcomes for already NEET young people was not commensurate with the resource input required for their achievement.

'I'm not saying ... there's deliberate cherry picking going on, but I do think ... the IF contract might have been an opportunity to put some more ... financial weight ... behind the harder to support groups even within the overall client group.'

(Local authority stakeholder)

Not only were there fewer funded outcomes available for older participants in the way of entry-level qualifications and behaviour and attendance outcomes, for example, but providers felt that they were having to compete with alternative provision in the locality targeted on the same NEET cohort of young people. There was a sense, therefore, in which the experience of the first few months of implementation for several of the round one projects had highlighted the complex needs of the already NEET target group and the additional difficulties involved in implementing the IF model for older age groups who had already left school.

'My worry is that the funding is quite minimal for expected outcomes, so payment by results, which is a pressure for me working with young offenders, could potentially encourage the third sector to cherry pick the easier kids that are more likely to engage.'

(Delivery manager)

By contrast, one of the round two pilots demonstrated the greater scope and flexibility for outcome achievement available with younger cohorts in the school context. With all its provision delivered in school time and on school premises, this project was perhaps the closest of all the pilots to the mainstream educational agenda. The project recruited a small, fixed cohort of pupils to work within each of a number of local schools and 'tiered' them into different bands according to the level of intensity of intervention considered to be required in each case to progress them to an outcome or outcomes over academic years 10 and 11 (between the ages of 14 and 16). Within this model, it was acknowledged that recruitment was conducted with likely outcomes consciously in mind.

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'It sounds really strange – we're not there to help people that can't be helped ... initially we've had individuals referred and we've said we don't think that person is right for us – this is someone that's ... probably had 12 internal exclusions and a couple of external exclusions, there's a drug issue of something similar – we're not there for that type of individual.'

(Intermediary)

Equally, a young person had to have attendance issues if an improved attendance outcome was to be gained, but, because the project had no resource to track down pupils not attending school, recruits could not be complete 'school refusers,' nor have such low attendance that it would not be possible to work with them in school hours. Since this project was exclusively delivered on school premises, participants had to be attending school in order to benefit from the programme.

'That's one of the lessons learned ... when we've spoken to schools about their referrals ... it's a case of identify those young people who are ... no lower than 70 per cent [attenders] because at least that gives us a chance of them being in, and [us] being able to effect the change.'

(Delivery manager)

Ultimately, as with all the pilots, there was an economic imperative to achieve outcomes in a timely manner in order to generate sufficient revenue to finance the ongoing running of the project. Within the school setting there was found to be a sufficiently broad and varied target group of potential recruits, as well as a relatively extensive suite of different claimable outcomes, for this to be achievable.

'In the main we've got the target group of young people that we need, not only to ... achieve budget and finance, but obviously to effect a positive change for those young people.'

(Delivery manager)

4.7 Influence of the funding model

In a programme such as this, it is inappropriate to use terms such as 'cherry-picking' or 'creaming' to describe any of the processes of selection or support, given that participation is voluntary and that the eligible population of young people at risk of becoming NEET is relatively large and diverse, and increasingly so the younger the age of recruits and the further the distance they have yet to travel before leaving school. The IF projects were successfully engaging with the disadvantaged young people they had been set up to help. However, it is clear that the funding model under which the pilots operate presents economic imperatives which mean that some form of selection may be required within the overall eligible population which encompasses a wide spectrum of disadvantage.

Where the boundary falls between those young people who can and those who cannot be helped within the IF programme depends both on the individual characteristics of the young people (the type, extent and severity of their disadvantages and problems), the agreed contractual parameters of the programme (types of eligible outcomes, levels of payments for outcomes), together with the design of the specific pilot programme including, amongst other things, resource availability and the (estimated) length of time of intervention required to achieve an outcome.

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In these respects, the IF funding model could be seen to be a major driver of the behaviour of key stakeholders, and a key reason for the highly dynamic nature of the projects. All acknowledged the need to undergo an active and continuous process of monitoring and adaptation to circumstances because of the new territory in which they found themselves operating. Furthermore, monitoring and tracking is required down to the level of each individual participant, with each being targeted to achieve specific outcomes.

There was evidence that the shared challenge this presented had helped to build and strengthen partnerships as all those involved had worked together to ensure projects achieved their outcome profiles. All partners, including investors, were after all committed to achieving positive social outcomes. The strong focus on performance management and progress monitoring of each individual participant, in particular, was seen to have built capacity among delivery organisations, helping to drive up performance levels and improve overall programme effectiveness.

5 Working with schools

At the time of the research, the pilots had successfully secured ‘buy in’ to the programme from in excess of 100 schools. The innovative nature of the initiatives had given rise to a number of initial challenges for projects working with schools, although many of these were characterised as ‘teething troubles’ as new partners got to know each other and to understand the specific context within which they were working. Overall, the reaction and experience of school staff was reported as being extremely positive, and many schools were said to be seeking to maintain provision beyond the Innovation Fund (IF) programme period.

This chapter outlines some of the key aspects of success in engaging and working with schools during the early implementation phase. It goes on to discuss lessons learned, highlighting the challenges and opportunities which arose in the context of schools’ involvement.

5.1 Establishing partnerships with schools

Whatever the specific intervention and operational model chosen for delivery, all IF projects recognised the importance of establishing and maintaining close and strong relations with schools from where they were increasingly recruiting young people to the IF programme. With the exception of the Nottingham project, all of the pilots set out plans that involved working in various ways with schools and with school-aged pupils. Whereas the round one projects were designed to cover a broad range of differently aged young people right across the ‘learning to earning’ transition (from 14 to 24 years), the second round projects focused exclusively on recruiting 14 and 15-year-olds. The IF pilots thus involved different degrees of engagement with schools according to the proportions of school-aged participants they were targeting and the relative emphasis being placed on this particular age group.

Partnership with schools was seen as crucial to the effective running and success of projects in several ways: identifying appropriate young people to participate; ensuring the participation and release from classes of those taking part; facilitating access to school resources such as meeting rooms and IT systems; maintaining open and clear channels of communication with teachers; and providing a reinforcing supportive environment for the interventions being delivered.

Where relations were experienced as being most positive, they involved a high degree of commitment and ‘buy-in’ from schools, and an active engagement from them. Describing a particularly supportive relationship of this kind, one manager referred to the fact that an ‘echo of [the project] back at school keeps it alive’. This was not, however, universally the case. Managing relations with a minority of schools had proved more difficult, the perception being that while wishing for the support intervention to go ahead, some schools were not equally willing, or not in a position, to play an active role.

‘Management of [the project] we sometimes find difficult with schools. They want it but maybe they don’t actually want to do the work that’s required.’

(Delivery manager)

Despite the variable responses of individual schools, there was a general feeling expressed by delivery managers and investors alike that in many respects working in the school

environment carried considerable advantages. Most importantly, schools were seen to bring with them a formalised structure and clear routes of access to at-risk young people. Several respondents contrasted this explicitly with the difficulties attendant upon working with young people who had left school (those already NEET (not in education, employment or training)) where any problems arising were more difficult to address because there were not the same avenues of approach, formalised structures or additional support available.

5.2 Getting schools ‘on board’

Getting schools on board was recognised as a key early imperative across all projects. However, engaging schools was widely found to require more time and resource than had been anticipated and allowed for in operational plans.

[We experienced] probably slower than expected progress, maybe until the autumn time, mainly because of the schools – it seemed to be harder to get into schools than we’d previously imagined.’

(Delivery manager)

Local Education Authorities were seen in most pilot areas as declining in influence, thus removing the possibility of any straightforward ‘top down’ approach being made to schools. Even where an initial approach of this sort was attempted it proved lengthier and more complicated than anticipated. Increasingly, individual institutions were in charge of their own budgets and were deciding autonomously what services they would use and commission to help support their pupils. The rapid growth of academies in several areas was said to be accentuating this.

‘Getting access to young people is an increasing challenge right across the spectrum, because the schools in this area, as in others, are ‘academising’ at a rate of knots.’

(Delivery manager)

Indeed, because advice and guidance services are no longer centrally commissioned or funded, even organisations such as Connexions no longer had an automatic presence or guaranteed access to schools, and therefore did not always have a current relationship that they could build upon.

5.3 Good fit between IF objectives and schools’ needs and priorities

Projects were acutely aware that when working in school they were operating on another’s territory, as it were, and were required to take this into account in the way they behaved. As one delivery manager put it, they had to recognise that they were *‘actually going into school as a guest’*.

*‘We have to fit in very much with what the school’s doing: what’s on the school’s agenda; where they are in the current academic year; whether they’ve got an OFSTED [inspection] coming up ... That relationship is about me going in and **supporting** rather than going in and saying ‘right, OK, I’ve got this program and it’s brilliant and you have to do it’. I can’t go in like that.’*

(Delivery manager)

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Another respondent made a similar observation:

'We can't go in and dictate terms.'

(Delivery staff)

In spite of the felt obligation to be highly sensitive to schools' needs and ways of doing things, delivery managers were uniformly confident that they had something valuable to offer and that ultimately their own aims and objectives, and those of schools, were strongly aligned. This transpired to be the case. The prospect of a targeted service to help address issues among some of the most difficult pupils was generally felt to have been very well received by schools, and this was strongly reinforced by the fact that the outcomes towards which the IF programme was being directed mapped very closely onto schools' own priorities and targets

Disruptive behaviour from disengaged young people, for example, was a major issue for all schools and one which most recognised as needing additional resource to deal with effectively. Improving attendance rates and boosting General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) achievement were also 'core' issues for schools which, as one respondent pointed out, are themselves highly target-driven organisations. The knock-on effect of one pupil deciding to work seriously to try to improve GCSE grades as a result of a support intervention, and influencing or carrying along with them a small number of their peers, was also recognised as having the potential to make a significant impact in schools with below average GCSE results.

5.4 Shared commitment to young people at risk of becoming NEET

A related aspect of IF projects which schools were keen to embrace and a key reason for their involvement, was their broader objective of aiming to reduce the numbers of pupils subsequently becoming NEET. This was both for immediate reasons of wanting to reduce schools' statistics for the number of pupils leaving at 16 with no employment, education or training destination, and for reasons of genuine concern for the well-being of young people who would soon be leaving them with no clear progression route and with whom they often lost contact. All the pilots had made long-term commitments to schools and young people, some even beyond the period of the IF programme, which the schools concerned were said to value particularly highly.

'What schools really like about it [IF] is that it's long term, because a lot of schools are very concerned about what happens to students after year 11 ... because they lose them after that and know that they 'disappear'. So they really like the fact that the funding makes possible, and is geared around, long term outcomes.'

(Delivery staff)

'People are quite excited by the fact that actually this just isn't a quick fix kind of thing ... We'll follow them when they leave and we'll ... [continue to] be there for them.'

(Delivery staff)

This overall closeness of shared objectives between the IF programme and participating schools was perhaps most forcefully expressed by a school in Manchester, which not only acknowledged the value of the input from the IF project, but also saw it as having potential for its own business strategy and staff development programme.

The harmonious concordance of the aims and objectives of the IF projects and the schools with which they were working had undoubtedly helped in securing their 'buy-in' and in the development of positive relations between them.

5.5 Individualised approaches

This said, schools were found to be unexpectedly individualised, with each one requiring a separate, tailored implementation plan. Furthermore, projects found there was a need for highly differentiated lines of approach and techniques of persuasion to address the large differences between schools in terms of the context they presented for IF interventions. Finding the elements of a common approach to schools amongst this diversity had proved to be surprisingly difficult.

'I think the key thing about this programme is that every school has its own way of operating ... and you know you would think there was common ground (and I'm sure there is) but it doesn't often seem like that.'

(Delivery staff)

'So the schools are first of all completely different and you never have the same conversation and the same sort of questions being asked of you in every school you go into.'

(Delivery staff)

The ability to offer, through the IF, a support service to at risk young people at no cost to the school was widely seen as positive, and certainly a help in persuading schools to participate. However, the expectations many admitted to having at the outset that such an offer of a free service would see schools 'biting their hands off' had not always been realised. On occasion, there were concerns expressed that the very fact of the service being free to the school meant it risked being seen as 'not very good', especially in the absence of any prior experience or hard evidence that might persuade senior staff that this particular project had something valuable to offer over and above other provision on offer and competing for their attention.

'... Not everybody is going to open their doors to you. You're 'another project'. You might be offering a free service – lots of projects are – [but] they want to know: How different are you? What are you going to bring that this [other] project isn't going to bring? Do I need to expose these young people to yet another project?'

(Delivery staff)

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There was even said to be a danger of what might be called ‘offer fatigue’ in schools in certain areas.

‘They get a lot of agencies approaching them with additional option of careers events and behaviour programmes and sports coaching and loads and loads of different things – they’re inundated with that kind of thing. So I sometimes think they’re maybe a bit sceptical initially because they’re approached so often.’

(Delivery staff)

5.6 Marketing to schools

While some delivery organisations had previous experience of working with schools, many did not. Staff in many of the pilots also came from a variety of backgrounds – many from youth or community work. Some found they had underestimated the level of staff resource they needed to commit to communicating with schools as well as the specialist skills needed to persuade them to participate in the IF programme. Many assumed that schools would ‘snap their hands off for a free service’ but found that, in practice, the task required specialist expertise and a dedicated marketing resource. In several cases, delivery organisations made the decision to redeploy or recruit staff to enable more time to be devoted to marketing activities and to signing up schools to the programme.

Projects reported that schools (and subsequently the recruitment of young people through these schools) responded well to these activities and their involvement did significantly improve after several months of focused effort – not least because there was, by then, evidence that could be pointed to as to the effectiveness of the interventions.

‘Once they see the quality of what we do and they see how students change, suddenly they change how they interact with us.’

(Delivery manager)

‘One or two schools initially were slightly trepidatious about us coming in ... but once they got a feel for what we were trying to achieve ... there was buy-in from pretty much every single school.’

(Intermediary)

5.7 Time needed to ‘prove’ projects’ worth

These kinds of responses suggest that many of the challenges faced when trying to engage schools stemmed from the fact that what was being proposed was, in many cases, a new service and one being tried ‘from scratch’ or for the first time in their geographic area. As such, it is fair to call a considerable proportion of these difficulties ‘teething troubles.’ Bringing new projects into new schools meant that there was generally no ‘demonstration effect’ or little evidence that could be called upon from previous work to persuade schools to become involved and committed to identifying and recruiting eligible young people. Many of the projects thus faced the hurdle of what was referred to as ‘the novelty phase’.

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'If it is a new school that we're working with, it's [about] building the relationship and building that trust ... I could sit there and speak to a head teacher about how good the programme is but it's not until we deliver a few sessions and show how good it is that we'll get that complete trust ... The main issues always are [in] getting over that novelty phase ... and then embedding ourselves in the school, making sure we get the buy-in from all the teachers [staff and parents].'

(Delivery manager)

The main consequence of this 'novelty phase' was delay. It took more time than anticipated to persuade schools to become involved and to build the trust necessary for taking relations on to a productive partnership:

'I didn't think [that ultimately] it was going to be a problem, and it wasn't, but it did take a good few months and a lot of work to build those relationships – a lot of meetings ...'

(Delivery manager)

Several of the pilots saw the need for some kind of 'build-up' period in contracts; some run-in time during which to engage schools and lay the foundations for future working which did not adversely impact on performance outcomes – a period that could precede the full-on running of the programme as it were 'against the clock' for outcomes achievement. One respondent went further, and suggested that some top-down initiative from government explaining the programme, and even **requiring** schools to participate, '*might have greatly improved the chances of success*'.

5.8 Facilitating good communications

There was something of a consensus across all the pilots that a crucial element in establishing and maintaining effective relations with schools was to have 'high level' contact (at Head or Deputy Head level) to get things moving, and a single key contact going forward. Also found to be essential was ensuring that commitment was effectively cascaded down through other school staff and strong links established with all those involved in the process of the intervention. This was especially important for ensuring speedy recruitment of eligible young people. The knock-on effect of delays in recruitment numbers, and subsequently on the numbers and timing of achievable outcomes, could create financial pressures within the IF funding model, so timely recruitment was recognised as being of paramount importance. Projects had found that they needed to be quite forceful on this point with schools which, with the best will in the world, were extremely busy places with many other competing priorities.

'I think that a number of schools that we engaged with, who were ready, willing and able to participate in the programme, didn't prioritize the delivery to us of young people because the schools were just busy ...'

(Delivery manager)

'We knew the need was there. The schools knew the need was there. But the referrals just weren't happening ... When we started to get more proactive and put deadlines [on the process] ... it's amazing how many started to come in.'

(Delivery manager)

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It was a source of some frustration for the pilots that vital processes within schools, that would ensure good communications and facilitate projects, were largely outside their sphere of influence. This was true in relation to getting referrals, but also applied further down the line, to aspects of participant monitoring, information collection and outcomes verification.

'... we're giving them the information and they're not cascading that down to staff, which is an internal issue for the schools rather than us.'

(Delivery manager)

Everyone was aware of how much could depend upon having a good, strong relationship with schools. However, the different delivery models of projects brought this issue into sharp focus. Projects with staff based inside schools, or delivery support primarily within the school environment, generally felt they had more opportunity to develop relationships than did those primarily acting outside schools, but relying on them for referrals. For the 'external' projects, the work of 'oiling the wheels' within schools fell less to coaches and link workers, and more to their managers.

5.9 Integration and separateness

The degree of 'integration' or separateness' of the different delivery models had other effects. Some IF projects pursued a delivery model based on effective integration into the schools' systems and into staff teams, while others maintained a more 'external' stance, forming relationships first and foremost with individual young people rather than their schools. Across all projects there was an acknowledged tension between the advantages of integration into schools and the need to maintain separateness and a distinct identity that was 'not school' – a need particularly to be perceived as different from school by young people, many of whom were seriously disaffected with education and with school authority.

'Where it works best, people come to them [coaches] for advice about all sorts of inclusion issues and they're kind of an expert in the school. Where it works worst, it can be hard to slot that external person into a system of management.'

(Delivery manager)

Frontline project staff in schools were particularly conscious of the need to maintain a workable balance, with the ultimate aim of providing a seamless service, inside and outside school, centred on the full range of needs of young people.

'I'm not a teacher and I'm not a social worker ... I can work with the school, but I'm separate from the school and the kids see that – and that's really important because we are not part of the institution ... that they're finding really difficult ... We're embedded here but we're kind of separate as well, we can work outside, we can work with their families ...'

(Delivery staff)

Maintaining an appropriate separateness in the eyes of young people involved a range of factors from insisting on terms of address that were not 'Sir' or 'Miss', but were either first names or references to role, such as 'Coach', through to the establishment of clear policies and statements about the confidentiality of anything young people might talk about with them.

Achieving a balance between effective functional integration into schools' systems, and the maintenance of a clear identity and role separation from teachers, was considered central to the successful delivery of IF interventions. As with so much in the first six to nine months of the programme's operation, projects were still establishing the parameters of their relations with schools and actively developing them. There was widespread expectation that once they had been able to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of interventions, then most of the early teething difficulties would be overcome.

5.10 Contextual factors in schools

During the first few months of implementation, pilot projects had begun to identify which aspects of a school's culture and practice assisted their interventions. Key elements for the potentially effective running of projects included such contextual factors as:

- the scale and effectiveness of pastoral care provision;
- the type of structure available for managing external (local authority) services in school;
- the existence and extent of other support services (such as ESF programmes);
- the presence (or otherwise) of pastoral care, learning support and inclusion teams; and
- whether participating schools had sixth forms.

Over and above factors such as these were broader and perhaps less tangible characteristics relating to the underlying ethos of the school and its overall effectiveness, including the quality of internal systems. These important determinants of productive and effective working relationships were seen as largely independent of more measurable aspects of variation such as the numbers of pupils leaving NEET or academic attainment levels.

'There are certainly schools which are harder than others for the coaches ... there is definitely a correlation between how 'sorted' and 'sane' the school is and how easy an experience the coach has.'

(Intermediary)

In a few cases, projects had found that there was a practical limit to unsupportive conditions in a school which meant that effectively the programme could not run there.

'These are schools where ... there just isn't either the institutional commitment or broader pastoral support for us to achieve the programme's aims. So there were three [schools] where we just called it a day and said 'it's not really working in this environment, we'll need to move on to another institution.'

(Delivery manager)

Where schools were reluctantly dropped from the programme, the trigger for doing so was the perception that they were not committed to supporting IF delivery staff in maintaining and supporting sufficient numbers of participants to justify the valuable resource input.

'If we have a school that drops below 60 per cent [in programme attendance] we start to worry about whether we can keep them on ... it may be the broader pastoral support within the school isn't there.'

(Delivery manager)

5.11 Increasing demand for services

A clear correlation existed between getting schools signed up to the IF programme and starting to regain early shortfalls in young people's recruitment numbers. However, the process of securing referrals of pupils was uneven among schools due to their individual circumstances. Initial commitment still needed to be translated into operational action and the trust and effort this required from a range of teachers took time to build.

'So we go into the school, we pitch the project to Head Teachers [or] Deputy Heads and then that will get filtered down to the people we're going to be working with ... it's working out these relationships with those people that results in referrals and [determines] when those referrals come. And it takes time to build that relationship and get it working smoothly.'

(Delivery manager)

Once activities were up and running, and interventions bedded in, pilots were increasingly able to rely on word of mouth recommendations from one school to another via various networks and joint working groups among senior staff.

'With schools, especially if you work in a borough, they all tend to network with each other anyway, so if you do a good job in one school the chances are you're going to get referred to another.'

(Delivery manager)

This positive 'snowballing' effect was enhanced through a variety of other means, from using graduate pupils from other schools as ambassadors for the programme, to encouraging local school designated police officers to report to other schools on the work in their area, to actively encouraging delivery bodies to 'shake their stakeholder trees.' A combination of such methods was ultimately successful in all project areas in catching up on early recruitment shortfalls. Indeed, several projects reported that stimulated demand from schools had increased to such an extent that it had begun to outstrip their capacity to respond.

'There was a tipping point ... in months ... 3 or 4 ... where it became clear that actually there were more schools who wanted to join the programme than ... we could accommodate.'

(Delivery manager)

5.12 Progression post-16

Effective relationships with schools were said to have allowed IF projects an element of influence in an important area – sixth form provision. Although there could be a potential conflict of interests if a young person's best interests were judged to lie in going to college rather than staying on at school (because schools wished to keep as many in their sixth forms as possible for funding), in practice this situation had rarely arisen. However, with the impending raising of school-leaving age, there was some speculation about the future.

'Whether or not there's going to be this push for them to hold onto young people when actually they'd be better off going elsewhere and doing something different only time will tell.'

(Intermediary)

In the meantime, some projects were using this prospect as an opportunity to persuade schools to add more vocational courses to their sixth form provision that would be better suited to less academically inclined students, and which would allow young people to stay in a familiar school environment post-16, rather than move to college.

'Think about the impact that we're having if we can influence sixth forms to put on low level courses, or more vocational courses, to cater for the young people that are at risk ... you're keeping them on site, you're keeping them in school, you're keeping them in education – there's some quite far-reaching influence that our programme can have.'

(Delivery manager)

The emerging view that many young people at 16, and especially many of those at risk of becoming NEET, were not ready for a move to a Further Education (FE) college, appeared to be borne out by the experience of other projects recruiting young people over 16. A significant source of referrals was said to be from colleges involving students who had ended up on the wrong courses or were unsuited to attending FE colleges, for example, because they found it hard to fit in or could not cope with the different demands they faced there. Other, self-referring participants in IF programmes had frequently been found to have ended up NEET after abandoning an unsuitable college course in the past.

5.13 Lesson learned from working with schools

Challenges and lessons learned arising from the more practical, operational aspects of delivery in schools centred around a number of areas. Most frequently mentioned were the following:

- the practical difficulties of fitting an intervention to the school timetable and cycle of the academic year;
- gaining access to pupils in school hours;
- ensuring continuity of involvement for individual participants; and
- using schools' data for outcomes verification.

5.13.1 Fitting to the school timetable and academic year

All projects attempting to engage schools and establish flows of referrals through schools had experienced some challenges around timing in relation to the school timetable and the rhythms of the academic year. As one respondent described it:

'You can tick all the boxes. You can design these things and allocate funding. But, you know, it's kind of like the 'elephant in the room' ... If you're going to work with schools, you've got to work on the academic year.'

(Delivery manager)

The timing of the IF pilots in relation to the school year was said by several projects to have been an important factor in the slow start they had made. Round 1 projects in particular, scheduled to start in April 2012, expressed frustration that they were faced with trying to engage schools during the lead up to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams and towards the end of the school year.

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'If I go in in April/May then it's, you know, on the wind down ... So I've got to get in early if I want to run something in the summer term – I've got to get in early enough ... understanding that cycle is crucial.'

(Delivery staff)

Acknowledging that schools are generally extremely busy places, it was felt that during the exam period teachers and school managers had even less time to spend on other matters than usual.

'Where this particular contract suffered really, really greatly was in the fact that it started in April, which is kind of towards the end of the academic year. All the people you needed to speak to in the schools [were] thinking about getting their kids through the exams ...'

(Delivery manager)

Difficulties were compounded when the overriding priority of exams during May and June was coupled with the effective shutting down of schools for two months in July and August over the summer vacation period, during which time key people could not be contacted. Some projects said that they effectively 'lost' four to five months at the start of their contracts which then required enormous effort and resource to recover.

'The programme ... started at the wrong time ... it wasn't synched with the academic year. July and August you could pretty much write off in terms of communicating and getting anything sensible done ... June – examinations – teachers are ... all in examination mode [and] holiday planning mode.'

(Delivery manager)

In the Links for Life project in Newham, there was the added difficulty of trying to contact schools during the build up to the Olympics and the extended school summer break, which hampered progress. It was the experience of several other projects that the hiatus of the summer holiday period continued to affect communications with schools into the new term and the new academic year.

'... when people come back for a new academic year ... the Head will decide, 'right I'm going to have someone new in there – people come and go – you're dealing with staff changes [and] changes of responsibility ... after the summer.'

(Delivery manager)

For both round one and two projects, it was often not until October that really effective work could resume (or indeed start).

'[We had to] let them get back after the summer for a while and then start working with them going into October, once things settled down. Whereas we had thought we could have hit the ground running as soon as schools got back in ... but it takes a bit of time to see who has come back and if they're still engaging ... what's happening with individuals.'

(Delivery manager)

In the instances where good contact had been made with schools before the break, there was a feeling that much of the momentum gained previously was dissipated over the summer months, and that relationships, both with school staff and pupils, needed to be rebuilt once the new school year had started.

The issue of dependence upon the academic year also extended to further education colleges, and the effect this could have upon the achievement of outcomes. Some planned outcomes depended upon young people moving on from school to college to gain certain qualifications. Failure to recruit sufficient numbers in time to follow-up pupils on to college could mean that a significant proportion of outcomes would be delayed by up to a whole year, with knock-on consequences for meeting key performance and outcome targets.

'... obviously college only starts at certain times of the year as well ... so we've already missed anybody started in this one that could finish [and get an outcome] so really ... we're going to be a year behind straight away.'

(Delivery manager)

5.13.2 Access to pupils

Most projects had planned on the assumption that once schools had agreed to participate, then gaining access to the required numbers of eligible pupils, for the necessary time to work effectively with them, would be relatively straightforward. This was not always found to be the case.

Organising activities and contact time within schools' timetables had, in several instances, proved challenging, especially for projects based mainly outside schools and coming in to deliver courses and support work perhaps once a week. The logistics involved were described by one delivery manager as 'really, really intense' because schools in his area were found typically not to want people coming into the school on Mondays and Fridays, thus restricting opportunities to the three days in the middle of the week. For coaches and advisers covering several schools this had resulted in imbalanced diaries and, from their managers' point of view, in an inability to use available staff resource as efficiently as they would have liked.

The more general issue across all projects, however, was the need to be sensitive about withdrawing pupils from their lessons. While schools were largely persuadable of the value of a support service for their most difficult young people, there often proved to be further persuasion required that such support justified taking them out of classes in order to participate. The practical timetabling difficulties that this entailed could be considerable, especially as in many cases the participants needed to be able to come together as a group though coming from different classes or even year groups.

'A lot of time is spent for them to find the right referrals, for them to organise a slot in the timetable where these young people can get together as a group and actually do this. And of course ... teachers, they're overworked.'

(Delivery manager)

Resistance was particularly likely if schools perceived any conflict with their primary goal of GCSE achievement. Some insisted that pupils should not be taken out of core subject lessons and project workers were aware that if they wanted to maintain activities, pupils should not be missing the same lessons every week.

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'We have to respect the timetable, so [with] maths, English and science, in some schools [they say] "please don't touch" – which puts a bit of pressure on our contact time ... [We] can't hit the same lessons all the time, that's for sure. It's definitely one of the biggest challenges.'

(Delivery manager)

Particularly disruptive pupils were the easiest to take out of lessons, because often their teachers were already looking for some means of reducing their impact on others in the class. Not infrequently, they were also seen as the young people less likely to achieve in their exams. With pupils who did not present an overt behavioural problem, or who were perceived as being on the margin of those potentially capable of passing their exams, there was rather more resistance:

'If the school feels they've got any chance of getting their GCSEs they'll ... try and keep them in class ...'

(Delivery staff)

Nevertheless, good relationships with school staff allowed for some negotiation around access to pupils, and project workers and managers had, in many cases, successfully persuaded teachers that for the young people identified for inclusion in the IF pilot there was a 'greater need' than remaining in class. Again, once some track record had been established in a school, and particularly where changes in the behaviour of students were clearly tangible, the school often had a change of heart. Objections previously made on the grounds of negative potential impacts on students' school work could be quickly overturned once teachers witnessed the benefits that could accrue to themselves, the young person participating in the project, and indeed their class group as a whole.

'They [the young people] could be in class for two lessons, completely disrupting it, or they could be learning with us and going back [into class] and contributing ... it's beneficial to ... not just the group we're working with [but] the whole class.'

(Delivery staff)

Opportunities for flexibility around timetabled lessons appeared to be greater for project workers based within a single school. However, this was somewhat offset by the fact that those who were set up as a dedicated resource within one particular school also tended to be dealing with a larger caseload. Whereas advisers working in five or six different schools would typically be looking to support between five and ten young people from each school year, a dedicated coach would, in contrast, be seeking to engage with perhaps 35 pupils from each year. The greater the numbers involved, and the greater the likelihood that participants would achieve their GCSEs, the greater was the potential resistance from teachers to releasing pupils (and one of the round 2 pilots was specifically targeting its provision on a participant group that included many considered close to being in a position to achieve five GCSEs).

The issues of scale are important because all projects suffered some early delays and were engaged in trying to catch up on their recruitment and outcomes targets. Achieving access to good numbers of young people through schools was central to those efforts and crucial to the working of the funding and business model. Indeed, it became clear in more than one project that there was a minimum threshold, both in terms of numbers recruited and in terms of available time for working with them to achieve outcomes, below which the project

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lost viability. This had led to several schools leaving the programme when it appeared that the minimum required number of participants would not be forthcoming. It was precisely problems of access to sufficient numbers of pupils which triggered these events. Talking of a school which had to be replaced in the programme in Shoreditch over the issue of not releasing students, a delivery manager explained:

'We realised that if we wanted this model to work with the numbers, we had to have more access to young people out of lesson times, and they just didn't ... like that principle at all. So ... when we went to the [replacement] school ... we were very clear – 'this is non-negotiable ... you have to give access ... if you're going to make this work' ... For any sort of preventative programme like this, if you're going to operate it in a school, you have to have access [to young people]. You can't do it at lunchtimes and after school. If we want to make real impact we need to have that contact time with young people.'

(Delivery manager)

In this instance it was further apparent that the capacity for delivering appropriate support was also compromised. Restricted by the school's policy of no release from timetabled classes, all provision was having to take place in break times and be in the form of group sessions rather than the mixture of group work and one-to-one sessions which was deemed necessary for participants. The situation was exacerbated by the lack of any pastoral support team in the school to back up the work being undertaken by IF staff. As the coach there said, with no allowance for the fact that many of the pupils had school attendance rates of 60 per cent or less:

'[I was expected] to make an impact with the attendance, attainment and behaviour by seeing 70 young people a week for 45 minutes in a group session during lunch break and tea break – now that ... just isn't physically possible.'

(Delivery staff)

Only intensive work with the first intake over the summer holidays was said to have prevented the initial cohort from dropping out of the programme. The school was willing to keep going, on its own terms, and hoped it would benefit from continued involvement.

'They [the school] were happy to continue with it [but] within certain parameters where we thought we weren't going to achieve the outcomes we wanted.'

(Delivery manager)

A judgement had to be made and acted upon as quickly as possible. The decision to pull out of the school was clearly not taken lightly, but effectively forced by the rigours of the funding model; the school represented 10 per cent of the project's potential outcomes. Capacity was, however, soon restored through the recruitment of a replacement school with a more flexible approach.

5.13.3 Continuity of involvement

A second area of potential tension between schools and the pilot projects centred around the possible withdrawal of pupils from IF provision once they had started, and the interruption of provision for reasons outside the control of those delivering it. Two basic reasons had emerged for why schools might withdraw young people from the programme. The first was the consequence of teachers using refusal of participation as a punishment for a student failing to improve their behaviour in class and in other school activities. The fact that students often did view it as a punishment when they were prevented from attending project activities was a reflection of how positively they viewed the provision and the support it was giving them. This seemed to be particularly strongly felt when activities involved venues other than school. The second reason was as a result of the physical exclusion of a student from school premises.

Undertaking activities off-site was an important and deliberate part in the thinking of several projects. Not only did some providers have solid evidence from past work that being in a different environment away from school could result in quite dramatic improvements in the behaviour of individual young people, but they also argued that it made explicit sense given that the target participants were those who were particularly disengaged from school and for whom the school environment did not seem to be working.

The simple fact of going off site, for any reason, was widely regarded as a privilege by teachers and students alike. For this reason it could easily become a potential sanction against misbehaviour in lessons and elsewhere.

'We've said specifically that for any projects that do involve students going out of school, that we expect ... we need to see an impact in terms of behaviour.'

(School stakeholder)

To an extent, projects were willing to go along with this and reap the benefits. Young people behaving better in order to gain access (or maintain access) to support was viewed as one of the ways in which projects might begin the process of re-engaging them with school and education. However, project workers were aware that it was unrealistic to expect 'instant' results and that a certain length of time would be required before most of those they were working with could be expected to show measurable, or most importantly, sustained, behaviour improvements. Indeed, there were several instances recounted by school staff in which positive changes reported to them in a young person's behaviour while on out-of-school activities were not mirrored by what teachers witnessed once students returned to the school environment.

[I tell students:] "you know, you're quite privileged to have this. We expect to see a positive spin-off in your behaviour in here." The call-outs system ... still shows that for some students their behaviour hasn't seen benefits.'

(School stakeholder)

This time-lag had raised some difficult issues for the pilots. Project staff were strongly of the view that they needed to be given the opportunity to complete work with participants, and given sufficient time to bring about the fundamental shift in attitude that was so often required. If students were excluded from school part-way through a period of planned provision, they were likely to lose most of the gains made to that point and potentially to revert to poor behaviour reinforced by a fresh sense of resentment.

5.13.4 Sanctions on attendance

School sanctions on pupils' participation due to bad behaviour in class, for example, could be disruptive for projects. Young people would be lost through withdrawal from the project, perhaps following several weeks of support and encouragement but before sufficient time could be spent with them to achieve any specific outcomes. The risks were exacerbated for projects delivering fixed period courses or activities to static cohorts of young people. Beyond a certain point in time it became impossible to replace a student with a new recruit, because insufficient time remained for them to catch up with others in the cohort with whom they had started. Even though some replacement of participants was possible if it took place early enough, this could have detrimental effects upon the dynamics of the original group – and this group dynamic aspect to provision was seen as being extremely important to the success of many interventions.

Whereas withdrawing students as a punishment could in some ways be seen as evidence of schools 'buying in' to the aims of the IF programme, other types of disruption were not so favourably interpretable. One project in particular had experienced what one respondent described as somewhat inconsistent behaviour from some schools, reporting that agreements were all too frequently broken at the last minute and for reasons which suggested that a much lower priority was being attached to programme participation than first discussed and agreed.

'It's very disruptive to not have a consistent group ... I don't understand how you can book a group of young people onto a programme, and you know all the dates, ... and [then] they can't do half of it !'

(Delivery manager)

When this prevented young people from attending a key aspect of provision (such as a residential weekend designed to cement group identity and build relationships with project workers) it was felt to be potentially undermining the chances for success for those concerned.

Managing this issue required strong relationships with schools. For the most part projects felt that they had been able to develop better understandings among schools of the issues involved. Acceptable compromises had been found in many cases and participating schools began to limit the use of sanctions in respect of participating pupils, although teething troubles seemed to have persisted in some areas.

5.13.5 Out of school 'duty of care'

A more 'technical' issue that had arisen for projects taking young people out of school was the varying interpretations from one area to the next of what the implications of this should be for 'duty of care'. All projects had found that their coaches had had to shoulder a certain amount of paperwork around this issue (for example, getting parental agreement, doing risk assessments), but some schools were additionally insisting that a full-time member of school staff had to accompany all off-site activity.

Not only had this insistence led, on several occasions, to IF activities being cancelled because no staff member was available, but project workers were also concerned that the presence of school staff could affect their relationships with young people and make them less willing to 'open up' and discuss their problems than they otherwise might be. Where groups involved pupils from several schools in a Local Education Authority area, this meant a

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member of staff from each school having to attend, with the result that school staff could end up outnumbering project workers. When providers were making significant efforts of 'trying to be 'not school', (Thames Valley Energise) such practices were viewed as frustratingly counter-productive.

5.13.6 Using schools' data

Another area in which IF projects reported some teething troubles in the early months of working with schools was in the use of schools' data for the verification of programme outcomes with pupils. The difficulties encountered were around the provision of 'signed off' letters confirming improved behaviour, and the provision of attendance data.

'Getting things like attendance data from schools is not easy – when we're looking at that ... outcomes, we need to know what we're up against, and ... some schools are not very helpful.'

(Delivery manager)

In the case of the former, getting teachers to sign off improved behaviour did not generally pose a great problem as long as the routine burden of checking dates and preparing a letter was carried out for them and all that was then required was a signature on a pre-prepared document. There was little reason why school staff should not have been willing to fulfil this task, as from the school's point of view there was little riding on it. Getting the process running smoothly was found to cement relationships and to help engage schools in the purpose as well as the progress of the interventions. Because 'behaviour' covered a wide range of possibilities from evidently disruptive activity through to, say, approaches to studying, some interchange with teachers was always necessary, and was found to be potentially useful in securing positive 'buy-in' to the programme.

'Schools themselves say "well, to sign this we want to ... understand the difference you've made". Now on some young people that's very visible and you know ... in other cases schools are saying "happily sign the letter but make sure you ... attach what your evidence is." So I think schools really entered into the ... concept and [are] taking it quite seriously, which is a good thing.'

(Delivery manager)

However, seeking verification for improved attendance had proven to be more troublesome in some schools, requiring as it did a degree of access to school-held data, and their manipulation in terms of the outcome measurement required for the purposes of claiming an outcome payment.

'The schools are getting fed up of us asking them for further information – because we're being asked for information and we can only get it from the school ...'

(Delivery manager)

The precise formulation of the attendance outcome – improved attendance to the school average sustained for 13 weeks – had also caused some problems for several of the projects. It had taken considerable time and effort to get all those involved (teachers, coaches, programme managers) lined up behind an agreed and consistent definition that would allow outcomes to be claimed.

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'It had been hard to get the exact ... format of that evidence right – you know, manipulate the data from the registers and codes in such a way that it matches with the DWP definition.'

(Delivery manager)

A related issue affecting attendance outcomes claims that had been noted in several of the pilots was the degree of 'hidden' or 'internal' truancy with which projects were dealing. In rural schools this was said to involve young people (who elsewhere would be truanting) turning up at school, but not engaging with anything once there. As a consequence, levels of recorded poor attendance were lower than expected in these locations and attendance outcomes harder to achieve. In urban areas the more frequently encountered problem was the number of young people who were found to be turning up to school initially, but who were then subsequently going off site. Registers did not typically record the degree to which this was happening, making attendance problems harder to justify.

5.13.7 Issues of exclusion

Ensuring good, continued access to school-aged participants threw up some challenges for projects around the question of what was to happen if a student was excluded from school. By definition, IF programme participants include young people judged to be on the brink of exclusion or referral to a specialist unit. Indeed, a previous history of exclusions was one possible selection criterion to be used when seeking appropriate referrals from schools. Projects whose primary purpose was to work with such at-risk young people, to prevent them dropping out of education, could find themselves faced with the prospect of losing participants mid-stream, to the very process of exclusion they were seeking to reverse.

'There's been cases where young people were potentially going to be put off-roll in something like a PRU [Pupil Referral Unit] and the coach has advocated for them to stay ... The coach is sometimes in a tricky position where he doesn't want to offend the school, because the relationship with the school is vital for them to be able to do their work, but at the same time, if they think that a young person isn't being well served they need to speak up.'

(Intermediary)

Exclusion, whether internal or external, generally involved automatic withdrawal from any out-of-school activities but, additionally, it could involve a physical move to a pupil referral unit (PRU) at a different site, presenting a practical and logistical obstacle to continued contact with an IF project worker. While several of the pilots were exploring ways in which they might work with PRUs in the future, it had proved difficult in many cases to justify the extra time and resource input required to continue contact with an individual young person who had been removed from the school to a different location (especially for projects where coaches were based full-time in a school).

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'We've got some that are being excluded and going off-site. We have to make a real judgement on whether we can continue to work with them ... We're trying to ... because they're the most at risk.'

(Delivery staff)

With exclusions, schools were seen to be making decisions based on the balance of interests between an individual and the majority of other pupils. In order to argue for the best interests of the individual students they were supporting, projects had faced some delicate negotiations. Whereas in some cases the connection with schools was too distant to allow much more than acceptance of the fact that some participants would be lost in this way (although efforts were being made to improve the recording of reasons for any absences), in other projects there had been robust action taken. In Manchester Teens & Toddlers, for example, the lesson had been learned from experiences with the first cohort of participants that clear communication was required from the start to emphasise that the continuous attendance of participants recruited to the programme was a necessary prerequisite for a school's involvement.

'When I talk about young people very much on the verge of exclusion, it's ... about the school's control over that, so ... [for] the second cohort we're much clearer to say 'you need to re-visit the service level agreement which says if a student has got an internal exclusion they can still come to the project'.'

(Delivery manager)

On this project they had successfully argued the case on behalf of individual students and persuaded schools to reverse decisions about ending their participation on the IF programme. The task was, however, acknowledged to be 'politically sensitive' and requiring delicate handling to prevent getting into a confrontational 'them and us' situation.

'We need to be clear ... that our programme is very much about addressing disaffection ... to take it away from [the students] who we believe need it the most, doesn't serve a purpose for anybody.'

(Delivery manager)

The strength of this conviction to keep participating pupils on board was said to be having direct effects on schools' decision-making in several of the pilots. In some instances arguing on behalf of students facing exclusion was said to have been instrumental in keeping them in school.

'The longer we're working with them ... we're able to influence the choices that they schools make ... where they were on the edge [and] could have been kicked out and sent to a PRU, we are keeping [young people] in for sure.'

(Delivery manager)

6 Early implementation: conclusions

Any 'conclusions' made at such an early stage in the three and a half year life of the Innovation Fund (IF) pilots must, of course, be somewhat tentative and remain subject to revision in the light of further operational experience, and evaluation research and evidence. However, the first nine months or so of implementation seem to indicate that most projects had bedded in well after some early teething difficulties.

All projects had delivered early successes for young people participating in the programme and there has been a generally very positive response to pilot interventions from schools and project participants. Young people highlighted the specific aspects of the support they had received as meeting their needs and helping them to progress: strong one-to-one relationships with a 'critical friend' support worker; goal setting and progression planning; 'holistic' support across many different aspects, areas and periods of their lives; and consistent support from familiar and trusted figures who would be there for them into the future and over a sustained period of time should they be needed. Some form of action planning and target setting, along with personalised one-to-one support, are core elements in the service offer from all the pilots. Holistic and long-term support elements are also key to some, but not all, projects.

Aside from the Payment by Results (PbR) social investment funding model, perhaps the most innovative and potentially fertile aspects of delivery has been working with schools. It is also an area of activity which looks set to grow in importance in the IF pilots as projects increasingly focus on young people aged 14 and 15, on early intervention, and on 'preventative' rather than 'curative' measures to address the issue of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). This shift in emphasis onto a younger pre-NEET target group is also taking place against the backdrop of a rise in the statutory school leaving age from 16 to 17 in September 2013, and from 17 to 18 in September 2015.

The offer of additional support specifically targeted on pupils at risk of becoming NEET was widely seen as valuable and of significant help in persuading schools to participate in the IF programme. Disruptive behaviour from disengaged pupils was a major issue for all schools and one which most recognised as needing additional resource. Improving attendance rates and boosting General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) achievement were also core issues for schools. Of key importance to the willingness of schools to become involved was thus the closeness of shared objectives and strong alignment between IF projects and

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schools' educational priorities.

Working with schools had nevertheless raised some important issues and challenges. Some of these can be characterised as 'teething' troubles in the forging of new relationships and operational partnerships. Others are of a more 'structural' nature, relating on the one hand to the sensitivity of the PbR funding model to timing and delay, and to issues around fitting to the rhythms of the school year and educational priorities, and on the other, to the needs and characteristics of eligible target cohorts (numbers of participants per school, and the degree to which project workers are dedicated to individual institutions or peripatetic).

Performance management has been intense and there has been a high level of demand from intermediaries and investors for performance data and progress reporting. There has been active, hands-on involvement and a high degree of commitment from all project partners in this management effort, from delivery managers and staff to intermediaries, to investors and board members of Special Purpose Vehicles. The perception is that this effort has successfully pushed up performance and that it will yield the desired results in terms of achieved outcomes and ultimately, social impact. There is evidence, however, that for some projects this successful delivery did not initially proceed fast enough, nor engage with a sufficient volume of young people, to meet the early demands of the social investment financial model which underlies each individual pilot's business and delivery plan. In particular, some projects experienced difficulties meeting the requirement to generate sufficient revenue to provide early 'cash-flow' for working capital after the first 6 to 12 months of delivery.

The projects have proved very dynamic in their responses to a myriad of issues thrown up by implementation and have seen continued adaptation and remodelling over the early months. As projects have adapted to changing operational and financial circumstances, they have become somewhat more homogeneous in the process. Differences between projects in terms of their content and structure have thus diminished as projects refocused their efforts upon younger, school-aged participants and on delivery with (and within) schools. All the initiatives have placed increasing emphasis on time-limited and more tightly structured interventions. Greater emphasis has correspondingly been placed on intermediate and educational outcomes such as improved behaviour and attendance at school and General GCSE qualifications. Contributing factors in this shift include greater access to participant volumes, working in a potentially more manageable environment and controlled setting for recruitment, referral and delivery, and greater scope for achieving early and more evenly spread outcomes against which projects can be sustainably funded.

In contrast, recruitment and engagement of older age-groups who are already NEET has thus far proved in many cases to have been more challenging than expected, requiring more time to recruit and effect progression and offering less opportunity for early claimable outcomes. The already NEET young people have thus often proved also to be the most 'risky,' hardest to reach and more likely to be affected by personal, family, labour market and social issues, and thus more likely to need lengthier interventions and specialist or sustained support over a long period to attain job and qualification outcomes. An important longer-term evaluation consideration will be to explore the relative successes and impact of the IF pilots in terms of the two different cohorts of young participants with which the projects are working; the post-16 cohort who were already NEET at the time of their recruitment onto the programme, and the younger cohort of compulsory school-age pupils.

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In the meantime, what investigation of the early implementation phase of the IF pilots has provided are some indicators as to what types of project and what forms of intervention might flourish or struggle within the constraints and demands of the social investment PbR model. Those projects seemingly most suited to the model appeared to be those exhibiting some or all of the following characteristics:

- being targeted on a pre-NEET, younger (still at school) age group;
- including a high proportion of 'intermediate' outcomes such as improved attitude to education, increased attendance and improved behaviour at school, and entry level qualifications;
- involving a rolling intake and a relatively even spread of outcomes over time;
- engaging a target cohort with sufficient volume and flexibility to allow rapid expansion if required;
- providing varied intensities of support to a differentiated and broadly segmented eligible target group; and
- delivering time-limited and structured interventions.

Those projects that seemed less adaptable and less comfortable within the model appeared to exhibit some or all of the following characteristics:

- being predominantly targeted on young people who were already NEET;
- including significant numbers of over 18-year-olds;
- including a high proportion of job outcomes in their projected profiles;
- having a 'lumpy' profile based around highly bunched outcomes, such as GCSEs;
- engaging a narrowly defined target group;
- delivering support services at many different locations and through many different organisations; and
- maintaining a commitment to long-term, continuous support provision.

Evaluation of the efficiency of projects in their own terms, and of their ultimate effectiveness in having an impact on reducing the numbers of young people becoming and remaining NEET, will be crucial to any final assessment of the viability and success of the IF pilot programme. The planned long-term monitoring of employment outcomes in particular will be of particular value.

Appendix A

Outcomes rates table

Maximum payments for agreed outcomes were set at the following rates for projects in the first and second bidding rounds:

Table A.1 Maximum payment rates for agreed outcomes in the first and second bidding rounds

Outcome measure	Maximum outcome payment (££)	
	Round 1	Round 2
Improved attitude to school/education	none	700
Improved school attendance	1,300	1,400
Improved school behaviour	800	1,300
Qualifications and Credit Framework accredited Entry Level Qualification	none	900
Basic skills	none	900
First Level 1 National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Qualification	700	1,100
First Level 2 NQF Qualification	2,200	3,300
First Level 3 NQF Qualification	3,300	5,100
First Level 4 NQF Qualification or above	2,000	none
English for Speakers of Other Languages	1,200	none
Entry to first employment (13 weeks)	2,600	3,500
Entry to first employment (26 weeks)	1,000	2,000
Cap per individual young person	8,200	11,700

Appendix B

The 10 pilot projects at a glance

Name	Location	Delivery body (bodies)	Type of investor(s)	Participant ages	Project size	Target group	Service offer
New Horizons	Greater Merseyside	Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership (GMCP); Business in the Community; Forum Housing; Fusion 21; Local Solutions (from the end of May 2014 the sole delivery body will be GMCP)	Social Investment Funds; Bank; Registered Social Landlords; Charitable Foundation	14 +	Large	Eligible NEET clients from CCIS database. Young people with learning difficulties, care leavers, young offenders.	One to one coaching, mental toughness training, signposting to provision, access to ring-fenced job interviews and links to employers. Carried out on partner premises and in schools. Referrals from Youth Offending Team, Leaving Care Teams and Registered Social Landlords.
The Advance Programme	Birmingham	Birmingham Employment Skills and Training (BEST) Network members – Jericho Foundation; St Pauls Community Trust; Merlin Venture Ltd; ENTA; Birmingham Disability Resource Centre; Focus Enterprises; Birmingham Institute for the Deaf; Worth Unlimited; Gateway Family Services; Autism West Midlands; Createafuture; Crossmatch Solutions; Rathbones	Single private sector	14–24-year-olds	Medium	Young people (including those excluded from school) who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET in ‘hot-spots’ within the City of Birmingham, in both white outer-city estates and inner-city black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.	Fully integrated support programme with a flexible, non-uniform delivery model. School-based delivery provides Level 1 and 2 coaching, family counselling, extracurricular activities and work experience tasters linked to supported progression onto apprenticeships. A strong focus on embedding literacy and numeracy skills within vocational training, supplemented by small tutorial groups. Targeted engagement outside schools. Delivered on agency premises and at outreach venues. Referrals through schools, Connexions Service, YOS and community networks.

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Name	Location	Delivery body (bodies)	Type of investor(s)	Participant ages	Project size	Target group	Service offer
Think Forward	Shoreditch East London	Tomorrow's People – a youth employment development charity	Social Investment Funds	14–17-year-olds	Medium	The 20% of school pupils in the Shoreditch area most at risk of becoming NEET.	Intensive coaching and employment mentoring in groups and one to one. Activities and links to training and to employers (in the City of London). Delivered by progression managers in 10 schools and in community venues.
Nottingham Futures	Nottingham	Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Futures Ltd	Single public sector	16 +	Large	The most at risk young people among those initially 'not known' on CCIS database with a focus on the six most deprived wards in the city.	Advice, coaching and signposting to specialist services and to an apprenticeships agency. Links to employment and training partnerships. Provision on Nottinghamshire Futures premises, with home and community outreach.
Links for Life	Stratford/ Newham, East London	Community Links (a local community organisation)	Social Investment Fund; Regeneration Partnership	14–19-year-olds	Small	The most vulnerable young people and those falling through gaps in mainstream provision.	Long-term, holistic support. Crisis support, intense coaching, signposting and brokerage using community 'hubs'. Referrals from schools, local NEET forum, Leaving Care Team, Mental Health Teams and youth providers. Also self-referrals.
Living Balance	Perth and Kinross	Perth and District YMCA	Individuals; Local small businesses; Church; Private sector project management company	14–24-year-olds	Small	Young people – NEET or in school with behaviour and circumstances putting them at risk of becoming NEET.	Complete support package under one roof, including confidence building, training, employment placements in social enterprises and links to employers. Delivered at the premises of Perth YMCA, at community venues and schools outreach locations. Referrals from agencies and schools, and self-referrals from young people.

Innovation Fund pilots qualitative evaluation: Early implementation findings

Name	Location	Delivery body (bodies)	Type of investor(s)	Participant ages	Project size	Target group	Service offer
Teens & Toddlers	Greater Manchester	The charity Children Our Ultimate Investment (COUI)	Social Investment Funds, Charitable Trusts and Foundations	14 and 15-year-olds	Medium	Young people in schools in areas with high levels of gang involvement and high rates of being NEET.	Phase 1 pairs at-risk 14 and 15-year-olds with toddlers in a nursery setting one afternoon a week for 18 weeks, using this to explore their own vulnerabilities and aspirations, followed by an hour in a classroom to work through a structured development programme (to QCF entry level qualification). In phase 2 participants meet facilitators monthly and focus on their work in school.
Capitalise	South Wales	Dyslexia Action and Include (Catch 22)	Social Investment Fund, Third Sector Partnership Organisation	14 and 15-year-olds	Medium	Those at risk of not gaining a GCSE in English, with literacy and self-esteem issues.	In school, cognitive behavioural approach, three levels of intensity of intervention. Mentoring, study skills, literacy support, and small group motivational work.
Energise	Thames Valley	Adviza	Social Investment Fund, Charitable Trusts, Local Authority, Social Housing Provider	14 and 15-year-olds	Large	Young people with one or more 'vulnerable' flags on CCIS database.	One-to-one mentoring combined with variable lengths of time (as appropriate) at motivational residential.
Prevista	West London (six boroughs)	Charitable, voluntary and community organisations: Urban Futures; Fit for Sport; Catalyst Gateway; Twist; Arrival Education; and Positive Arts	Training and Business Development Organisation, Consortium of private individuals	14 and 15-year-olds	Large	Young people with offending histories, substance misusers and/or involved in gang activity.	Stabilisation and prevention programmes, workshops on gang activity and knife crime, social skills programmes, prison reality workshops and further education and work integration programmes.