



Department
for Education



Process evaluation of the Essential Life Skills programme

Final evaluation report

December 2020

**Authors: Matthew Cutmore, Jo Llewellyn,
and Ian Atkinson (Ecorys UK)**

Contents

Executive summary	4
1 Introduction	8
1.1 The ELS programme	9
1.2 Evaluation aims and framework	13
1.3 Methodology	13
2 Design of the ELS programme	18
2.1 Programme delivery and funding mechanisms	19
2.2 Design of the ELS programme and early inputs to implementation	23
3 Implementation of ELS activities	29
3.1 Delivery and focus of ELS projects	30
3.2 Meeting the ELS criteria	32
3.3 Engaging intended participants	35
3.4 Participants reached and their characteristics	39
4 Outcomes of ELS activities	47
4.1 Outcomes for young people	48
4.2 Sustainability and legacy	54
5 Conclusions	56
5.1 Process for selecting and allocating funding to providers	56
5.2 Alignment of ELS projects with policy intent	56
5.3 Key success factors and challenges	57
5.4 Reaching intended participants	57
5.5 Emerging outcomes	58
5.6 Sustainability	58
5.7 Summary	59

Acknowledgements

The evaluators would like to thank the young people, families, schools/providers and Opportunity Area representatives who participated in the research. Opportunity Area representatives also helped facilitate research with providers, young people and their families.

Thanks also to colleagues at the Department for Education for their continued support with the research including early thoughts on the evaluation framework.

Executive summary

This final report presents findings from the process evaluation of the Essential Life Skills (ELS) programme, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and undertaken by Ecorys and Ipsos MORI. The ELS programme, which ran between the summer term of 2018 and September 2019, was intended to enable children and young people aged 5-18 years old to participate in regular extracurricular activities. Funding of £21.75 million supported a wide range of activities, including sports, arts, debating and information technology (IT). The independent evaluation of the ELS programme, and the projects that ran within it, focused on the design, implementation and perceived outcomes of the provision.

The programme was delivered across twelve Opportunity Areas (OAs), identified as social mobility 'cold spots', with responsibility for delivery devolved by the DfE to these OAs. ELS provision ran alongside the government's broader OAs programme, sharing the objective of promoting social mobility through enhancing the life chances of those from disadvantaged backgrounds. ELS projects were typically delivered within term time, although activities were also run during school holidays as well as being delivered in residential settings or at weekends. Provision was designed to promote the development of life skills, such as teamwork and resilience, building on a growing body of evidence that links such skills with improved educational, labour market and wellbeing outcomes. extracurricular

The ELS evaluation adopted a mixed methods research design, comprising four main strands as follows:

- Two waves of consultations with OA representatives in each area.
- Two waves of an online survey with providers (e.g., schools, colleges, external organisations) delivering ELS projects.
- Collection and analysis of attendance data for those participating in ELS projects.
- Focus groups with pupils participating in ELS, with pupils not participating, and with parents/carers (plus supplementary telephone interviews with the latter group where focus groups could not be arranged).

Key Findings concerning each of the areas of evaluation focus – programme design, implementation and outcomes – are summarised below.

Design of the ELS programme

Evidence concerning the effectiveness of the overall design of the ELS programme was broadly positive. Devolving funding and responsibility to OAs to develop and commission ELS provision, in a way that met programme objectives while responding to local

opportunities and contexts, was seen as a particularly beneficial approach. The main findings concerning programme design, drawn principally from consultations with OA representatives but also drawing on provider perspectives, included:

- OAs and providers had a clear focus on **designing provision to meet the needs of disadvantaged young people**, reflected both in the selection of providers experienced in working with such groups, the nature of the activities developed, and the approaches taken to promote the engagement of disadvantaged young people.
- **In general, provision was felt to align well with wider OA activity**, though in a minority of OAs representatives felt that alignment might have been closer and more effective.
- In particular, the design of local ELS projects and activities **benefitted from the use of local data and knowledge, feeding in the pupil voice, and designing approaches to benefit from local opportunities** such as prominent employment sectors; each of these success factors relate to a focus on local contexts and meeting local needs.
- Although it was not felt to have significantly affected provision overall, in a minority of cases the short timescales for initial design and implementation caused some challenges. In some instances, compressed timescales were seen as compromising the effectiveness and efficiency of design and implementation, suggesting that **a focus on ensuring adequate lead-in times would be beneficial in future programmes**.
- Additionally, **slightly more flexibility in the eligibility criteria for funding may have helped to promote longer-term sustainability**, for example through allowing more capital spend on equipment that could be re-used and/or permitting a greater focus on building the capacity and skills of those delivering ELS provision. While there were good examples of building sustainability into design and implementation at OA level, this was variable between areas; equally, in a number of cases, OA representatives and providers felt that sustainability could have been enhanced.

Implementation of ELS activities

A range of providers, including schools and external organisations, delivered a wide variety of activities to support the development of life skills. Sports, outdoor/adventure and arts-focussed projects were the most commonly reported. In some instances, providers ran larger-scale (sometimes summer camp style) provision, although smaller, more targeted projects working with specific groups and/or focusing on more specialist activities also formed part of the programme. Key findings from the implementation of ELS activities, drawn from all four evaluation strands, are:

- A notable proportion of providers used at least part of their funding for **capital items, such as equipment, with the rationale for this relating to a desire to help sustain provision** after the ELS funding period.
- **There were high levels of engagement and attendance in ELS provision, particularly amongst disadvantaged pupils.** Half of all recorded participations were by disadvantaged pupils, which in many cases surpassed providers' expectations.
- The **average attendance rate across the ELS programme** was equivalent to nine out of ten sessions attended, indicating that initial attendance was sustained and that the young people participating were generally consistent in their attendance.
- While there were some barriers to pupil engagement, it was evident that providers had generally anticipated and planned for these. **Barriers linked to young people typically included confidence and negative preconceptions about extracurricular activities.**
- Other barriers to participation included a lack of **parental engagement, logistical/financial constraints**, and, particularly **for external providers, some initial challenges in developing relationships with schools.**
- Actions to mitigate these challenges with engagement included **proactive and effective communication with pupils and parents**, offering a **wide range of activities, tailoring activities** to the needs of pupils and, where possible, **support with costs and transport.** Given the strong engagement and attendance rates apparent, the evidence suggests that such mitigating actions were largely successful.

Outcomes of the ELS programme

Evidence suggests that the **key intended outcomes of the ELS programme**, particularly in terms of more immediate effects on participating young people, **were achieved to a significant extent.** The evaluation timeframe meant that longer-term impacts around attainment and social mobility were harder to assess reliably, though the available indications were positive. Key findings, drawn in particular from the focus groups with young people and interviews with parents/carers, but also from the other evaluation strands, included:

- Young people commonly reported **beneficial outcomes relating to confidence, resilience, building relationships, and social and emotional intelligence.** This was reinforced by observations by providers and OA representatives.
- The **regular structure of the provision encouraged commitment** and organisational skills, further benefiting young peoples' development.

- Those participating in the research, including providers, OA representatives and young people, were confident that, **over the longer term, outcomes related to pupil behaviour, attendance and aspirations would be realised.**
- **The ELS programme enabled new partnerships to be formed and there was evidence of community level outcomes:** bringing young people of different ages and backgrounds, who would not usually do so, together.
- From a sustainability perspective, **the ELS programme helped raised the profile of extracurricular activities** relating to life skills locally. Importantly, **capital spending** (on equipment and other resources) was used to support provision beyond the ELS funding period.

The overall impression of the ELS programme is of a positive intervention that was welcomed by schools, colleges, external providers and young people. In particular, the focus group research suggested that young people enjoyed and benefitted from the activities on offer, and that in many cases ELS provision provided a route to participating in positive activities that may not otherwise have been available for some of those engaged. The programme also offers useful learning for any future wider roll out of extracurricular support provision, hence generating broader positive outcomes in terms of lessons that might inform future policy and initiatives.

1 Introduction

This final report presents findings from the process evaluation of the Essential Life Skills (ELS) programme. ELS was an initiative developed by the Department for Education (DfE) to support the development of extracurricular activities, particularly targeted at disadvantaged young people. The programme was delivered across 12 Opportunity Areas (OAs), selected on the grounds of facing challenges in respect of social mobility.¹ Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the report focuses on the design, set up and implementation of the programme, along with the outcomes achieved.

The DfE commissioned Ecorys and Ipsos MORI to conduct the research.

The following key terms are used throughout the report.

Key terms

Opportunity Areas (OAs): Social mobility ‘cold spots’ where the Department is prioritising resource and bringing local and national partners together to break the link between background and destination, thereby improving social mobility for children and young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. ELS funding was awarded to OAs, in addition to their existing funding, to help the most disadvantaged children.

Essential Life Skills (ELS): Programme of extracurricular activities intended to help develop ‘life skills’ amongst children and young people, including, for example, enhanced resilience, confidence, team-building and leadership skills.

Project: ELS projects within schools/external providers focused on a specific activity and cohort of pupils.

Programme: Collectively, all ELS projects across the 12 OAs where the programme as a whole is running.

Activity: The specific ELS activities delivered within ELS projects; projects may be focused on a single activity – e.g. sport, drama, or debating – or a range of activities combined within a single project.

¹ For more information on Opportunity Areas, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas>

Provider: Organisations delivering ELS projects and the activity or activities within them, including schools, colleges, private sector organisations, local authorities, and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) bodies receiving direct funding from OAs to deliver ELS.

1.1 The ELS programme

The ELS programme represented one component of the government's wider social mobility agenda. It operates in addition to the broader OAs programme which aims to tackle social mobility 'cold spots' and enhance the life chances of those from disadvantaged backgrounds.^{2 3}

The DfE allocated £21.75 million⁴ for the ELS programme across all 12 OAs, with the programme running between the summer term of 2018 and September 2019. The funding was intended to enable children and young people aged 5 to 18 years old to participate in regular extracurricular activities. ELS projects were typically delivered within term time, although activities were also run during school holidays as well as being delivered in residential settings or at weekends. Examples of ELS activities included sports, volunteering, debating, drama and projects intended to promote social benefits including, for example, environmental activities in local communities.

1.1.1 ELS theory of change

To enable a robust and appropriate evaluation of the ELS programme, a theory of change (ToC) was developed at the outset. The ToC built on a review of relevant literature, including documents produced by DfE when designing the programme and developing guidance for OAs. Figure 1.1 overleaf presents a theory of change (ToC) for the ELS Programme in diagrammatic form. Each element can be summarised as follows.

The **rationale for intervention** was based on a growing body of evidence that links non-cognitive skills such as resilience, self-efficacy, emotional and social skills with improved educational, labour market and wellbeing outcomes. The evidence also suggests that extracurricular activities can play a role in building these skills.⁵ Extracurricular activities

² Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2016. [The Social Mobility index](#). See:

³ The 12 Opportunity Areas are: Blackpool, Bradford, Derby, Doncaster, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Ipswich, North Yorkshire Coast, Norwich, Oldham, Stoke-on-Trent and West Somerset.

⁴ Essential Life Skills programme was funded through the soft drinks industry levy (SDIL)

⁵ Cunha, F., Heckman, J. J., & Schennach, S. M. (2010). Estimating the technology of cognitive and non-cognitive skill formation. *Econometrica*, Vol 78 (No 3), 883-931.

can benefit all pupils, including improving outcomes around attainment. However, there is evidence that wealthier children and those in private schools are more likely to access and utilise extracurricular provision relative to their less socio-economic advantaged peers;⁶ therefore, the ELS programme had a particular focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils to ensure that all pupils could benefit.

Based on this evidence, the ELS programme **aimed** to enable disadvantaged pupils, across 12 Opportunity Areas, to take part in regular extracurricular activities to support the development of essential life skills. The programme aimed to promote such skills given their association with success in school the labour market, enhanced wellbeing, and ultimately upward social mobility.

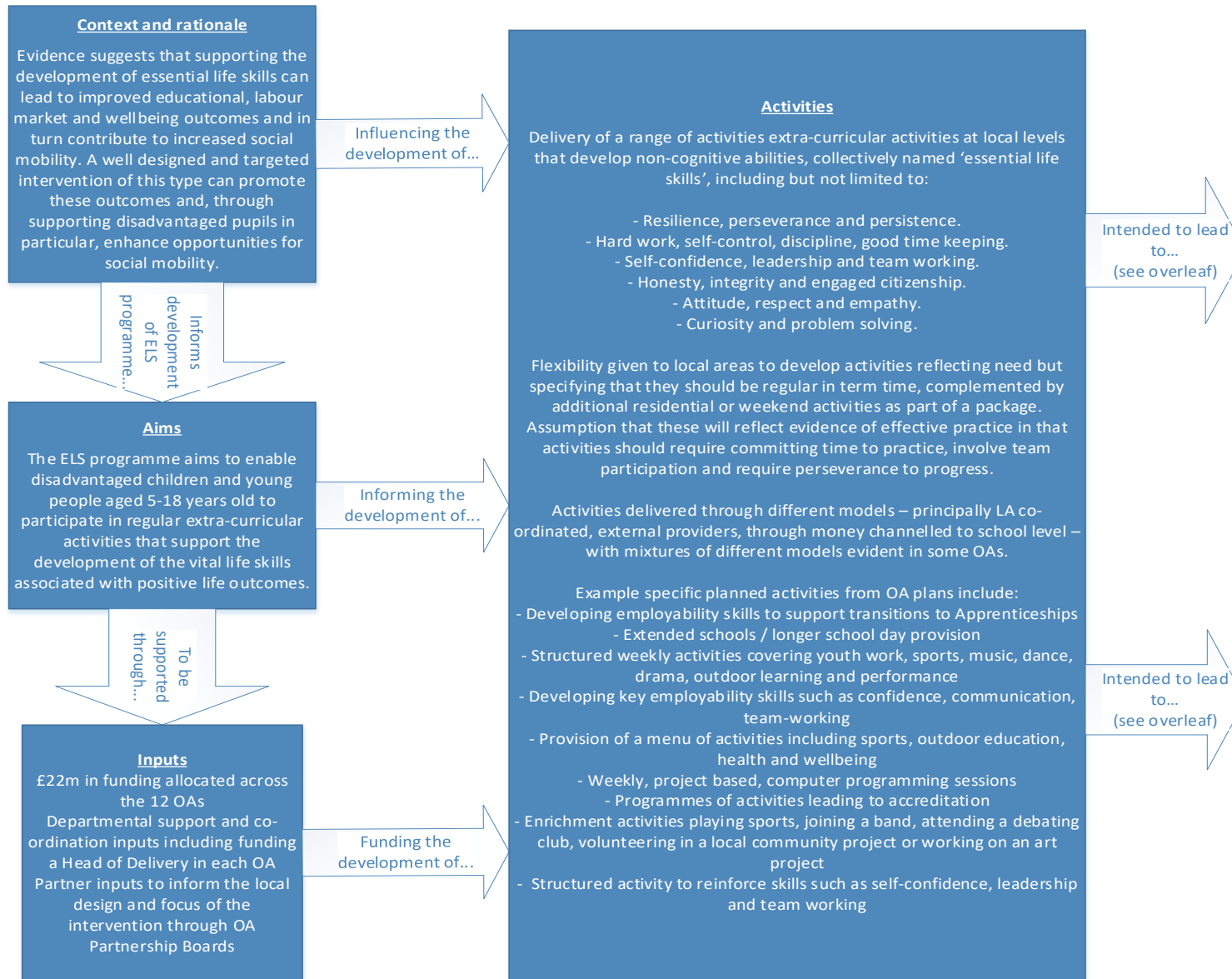
In terms of **inputs**, the programme received a total of £21.75 million funding. As part of its overall approach, DfE offered a range of support, including a funded Head of Delivery (as part of the wider OA programme, not just for the ELS programme). Another input came in the form of support from local partners to develop the local design and focus of ELS activities through OA partnership boards.

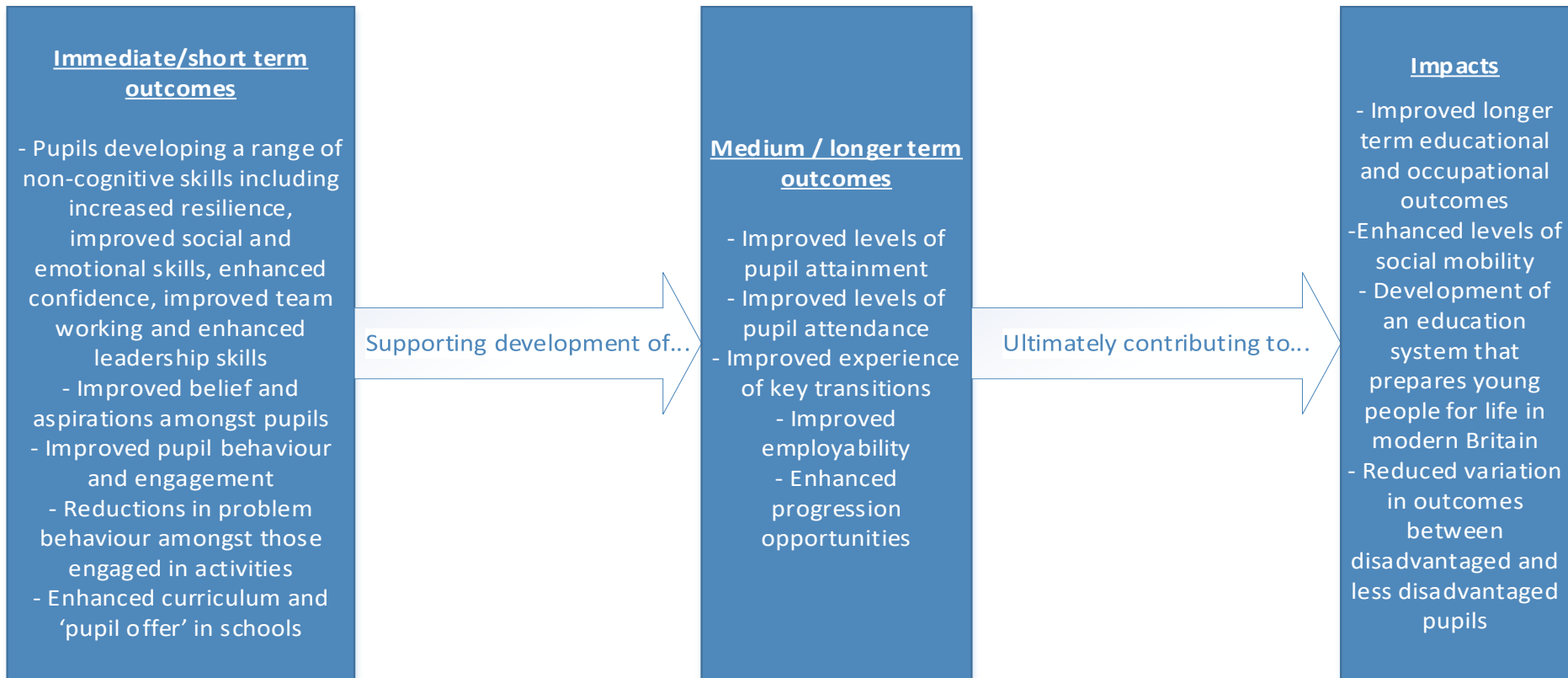
OAs had flexibility with regard to which **activities** were pursued, based on local needs. Activities had to support the development of essential life skills, occur regularly within term time and could be complemented by residential or weekend activities. As the diagram illustrates, there was a wide variety of activities but all focused on supporting the development of the type of essential life skills referenced in the programme rationale.

ELS activities aimed to lead to a set of **immediate/shorter-term outcomes** around pupils' development of non-cognitive skills, along with improving aspirations, behaviour and engagement. In the **medium and longer term**, the aim of ELS support was to contribute to improved attainment and greater employability, as well as enhancing progression opportunities and supporting successful transitions. Ultimately, these short, medium and longer-term outcomes were expected to lead to broader impacts including improved longer-term educational and occupational outcomes, an improved education system and enhanced social mobility.

⁶ Sutton Trust (2014). 'Research Brief: Extra-curricular Inequality'

Figure 1.1: ELS Programme level theory of change





1.2 Evaluation aims and framework

Following the development of the programme level ToC, an evaluation framework was developed. The overarching research questions are below. The full evaluation framework, which further expands on these questions, and links each evaluation question to the sources of evidence/methods used to address them, is included at Annex A.

- To what extent was the process for selecting and allocating funding to providers effective?
- How far did the funded projects and activities align with the overall ELS design and policy intent?
- What were the key success factors and challenges (and how were these addressed) in implementing the ELS programme?
- To what extent were identification, recruitment and retention processes effective?
- To what extent were ELS activities reaching the participants intended? And what can be determined concerning the relationship between pupils' characteristics and participation?
- What were the emerging outcomes from the programme?
- To what extent was sustainability considered and how effective were any plans developed to support this?
- What are the key lessons that can be derived from the design and implementation of the ELS?

1.3 Methodology

To meet the research aims, a mixed-methods evaluation approach was employed. Specific research methods included:

- Two waves of consultations with OA representatives in each area.
- Two waves of an online survey with providers (for example, schools, colleges, external organisations) delivering ELS projects.
- Collection and analysis of attendance data for those participating in ELS projects.
- Focus groups with pupils and parents/carers, with additional telephone consultations with the latter group where focus groups could not be arranged

Each method is detailed below.

1.3.1 Consultations with OA representatives

Semi-structured consultations were undertaken with OA representatives in May 2018, when ELS projects were in the process of being designed / commissioned, and September 2019, when the ELS funding was drawing to a close and projects had been delivered.

The first wave of consultations was timed to enable views on the design and anticipated delivery to be captured and covered how the programme was organised locally, how projects were selected, and early lessons around set up and delivery.

At wave two, consultations covered reflections on the design and anticipated delivery (i.e. had anything changed substantially), the extent to which ELS projects reached and supported the intended young people, the outcomes for pupils and providers, and lessons learned.

OA representatives consulted comprised a mixture of DfE staff and those from local authorities, depending on the most relevant person to interview in light of the structure in each OA. Representatives from all 12 OAs were consulted at both waves.

Consultation write-ups were analysed to draw out key themes and interesting differences between OAs.

1.3.2 Online provider survey

OA representatives shared project details to facilitate the administration of an online survey of organisations delivering ELS projects. Providers included schools, colleges and external providers (for example, local authorities, voluntary and community organisations). Similar to the OA representative consultations, there were two waves of the survey, covering set up and early implementation at the first wave and reflections on delivery and outcomes at the second wave.

The first wave of the survey achieved 179 responses (31 per cent of all organisation details provided) and focused on: providers' experience of accessing ELS funding; their planned projects and the focus of activities; how they recruited pupils; their anticipated outcomes; and lessons learned at the early implementation stage.⁷

Wave two of the survey received responses from 172 providers (a response rate of 26 per cent, where details for additional organisations were provided) and focused on: what providers had delivered; whether projects reached the intended pupils; challenges/success experienced around this; outcomes observed, and overall lessons learned.

Whilst OAs shared some named contacts, many of the contact details received were generic to the organisations concerned. These details were also included in the sample

⁷ Providers from 11 OAs responded at wave one and providers from all 12 OAs responded at wave two.

to maximise the number of responses on the assumption that the organisations contacted would delegate the survey to the most appropriate person to complete. The online survey was not a longitudinal study (baseline and follow-up) of the same organisations – rather it was a pooling of two cross-sections of data covering different providers.⁸ As detailed above, the sample sizes achieved at both waves are sufficient to consider the results from both waves as broadly representative of the ELS programme as a whole.⁹

1.3.3 Attendance data

Attendance data, including the ELS project name and the main activity focus, and pupil characteristics (gender, year group and disadvantage status), were collected by providers in a pupil-level standardised spreadsheet and sent to the evaluation team each term. Due to data protection concerns, pupils were not identifiable in the returned data. As such, the unit of analysis was participations in discrete ELS activities. This meant that, within a return of ELS participation data, the same pupil could appear multiple times (taking part in different activities). As such, there was no way of tracking pupils across projects in the available data. Therefore, each set of ELS participation data reflected the overall number of pupils who participated in each activity, but as the same pupil could participate in multiple activities these numbers did not reflect the number of *unique* pupil participations, or allow us to track the participation of individual pupils over time.

Some providers, particularly external (non-school/college), were unable to collect pupil characteristics for some (or all) young people participating in their projects. Considering data protection concerns, and in some cases the primary data collection required for this, this was to be expected. As such, and only where appropriate, analysis excludes missing data.

Attendance rates were calculated based on the maximum-recorded participations for each unique combination of school/provider, project name, main focus of activity and year group. The latter was in recognition that although some projects ran across year groups, the maximum number of sessions available may have differed by age (for example, Year 7 pupils have more sessions than Year 11 who may be preparing for exams etc.). This ensures that, as far as possible with the available data, the attendance

⁸ Fifty-nine providers responded to both waves of the survey. However, due to how the survey was (out of necessity) distributed, we cannot be certain it was the same individual within that organisation responding.

⁹ Based on the response rates, the margin of error was 6% at wave one and 6.4% at wave two.

rates for projects running across multiple year groups are not biased by certain year groups being able to attend more or less than others.

Overall, the evaluators received data for more than 170,000 participations across the 12 OAs. The majority of participation data came in the spring and summer terms of 2019, approximately 60,000 and 84,000 participations, respectively. This reflects greater levels of activity over these periods. Table 1.1 details the overall participations by OA. It is important to note that participations recorded in the attendance data submitted are not, on their own, a measure of successful delivery of ELS projects. Funding amounts to OAs varied based on their overall pupil population. Some OAs also made completing attendance data for the evaluation a condition of funding for their providers. Furthermore, there were contextual factors, such as the rurality and intended target groups for projects in some OAs that naturally meant fewer participations.

Table 1.1: Recorded participations by OA, Summer 2018 to Summer 2019 (all ages)

Opportunity Area	Count of all recorded participations	Percentage of all recorded participations
Blackpool	20,199	11.6
Bradford	25,491	14.7
Derby	23,232	13.4
Doncaster	33,307	19.2
Fenland And East Cambridgeshire	1,807	1
Hastings	12,445	7.2
Ipswich	9,313	5.4
North Yorkshire Coast	3,878	2.2
Norwich	3,536	2
Oldham	14,295	8.2
Stoke-On-Trent	24,957	14.4
West Somerset	975	0.6
Total	173,435	100

Source: Ecorys participation data

1.3.4 Focus groups and telephone interviews with parents/carers

Focus groups were conducted with pupils participating in ELS activities, with their parents/carers, and with pupils who did not participate in ELS activities (three in each OA, one per stakeholder type). In a small number of cases where it was not possible to arrange focus groups with parents/carers, telephone interviews were undertaken as an alternative.

Overall, 240 individuals participated. A series of tailored topic guides were designed with different question wording and interactive activities to support facilitation. Topic guides were further tailored based on the age of pupils (key stage three and below, and key stage four and above) to ensure the activities were appropriate and maximum insight could be gained.

A purposive sampling approach helped to ensure the focus groups represented significant strands of activity within each OA and there was a good range of activity/cohorts covered across the evaluation. The sampling criteria comprised geography (urban/rural), type of provider/setting for activities, age of participating pupils, and the main focus of activities.

Focus groups (and in a minority of cases additional telephone interviews) were undertaken in nine OAs in the summer term 2019 and captured pupil (and their parent/carer) views on why they engaged (or could not / did not want to engage) with ELS projects and the impact engagement had (where pupils took part in activities). Three OAs could not participate due to providers not being able to accommodate the focus groups. OA representatives in these areas and the evaluation team made every effort to secure engagement from multiple providers but this proved not to be possible in the available timescale.

2 Design of the ELS programme

Key findings

- Funding and delivery models were effectively designed to meet the overarching ELS objectives whilst taking account of local opportunities and context.
- Devolving responsibility to OAs to design and develop ELS provision was welcomed locally and proved an effective mechanism for delivery.
- Two broad funding and delivery approaches were evident: devolving funding to individual institutions and commissioning external providers to deliver provision on a (generally) larger scale; in some cases, these were combined.
- Procurement, contracting and provider selection worked well, and ELS providers generally welcomed the straightforward approaches adopted.
- The main exceptions to positive views on the rationale for, and design of, the ELS programme related to views that eligibility criteria for funding might have been more flexible and developed with sustainability more in mind.
- The main challenge faced in terms of initial design and implementation concerned the short timescales available, particularly in light of the amount of funding allocated in some cases, though this issue was generally felt to have been overcome.
- There was clear alignment of ELS provision with wider OA activity in most cases, with this evident from the design stage through implementation.
- Success factors in designing provision included taking account of local data, intelligence and knowledge, feeding in the 'pupil voice', and designing approaches that could benefit from local contexts and opportunities.
- There was a clear focus on targeting ELS as far as possible at disadvantaged pupils in terms of design and delivery mechanisms established at the OA level.

The sections that follow examine the overall design of the ELS programme, including the approach taken to programme delivery through the local OAs and the funding mechanisms established. OA approaches to the selection of particular ELS projects and providers are also examined, along with the development of activities and project design. The final section assesses the level of alignment achieved between the ELS programme and wider OA activities. Findings presented are principally informed by two rounds of interviews with OA representatives, one early in programme implementation and the latter at the end of evaluation activity, along with selected insights from the provider surveys.

2.1 Programme delivery and funding mechanisms

The evaluation investigated how OAs organised and designed mechanisms to fund ELS activities at the local level, including how providers applied for and accessed the available funding and the factors that helped or hindered these aspects.

2.1.1 Delivery models and mechanisms to allocate funding

Interviews with OA representatives early in ELS programme implementation highlighted that a range of different delivery and funding approaches were apparent locally. This reflected the thinking behind the DfE's approach to programme delivery in terms of devolving responsibility for delivery models and funding mechanisms to the local OA level, as outlined in the ToC in the previous chapter. OA representatives welcomed this devolution in terms of facilitating a delivery approach attuned to local contexts and needs.

Two broad groups of approaches in respect of ELS funding and delivery models were developed at the OA level: (1) devolving funding to the school or college level through direct grants; and (2) commissioning external providers to deliver activities for pupils. Several areas adopted models that combined direct grants to schools or colleges with the commissioning of additional external provision or activities.

Where funding was channelled to the school or college level, in some cases institutions developed and delivered their own activities using the grant funding allocated. In others, schools and colleges used the grants they received to procure external provision. In some cases, this was from a menu or prospectus of activities run by external providers coordinated and set up by partners within the OA.

The rationale for allocating funding directly to schools and colleges tended to rest on two main considerations: firstly, that they were best placed to develop and/or procure activities to meet their needs; and, secondly, that such an approach would promote engagement ownership. When reflecting back on the ELS programme, most OA representatives felt that this rationale and its presumed benefits had held true. They noted that schools and colleges were able to develop or procure provision that had been successful in engaging young people, and that a significant proportion of schools and colleges within local areas had engaged with the programme.

Approaches where funding was channelled through external providers were also apparent. Typically, such providers either delivered larger-scale activities open to pupils from a range of institutions, or provided a range of provision from which individual schools or colleges could select. In some instances, a proportion of funding from the overall amount available was allocated to external providers to deliver ELS, with this

being combined with grant funding to the individual institutional level. In such a way funding to OAs was ‘top-sliced’ to support providers to offer different or broader activities in combination with those delivered by schools or colleges.

Reasons for funding external providers often related to the local context. For example, two OAs identified that communities and schools in their areas were historically isolated from each other. Commissioning providers to deliver cross-school activities thus formed one of the ways the OAs concerned sought to overcome this isolation. Other OA representatives cited their trust in and relationships with existing experienced providers in their area, hence being confident that these providers could deliver ELS activity effectively.

When looking back on the programme, OA representatives in cases where external providers were engaged felt that the rationale for doing so was reflected in the results. They felt such external provision offered something complementary and/or additional to activities delivered by individual schools. Likewise, there was a view that the approach taken had been beneficial in delivering provision at a scale able to engage pupils from across different schools and communities.

In terms of success factors, OA leads commonly cited devolving funding to OAs and the ability to leverage local understanding of issues and priorities. Within this, the consequent ability to design approaches attuned to the local context was noted. Building on existing local knowledge, experience and provision was similarly identified as a success factor. Indeed, across OAs a desire to build on existing provision of extracurricular activity was apparent – for example, through harnessing established networks, building on existing evidence, and supporting particular organisations already delivering to disadvantaged young people.

Other factors influencing the delivery models adopted by OAs included:

- Taking account of the “pupil voice” on the types of support they felt were required, or evidence on specific issues that needed addressing in local areas.
- Geographical considerations (for example, rurality influencing the decision to channel funding to schools, where they were relatively remote from each other, rather than, for example, using external providers to develop projects bringing schools together).
- Sectors prevalent within local economies; for example, one OA commissioned a large-scale programme with a technology focus due to a good pre-existing relationship with a known provider and employment opportunities in the local economy.

- Meeting wider OA priorities; for example, an OA aiming to broaden the horizons of disadvantaged pupils commissioned an external provider to run projects to encourage higher education uptake.

In most cases, OA representatives felt that the funding and delivery models adopted had been effective, as evidenced in part by the lack of significant change to these models over the period of ELS delivery. There was no clear evidence that either of the two broad approaches outlined, directly funding schools and colleges through grants and using external providers, was more effective than the other. However, interviewees did generally feel that the model they adopted was suited to their areas, taking into account factors such as geography, provider base, and existing school or college activity.

2.1.2 Selection and procurement of providers

Under models directly devolving funding to the school or college level, the typical process for selecting providers and allocating funding worked as follows:

- OAs notified schools and colleges of the programme, available funding and the process of applying;
- Institutions responded, generally, via a short standardised proforma, detailing the types of activities they wanted to run and how these met the ELS criteria.
- OAs awarded funding to schools or colleges meeting the criteria through grant agreements, requesting adjustments in cases where proposed activities were outside the ELS criteria.

The above approach tended to not be competitive – as long as schools had suggested activities that met the ELS criteria they were awarded funding. Where OAs implemented this model, representatives felt that it helped minimise the burden on schools in particular, hence encouraging broad engagement. In a number of cases the high levels of engagement reported, in terms of schools and colleges benefitting from ELS funding, were linked to this.

Typically, OAs allocating funding directly to schools and colleges through grant agreements sought to distribute it in a structured and equitable manner. This commonly involved a formula consisting of a base amount of funding allocated to all eligible institutions, which was then “topped-up” based on the number of disadvantaged young people attending the school or college. The common measure for disadvantage was number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium. OA representatives generally felt that this model worked well, citing the specific advantage of ensuring that where schools had a limited number of disadvantaged pupils, a reasonable overall funding amount was still available to encourage their participation.

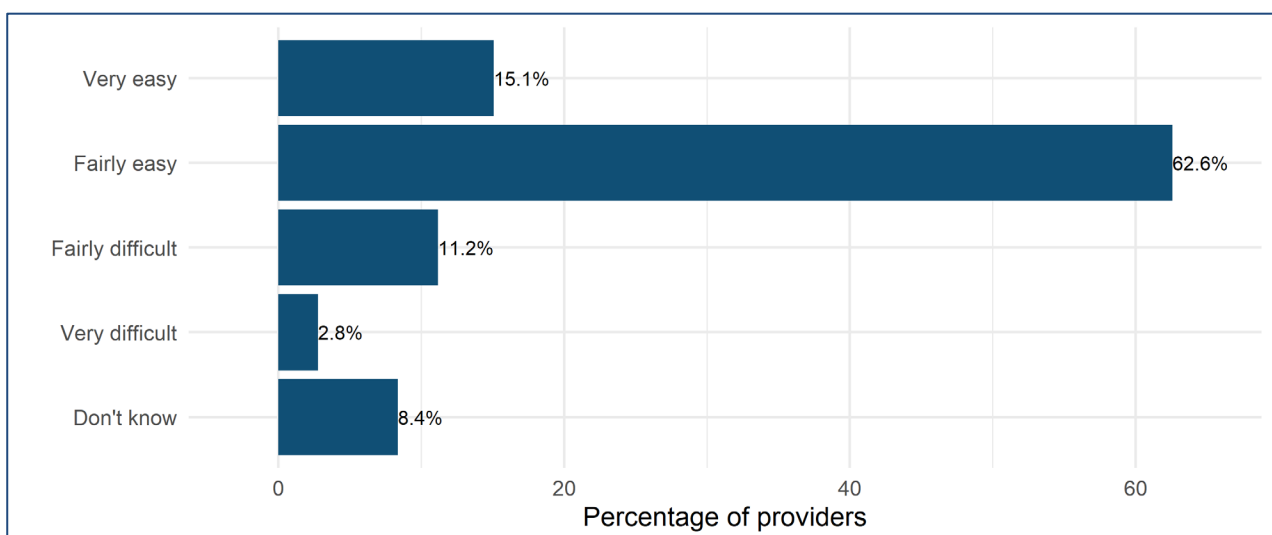
There were two main procurement approaches to commissioning external providers: firstly, competitive tendering; and, secondly, directly approaching providers with a strong local presence and/or significant experience of delivering extracurricular activities. This latter approach was used in some cases to select providers to offer additional activities across schools and colleges, being combined with directly allocating some grant funding to individual institutions.

Whichever approach to selection and procurement was adopted, accepting some initial implementation challenges (see section 2.2.2), interviewees from OAs tended to report that the processes involved had worked well overall. The approaches taken were seen as pragmatic, proportionate, and fairly simple from the perspective of the institutions and providers receiving funds. In particular, they were also felt to have successfully facilitated an inclusive approach where the funding could be distributed as widely as possible and engagement promoted.

2.1.3 Provider perspectives on the funding and initial implementation approach

The impression of effective processes around implementation at the OA level, in terms of developing models to guide funding allocation and contracting, was confirmed from the provider perspective. As figure 2.1 shows, a large majority of providers responding to the wave one survey, just under four in five, found the process of applying for funding to deliver ELS activity either very easy (15 per cent) or easy (63 per cent). Only 11 per cent rated this experience as fairly difficult and three per cent as very difficult.

Figure 2.1 Ease of applying for funding to deliver ELS activities



Source: Wave one provider survey. Base: 179 respondents

It is also worth noting that just under two in five of the 179 respondents to the wave one survey selected 'ease of applying for and receiving funding' as one of the 'most helpful' factors in supporting their development of ELS activities.¹⁰ Equally, several respondents to an open survey question around what worked best in delivering ELS referenced the funding and (ease of) set up in their responses. Combined with the above findings presented in figure 2.1, this suggests that the process was considered relatively simple and effective from the perspective of those receiving funding to deliver activities.

2.2 Design of the ELS programme and early inputs to implementation

Both the DfE and each individual OA provided a number of inputs during initial design and early implementation. The DfE provided guidance reflecting the policy intent and specifying eligible activities. OAs helped to shape the activities offered locally. Interviews with OA representatives, along with some of the questions in the provider surveys, were used to gather reflections on programme design and early implementation.

2.2.1 Perspectives on the overall design of the ELS programme

In general, OA representatives felt that the rationale for the ELS programme, captured in the ToC presented in the previous chapter, was sound. Likewise, OA representatives welcomed the opportunity to combine ELS with wider OA activities, whilst acknowledging that this also raised some challenges (see section 2.2.2). The focus on disadvantaged pupils in respect of the design of the ELS programme was seen as particularly significant, with OA representatives typically outlining how they sought to ensure provision was influenced by this consideration. Examples included:

- Identifying organisations with specialist experience of delivering support to disadvantaged young people, and commissioning them to deliver ELS provision.
- Commissioning activities for specific groups (for example, those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)).
- Ensuring that potential providers were aware of the importance of the ELS focus on disadvantage when working with them to approve provision, in particular making this clear in the guidance sent out to schools, colleges and other providers.

¹⁰ Respondents were invited to select **up to** three factors that they found 'most helpful' out of six (including 'other – please specify')

- Ensuring that places were available/prioritised in the first instance to particular groups identified as being in need locally (for instance, young carers, young people in care and those at risk of becoming involved in gang related activity).

While there was an evident focus on disadvantage, most OA representatives acknowledged that it would have been problematic to focus solely on this when activities were delivered in schools or colleges. As such, while activities were designed and selected based on their suitability for disadvantaged pupils, activities in many of the OA contexts reviewed were accessible to all young people. As discussed in chapter three, the ELS management information (MI) collected from providers suggests that the focus on disadvantage was reflected in terms of actual participation in the programme.

Although OA representatives generally welcomed the design of the ELS programme, views on the specific eligibility criteria for activities were more mixed. Several felt that there might have been more flexibility to use capital spend to support activities, though it was acknowledged in some cases that this had emerged during delivery. A minority of interviewees also suggested that ideally they would have had more flexibility to use part of the funding to support organisational (provider) development, or continuous professional development (CPD) amongst those delivering activities. In each case these issues were raised from the perspective of better promoting sustainability.

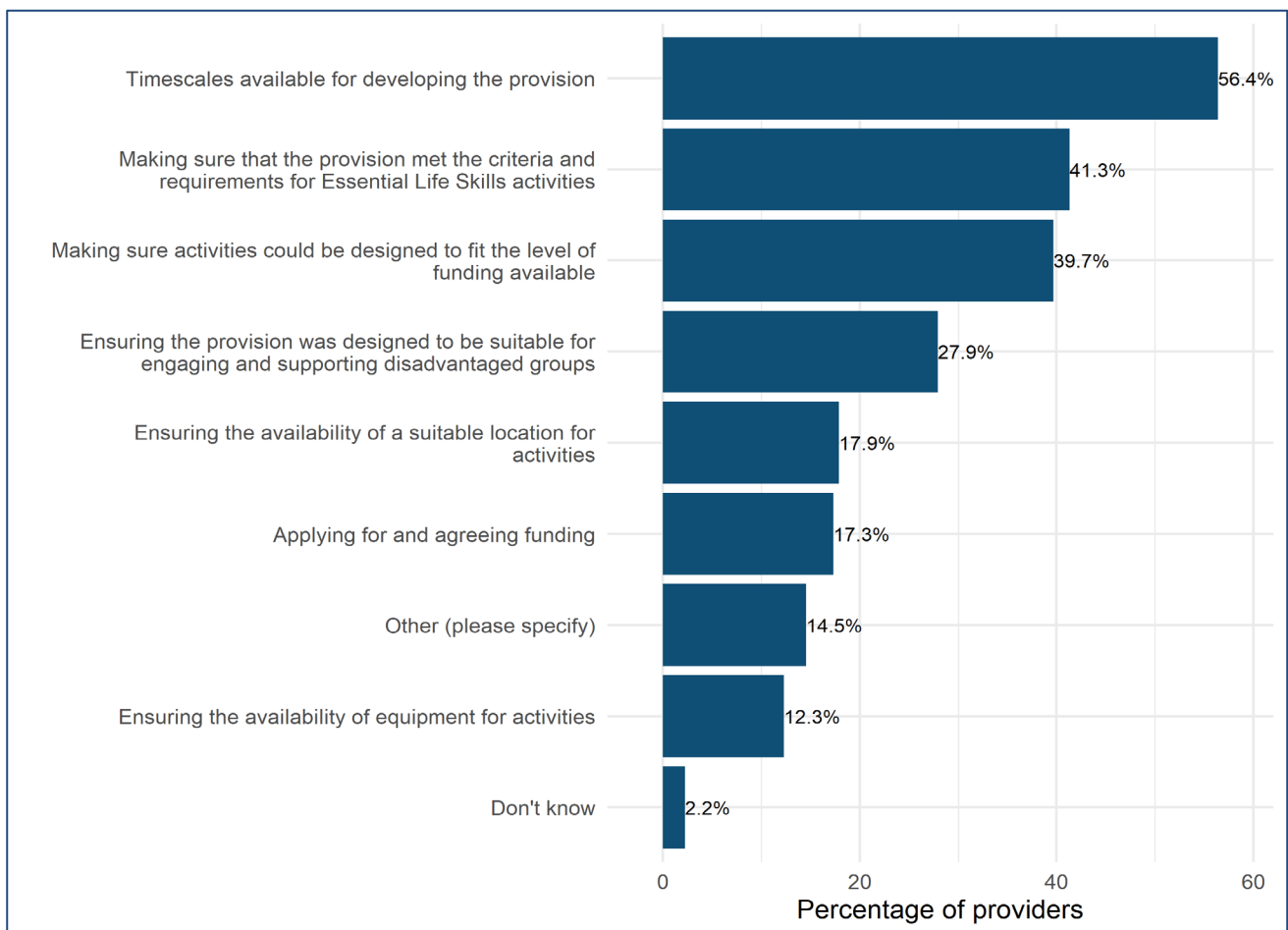
2.2.2 Initial implementation challenges

While the general view was that the development of delivery models and funding mechanisms worked well, OA interviewees typically added the caveat that this was not without challenges, particularly early in the programme's development. Restricted lead-in and implementation times was the most commonly raised issue. While this issue emerged strongly in the wave one OA interviews, the interviews held towards the end of the evaluation were mixed as to its significance. A small number of interviewees felt that the potential of the programme was compromised by this issue. However, the majority felt that early difficulties had been overcome, and that the programme had proved effective once it was up and running.

For providers, while programme implementation and outcomes were generally seen as very positive (as subsequent chapters illustrate), it was evident that the issues around implementation timescales flowed through into delivery. In addition, as figure 2.2 shows, when developing activity some of the concerns noted in the preceding sub-section were also apparent – in particular those related to the criteria for eligible activities. As the chart illustrates, when asked to select up to three main challenges in developing ELS activities, over half of respondents (56 per cent) cited timescales as a key challenge, while just over

two in five respondents (41 per cent) identified eligibility criteria as a key challenge. These two challenges were the most commonly identified from the available options.

Figure 2.2 Challenges in developing ELS activities



Source: Wave one provider survey. Base: 179 respondents

The other key implementation challenge raised by OA representatives concerned the fact that, at the local level, ELS represented a large amount of money to absorb quickly. This challenge was seen as being heightened in the context of the significant range of other OA activity occurring in localities, allied to the need for a rapid implementation pace. Several interviewees raised this in related ways as a learning point for future programmes, particularly in terms of ensuring adequate lead-in and implementation timescales to promote effective and efficient use of funds.

While the above issues are important to consider from the perspective of future programme design, on balance they were not felt to have significantly affected ongoing ELS implementation and the generation of positive outcomes.

2.2.3 Building sustainability and value for money into project design

Interviews with OA representatives early in implementation were used to examine how far sustainability and value-for-money were built into the design of provision. As noted in section 2.1, a number of OA representatives commented that their decision to channel money directly to schools and colleges, to promote engagement and ownership, was one key mechanism for promoting sustainability. The perception was that the funding could kick-start activity, along with demonstrating its benefits, hence encouraging institutions to sustain it after the ELS funding period.

As referenced later in the report, evidence suggests that this assumption was only borne out in part, given that sustaining activity post-ELS was seen as a key challenge in many areas. Accepting this, the evaluation evidence does suggest that there are examples of plans to sustain activities, as well as individual institutions and ELS projects seeking to consider sustainability where possible.

Specific approaches to building sustainability into the design of provision included:

- Using a small proportion of the funding for training and capacity building within providers.
- OAs working with institutions to explore options for sustainability.
- Ensuring organisations delivering ELS considered options for sustainability from the outset.
- Using other funding from the overall OA budget to lay the basis for longer-term ELS-type provision.

Equally, in the case of at least one OA ELS was integrated into a broader initiative from the outset, with this initiative continuing after the ELS programme.

Interviews with OA representatives at the end of the programme gave a mixed picture in terms of the degree to which the above efforts to promote sustainability would be successful. In some cases, OA representatives were relatively confident, though others expressed more scepticism whilst suggesting that sustainability should feature in the programme design and eligibility criteria more effectively in future initiatives.

Equally, it was apparent from the open responses to the provider survey that sustainability was seen as a significant challenge, both due to restrictions on the use of funds and what was perceived as a short programme delivery period. In a small number of cases, respondents also cited a perceived lack of clarity, guidance and support around how they might promote sustainability. It was unclear, however, whether these perceptions related to high-level programme guidance from DfE or an expectation of more ongoing guidance and support from the OA level.

In terms of value for money, OA representatives cited a number of ways they had sought to achieve this. These included:

- Requiring details from providers at the contracting and procurement phase around how they planned to ensure value for money.
- Considering value for money as a key criterion when identifying or selecting provision to fund.
- Seeking to ensure that ELS had the maximum impact for the available funding through approaches such as using trusted providers, building on pre-existing provision, or combining with pre-existing initiatives.
- Seeking to combine and integrate ELS with broader OA activity so that the different strands of activity reinforced each other.
- In some cases, undertaking 'light-touch' monitoring to ensure that providers were indeed seeking to ensure value for money.

In general, OA representatives were confident that the approaches taken meant that the programme was delivered efficiently, and that value for money was appropriately and effectively considered. The only exception was a minority view that more value might have been generated if some of the issues noted above around sustainability, restrictions on eligible expenditure, and/or implementation timescales had been approached differently. From this perspective, if the funding was more flexible, there was more of a focus on sustainability and legacy, and there was less of an imperative to deliver at pace, then greater value for money might have been ensured.

2.2.4 Alignment of ELS with wider OA activities

It was evident that all OAs had considered the design of the programme in the wider context of OA delivery. In most cases, ELS was effectively 'programmed' under one of the headline OA priorities defined and established locally. OA representatives also commonly noted that ELS fits very well with the overall intent of broader OA policy, and that as a result the programme had a clear and close strategic fit with this.

In some contexts, representatives involved in developing the overall OA approach noted that they were aware of the likely development of an ELS programme and that OA priorities or strategies had been developed accordingly. Likewise, through developing OA plans some areas had already identified the development of life skills as a key priority, and noted that ELS would be a key part of achieving this. More specifically, the 'increasing engagement in education' element of ELS was viewed as having a close alignment with the wider OA programme. From this perspective, ELS was seen as one route to promoting broader objectives around enhancing attendance and engagement.

OA representatives interviewed at the end of the programme were generally confident that close alignment of ELS with wider OA activities had been maintained through implementation. However, this was not universal, with one OA representative acknowledging that a weakness of the programme locally was the lack of alignment achieved. In another case, it was felt that while there was broad alignment, opportunities to combine provision and activities had proved limited. Conversely, positive examples of alignment included:

- Combining ELS provision with a wider suite of activity developed to support young people in PRUs.
- Combining with OA provision for excluded pupils where, as part of a mentoring scheme they were involved with, and the broader support package put in place for them, young people had to attend at least one ELS activity.
- Prioritising ELS funding to a number of primary schools identified locally through OA planning and the broader policy programme as being the most disadvantaged.

In such cases, OA representatives generally felt that the overall benefits were greater than would have been the case if ELS was run in isolation.

3 Implementation of ELS activities

Key findings

ELS activities

- A wide range of activities were delivered by a variety of providers, with sports, outdoor and arts-focussed projects being the most common.
- Projects focusing on more specialist activities such as business, debating and technology were less commonly reported but reflected the targeted nature of some ELS provision, typically being aimed at particular age groups or seeking to reflect key sectors in the local economy.
- The majority of ELS projects occurred regularly, within term time and were focussed on developing outcomes related to essential life skills.

Engagement of young people

- Half of all participations recorded involved disadvantaged pupils, defined as such by FSM status. With only a few exceptions, disadvantaged pupils were as likely as their non-disadvantaged peers to participate in most activities.
- High levels of engagement amongst all pupils were reported; in many cases, providers also noted that engagement amongst disadvantaged pupils was often higher than their peers.
- The average attendance rate across the ELS programme (all pupils and projects) was equivalent to nine out of ten sessions attended.
- Strategies to overcome barriers included proactive and effective communication with pupils and parents, tailoring activities to the needs of pupils and support around associated finance and transport. These appeared to be effective, judging by the high engagement and attendance levels evident.
- Alongside the strategies adopted to address barriers, the type and range of activities on offer were noted as success factors in engaging young people. Most providers made provision available to all pupils but, in line with the policy intent, placed additional focus on engaging disadvantaged pupils.
- Several barriers to engagement were apparent, including a lack of parental engagement and/or logistical/financial constraints; pupil confidence; and negative preconceptions about extracurricular activities.

This sections that follow explore the implementation of ELS funded activities, including the types of activities developed and the types of pupils targeted and reached. They also

examine the success factors and challenges associated with implementing ELS activities. Findings are principally informed by two rounds of an online survey of providers and activity attendance data collected as part of the evaluation. Where applicable, insights from the interviews conducted by OA representatives are also referenced.

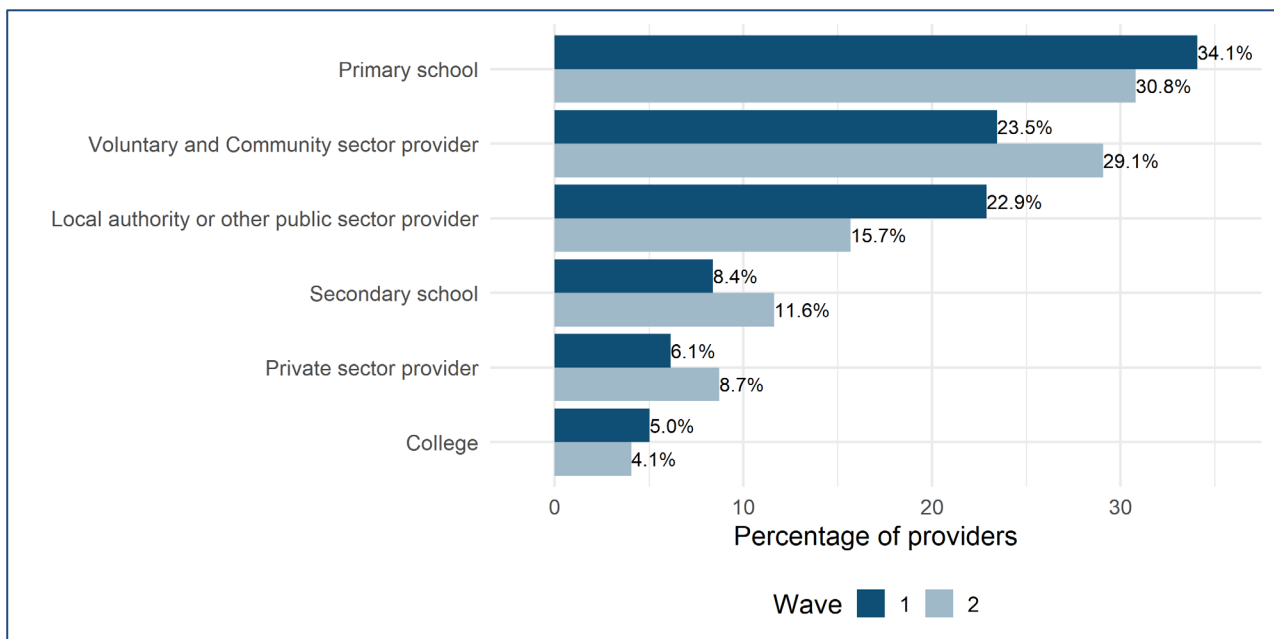
3.1 Delivery and focus of ELS projects

As illustrated in the ELS ToC and outlined in the previous chapter, flexibility was given to OAs in terms of which projects to approve, and the identification of appropriate organisations to deliver ELS provision.

3.1.1 Types of provider

A range of providers delivered ELS projects. Primary schools were the most common type of provider accounting for approximately one in three responding to the survey. Figure 3.1 details the types of providers responding to the survey at waves one and two, providing some insight into the spread and prevalence of different provider types. Based on insights from OA representatives, it is possible that changes between waves one and two of the survey are explained by a wider range of projects being underway at wave two, including additional external providers being commissioned.

Figure 3.1 Types of ELS provider



Source: Waves one and two provider survey. Base: 179 and 172 respondents respectively

More than half of providers responding to the survey (both waves) directly delivered ELS activities. A notable minority (c.15 per cent) supported other organisations to deliver activities. For instance, in terms of supporting other organisations to deliver ELS, examples were provided by OA leads of providers, schools in particular, working in partnership with one another to deliver activities. In some cases, this involved schools building on existing partnerships (for example, cluster schools). In others, new, and sometimes unexpected, partnerships were formed. This organisation-level outcome is discussed in chapter four.

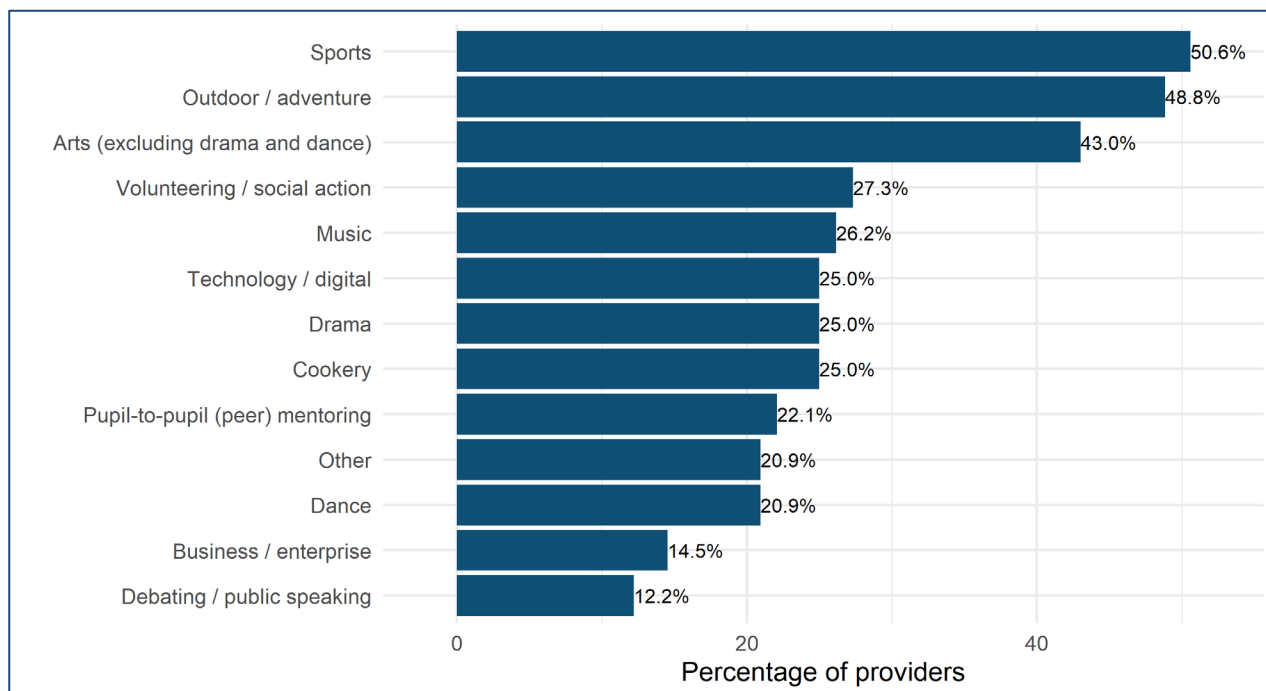
3.1.2 Main focus of activities

A wide range of activities were delivered through projects. Figure 3.2 reveals that the activities most frequently reported by providers focussed on sports, outdoor/adventure and arts. Activities focussed on business and debating were less common. Although somewhat limited by sample sizes, analysis by the type of provider indicates that business and debating focused activities were typically designed for, and targeted at, older cohorts. In the case of business-focused activities, it was also apparent that these were more likely delivered by private providers. Typically, more commonly reported activities were delivered to all ages and by all types of providers.

There was very limited change in the distribution of the main activities of focus between waves one and two of the survey. Alongside views from OA leads, who generally reported little change to the type or spread of provision being delivered over the life of the ELS programme, this is evidence that the activities that were anticipated (or in the stages of early delivery) at the time of the wave one survey continued to be delivered over the course of the programme.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, some projects were targeted at specific groups and/or the OA had selected particular projects based on local needs and opportunities. For example, one OA with a technology centred local economy commissioned projects where this was the main focus of activity.

Figure 3.2 Main focus of activities delivered by providers



Source: Wave two provider survey. Base: 172 respondents. Multiple response permitted.

3.2 Meeting the ELS criteria

Projects had to occur regularly within term time, could be complemented by residential, weekend or holiday activities, and were required to support the development of essential life skills. Guidance was also provided by DfE on the amount of funding that could be used for capital spend, which included equipment and staff training.

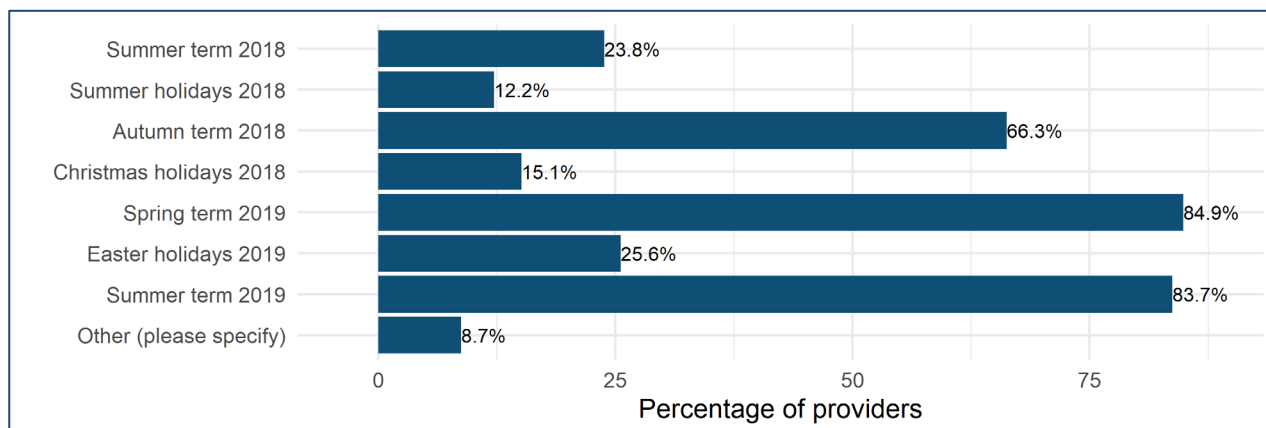
3.2.1 Frequency of ELS projects

In line with the policy intent, the majority of providers reported delivering projects on a regular basis. Projects were delivered at least once a week by 77 per cent of providers responding to wave two of the survey. Others reported the frequency was either variable (17 per cent) or less often than once a week (6 per cent).¹¹ Although based on small sample sizes, private sector providers were more likely to deliver projects occurring less often. This fits with insights from a number of OA representatives that some private sector organisations had been commissioned to deliver more specialist but less frequent projects/activities.

¹¹ Source: Wave two provider survey. Base: 172 respondents

The majority of providers delivered projects during term time, particularly in the spring and summer terms of 2019. Figure 3.3 shows that some providers operated over the school holidays and this was a particular focus for some OAs where large-scale projects, offering a range of activities (summer camp style), were operational. Residential activities, which were also within scope of the ELS criteria, were reported by some providers.

Figure 3.3: When ELS projects were delivered

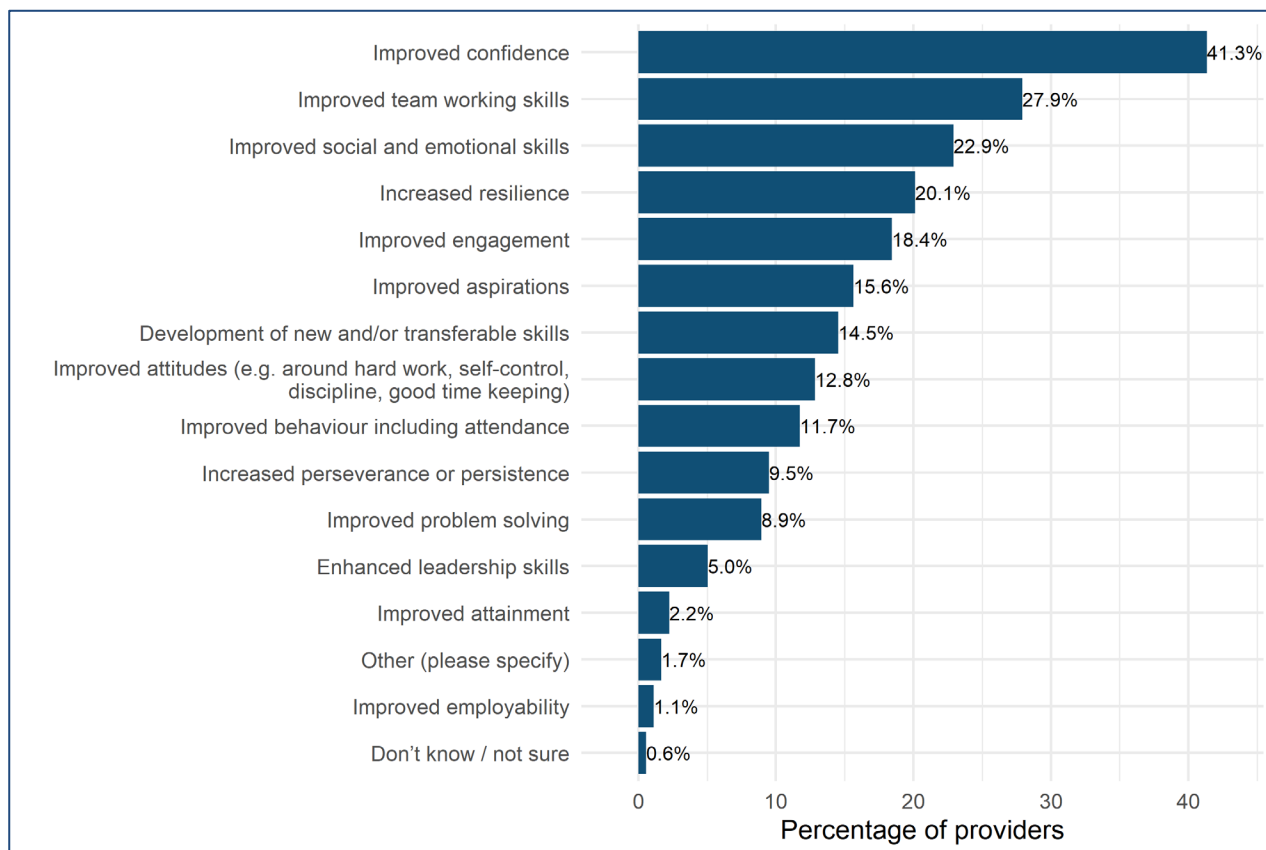


Source: Wave two provider survey. Base: 172 respondents. Multiple response permitted.

3.2.2 Developing essential life skills

Providers had developed projects where outcomes considered essential life skills were anticipated. Figure 3.4 shows that improved confidence and team working skills were the most commonly anticipated outcomes reported by providers at wave one of the provider survey. Outcomes such as improved attainment and employability being reported less often is likely to be explained by the fact that these are longer-term impacts, hence only becoming apparent in most cases long after the programme's end. The actual outcomes observed by providers (at wave two), OA representatives and pupils are considered in chapter four.

Figure 3.4: Essential life skill outcomes anticipated by providers



Source: Wave one provider survey. Base: 179 respondents. Multiple response permitted.

3.2.3 Capital spend

The option to use some ELS funding for capital spend was evident for a notable proportion of providers. Of the providers responding to the survey, 37 per cent at wave one and 46 per cent at wave two used part of their ELS funding in this way. There was also an increase in the amount of funding used for capital spend reported by these providers, with 34 per cent at wave one, and 40 per cent at wave two, using more than a fifth of their overall funding for this purpose. This increase could be explained by different providers responding to the survey at each wave. However, it is also possible, based on insights from OA representatives, that there was a shift to increasing a focus on sustainability beyond the ELS programme, along with agreement being obtained from the DfE for capital spend on the basis of a rationale for this being provided.

Organisations were asked how they had used the capital funding and how it had helped them to deliver the ELS activities. Survey respondents indicated that they had used the capital funding to purchase equipment that was required for the planned activities, which could be used in the future. One common example was gardening equipment to support 'forest schools' projects (where pupils and staff were developing green spaces within the

school grounds). Other examples included audio/visual equipment, website subscriptions, educational robotics and virtual reality kits. In addition, organisations responded that they had used the funding towards facilities, either hiring space for before or after school clubs in the community, or improving the facilities that they already had, such as their daily mile running track, school gardens and allotments. Other responses highlighted the need for staff training, becoming part of their CPD, for example in health and hygiene, or for bush craft activities.

Other respondents invested in high-quality, validated resources that could be used beyond the lifecycle of the ELS funding. Examples of these were visual aids, hand learning tools, Duke of Edinburgh applications, as well as Beaver-Scout and Rainbow-Guide subscriptions.

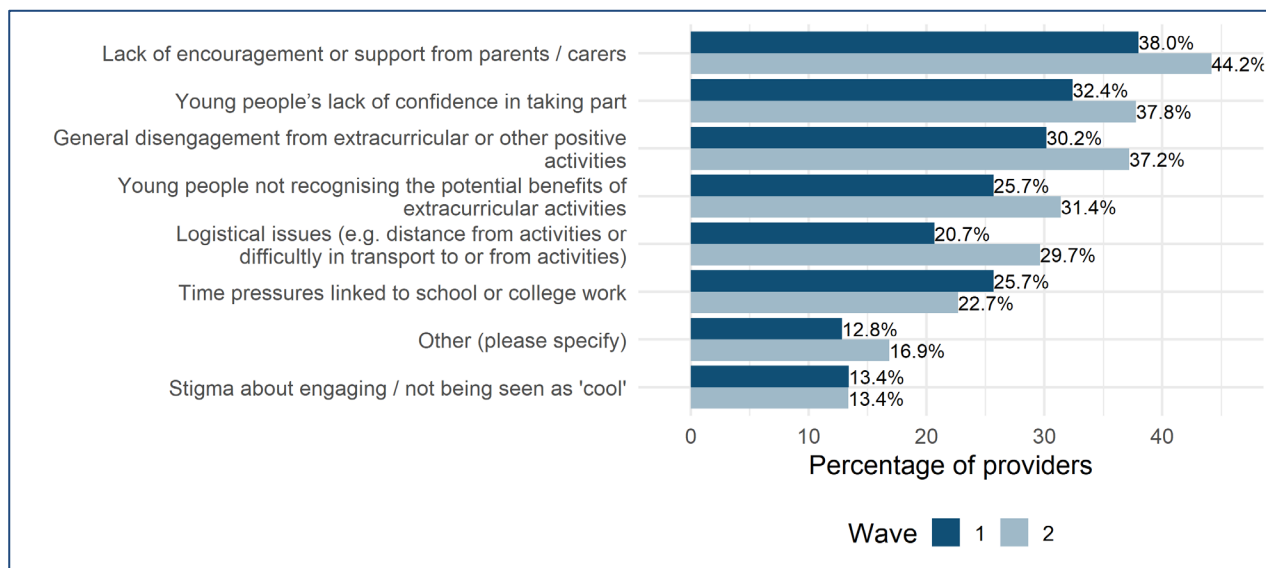
3.3 Engaging intended participants

As detailed in Chapter two, in many cases the ELS programme could be accessed by any pupil in funded schools/areas. However, in line with the policy intent, there was a particular focus placed on reaching those who would not normally have the opportunity to (or choose to) participate in extracurricular activities. A key group ELS intended to support was those with socio-economic disadvantage.

3.3.1 Barriers to engaging participants

A range of barriers around engaging pupils to participate in ELS projects was identified. Barriers comprised a mix of external (to the individual) factors, such as the influence of parents/peers and logistics, and internal factors, for example confidence and attitudes towards extracurricular activities. Providers responding to the survey most commonly reported that a lack of parental encouragement and low pupil confidence were challenges to engage pupils (Figure 3.5). Increases in the proportion of providers reporting barriers at wave two of the survey suggests there was a greater awareness of barriers at this stage when substantial activity had been delivered.

Figure 3.5: Barriers to engaging pupils



Source: Waves one and two provider survey. Base: 179 and 172 respondents, respectively. Multiple response permitted

Drawing on open text responses to the survey, the influence of parents/carers presented challenge in several ways, such as engagement, support, encouragement (or discouragement), awareness and commitment to the activities. Where families did not have a particularly positive relationship with the school, it was a challenge to get them on board with school-based ELS projects. Furthermore, for some families with multiple children at school, there was reluctance to engage due to the need to make multiple trips to and from school, if the activities were not absorbed within the school day. For example, one survey respondent noted that:

“in term time there are sometimes logistical issues about children staying after school and parents/carers being unable to pick them up later due to looking after other children at home... it’s difficult as their home lives are complex and there are competing demands on parents/carers”

Parental engagement was a particular challenge for some external providers that lacked existing relationships with parents and/or were running activities outside of the school setting, which could make some parents more hesitant.

An additional challenge affecting some external providers, where there was a combination of school delivered and external projects available to the same pupils, was a saturation effect where the external provider (initially) struggled to recruit pupils who were already engaged in school-led projects.

Several respondents noted timing in the school day or week as a challenge for pupil engagement. For example, “peer group influence” was reported to impact on the projects attended, where pupils were attending different clubs or activities, with conflicting times. Pupils were reportedly influenced by other commitments or responsibilities outside school hours, such as caring for family or work. Survey responses indicated that there was a lack of engagement in primary school lunch time settings, as this was often a rare time for free-play. Some teachers thought that a structured ELS activity taking this place was (anecdotally) not as valuable to the children.

Pupils’ (particularly disadvantaged) confidence and general attitude to extracurricular activities presented multiple challenges. For instance, some providers reported that pupils had a preconception that particular levels of literacy and numeracy to engage in the activities were required. In other cases, pupil perceptions of activities and what they would entail were a barrier:

“they [pupils] are not in the habit of taking part in extracurricular activities. We need to start earlier in Primary school but opportunities are often limited in Primary. [There are] more opportunities at secondary but quite often students are already disengaged by this point”.

Furthermore, the perceived stigma of being targeted for free activities was highlighted, where they were not offered as an open, or, blanket provision: “[ELS] participants feel singled out and objectified as people - they become something that a thing is done ‘to’ rather than a person something is done with, this can make them suspicious”. Other aspects of the views of pupils impacting their engagement, was perceived that staying at school outside school hours, for example, was negative - as a “punishment or something that is undesirable”.

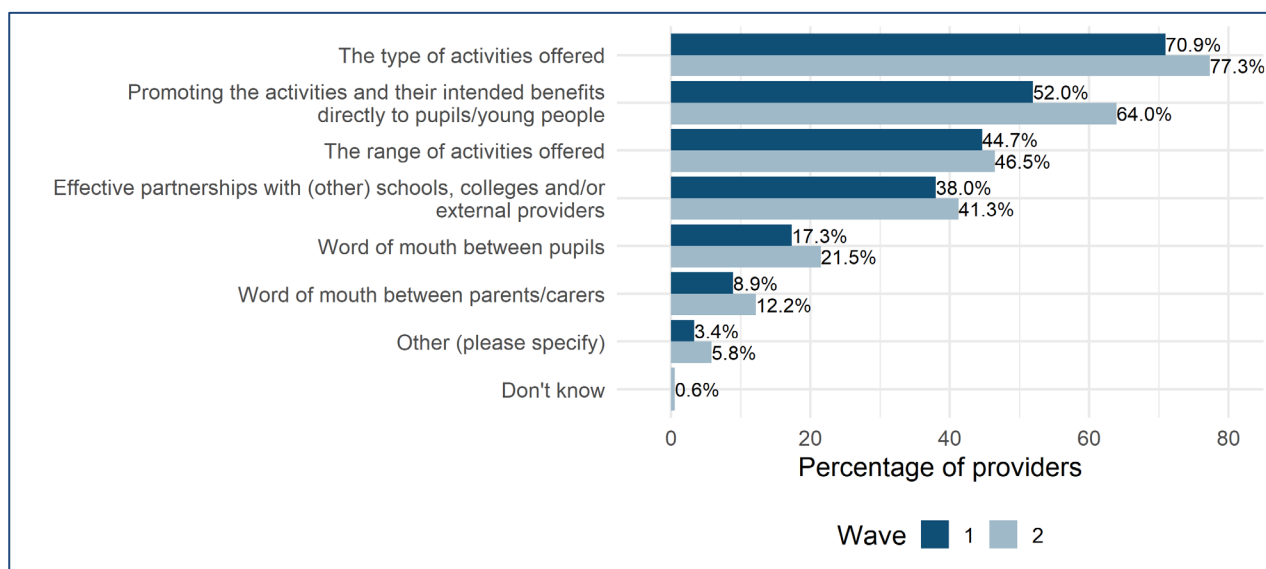
There were often multidimensional barriers to engagement and that these challenges were not isolated instances and were compounded by several factors. For instance, transport barriers were interwoven in certain contexts, with the distance from the school or provider setting, and challenges due to rurality, such as, the lack of, or irregularity of public transportation. A school representative perceived that “the closure of a large number of Youth Service centres and opportunities has resulted in a decline in sampling new avenues away from school and home”, which played into families’ worries or uncertainties about attending sessions outside of the school context. Another provider commented, “running things in places that are less familiar to parents can jeopardise their involvement”. It was perceived by staff that cost to families was a notable challenge in encouraging participation, “the school is situated in an area of multiple deprivation so money is a major factor in accessing opportunity”.

3.3.2 Success factors in engaging participants

Providers, and their strategies to overcome barriers (discussed below), can be considered effective in engaging the intended participants. The majority (87 per cent) of providers responding at wave two of the survey reported that the number of pupils engaging with activities either met their expectations or exceeded them. Furthermore, engagement of disadvantaged pupils was reported by most providers as either similar to pupils without disadvantage status (46 per cent) or higher (32 per cent). The latter reflects the targeted nature of some provision.

The types of activities offered and promoting their benefits were reported as key success factors to engage pupils by the majority of providers responding to the survey (Figure 3.6). Effective partnerships with other providers was highlighted as particularly important for external providers. External providers often needed these partnerships with schools so that they could identify and recruit pupils, and secure the engagement of parents.

Figure 3.6: Success factors in engaging pupils



Source: Waves one and two provider survey. Base: 179 and 172 respondents, respectively

Typically, it was providers' response to challenges (discussed in the previous section) which helped with engagement. In the case of parental engagement, proactive communication and help with logistical/financial constraints was highlighted as an effective strategy:

"We communicated frequently with parents over SMS so it was easy for them to keep up to date with the events and to let us know if they were having issues with getting the children to our sessions.... We had a travel fund for parents to use to help cover the costs of taxis;

parents could apply for this at the start of the course and were also reminded of this for particular sessions such as when the children needed to bring certain items”

In terms of overcoming internal barriers, providers placed emphasis on the importance of effective targeting and communication, and tailoring provision to the needs of pupils (particularly those with disadvantaged status):

“Once the school has identified young people who meet the criteria, our project coordinator will go into the school to talk to these young people about the project and the benefits to them. The Coordinator will then meet with the referred children – individually or in a group setting – to explain the project and the benefits of it”

“We work in areas that fall within the 20 per cent lowest indices of multiple deprivation. Young people that we have consulted in these areas have stressed the importance of activity provision and safety education as a positive means of deterring them from engaging in crime and anti-social behaviour”

3.4 Participants reached and their characteristics

Attendance data collected by the evaluators provides an indication of the numbers reached through the ELS programme and the characteristics of those participating. As discussed in the methodology section in Chapter 1, a level of caution is advised on using the number of participations recorded in attendance data as a sole measure of success. It is likely not all providers responded with data.

3.4.1 Participant characteristics

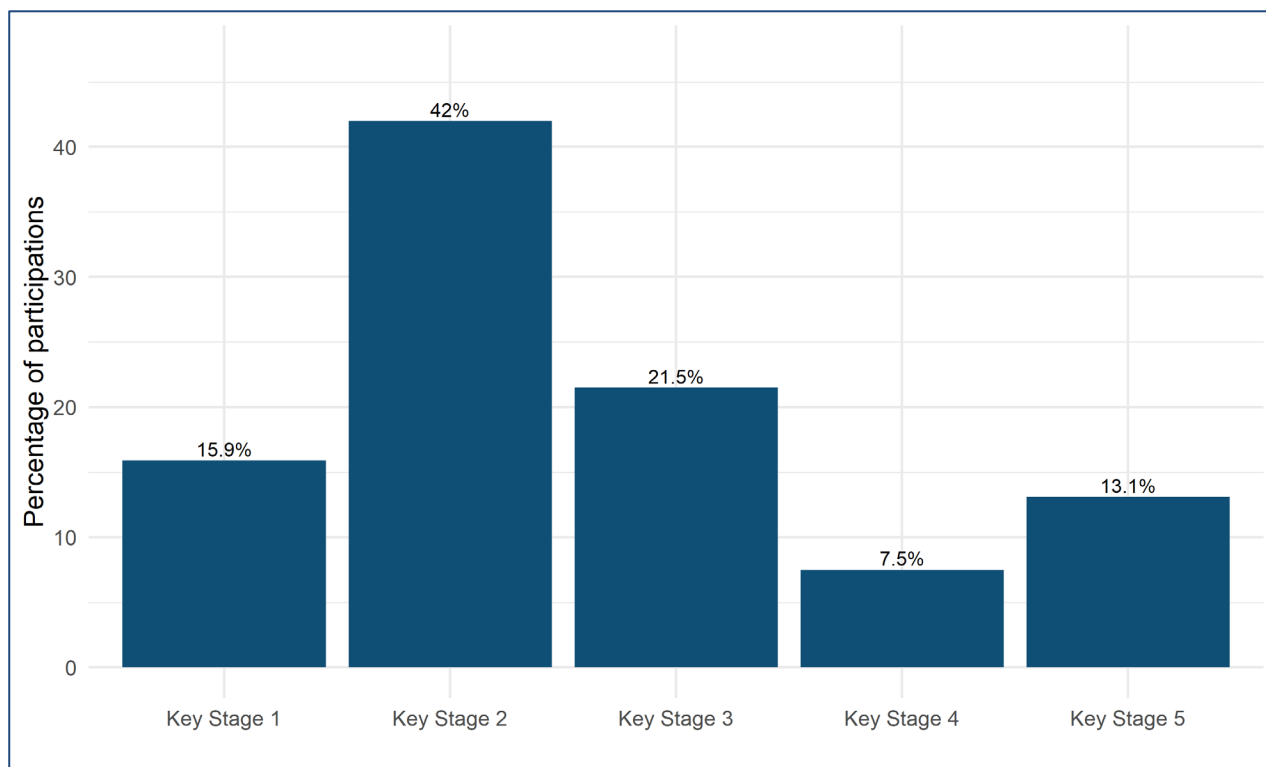
At an overall programme level, there were similar levels of participation from males (51 per cent) and females (48 per cent). A small proportion of participations were recorded as ‘prefer not say’ or ‘other’.¹²

Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 accounted for the greatest proportions of participations, 42 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively. This reflects the predominant targeting of projects referred to by providers and OA representatives. Pupils of this age are old enough to

¹² Source: Ecorys collected attendance data. Base = 173,435. Gender missing for 4,183

participate in wide range of activities and, relative to pupils in key stage four and five, may have fewer out of school commitments, academic or otherwise. There were limited differences in the overall participations at each key stage by gender.

Figure 3.7 Percentage of Participations by Key Stage



Source: Ecorys collected attendance data. Base = 173,435. Key Stage missing for 6,523

The ELS programme effectively targeted and supported high proportions of disadvantaged pupils. As a reference point, recent analysis by DfE revealed 13.6 per cent of pupils in England are eligible for free school meals (the same disadvantage proxy that applies to most participations in our analysis).¹³ Half of the overall participations recorded were by disadvantaged pupils and this was broadly consistent at the OA level.¹⁴ However, due to the influence of missing data in some smaller OAs, analysis is not provided at this level. The most common reason for missing data on disadvantage status was providers, typically external, not having access to this data and concerns around asking pupils directly for this information.

¹³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719226/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2018_Main_Text.pdf

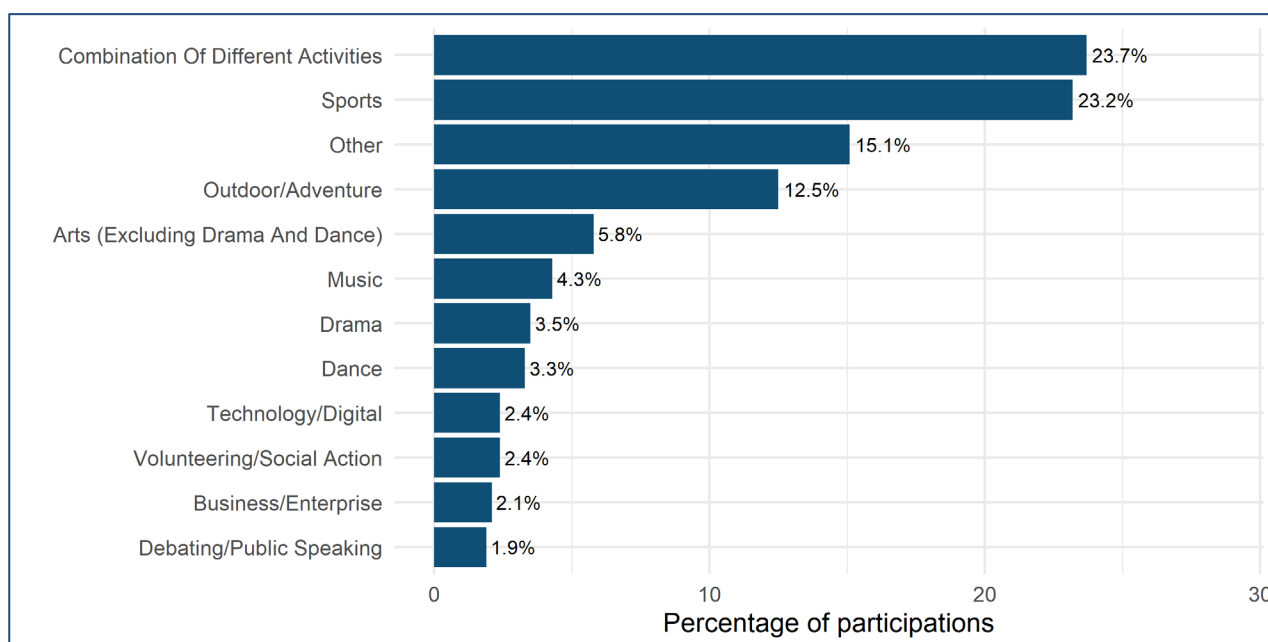
¹⁴ Source: Ecorys collected attendance data. Base = 173,435. Disadvantage status missing for 34,780

3.4.2 Participations by main activity focus

Providers completing the attendance data were asked to provide the main focus of the activity for each participation from a drop-down menu of options, detailed in Figure 3.8.

Whilst the proportion of participations broadly mirrored those reported as being delivered by providers (see Figure 3.2), the high proportion of sports and outdoor/adventure focused activities indicates these were delivered at a larger scale. Participations in projects focusing on a combination of different activities potentially reflect providers offering projects with a range of activities on offer to secure pupil engagement, and 'summer camp' style projects running over the school holidays in some OAs.

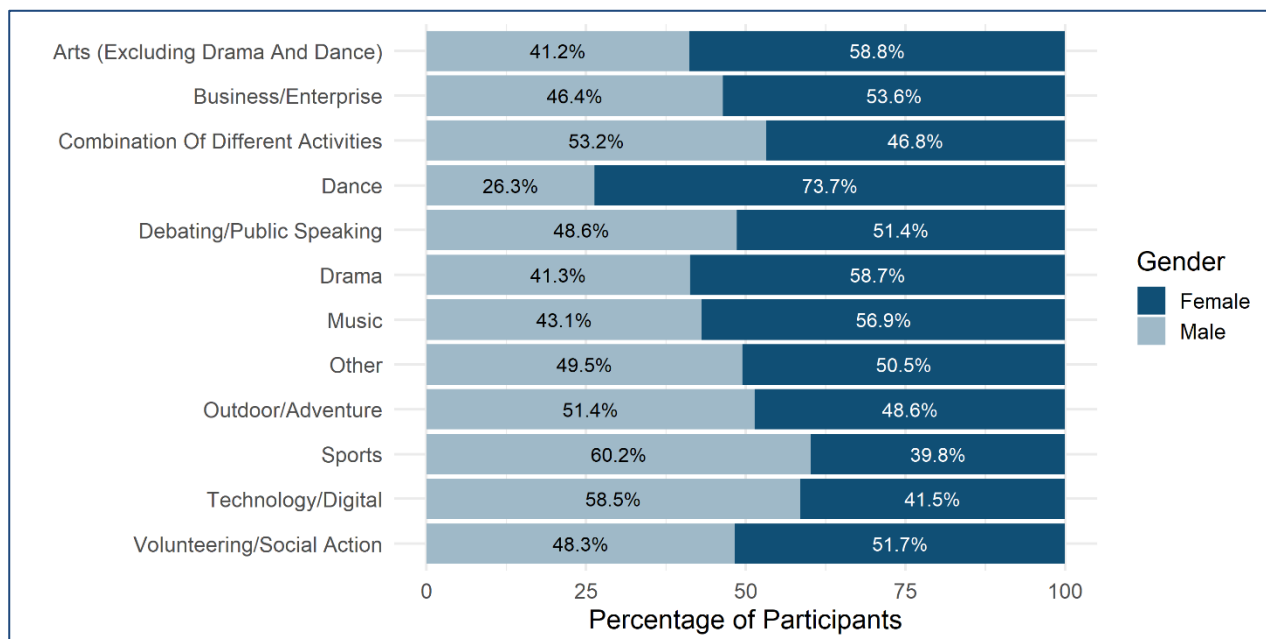
Figure 3.8 Participations by main focus of activity



Source: Ecorys collected attendance data. Base = 173,435

Generally, there were good levels of participation from males and females across different activities. Exceptions to this highlighted in Figure 3.9 were females overrepresented in dance focused activities, and males overrepresented in sports and technology.

Figure 3.9 Participations by main focus of activity and gender



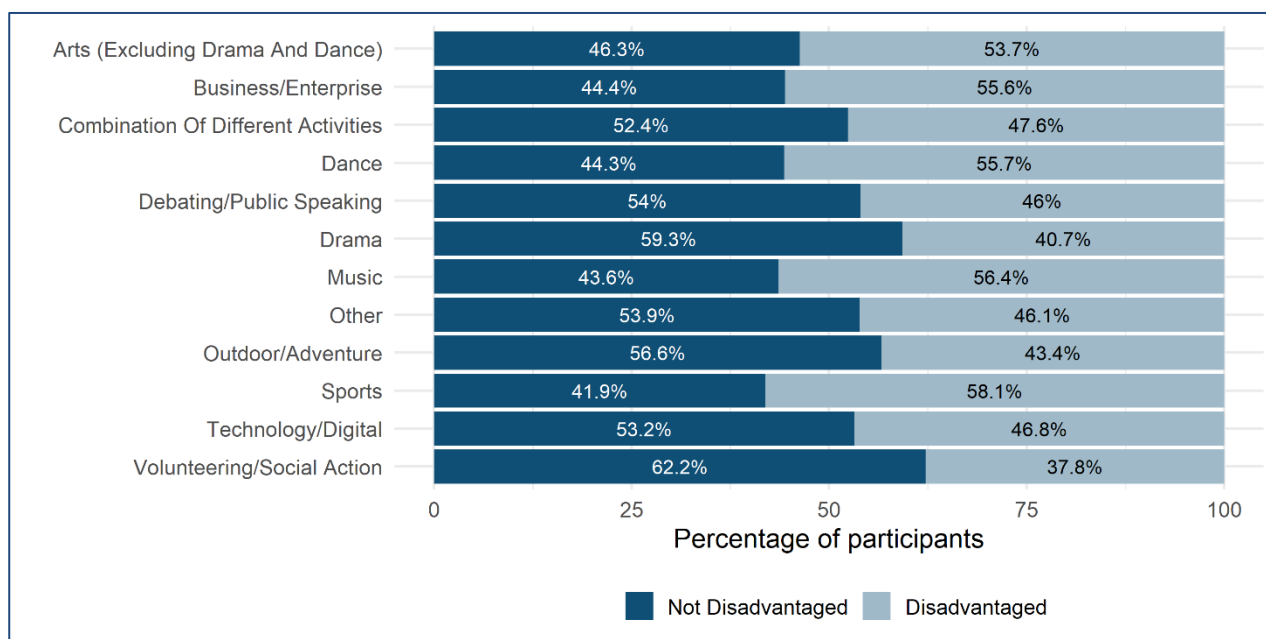
Source: Ecorys collected attendance data. Base = 173,435. Gender missing for 4,183

Key observations for participations in different activities by key stage included:

- The high proportion of participations in projects focusing on a combination of different activities was prevalent across all ages.
- Sports and arts focused activities were popular across key stages one to four but account for a much smaller proportion of key stage five participations.
- Business, debating, technology and volunteering accounted for relatively fewer participations for key stage one pupils. This reflects aforementioned insights from providers and OA representatives that sometimes more specialist activities were targeted at certain groups.

In line with the policy intent, disadvantaged pupils participated in a wide range of extracurricular activities. Figure 3.10 details the distribution of participations by pupils' disadvantage status. Participations in business, dance, music and sports were particularly high for disadvantaged pupils, whereas drama, outdoor/adventure and volunteering accounted for fewer participations amongst this group. The latter two activity types potentially reflect logistical barriers and preconceptions held by disadvantaged pupils about activities highlighted by providers, which may have made disadvantaged pupils less likely to participate (see Section 3.3).

Figure 3.10 Participations by main focus of activity and disadvantage status



Source: Ecorys collected attendance data. Base = 173,435. Disadvantage missing for 34,780

3.4.3 Attendance rates, overall and by pupil characteristics

Attendance rates were calculated to help understand whether certain activities were attended more or less regularly than others and if this differed by pupil characteristics.

The overall average attendance rate across OAs (overall programme level) was 87 per cent. In other words, if all projects ran for ten sessions in total, approximately, nine of these were attended. Table 3.1 details the average attendance rate by the main focus of activity and provides information about the typical number of sessions associated with projects. Using arts as an example, the table can be interpreted as follows: there was a total of 10,004 participations, the average number of sessions for different projects was nine; however, some projects included just one session and the project(s) with the most sessions included 61. Across all projects with arts as the main focus, participants, on average, attended 82 per cent of the sessions.

Key observations from Table 3.1 are:

- On average, projects with a focus on a combination of different activities, sports and debating delivered more sessions. The former two are explained in part by these types of activities being a focus for many providers.

- Business, drama and volunteering focused projects ran fewer sessions. This likely reflects these activities potentially being more specialised and, in the case of drama, sometimes included trips to the theatre (or similar).
- In terms of attendance rates, business, drama and outdoor focused projects had the highest. However, it is important to note that these projects typically ran fewer sessions. Regarding outdoor/adventure activities, these were reported by several OA representatives as a good example of brand new experiences which many pupils hadn't experienced before. This perhaps helps explain the high attendance on these projects.
- Arts and sports focused projects had relatively lower average attendance rates. However, average attendance of eight out of ten sessions should not be viewed as a negative as projects focused on these types of activities were large scale, and were potentially easier to drop in and out of for pupils.

Table 3.1 Attendance rates by the main focus of activity

Main focus of the activity	Total participations	Min no. sessions	Avg. no. sessions	Max. no. sessions	Avg. percentage of sessions attended
Arts (Excluding Drama And Dance)	10,004	1	7.8	61	81.6
Business/Enterprise	3,574	1	3.8	54	98.6
Combination Of Different Activities	41,065	1	12.3	78	88.2
Dance	5,679	1	7	20	88.3
Debating/Public Speaking	3,325	1	12.1	65	89.5
Drama	6,019	1	4.3	42	94.8
Music	7,509	1	8.3	52	90.5
Other	26,218	1	8.1	84	78.1
Outdoor/Adventure	21,596	1	5.3	72	94.9
Sports	40,227	1	8.5	73	83.9
Technology/Digital	4,129	1	7.7	64	92.5
Volunteering/Social Action	4,090	1	4.9	46	90
Total	173,435	1	7	84	86.9

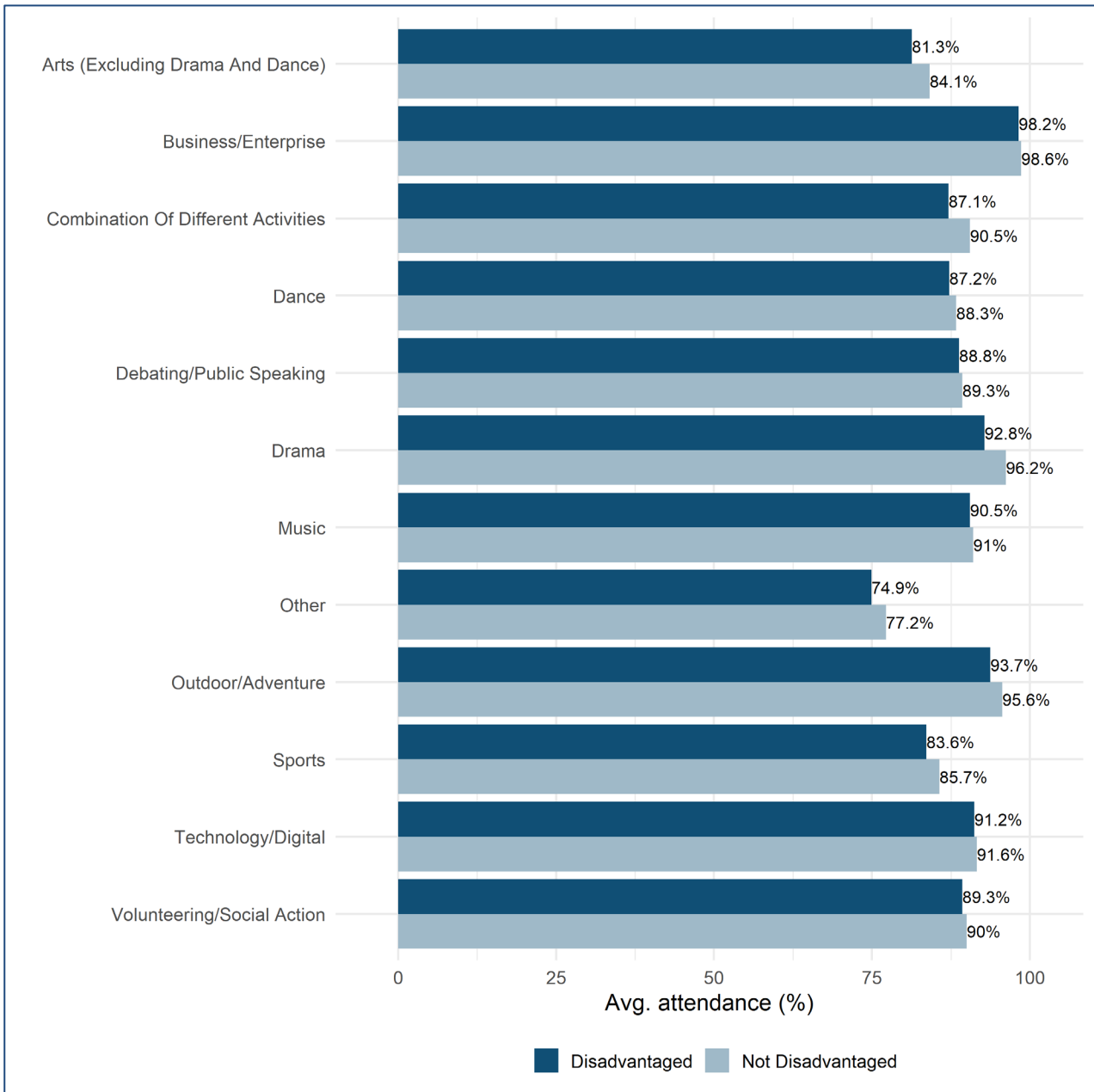
Notable differences between age groups in attendance, generally, reflected the targeting of certain groups. For example, there were more than double the participations in debating by pupils at secondary school than primary school and, on average, there was 12 more sessions per project in secondary schools. Sports focused projects had a similar

number of sessions across age groups, yet average attendance in primary schools was much higher – 85 per cent compared to 76 per cent.

There were no substantial differences in attendance rates between genders. This indicates that there were no notable differences in terms of pupils choosing to participate by gender. Equally, once pupils were engaged in a project, there was no evidence of attrition based on gender.

On average, attendance rates for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils were very similar. This is depicted by the main focus of projects in Figure 3.11.

Figure 3.11 Attendance rates by disadvantage status



Source: Ecorys collected attendance data. Base = 173,435. Disadvantage missing for 34,780

4 Outcomes of ELS activities

Key findings

Outcomes for young people

- Confidence, resilience, team working / building relationships and social and emotional skills, representing intermediate outcomes detailed in the ELS ToC, were the most common outcomes experienced by young people.
- Young people and their families felt strongly that engagement with ELS provision would have a positive and lasting benefit.
- It was evident that the ELS programme supported young people to try new things that they would have been unlikely to do otherwise.
- The regular structure of ELS provision encouraged young people to be more organised and committed – skills that families reported were lacking before but important for later life.
- New friendships were formed between young people, both within and across schools, facilitated by certain activities running across year groups and schools.

Broader outcomes

- At an organisational level, new partnerships were formed between schools and external providers, and between schools and local authorities. Furthermore, within schools, teachers felt better equipped to deliver extracurricular activities.
- Outcomes were also apparent at an area level, including increased contact amongst young people of different ages and backgrounds who would not normally interact.

Longer-term effects and sustainability

- Longer-term impacts around attainment and social mobility were not possible to assess fully in the evaluation timeframe, though initial indications were positive in terms of a basis for these impacts being put in place.
- OA representatives in particular were confident the longer-term outcomes and impacts of the ELS programme would be realised.
- Schools likewise reported positive changes in pupil behaviour, attendance and aspirations that they believed would be sustained.
- In terms of sustainability of activities, schools and colleges were continuing ELS-type activities where possible. Some of the ELS funding used for capital spend is likely to help facilitate this in the near term.

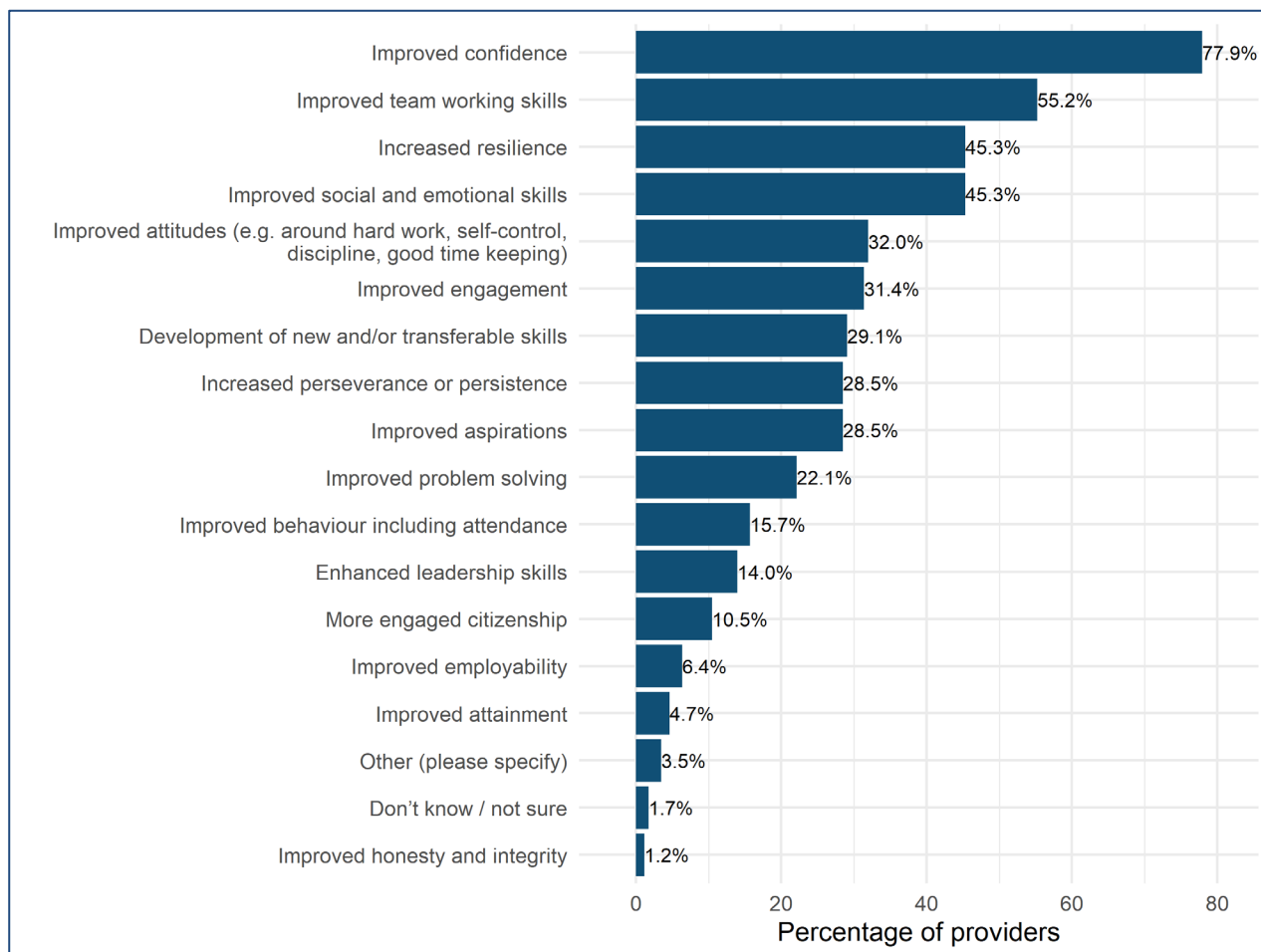
The following sections explore the emerging outcomes from ELS-funded activities, including perceptions from young people and their families. They also examine the sustainability and legacy of the ELS programme at an organisational level. The findings that follow are principally informed by the research undertaken with young people and their families, along with interviews with OA representatives. Where applicable, insights from the other research strands are also referenced.

4.1 Outcomes for young people

As discussed in the previous chapters, OA representatives and providers had commissioned/designed projects where outcomes associated with essential life skills were anticipated.

There was evidence from all stakeholders that the outcomes anticipated were achieved. Figure 4.1 details the outcomes observed by providers responding to wave two of the survey. Improved confidence, team-working skills, resilience and social and emotional skills were common outcomes. Outcomes such as improved attainment and employability were less apparent; however, in line with the ELS ToC, these can be considered longer-term outcomes unlikely to be observable in the evaluation timescale. However, as outlined in the ToC, the outcomes that were reported serve as intermediate outcomes to improved attainment and employability, and ultimately, impact on upward social mobility.

Figure 4.1 Pupil outcomes observed by providers



Source: Wave two provider survey. Base: 172 respondents. Multiple response permitted.

OA representatives were very positive concerning the overall outcomes of the ELS programme and those on young people in particular. It was evident that, at the local level, representatives had commonly sought and been sent feedback from teachers and provider staff, as well as observing activities. One interviewee described the ‘incredible feedback’ received from participating schools and pupils; others gave examples of schools reporting notable effects on behaviour and attendance. Universally, the representatives interviewed at the end of the programme felt it had been highly beneficial for young people, but also that, in many cases, it had generated a range of positive outcomes for schools, providers, and, in some instances, local areas and communities.

In several instances, OA representatives described monitoring and other evidence that had been gathered around ELS outcomes. As well as MI data collected locally, in addition to that collected for this evaluation, in some areas this included local evaluations. Typically, this evidence reinforced the feedback and more anecdotal evidence that OA representatives had received, particularly in terms of positive impacts on young people’s

confidence, behaviour, attendance, and aspirations. Confidence and access to activities that young people would otherwise not engage in emerged as particularly strong themes from the OA interviewees, both in reporting evaluation evidence collected locally and in reflecting on the feedback they had received.

In some areas where local evaluations of ELS activity had been undertaken, OA representatives were also able to highlight specific benefits of the programme from the school perspective. For example, one interviewee outlined evaluation findings based on hard data around attendance improvements, in addition to a range of softer outcomes concerning increased engagement of pupils in lessons and improved behaviour. Allied to the feedback outlined above, such evidence contributed to the positive impression of outcomes from the programme as a whole expressed at the OA level.

In the following subsections, specific outcomes emerging from the focus groups with young people and their families are discussed. Particular attention is paid to what these outcomes meant for young people.

4.1.1 Building resilience

Academic and emotional resilience was prevalent in discussions of benefits and outcomes of attending the activities. Young people attending ELS projects spoke of self-improvements related to resilience:

“...I can concentrate on things for much longer now and am not phased by the small things I was”

“the breathing exercises are good when I am feeling stressed they bring me right down and I can go back into the school day”

“if you’ve had a bad morning you can go in there and release everything and say it how it is and that gives you a break from everything that has happened in the morning and start fresh in the afternoon”

These direct and indirect comments from young people relating to resilience were bolstered by findings of the family focus groups:

“It was the resilience stuff. We thought he would be ideal because of his autism and it’s probably the best thing they’ve done for him... [he’s] done things out there that you wouldn’t normally do. It gives him a confidence and there’s somethings that he’s a bit resistant

towards it...he took a real passion into that and was putting extra time onto it" (parent).

An observed benefit of engaging in the activities was that it built resilience that the young people would need as a character trait in later life. A participant commented that the routine of having weekly commitments outside the usual curriculum was about *"building resilience and setting them up for getting older really, sticking to it, not doing it for a week and giving up"* (Grandparent).

Parents and carers were seeing benefits for their young people, in their commitment to their wider education. This was demonstrated through the exchange of two parents in one focus group:

Mother: "I think personally it's just made his schooling so much easier as well. Especially this year. I think he found it very difficult coming up here and going to high school".

Father: "Yeah, the way it's been going this year with the extracurricular as well. I think taking away a bit of the pressure and allowing him to relax into it has helped so much. This escape stuff and this resilience stuff I would love all kids to be able to do to be honest".

As well as applying what they learned in ELS activities to the curriculum and their approaches to learning, families spoke of the new found commitment that the young people had to their extracurricular activities. One family member commented that *"they [the group] are doing a play soon and they are practising that every day"* (Parent).

4.1.2 Building confidence

Increased levels of confidence was conceptualised in several ways: increased confidence as a result of experiencing new things, confidence to step outside of the usual setting or familiar activities, confidence to speak with new peers and adults, and self-confidence in their abilities. The format of activities was also thought to help with the young people in growing their confidence to be able to achieve something outside of what they would usually do. For example, one programme of activity allowed the young people to build confidence throughout the course of the activities, to prepare for the reward trip at the end of the year:

"it's built her confidence, in year six she was meant to go to France, she wouldn't [have gone before] but because they have had the

whole year to build up to this and do the activities with the group of people, she is looking forward to it. And the friends [made] through these activities mean more to her now” (Carer)

For some families the ELS activity was the perceived accelerator for improvements in their children’s confidence levels:

“it’s the confidence she’s had in the last year, she’s come on leaps and bounds. She wouldn’t have done anything like this in the past, no way. Maybe if she’s been given a bit of a shove but you’ve got to sort of be there as well, that familiar face. So she has been to stuff before but I’d have to be there for it all” (Parent).

4.1.3 Building Social and Emotional Intelligence

Both young people and their families noted that the activities had enabled the self-management of emotions. For some, this was regarding stress, or being overwhelmed by aspects of school life. Through mindfulness activities, young people suggested that, *“if you’ve got stress and things like that you can talk to people and they help you know what to do to sort it out in your head”* (Young Person, 14). Young people also discussed decision-making for themselves, regulation of anger or stress, and carrying on when they felt like giving up (also linking to resilience above).

For others, the self-management of emotions was less apparent, but was encouraged through adjustments to the activities that allowed the young people with additional needs to fully engage. A parent discussed the helpful adjustments that the activity leaders had made:

“they look at her [additional needs] really favourable and look at them to help to keep in the class and groups and they do give them support... when it was noisy they did take them out the room and change it for them so they can do it themselves” (Parent)

The help that a young person received in self-managing her emotions had inspired her to do work similar to the ELS leaders in the future, suggesting to her Head of Year that she would like to facilitate a self-help group for those with social, emotional and mental health challenges the following academic year:

“it’s like when the year eights go into year nine next year I want to go and help them and that. I didn’t know what I wanted to do when I

finished school and now I know I want to do what they do and help kids and that” (Young Person, 15).

The ELS activities gave space in school life for young people to express themselves, who might not be able to in classroom environments. Following speaking of his set-backs in an academic setting, a young person attending said the outcomes for him were:

“so it boosts your confidence and helps improve your teamwork skills and it’s also a place that you can express yourself and relax and enjoy yourself. I went on some of the trips and it basically just gives you the opportunity to do things you wouldn’t normally. On residential we went on the high ropes and mountain biking and on the boats and it’s a place you can relax and not get judged for stuff” (Young Person, 13).

4.1.4 Building relationships

An outcome of the ELS activities is that they facilitated new relationships to be made outside the classroom, as well as, enabling engagement with other young people outside their age group, class, or interest groups. Where this happened, young people reported that they had helped others with activities *“...we don’t do much with Reception, so it was nice to do Forest Skills with them and roast marshmallows” (Young person, 10).*

Teamwork and socialising with others for parents was seen as a notable benefit, *“they are making friends who they wouldn’t normally meet up with”* and that *“it’s quite good to have different friends to the ones that you see all the time”*

A family member was surprised at the benefit of being in a social group outside the home-school environment and how that had been reinforced through approaches of the activity leaders:

“They are quite civilised and polite to each other now which they weren’t to start with and I think that’s because of the activity leaders’ way of doing things. As a parent you try to teach them that but it’s sometimes more powerful coming from someone outside your family who is always telling you what to do anyway”

In other settings, it had allowed young people from other friendship groups to come together widen their social networks. However, in some cases the wider group was barrier to engagement *“well some people from another school ruin it and they are always the same people that makes me not want to be there” (Young Person, 8).*

In terms of participating in the activities, parents and carers perceived that young people were influenced by who else was attending, *“it was more to do with friends and certain groups of people... from what I can tell everyone seems to be getting on well with each other despite it being mixed aged groups”* (Parent).

Another parent highlighted how new opportunities, building confidence and establishing new relationships had all played into her daughter being able to widen her social networks:

“It’s really helped her to come out of her shell because she is here with girls that aren’t at her school. So she is talking to more people now even outside the club” (Parent).

4.2 Sustainability and legacy

As discussed elsewhere in the report, the ELS programme led to provider- and wider area- outcomes. Common outcomes included:

- Creating new, and strengthening existing, relationships between schools and between educational settings and external providers, hence producing a legacy that is likely to be built upon through new initiatives.
- Raising the profile of, and interest in, extracurricular activities locally.
- Enhanced relationships and partnerships between local authorities and schools.
- Improving community relations: in one instance an interviewee outlined how ELS had been very effective in enabling children of all backgrounds to get together through, for example, using cricket as a medium for recent immigrants to integrate with the local community and their peers.
- Establishment of new initiatives, centres or mini-departments within schools to coordinate and promote extracurricular activity.
- Improving staff experience, confidence and skills in delivering extracurricular activities to pupils and young people.

Whilst views on sustainability in respect of the ELS programme were mixed, most OA representatives were confident that organisational and area level outcomes such as those outlined would leave some form of positive legacy. Furthermore, providers use funding for capital spending (see Section 3.2.3) was viewed as important to ensure some activities, which pupils had benefited from and had low ongoing costs (often just staff time), could continue in the near term whilst alternative funding avenues could be explored.

Regarding the longer-term impact of the ELS programme, while OA representatives generally acknowledged that outcomes such as effects on social mobility, employability and increased attainment were hard to assess in the near term, several of those interviewed felt strongly that the ELS provision will have contributed to these elements through the more immediate outcomes noted. In particular, effects around enabling young people to experience different things, to have their horizons widened, and their aspirations raised, were all commonly cited as important precursors to the longer-term outcomes ELS activity sought to promote: in particular, educational, labour market and social mobility outcomes.

Specific examples of the kinds of activities interviewees felt would play this role of broadening horizons included young people learning musical instruments who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to, learning about potential careers, or engaging in art forms new to them. Comments from one OA representative are particularly illustrative of the role the programme was commonly felt to have played in laying the ground for longer-term outcomes:

“In one of the areas the kids were learning how to fix bikes and make bird boxes. What they were then doing was going down to the local market to sell the bird boxes. It was teaching the kids about entrepreneurship.”

“It is about getting them to think about the bigger picture... I can do this, I can achieve that.”

5 Conclusions

In this concluding chapter, reflections on the overarching research questions are provided.

5.1 Process for selecting and allocating funding to providers

Overall, the processes adopted by OAs for selecting and allocating funding to providers were effectively designed. The flexibility given by the DfE to OAs was welcomed and played an important role in ensuring that local contexts, and opportunities relating to them, could be considered.

Two broad funding models emerged from the initial design and implementation phase of the programme. Some OAs chose to devolve funding to individual schools or colleges for them to deliver projects internally and/or commission external providers; others commissioned external providers to deliver projects at, typically, a larger scale. In some cases, a combination of these models was adopted. In all cases, OA representatives felt the model pursued was effective and appropriate based on local needs and priorities.

Generally, providers reported that the process for accessing funding was straightforward and proportionate. This was particularly important where funding had been devolved to schools. Typically, schools only had to complete a streamlined proforma, outlining how projects would meet the ELS criteria and support essential life skills. Furthermore, funding to schools was often based on the number of disadvantaged pupils attending, helping to ensure resources were sufficient to reach the principle intended target groups.

5.2 Alignment of ELS projects with policy intent

Reflecting on the ELS ToC, it is clear that the intended activities were, largely, delivered as anticipated and were aligned to the policy intent. A variety of providers delivered projects focused on a wide range of activities. In the main, provision met the ELS criteria and had a clear focus on outcomes associated with essential life skills.

Projects ranged from large-scale, universally targeted activities to more bespoke projects working with specific target groups and/or towards local priorities. The former typically focussed on activities such as sports, outdoor and adventure, and arts. More bespoke targeted projects were more likely to focus on business and debating (typically engaging older pupils), and technology – for example where the latter was a prominent local sector for one OA.

5.3 Key success factors and challenges

Success factors during the design phase included taking account of local intelligence, the 'pupil voice', and maximising potential opportunities within the local economy. Despite widely acknowledged challenges around short timescales at the design stage, these were felt to have largely been overcome without there being a significant negative impact on the provision offered.

Nonetheless, greater consideration could be given to lead-in times for similar programmes in the future to avoid pressures on schools/providers, and potentially, achieve greater reach. In respect of this latter point, attendance data indicated that there were increased participations in the last two terms of the ELS funding period, suggesting that such provision takes time to get embedded and fully up and running.

Successful implementation of the programme centred on securing pupil engagement, particularly amongst disadvantaged pupils who may not normally participate in extracurricular activities. While a number of success factors to engage pupils were identified, for example, the range and type of activities offered, it was the strategies adopted to overcome barriers that provided greatest insight into successful implementation. Parental/carer engagement and, sometimes compounding, logistical and financial constraints were identified early on by providers as potential barriers to pupil engagement. Additional barriers included pupil confidence and preconceptions about extracurricular activities. To mitigate the impact of external barriers, proactive and effective communication with parents/carers was highlighted as key. Support with finance and transportation was also welcomed, particularly for families with multiple children and/or in rural areas. Communication was also noted as important to support pupils with their confidence to participate.

In terms of lessons learned around implementation, external providers sometimes struggled to engage pupils, particularly where they did not have the same relationships with parents/carers as schools did, and/or there were competing activities within schools. The latter was highlighted as a potential saturation effect. Whilst providers generally reported that this was only an issue in the early stages of delivery, a focus on supporting partnerships from the outset may have enabled greater coordination and effectiveness between school-led and external provider-led projects. However, recognising the design and setup timescales for the ELS evaluation, this may have proved challenging.

5.4 Reaching intended participants

The ELS programme was successful in reaching and maintaining engagement with pupils. Approximately half of all recorded participations in the ELS programme involved

those with disadvantaged status, defined by their eligibility for free school meals. Providers often reported that participations by disadvantaged pupils had surpassed their expectations.

On average, pupils attended nine in ten sessions within activities delivered. While this varied slightly by the focus of activity, differences based on pupil characteristics, including disadvantaged status, were limited. This was very encouraging given the policy intent of the ELS programme to reach those who would not normally have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities.

5.5 Emerging outcomes

The outcomes anticipated by the ELS programme were generally cited by all stakeholders as having been achieved to a significant extent. Improved confidence, resilience, relationships and social and emotional skills were most apparent in terms of outcomes for those benefitting from provision. Young people and their families emphasised that taking part in something structured, involving activities that young people might not normally engage in, helped to develop these skills.

Furthermore, the nature of some provision, delivered across schools and year groups, enabled new friendships to be formed. In itself this was cited in some cases as having additional positive benefits for the wider community by bringing young people, who wouldn't normally interact with each other, together. In addition, new partnerships were formed between schools and external providers, and between schools, providers and local authorities. Within schools, the capacity for teachers to deliver high quality extracurricular activities was also cited as an additional benefit in some cases.

5.6 Sustainability

In most cases sustainability had clearly been considered at the initial design and development stage, with OAs taking this into consideration when commissioning projects. While there was variation in the degree to which activities were felt to be likely to continue, delivering the ELS programme was acknowledged as having raised the profile, and evidenced the benefits, of extracurricular activities locally. This was cited as making it more likely that participating institutions would seek to sustain activities where possible; indeed, in a number of cases such plans were in place. It was also noted that some of the ELS funding used for capital spend would help facilitate the sustainability of activities in the near term.

5.7 Summary

Reflecting on the ELS ToC, it is clear that the intended activities were, largely, delivered as anticipated and the intended target groups reached. Examining insights from all research strands reveals that the intermediate outcomes were achieved. Equally, while the evaluation timescale precludes firm assessments around longer-term outcomes, there were positive indications that a solid basis had been laid for the achievement of outcomes around attainment and improved labour market opportunities. While the positive outcomes apparent were not achieved without challenges, the overall delivery models and pragmatism of providers enabled the successful delivery of the programme – benefiting young people, their families and the wider community.

Annex A: Evaluation framework

	Document review	MI analysis	Interviews with leads	OA	Provider surveys	Pupil/parent focus groups
To what extent was the process for selecting and allocating funding to providers effective?						
What is the funding structure within each OA?	X		X			
What is the process for potential providers applying for / accessing funding?	X		X			
How are programmes selected for funding? (e.g. selection criteria, decision responsibility)	X		X			
To what extent is the selection of programmes informed / aligned with wider OA activity?	X		X			
How far was potential sustainability considered in selecting programmes?	X		X			
To what extent do the activities planned build on pre-existing activities? What is the balance between such activities and completely new ones?	X		X		X	
What factors enable / hinder programme funding and selection processes?			X		X	
At the stage programmes were chosen, what were the perceived potential benefits and disadvantages?			X			
To what extent and in what ways has value-for-money been considered in planning activities? What is the anticipated result from this?	X		X		X	
What is the nature of the agreements made with extracurricular activity providers (e.g. contracts, grant condition letters etc.)?	X		X		X	
How far do the funded programmes and activities align with the overall ELS design and policy intent?						
What types of activities are being funded?		X	X		X	
Who is delivering the programmes?		X	X		X	

	Document review	MI analysis	Interviews with leads OA	Provider surveys	Pupil/parent focus groups
To what extent are identification and recruitment processes effective?					
How are pupils identified and recruited on to programmes?				X	
How is participation, particularly for "hard to engage" groups, encouraged?			X	X	
What are the reasons for pupil participation / non-participation and perceived barriers / enablers?		X		X	X
What factors enable / hinder the identification and recruitment processes?			X	X	
To what extent are ELS activities reaching the participants intended?					
What groups do the programmes intend to support? (e.g. age, disadvantage, SEND)	X		X	X	
To what extent does the programme(s) reach the intended groups and anticipated participant numbers?		X	X	X	
What factors enable / hinder supporting intended participants?		X		X	X
To what extent are ELS activities retaining the participants intended and why?					
What is the attrition rate for programmes? Does this vary by pupil characteristics (e.g. age/gender) and, if so, how?		X			
What are the reasons for attrition?		X	X	X	X
What are the emerging outcomes from the implementation of the programme?					

	Document review	MI analysis	Interviews with leads OA	Provider surveys	Pupil/parent focus groups
What are the perceived benefits / outcomes of the programmes funded?	X		X	X	X
To what extent are the anticipated benefits of the programmes realised?			X	X	X
Are there any unexpected benefits of the programmes?			X	X	X
To what extent do pupils feel that the activities are meeting their expectations?					X
What activities are particularly welcomed by pupils and does this appear to vary by pupil characteristics?					X
What benefits do pupils perceive from their engagement					X
How and to what extent do pupils feel that the activities they have engaged with are helping to develop life skills?					X
What are the perceived benefits / implications of developing extracurricular skills on the part of pupils, now and in the future?					
To what extent is ELS activity being implemented effectively?					
What are the enabling success factors of the programme?			X	X	X
What are the perceived disadvantages / challenges of the programmes funded?			X	X	X
How do the programmes work with / complement wider OA activity?			X		
What are the key challenges being faced in implementing the ELS programme and how are they being addressed?					

	Document review	MI analysis	Interviews with leads	OA	Provider surveys	Pupil/parent focus groups
What action is being taken to address any challenges faced in implementing activity and to what effect?			X		X	
To what extent have the anticipated challenges of the programmes been realised?			X		X	
Are there any unexpected challenges of the programmes?					X	
What impact do challenges experienced have on delivery?					X	
What steps have been taken to overcome challenges on programmes?					X	
To what extent has sustainability been considered and how effective are any plans developed to support this?						
How far are there effective plans in place to sustain particular programmes (or elements within) after the ELS funding period?			X			
To what extent are activities expected to continue?			X			
Are there any elements of the programmes that are likely to not be sustained and, if so, why?			X			
To what extent are programme monitoring processes operating effectively?						
How are programmes monitored?			X		X	
How effective and consistent are providers being in providing monitoring data?		X	X		X	
What challenges have been encountered in collecting monitoring data?			X		X	

	Document review	MI analysis	Interviews with leads OA	Provider surveys	Pupil/parent focus groups
How is monitoring data being used to support the delivery of programmes and how effectively?			X	X	
Has monitoring data lead to any changes to programme delivery?			X	X	
What are the key lessons that can be derived from the design and implementation of the ELS?					
What changes could be made to improve the programme?			X	X	X
How could delivery of activities to pupils be improved?			X	X	X
What can be determined concerning the relationship between pupils' characteristics and participation?					
What characteristics do participating pupils exhibit?		X			
What patterns of participation are evident across pupil groups with particular characteristics?		X			



Department
for Education

© Ecorys 2020

Reference: DFE-RR1082

ISBN: 978-1-83870-207-6

The views expressed in this report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact us at:

Catherine.newsome@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications