



WHAT **WORKS** IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIPS

THE CASE STUDY COLLECTION

Cristiana Orlando
June 2021



Institute for Employment Studies

IES is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and HR management. It works closely with employers in all sectors, government departments, agencies, professional bodies and associations. IES is a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and HR planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation.

The Health Foundation

The Health Foundation is an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK. Their aim is a healthier population, supported by high quality health care that can be equitably accessed. From giving grants to those working at the front line to carrying out research and policy analysis, they shine a light on how to make successful change happen. The Health Foundation use what they know works on the ground to inform effective policymaking and vice versa. They believe good health and health care are key to a flourishing society. Through sharing what they learn, collaborating with others and building people's skills and knowledge, they aim to make a difference and contribute to a healthier population.

The young people's future health inquiry

This case study collection is part of the Young people's future health inquiry which is funded by the Health Foundation. The inquiry is a first-of-its-kind research and engagement project that sets out to consider how the experiences of young people today are likely to shape their future health outcomes. This guide forms part of a wider programme of policy research in the action phase of the inquiry. The research is led by IES across the four UK nations and is focused on understanding how to improve access to good youth employment and amplifying the voices of young people in research and policy-influencing.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Martina Kane and Cara Leavey of the Health Foundation, for their stewardship and support throughout this time. I am incredibly grateful to Becci Newton at IES, for her time, invaluable support and expert input in the development of this work. Thanks also goes to Tony Wilson at IES for his guidance and input. Finally, I would also like to thank each of the participants that took part in the sense-checking workshop in March 2021, whose contribution was key to this work.

About the author

Cristiana Orlando is a Research Fellow at IES, leading the programme of research on improving access to good quality youth employment as part of the employment strand of the Young people's future health inquiry.

Introduction



What is the case studies collection?

The collection includes a review of national youth employment support programmes, with a focus on youth employment partnerships. Each case study includes an overview of the programme and the context in which it developed, the impact achieved, and in-depth discussion of partnership working, including elements that worked well, challenges, and key messages.



How can the collection be used?

The aim of the collection is to support stakeholders who are working or looking to work as part of a partnership to improve their understanding of what works well and common challenges in youth employment partnership work, using evidence-based learning. It can be used when designing or reviewing and improving interventions, to learn from practice elsewhere or assess challenges and progress against what has worked in previous interventions.



How was the collection developed?

The collection was developed through a desk review of 12 national youth employment support programmes across England, Scotland and Wales. The review was led through analysis of evaluation studies, programme reports, and strategy documents to assess provision and impact of the interventions and draw key lessons.



Who is the guide for?

The collection has been developed for youth employment service leads, programme managers, and practitioners, as well as wider service providers and advisors. It is a resource for all who wish to design, develop, deliver and fund youth employment interventions through effective partnerships.

Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG)

What is it?

The Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) was a £5.9 million programme delivered by Liverpool City Region (LCR) between November 2014 and 2017 aimed at reducing youth unemployment in the region. The programme was targeted at young people aged 18-24 who had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Universal Credit (UC) for between eight weeks and nine months. The YEG was designed and delivered collaboratively by the six local authorities in LCR, from bidding for funding through to delivery via the YEG Steering and Operations groups.



What did it do?

The core element to the YEG was the tailored one-to-one employment support for young people led by a YEG advisor, which was enhanced by a range of other in-house and external support delivered in partnership with external providers. This ranged from YEG advisors working closely with employer engagement teams on job matching, to building links with a wide range of local support services, and strengthening communication with Jobcentre Plus (JCP), the main referral partner, to ensure support was coordinated.

A number of key activities to the collaborative approach included joint ventures with JCP, such as courses for employability and IT, daily updates with employer engagement teams on vacancies and job matching, and joint work with council departments (homeless units, debt advisors, council tax officers, Troubled Families teams, etc.) to provide wrap-around support to participants with more complex needs.

In some instances YEG advisors worked with external partners to develop provision which wasn't previously available, including a mental health and wellbeing course in partnership with a college, and additional sector-based training with the council's adult learning service. Through close links with external providers, particularly counselling and health services, the YEG was also able to reach young people with more complex needs who were not ready to join the programme yet and needed additional support to enable them to participate.

What was the impact?

The programme was delivered in two phases. By December 2016, the Phase 1 programme targets for starts, job outcomes and sustained outcomes had all been exceeded, including 829 participants moving into work against a target of 590 and 439 participants achieving a 26-week job outcome against a target of 413. By September 2017, the Phase 2 target for starts had been achieved, the target for job starts almost achieved (98 per cent), and the target for sustained job outcomes stood at 59 per cent. The lower performance in Phase 2, compared to Phase 1, is partly linked to higher targets in Phase 2, and shorter timeframe compared to Phase 1.

What worked well?

- The **wrap-around support** provided through joint working with external providers, which was viewed as one of the most valuable types of support by young people.
- **Co-location** of YEG advisors in JCP offices on particular days and times, strengthening links between YEG and JCP, and improving referral processes. In this way, YEG and JCP advisors could discuss programme eligibility and participant progress frequently and face to face, which encouraged JCP referrals.
- **Joint workshops** between YEG and JCP staff during Phase 1, which improved relations, communication and understanding and led to improved conversion rate of referrals to programme starts in Phase 2.
- **Information circulation**, whereby YEG staff delivered group information sessions at JCP, distributed leaflets and organised regular meetings to discuss the programme and respond to queries from JCP staff.
- **Effective referral practices** between YEG and JCP, including maintaining a database of all new claimants and when their eight-week eligibility criteria would be met, and JCP advisors discussing pre-referral of young people to YEG after five weeks of a claim, allowing YEG providers to identify potential participants early on.

What were the challenges?

- **Inconsistencies in referral rates** across some JCP offices, particularly at the start of the programme, linked to a lack of awareness of YEG among JCP staff, staff turnover, competing priorities, and staff moving between teams and locations.
- **Gaps in external support provision**, including affordable housing, good quality and flexible learning and training provision, long waiting lists for health and wellbeing services, and limited support options for participants with learning disabilities and complex support needs.
- **Underuse of the personal budget**, which each participant had access to, to support their employment journey, among longer-term unemployed participants, as the budget was tailored to the needs of participants with fewer barriers to job entry.
- **Lack of sufficient and consistent in-work support**, leading to some young people struggling with the work transition or becoming stuck in insecure or unfulfilling work.

Key messages

- **Investing in relationship-building.** Proactively building cross-service relationships and investing resources in developing tailored approaches, such as with JCP and local providers, enables partners to create integrated and joined up provision, identify elements for innovation, and provide enhanced wrap-around support. This is key to improving referral rates and reaching and engaging a wider range of young people.
- **Knowing the local service landscape.** Knowing the local service ecology and state of the labour market ahead of delivery is key to identifying gaps in provision and addressing these in advance. Where this doesn't happen there is a risk at the stage of delivery that support provided to young people is not adequate to address specific barriers or support them into sustainable work.
- **Testing design.** During intervention design and ahead of delivery, it is key for partners to check for any potential challenges (eg. budget underspend and lack of in-work support for the YEG), for example through consultations and scenario testing with stakeholders and potential participants

Further reading

- Ray K., Crunden O., Murphy H., 2018, [Evaluation of Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway](#)
- **Evaluation approach** - Research methods for the evaluation included analysis of management information (MI) for each phase of the programme, recording participant characteristics and outcomes achieved (available for 4,985 participants); online surveys of participants to gain an overview of their experiences on the programme (11 per cent response rate); qualitative interviews with management and delivery staff and with project participants (110 engagements); a benchmarking exercise, comparing trends in the youth claimant count in the Liverpool City Region over the period of YEG delivery against trends in other cities that have some comparability, to try to address the additional impact that YEG may have had.

Suffolk County Council - MyGo

What is it?

MyGo was a youth employment support service developed and delivered by Suffolk County Council, in partnership with PeoplePlus and Jobcentre Plus (JCP). The service was rolled out over three phases across the region and run from 2014 to 2017. MyGo was open to all young people and the programme focused on engaging 'harder to reach' groups, beyond those claiming benefits, through outreach activities in close partnership with external providers and support services in the community. In Phase 1 and 2 Suffolk County Council, PeoplePlus and Jobcentre Plus collaborated closely to develop the service. In Phase 3, MyGo was managed by Suffolk County Council with input from a steering group comprising DWP, the Council's Early Help team, the district council, and a coalition of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.

What did it do?

The MyGo programme was centred around a personalised and intensive support offer, focused on meeting the needs and aspirations of young people and supporting them on different pathways into work. Core to the MyGo approach was the integration of JCP services with the additional support service provided by MyGo coaches, and the close collaboration between MyGo coaches and external providers to offer extensive employment-focused and wrap-around support.

Four key components made up the MyGo offer:

- **Joint working between JCP and MyGo staff**, focused on service integration and including common processes for data sharing; a shared MyGo uniform and shared social events to help create 'team spirit', joint team meetings to share information; and a buddying system whereby MyGo and JCP work coaches were 'buddied', sharing a caseload and conducting meetings jointly, to improve support co-ordination. MyGo and JCP staff also worked collaboratively to source job opportunities and deliver training provision throughout the programme.
- **Strengthened partner engagement**, with external providers including employment-focused support services, specialist services, advice services, and local authority social services and Early Help Teams. MyGo coaches organised regular drop-in sessions and events at partners' premises to recruit young people into MyGo, or invited partners to base themselves in the MyGo centres to deliver or recruit for their services, or deliver events (eg training tasters).
- **A focus on collaboration at the strategic level**. As the programme progressed, there was greater focus on ensuring all partners were benefitting from the partnership and that each made a contribution to MyGo outcomes. This included improving the use of MyGo management information to source a wider range of training opportunities, increased focus on sourcing training provision that led directly to work, and ensuring the availability of appropriate specialist support to progress participants with more complex needs.
- **A dedicated employer engagement element**, which in some areas was realised through a dedicated team focused on vacancy generation and job matching. This service offered employers targeted support in the filtering, screening, and matching of candidates to vacancies, and was tailored to employers' business and recruitment requirements. The employer engagement team also regularly visited local employers to raise awareness of MyGo, which helped source a wider range of employment opportunities, apprenticeships, and work experience.

What was the impact?

Two fifths of participants on MyGo were not claiming benefits at the point of referral, indicating how the partnerships established by the service were key to engage hard-to-reach young people. Job outcome rates for participants were 44 per cent in Phase 1, 43 percent in Phase 2, and 29 per cent in Phase 3. Job outcome increased as the programme progressed for all participant groups, suggesting that the programme improved and became better at transitioning people into jobs. The lower outcome rates in Phase 3 reflect the shorter delivery period and changes in the labour market at the time. The rate of 6-month sustainment rises to almost two thirds of all claimable job outcomes.



What worked well?

- **Joint working** and good working relationships between Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and external providers and support services.
- **Co-locating partners** in MyGo centres, key to improving access to services, help develop a shared understanding of roles, and promote good working relationships.
- **Simple referral processes**, regular communications and effective sharing of information and data.
- **Effective employer engagement**, which allowed for a wider work experience, traineeships and work-focused training offer, and offered valuable support to employers by filtering, screening, preparing and matching candidates to vacancies.
- **The friendly and welcoming space** provided by the MyGo centres, which helped young people view MyGo more positively compared to JCP and other employment services, and contributed to sustained engagement by creating a good impression of the service.
- **Open and regular communication at the strategic level**, about the programme's delivery and performance, which allowed partners to address challenges as they arose through rapid responses and improve the service as it developed.

What were the challenges?

- Where dedicated employer engagement teams were not available, MyGo coaches were tasked with sourcing vacancies, building links to employers and screening candidates, which was **resource-intensive and not always effective**.
- In some instances, JCP outcome targets, Focused rapid transition from benefits to work, prevented longer-term support being offered to higher need participants, leaving some young people feeling that **support provided was not appropriate for them**.
- Provision and support available to young people with additional and complex needs was not always available or adequate, particularly for those with **mental health and additional learning needs**.
- There was great variation in **in-work support extent and frequency**, with some young people who could have benefitted from support not receiving any, and others wanting more regular or structured support.

Key messages

- **Integrating services.** Focusing on relationship-building at the early stages of partnership (eg. through co-location and joint activities) paves the way to a seamless support pathway at the point of delivery and builds capacity for engaging additional provision as delivery progresses.
- **Emphasising inclusion at all levels.** Efforts to develop regular communication and shared understanding, and to foster inclusive environments (both physically and in-service relationships), support buy-in both within and outwith the partnership, strengthening cooperation, and enabling the engagement of harder to reach participants.
- **Focusing on processes.** Simple referral processes, good quality data systems, and prioritising the sharing of data and information enables partnerships to track progress and improve service delivery, increasing their impact.
- **Investing in dedicated resources.** Dedicated and specialist staff, such as employer engagement teams and special needs advisors, can help youth employment partnerships access valuable expertise and skillsets, increase capacity, and source better support and opportunities for young people, leading to improved outcomes.
- **Putting young people first.** Focusing on the length and intensity of support, ensuring interventions have young people's best interests at their core, and working with partners to develop approaches which help prioritise young people's needs over service targets and can source adequate specialist support.

Further reading

- Bennett L., Bivand P., Ray K., Vaid L., Wilson T., 2018, [MyGo Evaluation Final Report](#)
- **Evaluation approach** - Research methods for the evaluation included analysis of management information (MI) for each phase of the programme, recording participant characteristics and outcomes achieved (available for 9,037 participants); online survey of participants (77 responses) to gain an overview of their experiences on the programme; qualitative research with participants, staff, employers, other partners and stakeholders (278 engagements); an analysis of MyGo performance compared with other similar areas, to provide an estimate of the additional impact of the MyGo offer.

Big Lottery Fund - Talent Match

What is it?

Talent Match was a youth employment programme run between 2014 and 2018 in 21 Local Enterprise Partnerships across England and funded for £108 million by the National Lottery Community Fund. The programme focused on young people aged 18-24 who were furthest from the labour market, providing personalised, holistic and flexible support tailored to their needs and aspirations. Participation in Talent Match was voluntary and young people were active partners in both the design and delivery of the programme. At the heart of the programme stood the core principles of developing effective cross-sector partnership and creating structured opportunities through local coordination, supporting local solutions by matching young people to the local labour market demand, and using an asset based approach and positive communication.

What did it do?

Support provided through Talent Match was wide-ranging and varied, and included information, advice and guidance (IAG), basic skills (eg literacy and numeracy provision) and soft skills (eg confidence building) support, employability skills, peer mentoring, therapeutic support, specialist support, and job search. In terms of opportunities for participants, the majority of areas sourced short term work experience and work placements, and structured volunteering with a focus on improving job skills. Almost all partnerships did some form of job brokerage and many also engaged with employer mentors (local employers who supported participants on the job).

The partnership structure across Talent Match areas followed a core model, including:

- A lead voluntary and community sector (VCS) partner, acting as the accountable body for the funding and overseeing the strategic aspects of the partnership.
- Delivery partner organisations, contracted to deliver the programme activities.
- Wider partnership bodies, convened by lead partners into groups to oversee the programme.
- Young people, involved both as members of the partnership groups and in delivery activities.

Relationships between Lead and Delivery Partners were developed in such a way that delivery partners had a certain degree of autonomy from the lead partner over how they chose to deliver Talent Match services/activities. While devolving control gave lead partners less of a say on what was happening on the ground, it was key to developing a strong collaborative approach and fostering good working relationships.

Young people were key members of the Talent Match partnership groups and were involved in both the development and delivery of the programme (eg. sitting on interview panels for the selection of delivery partners, participating in outreach activities, training as peer mentors for clients).

Employer involvement in partnerships was also a core element of Talent Match provision in many areas. One Talent Match area set up an Employer Champions Group through support from Business In The Community (BITC). The group, made up of 17 employers, pledged opportunities for young people on the programme, advised on commissioning processes, and got involved in training Talent Coaches.

What was the impact?

Talent Match aimed to support 40 per cent of participants on the programme into employment. By the end of the programme 46 per cent of participants had moved into work. A second aim was that 20 percent of participants would sustain employment outcomes for at least six months or twelve months for those who were self-employed. Overall, 17 per cent of young people gained sustained employment outcomes, and five partnerships supported one fifth or more of their participants into sustained jobs. The lower rate for sustained employment outcomes was partly due to weaker labour markets in some areas, which affected young people's prospects in terms of sustaining jobs.

What worked well?

- Partnerships where members had **previous experience of partnership** work were able to draw on previous experiences and existing contacts, enhancing Talent Match's development and delivery.
- **Trusting local services** to understand their area's and client's needs best, devolving some power and control to them, and allowing for local flexibility.
- The **involvement of young people**, who brought a different dynamic to partnership work, enriching it through their lived experience and service user perspective, challenging misconceptions, and influencing organisations' practices.
- The **'test and learn'** and open dialogue approach of the programme, which allowed partnerships to adapt and change activities if they were not working and fostered a good environment for partnership work and growth.
- **Partnership leads** were key in setting the tone and direction for the partnership, and managing relationships, acting as independent brokers between strategic and delivery partners.

What were the challenges?

- **Long lead in periods** to the start of the programme, leading to other challenges such as staff turnover before delivery began, difficulties sustaining the engagement of local partners and employers, and changes in local area need.
- **Overlap with other local initiatives** which emerged during Talent Match's delivery, such as EU funded programmes or government policies for apprenticeships and traineeships, requiring partners to respond quickly to address risks of competition and service duplication.
- **A lack of effective communication** channels between strategic partners and delivery partners in some areas meant that learning from grassroots experiences of delivery could be little and slow.
- Some partners faced **resourcing and capacity** issues, often as a result of austerity, during the delivery of Talent Match. This meant that they had limited time to devote to programme development and management, and lack of attendance at partnership meetings was a challenge in some areas.
- **Meeting all partners' needs**, and ensuring inclusivity and manageability, particularly in bigger partnerships, where county and city areas had diverging needs, processes and structures.
- **Local labour market challenges**, such as lack of availability of good entry level jobs, meant that some young people entered and stayed in insecure employment with little career potential, or were underemployed.

Key messages

- **Developing positive and trusting relationships.** Building trust across stakeholders, such as between strategic and delivery partners and between partners and young people, can foster productive engagement, growth and innovation, promoting better service design and delivery.
- **Building on what has worked.** Drawing on previous experiences of partnership work, such as networks and established relationships, can help the partnership invest resources in a more targeted and effective way. It can also reduce risks of the partnership becoming unmanageable, as less time is spent on building and sustaining relationships from the ground, and duplicating provision.
- **Having strong leadership.** Establishing leadership mechanisms at the early stages of partnership development can help drive change, set clear directions, and support ownership at all levels of the partnership. Having established lead figures can help manage relationships within the partnership, enable it to be responsive to challenges, and streamline delivery.
- **Thinking ahead.** During design and development stages, partnerships should protect time to carefully assess the landscape in which they are forming and think ahead. This can help reflect on issues such as competition and overlap with other services, resourcing and capacity, and labour market challenges, and identify solutions early on to mitigate negative impacts at the point of delivery.

Further reading

- Damm C., Pearson S., Sanderson E., Wells P., Wilson I., 2020, [Talent Match Evaluation: Understanding the impact and value of Talent Match](#)
- Damm C., Green E., Pearson S., Sanderson E., Wells P., Wilson I., 2020, [Talent Match Evaluation: A Final Assessment](#)
- Wells P., Pearson S., 2018, [Youth Employment Partnerships: Lessons from the Talent Match programme evaluation](#)
- Wells P., Pearson S., 2018, [Talent Match Evaluation: Involving Young People](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – At the heart of the approach has been the participant data collected through a Common Data Framework (CDF), which includes participant characteristics, support received, and outcomes achieved. These can be compared across partnership participant groupings. The data collection was supported by qualitative research with staff and participants. Job outcomes for Talent Match participants were also compared against a matched wider population group using the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey Five Quarters Longitudinal Sample. The quasi-experimental comparative method gave a scientifically rigorous measure of additionality.

DfE – The Youth Contract (16-17 NEETs)

What is it?

The Youth Contract (YC) was a £1 billion government-funded programme, run between 2012 and 2015, to support young people aged 16-24 to participate in education, training and work across England. This included a programme of intensive support for 16-17 year olds who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET). The Education Funding Agency (now the Education and Skills Funding Agency) managed the delivery of the programme, and Local Authorities (LAs) where the YC was delivered were responsible for identifying young people not in education, employment or training. The YC was funded through a payments-by-results (PbR) model and was delivered through prime providers, who were in turn responsible for subcontracting any supplementary local provision, and work with LAs to identify potential beneficiaries and ensure that provision met local needs.

What did it do?

The YC local offers varied across areas but generally included programmes of intensive support targeted at disengaged 16-17 year olds to support re-engagement in education, an apprenticeship or a job with training.

The programme operated through a number of regional and local delivery models, including:

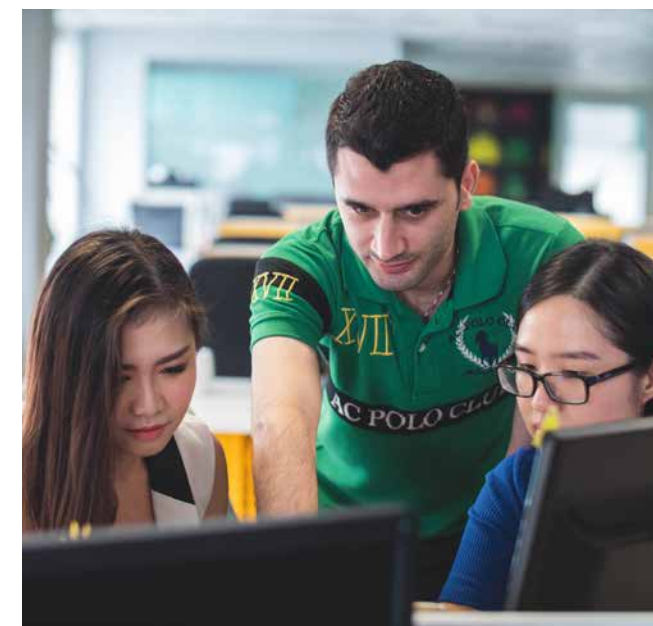
- A single delivery agent that provided intensive support combined with careers guidance.
- Key workers from the LA working in collaboration with college-based key workers.
- Multiple delivery agents providing a menu of support to young people.
- A prime provider organisation using a 'lived experience' approach whereby staff had experience of similar circumstances to those of YC participants and provided individually tailored support.

Across models, providers collaborated with LAs to source Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) data on young people, to identify and engage the target groups for the service. To support engagement, staff sought ways to implement multiple routes into the YC. In some areas, the model relied on the community and street level knowledge of the key workers, in others staff were recruited from local VCS organisations which were subcontractors for the YC, and in other cases key workers employed directly by the prime provider were given supplementary outreach training in collaboration with a local VCS organisation.

In terms of employer engagement, many of the employers that the YC sought to engage were SMEs with an interest in supporting young unemployed people, but had little experience or capacity. In some areas employer engagement was led by a dedicated employer engagement team. Where this resource was not available YC staff still endeavoured to develop engagement activities, such as workshops, to help employers improve their knowledge and skills on how to support a young person in work. Upon exit from the programme, entry into education, employment or training was dependent on the local labour market, and availability of opportunities for hard-to-reach young people, and on the local partnership context and operations of the YC.

What was the impact?

The main hard outcomes from the Youth Contract included a reduction of 1.8 per cent in the number of 16-17 year olds NEET in England (NB the programme targeted only a subgroup of the NEET population), a 12 per cent increase in engagement in learning and training among national participants, an 11 per cent increase in engagement in Level 1 learning and training for national participants, and a 2 per cent increase in engagement in Level 2 learning and training. In terms of soft outcomes (interpersonal, organisational, analytical, and personal skills), engagement with the key worker on the YC had a notable positive impact on young people's progression, particularly for participants who were long-term NEET. A survey of LAs also found that the YC had targeted some of the most vulnerable young people across LAs, helping them achieve sustained positive outcomes.



What worked well?

- **Pre-existing relationships** that LAs had with key agencies and services working with vulnerable young people (eg. Troubled Families), which helped identify target groups, develop strategies to engage them, and share key intelligence for delivery.
- **Regular contact** and the development of a **shared agenda**, across all partnership levels, which contributed to improving referral rates in some areas.
- **Schools and pupil referral units** (PRUs) were key referrers, as they could identify young people at risk of NEET and link them directly to the YC as the academic year ended. Housing associations and VCS organisations were also key sources of referrals.
- **Relationship-building** and sustaining engagement with employers, to manage expectations, and with participants, to maintain and improve motivation and attendance.
- **Sustained support**, both during job searching and post-transition, which supported young people to sustain their participation in education, employment or training destinations.

What were the challenges?

- In areas where the **quality of the local intelligence** was low, there was little understanding of the YC, or where there was limited outreach activity, referrals tended to be the lowest.
- Key stakeholders were **not always willing to share data or make referrals** and this slowed down delivery in some cases. Some LAs were reluctant to share CCIS data due to a lack of adequate data sharing agreements, while schools and PRUs were reluctant to refer pupils as they feared it reflected badly on the school.
- **Lack of engagement with LAs** during the early stages of the YC affected delivery later on, as LAs became reluctant to engage with the YC and did not view it as aligned to their plans to meet statutory duties.
- The development of **soft skills** (confidence, motivation and self-belief) was key to helping young people achieve sustained engagement in EET destinations, but it was not recognised by the payment system.
- In some cases, there was a **'mismatch'** between young people's aspirations and the provision available to them locally.
- The **local context and provision** had a strong impact on the achievement of positive destinations among young people, indicating the need for more flexibility in education and training provision.

Key messages

- **Sustaining engagement across the spectrum.** Regular and quality engagement with core partners, wider providers, and employers supports the development of a shared agenda and can lead to improved referral practices. It also helps build strong relationships with employers and can better support young people's journeys after participation. A lack of sustained engagement can instead lead to decreased buy-in and shared understanding across stakeholders and limit the reach of the partnership.
- **Aligning resources.** Ensuring the coordination of services, prioritising the focus on additionality of support, focusing on improving the flexibility of provision, is key to making the best use of resources and ensure support effectively meets the needs of the young people which the partnership wants to engage.
- **Focusing on person-centred approaches.** Drawing on skills and expertise across the partnership to develop holistic, young person-centred approaches, focused on soft skills and wider community engagement, is key to helping young people achieve sustained engagement in EET destinations.

Further reading

- Newton B., Nafilyan V., Maguire S., Devins D., Bickerstaffe T., 2014, [The Youth Contract for 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training evaluation](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – The evaluation comprised multiple strands of analysis. As part of quantitative evaluation, the causal impact of the YC participation on reengagement and learning outcomes and the value for money generated by these impacts were estimated. Following the impact assessment, a cost-benefit analysis was undertaken, to express economic benefits of the programme in monetary terms to indicate the value for money arising from the YC. To provide context to the evaluation 47 initial and follow-up interviews were undertaken with national stakeholders and policymakers drawn from key departments and agencies. Next, initial and follow-up online surveys focused on the design and delivery of the YC were issued to all LAs in England, and received a response rate of 56 per cent and 46 per cent respectively. This was followed by in-depth case studies in six delivery areas comprising 396 interviews in total.

DWP - Youth Employment Initiative



What is it?

The Youth Employment Initiative was developed by the European Commission (EC) as a response to the rise in youth unemployment following the 2008 financial crisis. The YEI provided €6.4 billion of targeted funding to support young people in regions of the EU particularly affected by youth unemployment. In England, the YEI was delivered between 2014 and 2020 through ESIF funding. It was overseen by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and delivered by 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through local ESIF sub-committees. The approach to implementation reflected the 'localism' agenda, using locality-based contracts for delivery, and focusing on the development of local partnerships and on co-location of services to address the needs of each area.

What did it do?

In England, the YEI had a particular focus on young people who were NEET, those at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities. Support included access to apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements and further education and was delivered through customised training and support, volunteering activities, specialist support, enhanced local careers guidance, and employer brokerage services.

In terms of development and implementation, the YEI relied on a local partnership model which included the following components in some or most cases:

- Each YEI project had a **lead or strategic partner**, and a group of **delivery partners** in charge of provision.
- Partnerships were often formed **at the point of bidding** for YEI funding, and collaborative work at this stage included frequent meetings and discussions, and in some instances workshops to involve other potential project partners.
- **Consultations** with potential service users and **evidence reviews** on working with the NEET group locally, using labour market data and evaluations, were carried out. This approach provided a forum to share lessons on previous interventions, which in turn informed the design and development of the YEI.

At the strategic level, YEI projects were managed through steering groups comprising project leads, leads for other local youth employment services, Jobcentre Plus, local colleges, and VCS organisations. Operational steering groups were also common across localities and provided a forum to discuss how delivery was progressing, strengthen relationships between delivery partners, raise awareness of available provision, and improve approaches to joint working.

Through the partnership approach the YEI aimed to enable providers to collectively address the diverse range of needs that participants on the programme had, and partnerships were often built on pre-existing relationships between the organisations involved. Referrals to the YEI were sourced from within the partnership, and through Jobcentre Plus, housing authorities, other local employment programmes and support services. The YEI also worked on an outreach basis, through co-location with services which young people were already using and by targeting places in the community where they usually gathered.

What was the impact?

The YEI ended in 2020, and the impact and outcomes are currently being evaluated.

What worked well?

- **Early-stage collaboration** between YEI project partners, including in developing bids, improved local relationships and the design of the service. This contributed to minimising risks of duplication, and strengthening links among delivery partners.
- Being part of a **branded intervention**, with a formalised partnership structure, helped partners develop ownership of the YEI and facilitated effective collaboration.
- The **localism agenda** strengthened the YEI offer and enabled partners to use robust local evidence for the design of the programme in each area, provide support 'at the door step' of young people, and help address gaps in services.
- **Effective governance** arrangements, with regular meetings, regular reviews of performance and sustained communication, produced high levels of engagement and participation among partners. Within operational groups in particular, effective mechanisms for sharing information enabled all partners to understand the provision available and provide feedback at the strategic level.

What were the challenges?

- **Early 'teething issues'** including delays in recruitment, staff turnover, getting processes and paperwork in place caused some challenges in the lead-in period.
- **Operational groups getting too large** and potentially dispersive, and meetings happening too frequently were initial issues which were later resolved as delivery became streamlined.
- In some areas a **geographical mismatch** between LEP areas and YEI-eligible areas caused design challenges and produced delays.
- **Skills mismatches and the nature of local labour markets** provided a challenge to effective employer engagement and the YEI's ability to match young people with real progression opportunities locally.

Key messages

- **Building a solid background.** Investing time to build relationships and knowledge during early stages of partnership, paves the way for strong networks, and better-coordinated provision at delivery stages.
- **Developing good governance structures.** Embedding clear governance mechanisms, with defined roles and responsibilities, and building communication lines between each level, can improve engagement and participation across partners and streamline delivery.
- **Minimising mismatches.** During intervention design, circulating information and investing time to get to know the local context is important to mitigate challenges at later stages of delivery, such as geographical barriers and skills mismatches.

Further reading

- Atkinson I., Kirchner-Sala L., Meierkord A., Smith K., Wooldridge K., 2017, [Youth Employment Initiative Process Evaluation](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – The study methodology comprised a combination of primary and secondary data collection and analysis focused on strategic fit, design and implementation. This was supplemented by desk research and workshops specifically designed to support the development of a theory of change for the YEI and to conduct an impact evaluation feasibility study. A series of telephone interviews formed the primary evidence source for the evaluation. A total of 56 interviews were undertaken with ESF, LEP, and European Commission representatives, and local providers. To gain a rounded view of each of the sampled projects, interviews were arranged with a representative of the lead partner for each project and a selection of managerial and delivery staff from lead and delivery partners.

DfE - Activity Agreement Pilots

What is it?

The Activity Agreement Pilots (AA) was a £60 million government-led initiative designed for young people aged 16-17 who were NEET, which took place between 2006 and 2011. The AA were overseen by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and delivered by the Connexions service in eight areas across England. As part of the programme, young people agreed to take part in a range of activities aimed at supporting them into EET, in exchange for an allowance. Each pilot area implemented one of three variants of the AA, with variations involving the level of the weekly payment available to the young person and in one variant a payment to the parent. The AA tested the effectiveness of offering a combination of measures, namely financial incentives, intensive support and individualised learning, to re-engage NEET young people into education, employment, or training.

What did it do?

The Activity Agreement took the form of a negotiated contract between a Connexions Personal Advisor and the client. This included a tailored and personalised action plan aimed at supporting the young person to work through their barriers and enter education, employment, or training. During their participation on the programme, young people received one-to-one support and advice and a weekly allowance, paid after the young person fulfilled their weekly agreement.

Given the nature of the AA and the groups it looked to target, particularly harder to reach young people from vulnerable backgrounds, the programme worked to extend and strengthen links with a wide range of support agencies to source referrals. These included YOS (Youth Offending Service), Leaving Care teams, housing departments, teenage pregnancy/parents support services, Sure Start centres, youth services and social services. In addition to agency referrals, young people were referred to the programme from Connexions, through 'word of mouth', and through meetings and leaflets used by AA to explain eligibility criteria to potential local partners.

Collaborative working between AA advisors and partners used a 'win win' approach, whereby agencies referred young people to the AA and entry to the programme was classified as a 'positive outcome' for the agencies. However, there was a delicate balance to strike to avoid agencies resorting to the AA as the solution for difficult clients just for the purpose of achieving delivery targets.

Flexible provision and rapid responses to filling gaps in provision were also key elements to the AA delivery. Following the engagement of young people or employers, advisors needed to act quickly to broker provision and sustain the engagement. Sub-contracting was the key mechanism to expand provision and tailor it to the needs of individual young people and employers. For example, in one AA rural area an advisor had worked with a college to fill a gap in provision, by having the college employ an advisor to visit the young people at their workplaces. In other areas, advisors worked from colleges and private providers, or run 'buddy group' meetings with providers, to increase buy-in and responsiveness to young people's needs.

What was the impact?

The main impact that AA had on participants was around improved uptake of personal development activities. Around 30 per cent of participants on AA reported doing some personal development in the 12-month period after first becoming NEET, which would have been just 4 per cent without AA. In terms of hard outcomes, around 17 per cent of participants entered paid work without training, around 3 per cent entered work-based training, and around 7 per cent took up studying towards a qualification who otherwise wouldn't have. Overall, the main impact of AA at the three-month mark post-participation was to produce a 13-percentage point shift away from non-activity or employment in jobs without training and towards work-based training and studying.

What worked well?

- Increased collaboration and inter-agency working **improved understanding** among local providers and agencies of each others' roles and the ways in which they could work together, even beyond the AA.
- The partnership approach helped make the **best use of existing resources**, and ensured young people's needs were at the core of the service, supporting them to receive the help they needed from the right service.
- Inter-agency working improved the **tracking of young people**, through regular communication and data sharing. This enabled the AA to complement, rather than duplicate, other services' work.
- **Co-location** of advisors and training providers in some areas strengthened awareness of mutual support, and supported in brokering provision more quickly and effectively through the single point of contact within the provider.
- Effective partnership work was key to **sourcing less common provision** and filling gaps in support. This was particularly important when brokering work-based provision, because staff had specific responsibility for this role as well as the time to work closely with providers and other partners to fill gaps.

What were the challenges?

- **Lack of sufficient communication** around young people with complex needs by AA advisors who referred participants onto other services, had prevented support services from providing adequate individualisation and risk assessment.
- In some areas, there was a **lack of integration** between the agencies and providers for the AA. This was in part linked to smaller and voluntary sector providers having limited resources to commit time to participate in steering groups, affecting the effectiveness of the strategic direction taken by the partnership.
- **Closer links** between stakeholders and AA staff would have facilitated the sharing of good practice, and knowledge about what worked for different groups, as well as promoting greater cohesion of the initiative at local level and embedding good practice locally following the end of the programme.
- The extent of **collaboration between AA and the local JCP** relied mainly on links between individual members of staff within local offices. This impacted the quality of referral practices, data exchange, and understanding about AA, which lacked consistency across areas.
- Some concern was expressed among delivery staff about the **increased resource** that inter-agency working required. It was identified that not all agencies were able to support young people in the way AA advisors could, or that young people did not want to work with other agencies.

Key messages

- **Throwing the net wide.** Involving a wide range of stakeholders during delivery, while prioritising manageability at the core partnership level, can have a positive impact on outreach and referral pathways, and tap into a pool of shared resources which can improve the partnership's capacity and efficiency.
- **Thinking outside the box.** Being flexible and creative when thinking about provision, is key to meet young people's needs and adapt to the local context. It enables partners to be responsive, sustain engagement with young people and providers, and source opportunities which are tailored to beneficiaries' needs and aspirations.
- **Building stronger joint approaches.** Where there is poor communication and a lack of service integration, partnerships achieve low impact, particularly when it comes to harder to reach young people. It is key that joint work is built on strong links beyond individual relationships between staff, as links risk breaking down when staff leave, and that opportunities are created to share resources and learning from across the partnership.

Further reading

- Newton B., Maguire S., Fearn H., Oakley J., Williams C., Miller L., Levesley T., 2011, [Activity Agreements Evaluation of the 2009-10 extension](#)
- Hillage J., Johnson C., Newton B., Maguire S., Tanner E., Purdon S., 2008, [Activity Agreements Evaluation](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – The evaluation comprised three strands: a quantitative evaluation, which involved the collection of quantitative data in pilot areas and control areas, in order to measure the comparative impact of the pilots on the employment education and training activities of the eligible NEET population; a process evaluation, which explored the local implementation and delivery of the pilots in each area, based on interviews with pilot managers, personal advisors, providers and local stakeholders; a programme theory evaluation, which aimed to identify and test the key theories which underpinned the policy development and examine what worked or did not work, and why or in what circumstances, through a series of focused studies. The extension evaluation comprised a series of implementation studies providing a longitudinal and qualitative account of the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the delivery of the extension, and two roundtable discussions with Connexions advisors and managers who were involved in delivery.

Glasgow Youth Employability Partnership

What is it?

The Glasgow Youth Employability Partnership (YEP) was a multi-agency partnership active between 2008 and 2014. The YEP was formed as a response to the Scottish Government NEET Strategy 'More Choices, More Chances', aimed to reduce the fragmentation across the complex youth employment landscape in Glasgow, and reduce NEET figures. It was headed by the local authority and involved key stakeholders, including local authorities, Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), JCP, further education colleges, the NHS, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector and Glasgow Housing Association.



What did it do?

The starting point for the YEP was the identification of two issues, namely that school leaver destination statistics were patchy and inconsistent, and that there were high levels of fragmentation across a multitude of post-16 provision. The lack of linkages across services, combined with a funding environment largely using PbR models, increased competition amongst services and stopped agencies from referring young people onto other support services, thus limiting the level and quality of support they were receiving, impacting their outcomes.

To address these issues the partnership focused on four areas for improvement:

- **Data monitoring.** SDS was given responsibility to lead on addressing issues tied to the inconsistent use of two different databases, one used by schools and the other managed by SDS. In both cases, the quality of destinations statistics was patchy, as schools did not record these consistently. SDS developed a single shared management information system and worked to strengthen their relationship with schools to promote a cultural shift towards improving the monitoring and sharing of intelligence. This led to the development of SDS data hubs across Glasgow, and improvements in data quality and sharing practices.
- **Early intervention.** The YEP worked with schools to identify the gaps in early intervention in school for young people at risk and found that support was being provided too late. To address this, the YEP developed a Risk Matrix for schools to use with students in their penultimate year, to identify young people who might struggle in their transition out of education. Using a joint case management approach, partners from the YEP formed multidisciplinary teams that worked with each school to address the support needs of at-risk pupils and signpost them to the right services and support.
- **Mapping.** The YEP recognised the need for better linkages across the wide range of employability services in the city, as well as the diversity that characterised the support landscape. To improve the way services related to each other, and promote a unified offer, the YEP developed a map of Glasgow's Youth Employment Activity/ Employability Services, which it regularly updated. The map in turn informed the Glasgow Youth Employability Pipeline, which outlined the services working with young people at each stage of their employability journey.
- **Commissioning.** The YEP reviewed the commissioning frameworks across Glasgow to identify ways of improving joint working. Thanks to the relationships built through collaborative work, the YEP was able to involve commissioners beyond EET in their effort, including health, justice and housing partners. The YEP's work led to an agreement among service commissioners across the city to improve communication and information sharing around commissioning plans, to reduce duplication and promote funding alignment. On the back of this work, a new commissioning model, Glasgow Works, was established. The new model introduced a client pathway, whereby each client had different progress points on their pathway which acted as funding triggers. This approach helped both spread rewards and promoted a cultural shift, whereby providers mutually acknowledged the key role played by other services in supporting young people.

Alongside these interventions, the YEP developed a **Youth Employability Framework** (YEF), outlining the structures in place to monitor progress and to co-ordinate and develop partnership work, which in turn informed the development of **Glasgow's Youth Gateway** (GYG) and **Youth Employability Groups** (YEGs). GYG acted as the operational arm of the YEP, providing a single gateway to support and signposting service to all 15-19 year olds who required intensive support. GYG was comprised of three multi-agency teams, one for each of the three strategic planning areas of the city, including Team Leaders from Glasgow City Council Education Services, Skills Development Scotland, Jobcentre Plus and Glasgow's Regeneration Agency. The YEGs formed the Strategic area-based driver for GYG and were headed by headteachers from local secondary schools, who worked with strategic partner organisations to develop local action plans to address the needs of NEET young people locally.

What was the impact?

It is not possible to assign any changes to NEET rates to the work done by the YEP exclusively, but there is evidence to suggest that the partnership contributed to structural changes which affected young people leaving school in Glasgow. For example, in 2010/11 a record 86 per cent of Glasgow's school leavers entered a positive destination, and from 2006/07 there has been a steady drop in the proportions becoming unemployed, from 25 per cent to 18.4 per cent in 2010/11, and going into further or higher education instead. Additionally, there has been a significant reduction in the rate of 'unknown' school leaver destinations, from 4 per cent in 2003/04 to 0.5 per cent in 2010/11.

Key messages

- **Investing in systems approaches.** Service improvement is rarely dependent on a single actor or stakeholder. Taking a system approach to change can enable partnerships to achieve wider and long-lasting transformation.
- **Streamlining provision.** Where partnerships identify that provision is lacking or not working optimally, early intervention and resource investment to change, restructure, or enhance services can bring improvements which have a strong positive impact at later stages.
- **Focusing on data.** Developing unified, cohesive, and coherent approaches to data governance and sharing can unlock a large pool of untapped potential. To do so, time and resources need to be invested in developing trust across services and strengthen relationships, to get buy-in and build accountability.

Further reading

- Glasgow City Council, 2013, [Youth Employability Partnership Guide](#)
- OECD, 2013, [Local Strategies for Youth Employment: Learning from Practice](#)



Scottish Government Developing the Young Workforce

What is it?

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) is the Scottish Government's Youth Employment strategy aimed at strengthening the pipeline between education and employment, and enhancing industry engagement within education. DYW operates through employer-led Developing the Young Workforce Regional Groups, across 21 Scottish local authorities, which act as a single point of contact to facilitate engagement between employers and education at a regional level. DYW Regional Groups aim to increase the range of choices for school leavers and improve young people's education about the options open to them. They do so by bringing schools, colleges, training providers and employers together in partnership to develop local pathways to youth employment.

What did it do?

DYW Regional Groups have developed a range of approaches to delivering the DYW strategy. These include developing new work based learning options, offering early-stage careers advice in school, introducing new standards for career education and work placements, and supporting employers and educators to collaborate to improve curriculum quality, planning and outcomes.

In terms of governance, the Regional Groups work through strategic boards which include local employers, education and training providers, local authorities, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Skills Development Scotland, and in some cases third sector delivery partners. Each board has sub-committees or working groups that lead on particular aspects of DYW activity for that group. Each Regional Group has a dedicated member from the DYW National Group, which acts as the main point of contact and feedback between the groups.

An executive team, employed to oversee operations, is responsible for:

- **Co-ordination**, including recording employer engagements between businesses and schools for each area, and monitoring non-DYW initiatives being delivered in the same space. This minimises the risks of overlap and duplication.
- **Performance monitoring**, focused on managing CRM systems and tracking DYW activity accurately and consistently, and producing regular progress reports for the Scottish Government. For each Regional Group this includes tracking progress against the unique KPIs for their area agreed with the National Group. KPIs typically include number of school-employer partnerships, young people participating in meaningful work experience, and employer engagement with young people.
- **Employer and school engagement**, drawing on partners' contacts and networks for employers (particularly through the Chamber of Commerce), approaching staff in schools and Directors of Education within the councils, and brokering relationships between employers and schools.

What was the impact?

A 2018 survey of Regional Group Board Members found that behaviour of employers had improved as a result of engagement with the DYW Regional Group (80 per cent of respondents agreed), while almost all schools and colleges in the survey (96 per cent) reported delivering better quality employer engagement activities as a result of their involvement in DYW. Additionally, the survey found that the vast majority of secondary schools had set up effective school-employer partnerships (80 per cent), were working with partners to develop their Senior Phase curriculum (84 per cent) and were using the Work Placements Standard to shape their offer to young people (78 per cent).



What worked well?

- Creating a **single point of contact** for employers and education to engage with each other.
- The **effectiveness the executive teams**, which provide high levels of support and responsiveness to employers and schools.
- Access to **employer databases** through the Chamber of Commerce, which enabled the partnership to strengthen and build on its links to employers.
- Seamless **monitoring and reporting** processes, through the use of a single comprehensive CRM system, enabling groups to work effectively at the local level.
- **Meaningful engagement between schools and employers**, addressing challenges in resourcing, timetabling issues, and competing priorities through the enhanced DYW support offer.

What were the challenges?

- **Poor communication with employers** in some cases, such as employers being told about events on too short notice and poor coordination with school timetables.
- **Resourcing and capacity issues in schools**, including a need for more targeted engagement aimed at hard-to-reach students and increased resources for delivery.
- **KPIs reporting and consistency issues**, with Regional Groups reporting that local KPIs don't fully capture the range of activities they deliver, and the National Group reporting that there is too high a volume of unique KPIs which creates challenges for understanding the national impact of DYW.
- **A lack of feedback on progress and performance** from the National Group, which created a one-way flow of information for some Regional Groups, making it hard to assess the performance of DYW against the national aims and strategy.
- Evidence on the **scale of the in-kind contribution from employers** is still a key gap in DYW's performance.

Key messages

- **Opening the door to employers.** Building bridges between education and work, and inviting employers to have a voice in developing interventions, helps develop ownership among employers. This in turn improves support pathways, enabling young people to achieve better quality opportunities upon entering work.
- **Developing a unified approach.** Developing a unified strategy, while allowing for flexibility, and setting up common monitoring mechanisms, with dedicated resources to oversee these, helps develop a shared language and framework which enables partnerships to better understand and explain their impact.
- **Thinking about resources.** Consideration of the individual resourcing needs and requirements of each stakeholder, and how the partnership should cooperate to meet these, should form a key stage of early design thinking and be regularly repeated throughout delivery. This minimises the risk of capacity issues and challenges with understanding and measuring impact.

Further reading

- SQW, 2018, [Formative Evaluation of the DYW Regional Groups](#)
- Scottish Government, 2019, [DYW Fifth Annual Progress Report 2018-2019](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – The evaluation focused on four of the 21 DYW Regional Groups – Ayrshire; Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian; Inverness and Central Highland; and North East. These Groups were pre-selected by the Scottish Government to ensure a mix of newer and more mature groups, urban and rural areas and different approaches taken to delivering DYW activity. The first stage of the evaluation included a desk review of background document and scoping consultations with national and regional stakeholders. The second stage involved evidence gathering through online surveys (328 responses) and in-depth consultations (25 engagements) with Regional Group Board Members, schools and colleges and employers. Limitations included the lack of consultation with young people, and risk of positive bias given only stakeholders and employers who actively engaged with the Regional Groups participated in the research.

Scottish Government Youth Employment Scotland Fund (YESF)

What is it?

The Youth Employment Scotland Fund (YESF) was a £25 million European Social Fund (ESF) and Scottish Government funded programme, run between 2013 and 2015. The YESF aimed to support 10,000 unemployed young people aged 16-29 into work. The fund provided a wage incentive for employers, called the Employer Recruitment Incentive (ERI), and built on local and national measures supporting EET outcomes for young unemployed people. A partnership was formed to develop and run the YESF, which included the Scottish Government, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) in Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, the Third Sector Employability Forum, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), Jobcentre Plus, the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development (SLAED) Group, and Local Authorities.

What did it do?

The YESF was delivered by Local Authorities and its core provision included the 26-week ERI, aimed at incentivising employers to take on young people on paid work placements. The incentive was available to employers in the private and social enterprise sectors, as well as to Local Authorities who employed young people. The ERI covered half of the salary costs of an employee at the National Minimum Wage. The majority of employers who took up the ERI were SMEs (over 90 per cent) in the private sector, with many working in hairdressing, engineering, construction, mechanics, leisure, and administration. Where young people belonged to more vulnerable groups (eg. disability, care leaver, ex offender) YESF provision included support from specialist agencies working with the young person to support the participant and the employer to sustain engagement.

A key aspect of partnership work on the YESF was marketing and referral activities. Local Authorities built on and strengthened their links with local training providers, employability partners, Business Gateway, Scottish Chambers, FSB, and the SCVO in a joint effort to promote the YESF widely to both employers and young people through mail-outs, information events, press releases, and social media advertising. In particular, the SCVO played a key role in sourcing jobs among social enterprises, and the FSB and Business Gateway supported the engagement of SMEs. JCP was the main source of referral for young people, but LAs also collaborated closely with schools, including through Careers Advisors and Guidance Teachers, to identify school leavers eligible for YESF, and engage young people at risk of becoming NEET.

To support employer engagement, some local authorities also provided shortlisting of candidates, beyond matching. This included reviewing candidates' CVs based on employers' requirements and presenting them with a shortlist of suitable young people. This was particularly useful for micro and small businesses who had limited recruitment experience and capacity to review a large number of CVs. Local Authorities also worked with employers to manage expectations on the experience and abilities of young people pre-employment.

What was the impact?

In total, 9,396 young people participated in the YESF, with participation rates varying between LAs. For the 22 LAs for which monitoring data was available, outcomes showed that 69 per cent of all starts sustained their positive destination after participation in the YESF. Of these, the majority stayed with the same employer while around one in ten went on to work with a different employer.



What worked well?

- The **effective marketing** led in collaboration with partners, which extended the programme's reach to young people and employers which would have otherwise been less likely to engage.
- LAs which had **strong employability infrastructures** were better able to integrate the YESF effectively into their provision, as they could more easily establish the processes, build on the relationships with partners and employers and recruit young people.
- LAs with existing employability provision were better able to provide **wraparound support** to YESF participants and enhance their offer, including pre-employment training, through-care, and aftercare which supported employment retention.
- Areas where the YESF was able to provide **business support to employers**, reported higher rates of sustained employment for young people beyond the YESF.

Key messages

- **Enhancing existing systems.** Partnerships should always ask themselves, at the earliest opportunity, whether their offer can reinforce rather than duplicate existing efforts. This means thinking about the strength of existing infrastructures and how partners can best cooperate to support these or address any gaps.
- **Focusing on the groundwork.** Allowing enough time to involve all stakeholders and build partner's understanding and buy-in during design and development stages mitigates the risks of poor practices, weak relationships, and delays in delivery at later stages.

What were the challenges?

- LAs where there were few or no previous employability initiatives reported **slow uptake** of the ERI, which meant on average only 10 per cent of YESF jobs had been taken up three months into delivery.
- Given the top-down nature of the YESF and the rapid implementation time, LAs found it challenging to be ready to **launch the programme within the short timeframe**, particularly in those areas where there was a weak employability infrastructure.
- There was a perception that some LAs signed up to the YESF **lacking full understanding** of what it entailed operationally, as not all staff was consulted during design and development stages. This created added burden for LA officers who had to learn how to work against the targets retrospectively.
- There were capacity issues tied to the **administrative burden** of the YESF, with staff struggling to balance general administration with committing time to support employers to claim the ERI, which was generally a resource intensive activity.

Further reading

- Scottish Government, 2016, [Youth Employment Scotland Fund \(YESF\) Evaluation](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – The primary research for the evaluation consisted of four main phases of research with stakeholders, Local Authorities, employers and young people who were involved in the YESF. The study team conducted consultations with strategic and operational stakeholders, led in-depth qualitative engagement with twelve Local Authority areas, and analysed monitoring data from all 32 Local Authorities. Additionally, 50 employers and 40 young people took part in telephone surveys from a sample of 12 LAs, and a further 74 young people from 20 LAs responded to an online survey (for a total of just over 1% of all jobs provided through YESF). Five young people case studies were developed with young people of different ages, in different locations, who completed the ERI period of the job at different types of employer by type, sector and size.

Welsh Government – SIEL Project

What is it?

The SIEL Project was part of the Welsh Government £29 million ESF-funded Reach the Heights Programme, aimed at re-engaging NEET young people in education, training and employment destinations. The project ran between 2010 and 2013 and supported 12 youth offending teams (YOTs) across Wales to deliver additional, intensive support to young people involved in the criminal justice system to transition into EET destinations. The target group for the project were young people aged 11-19 on community orders, but three quarters (76 per cent) of participants on the programme were aged 16-19. The project was set up as a consortium, with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC) acting as the grant recipient, the social justice charity Nacro acting as project administrator and coordinator, and 12 participating YOTs delivering the programme through a dedicated key worker providing additional EET services.

What did it do?

The SIEL Project was built on the principle that young people who had been through the justice system had negative experiences in educational settings and required intensive support to overcome their aversion and re-engage positively with EET settings. The goal of the project was to provide additionality, beyond what the YOTs were already offering, and boost the coaching and mentoring young people were receiving, to provide a focused and person-centred offer with improved links to the support services that met their needs. While activities varied across YOTs, the core offer generally included enhanced basic skills and training provision, intensive 1-to-1 support, and tailored Careers Wales support and group work in some areas.

Core elements of the SIEL project included:

- **Enhanced partnership work** with local providers to identify and, where not already available, develop quality support, training and education provision tailored to the young person's needs. The key contribution of the project was to allow for more resources to be invested in improving capacity, joint working and communication across partners to provide carefully tailored provision for the specific needs of young people in the justice system, which also included advocacy and brokering of specialist support. This included dedicated staff working with young people, schools (to identify early on those at risk of disengaging from education), and specialist providers (including support and training services), to develop bespoke action plans.
- **The SIEL keyworkers**, who had a strong background working in the local communities, as teachers, youth workers, careers advisors, basic skills tutors or learning coaches, and had a strong knowledge of both the young people's needs and the local service provision. In three SIEL project areas in north and mid-west Wales, project staff was seconded from Careers Wales.
- **Co-location of services**, with SIEL staff often using YOT venues as the base for core activities and working out of partner venues to deliver additional activities (training partner, youth centre, work placement premises). Co-location was particularly important in more rural areas, where getting groups together and providing drop-in facilities was more challenging and project staff travelled to the young people's local communities and worked with them 1-to-1 in a local and familiar setting.

What were the outcomes?

The SIEL (YG) Project engaged 919 young people aged 11-19, of which the majority were aged 16-19 (76 per cent). This was 68 per cent of the project target for engagement, with wide variations across project areas, with some reaching 96 per cent and others only 31 per cent. The challenges in meeting targets can be partly explained by the difficulty in sustaining the engagement of young people in the justice system, who face complex barriers to EET, and partly by the wide variation across local areas in terms of available provision and adequate infrastructure to engage with young people. In terms of outcomes, just under a third entered further learning or returned to education (30 per cent), eight per cent entered employment, and two per cent gained basic skills qualifications. Among young people aged 16 and over, entry into an EET destination raised to 38 per cent of the cohort. A further 30 per cent of participants was recorded as having achieved a positive outcome beyond EET destinations (eg. attending a job or college interview). However, YOTs did not use a standardised approach to how they recorded outcomes data, which strongly limited comparability.

What worked well?

- The focus on a **'young person' centred approach**, where practitioners put working at the young person's pace and level at the core of their work, and co-developed participants' journeys with them.
- The **thorough assessments** of young people's needs and consequent joint-up approach to support, ensuring young people had simultaneously and promptly access to a wide range of provision, from homelessness and drug abuse to training.
- Improved **communication and information sharing** with partners, which helped increase the range and quality of provision available to young people and help mainstream providers develop a tailored offer for young people in the justice system.
- The project's ability to **respond to local need**, identifying gaps in support to help the youth justice population engage in EET, and developing bespoke and locally tailored approaches to filling those gaps, working with young people, schools, and providers.
- Regular **multi-agency meetings** in a number of areas helped strengthen relationships, build trust and confidence across a wide range of partners, including Careers Wales, training providers, colleges, schools and the local education authority. Some of the institutional arrangements born from this approach stayed in place following the end of the SIEL Project.
- **Enhanced in-work support** once the young person was engaged in education or training, through ongoing informal support, guidance, and advice.

What were the challenges?

- **Lack of clarity around accountability** and responsibilities for decision-making, during the early stages of the project which caused delays. This included decision-making moving from one strategic partner to another, decisions changing, not being communicated promptly, or being unclear.
- The **monitoring and evaluation** arrangements for the project were **prescriptive and inflexible** due to the ESF requirements. This meant that a number of positive outcomes, including achievement of some qualifications, did not count as such according to ESF criteria and could not be registered beyond the generic 'other positive outcome'.
- Increased **learning and sharing** across project areas, including of good practice, resources and tools, might have improved the overall co-ordination of the project.

Key messages

- **Creating added value.** The strongpoint of partnership work is to provide resources that otherwise would not be available and enhance support pathways for young people in doing so. Building on existing service capacity and providing resources to help strengthen multi-agency work and source additional provision is key to this goal.
- **Drawing on community knowledge.** Partnerships that are able to tap into community resources, such as through experienced and local staff with a strong knowledge of both existing provision and young people's needs, are more likely to develop better outreach and holistic support and achieve increased impact.
- **Joining forces to reach deeper.** Investing in joint approaches, such as through co-location and drop-in services, can help partnerships reach target groups which would otherwise be hard to engage, such as young people in rural or more deprived areas of the community.

■ Rethinking learning processes.

Challenges in monitoring and evaluation and lack of learning and sharing opportunities highlight the need to carefully think and plan how partnerships carry out learning processes to ensure learning opportunities are maximised, both in capturing and registering data and in sharing information.

Further reading

- Aspinwall T., Butler D., Crowley A., Smai P., 2013, [Evaluation of the Support into Education and Learning \(Youth Justice\) Project](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – The evaluation design incorporated a range of qualitative and quantitative methods including: analysis of monitoring data, interviews with the 11 SIEL practitioners and managers from the YOTs involved in the project, interviews with 32 young people who had received support from one of the 11 projects, and input from a further nine young people via an advisory group and a workshop (total of 41 young people). Interviews were also conducted with Nacro, the Welsh Government and the Youth Justice Board as members of the SIEL project steering group. A survey of YOTs in the non-convergence areas and follow up telephone interviews were carried out, as well as interviews with seven local education or training providers and Careers Wales staff, two regional focus groups with practitioners, and a group session with young people who had been involved with the project.

Welsh Government – Getting Ahead Programme

What is it?

The Getting Ahead Symud Ymlaen / Moving Forward (SY/MF) programme was a £4.8 million Welsh Government initiative, delivered across Wales between 2013 and 2016. The programme was designed to support young people who were NEET, aged 16-18, and who had been in care or were known to the Youth Offending Services (YOS), to help them transition into EET destinations. This group was not being sufficiently supported through existing mainstream provision, which lacked adequate specialist support. A partnership of third sector providers with experience of providing employability and employment support for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people led the programme. A common model was followed across all project areas, which also accounted for flexibility to adapt to local needs.

What did it do?

The young people who engaged on the SY/MF Programme had at least one or more complex circumstances, generally including a history of poor school attendance and behaviour, poor levels of skills and qualifications, with some also being homeless or in temporary accommodation. This was compounded by a range of risk factors for many, including histories of violence to people or properties, alcohol and substance abuse, and poor mental health.

The core project offer provided through the SY/MF Programme was a preparatory eight-to-thirteen-week employability and essential skills course, followed by a six-month work placement, paid at minimum wage for 25 hours per week, matched against participants' needs and aspirations. Throughout participation on the programme, the young people were supported by a dedicated Employment Liaison Officer (ELO) from one of the core partner organisations, which was responsible for providing individualised support to participants and liaise with providers and employers to source tailored opportunities for the young people. Young people were also matched to a volunteer mentor, who provided informal in-work and post-participation support.

The programme, set up as a partnership of third sector organisations, was led and overseen by the homeless charity Llamau, who was also responsible for delivery in South East and North Wales, and the other core partners included:

- Gisda, a charity addressing homelessness across North Wales, delivering the programme in North West Wales.
- Centre for Business and Social Action (CBSA), one of Wales' largest business membership organisations, delivering the programme in South-West and Mid Wales.
- Construction Youth Trust (CYT), a charity supporting disadvantaged young people into the construction industry, sourcing and supporting work placements alongside CBSA.
- Sova, a charity working in youth crime prevention, managing referrals and recruitment, and training and managing the volunteer mentors.

Throughout the programme, partners collaborated closely to ensure flexibility to accommodate and arrange local provision, building on each others' networks and connections, and to improve delivery as the programme developed. Strong, and often pre-existing relationships with local referral agencies were a key factor, and referral levels were highest where delivery partners and referrers worked out of the same building, often in an accessible learning centre, and could have frequent face to face communication.

Effective joined up work was a key element to the programme as, when young people became ready to progress into a placement, the opportunity needed to be sourced quickly to minimise risk of disengagement. This required efforts on ELOs' part to source opportunities which were readily available and reflected participants' preferences as closely as possible. Close cooperation with CBSA and CYT as well as a range of local partners and businesses was key to both ensure opportunities were available and suited to the young people and that the young people were ready to take them.

Placements were sourced locally, and were mainly in retail, construction, hospitality and catering services, with many retail opportunities being offered by the charities that were linked to the partnership through their networks. The programme sourced a good range of work placements and focused on identifying placements individually rather than relying on a bank of employers, to improve tailoring to participants' needs. In addition to brokering opportunities with employers, ELOs also provided advice and support to employers to help them manage the young people on the placements, and ensured young people were being provided in-work training. As the programme progressed, ELOs developed stronger relationships to employers and mainly sourced placements through employers who had participated in the programme previously.

What were the outcomes?

Of the 1,096 young people referred to the programme, 933 engaged (85 per cent), exceeding programme targets for both referrals and engagements. Of those who engaged, 453 started placement, or 83 percent of the original target, representing almost half (48 per cent) of all those who engaged. In terms of qualifications achievement, 67 per cent of those who engaged also achieved an Essential Skills Wales qualification. For work placements, 103 per cent of the target started a placement and 83 per cent completed the full 26 weeks of the placement. Of those completing the placement, over half (55 per cent) progressed into employment, while another 8 per cent moved into further training and 3 per cent started volunteering. Therefore, a notable two thirds of participants who completed the programme moved into an EET destination. Among those who left early, 21 per cent had done so to progress to an EET destination.

What worked well?

- **Strong relationships** between delivery partners and referrers, often based on pre-existing contact and co-location of services out of a single, well-known community venue.
- The **bespoke and flexible** nature of the support offered to young people, focused on influencing attitudes and behaviours, and delivered in familiar and welcoming environments, on a one-to-one or small group basis.
- **Working closely with employers**, brokering opportunities, helping them to tailor placements, offering continued support, sustaining frequent communication to discuss challenges they or the young people were facing, and supporting them to use flexible approaches.
- ELOs efforts to help young people **prepare for the practicalities of the work environment** early on in the support journey, in advance of their placement.

What were the challenges?

Streamlining referral processes. Developing relationships with referral agencies early on, focusing on building awareness and understanding among referrers, and developing processes to jointly manage referrals, is key to ensuring partnerships target and engage young people who are more likely to benefit from the intervention. Where this doesn't happen, there are risks of wrong referrals, leading to young people disengaging or being left without support, or slow referral progress, due to lower buy-in from agencies.

Fostering supportive environments. The ability to respond rapidly following referral is key to maintaining interest and fostering engagement, and for developing trust between staff and young people. A networked approach to initial engagement, assessment, and planning, where partners join forces and share resources, can maximise efficiency, consistency of support, and facilitate access to the right provision. This principle also applies to employer engagement, with prompt, needs-focused and supportive engagement being key to encouraging positive behaviours and trust in the service.

Developing bespoke approaches. Interventions work best when they are bespoke, flexible, emphasise the development of positive attitudes, are inclusive, and are led in safe and welcoming settings. To do this effectively partners need to have strong relationships and communication, to tap into each other's resources and develop flexible and adaptable support, with a diverse range of provision. This allows for quick sourcing of the right opportunities, close and personalised relationships with young people and employers focused on their individual needs, and reduces the risk of disengagement.

Further reading

- ICF Consulting, 2014, [Evaluation of Getting Ahead: the Symud Ymlaen/ Moving Forward project](#)
- **Evaluation approach** – The approach included desk-based research, including a rolling literature review of initiatives to get young people back into work, analysis of secondary sources of data on youth unemployment and employment demand in Wales, a review of key Welsh Government policies and strategies related to youth unemployment, and a review of skills, training and employment programmes designed to intervene amongst young people in Wales. The evaluation also included analysis of SY/MF monitoring information, a stakeholder consultation involving in-depth interviews with 15 stakeholders involved in the design, management, and delivery and monitoring of SY/MF, and case studies in eight areas from across Wales to gain in-depth understanding of provision of SY/MF services.

NPTCBC – Engage Project

What is it?

The Engage Project was a three-year ESF-funded project run across South West Wales between 2009 and 2012, targeting young people aged 14-19 at risk of disengaging from education and those who were NEET. The project lead was Neath port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC), and core partners included the five other LAs across which the project was delivered, and five colleges across the region. The wider partnership included Careers Wales West (CWW), Youth Offending Teams, CAMHS, social services, and schools and colleges.

What did it do?

At the core of Engage were four key delivery areas, including the provision of intensive one to one support, specialist support in collaboration with external agencies, upskilling of learning coaches and youth workers, close collaboration with key referrers (PRUs, care leavers and youth offending teams), and the provision of an increased number of supported work placements and extended vocational provision.

Across project areas, beyond youth and outreach workers, a wide range of specialised staff was employed for the delivery of the project, with specific roles varying between areas. Some of the roles included, Keeping in Touch outreach workers, vulnerable pupils support workers, NEET youth workers, mentoring and work experience coordinators, restorative justice workers, education inclusion officers, and personal development mentors. The wide range of roles highlights the holistic, intensive, and coordinated nature of the Engage provision.

Among the collaborative work carried out by the Engage teams there was:

- Basing youth workers and restorative justice workers within schools to work alongside educators and PRUs to identify young people needing support and provide it in loco.
- Cooperation between Keeping in Touch outreach workers and CWW, as the primary source of referral into the programme.
- Support workers working alongside schools to assist them in the delivery of action plans for Engage participants.
- Joint work between Engage partners and secondary schools to develop transition support offers for young people leaving education.

In terms of governance and management, Engage was led at the strategic level by a regional Steering Group, including project co-ordinators from each area, and representatives from project sponsors. At the operational level, a Regional Delivery Team, comprising management staff from each of the partner organisations, met quarterly to discuss and address the operational elements of the project. A team based within NPTCBC managed the executive aspects of the project, and represented the Regional Project Management Team, which oversaw the financial and monitoring aspects of the project, and collated delivery information for each area, acting as a central point of contact between partners and the Welsh Government.

What were the outcomes?

Engage eligible areas outperformed non-Engage areas in Year 11 leavers known not to be in education training or employment with a 39 per cent reduction in NEETs between 2009-2011 in Engage areas compared to a 22 per cent reduction in non-engage areas. Additionally, the rate of permanent exclusions decreased by 27 per cent in Wales over the same period of time, with Engage areas accounting for over 60 per cent of the decrease, while the number had fallen by just 14 per cent in non-Engage areas. The rate of young people leaving education with no qualifications also decreased notably in Engage areas, with a 41 per cent decrease, compared to just 9 per cent in non-Engage areas.

What worked well?

- **Schools having a say** from the early stages of design and implementation on the type of support that would most add value to their existing work with vulnerable young people.
- **Effective data sharing** between colleges and local authorities (via school) to target transition provision to young people who most needed it, with good practices focused on increased comprehensiveness of the data and sharing frequency.
- **Strong links to CWW** in some project areas, which enabled partners to work in close collaboration and develop effective data sharing mechanisms, gaining access to CWW's high quality database.
- **Retaining local distinctiveness** while operating under a regional model, by allowing partners to build on existing local support infrastructures, and adapt provision to the geographical and economic needs of each area.
- **Effective partnership working** across some areas, and a desire among partners to retain the Engage model after the project ended, acknowledging it as an established regional partnership and facilitating the exploration of future funding opportunities.

What were the challenges?

- Frustrations with delivery have emerged in relation to **changing or unclear requirements** and definitions of outputs and results, and the need to retrospectively capture data as requirements were changed at later stages by the Lead Partner.
- **Delays in clarifying eligibility criteria** in some instances, leading to delays in delivery, cancellation of provision, and even the loss of some participants who became disengaged due to the waiting time.
- **Inconsistencies in measuring progression**, particularly of soft outcomes, due to a lack of a common approach, tied to the local distinctiveness of each project.
- **Structural changes** in a number of partners, the loss of a partner, and lack of clear guidance, constraining the ability of partners to deliver to target and leading to the re-profiling of targets.

Key Messages

- **Having the right processes in place.** Before delivery begins partners need to ensure all the right processes are in place, that staff across the partnership understands these, and that there are mechanisms in place to enable this knowledge to be passed over even in the instance of structural changes to the partnership. Partners should strive to keep these processes unchanged wherever possible, to enable consistency during delivery and minimise risks of inefficiencies as the project progresses.
- **Sharing resources.** From cross-project database through to data capture methods and mechanisms, resource-sharing is key to strengthening integrated partnership working. This includes embedding key measures in shared approaches and creating opportunities for delivery teams to network to share practice and experience at regular intervals during design and delivery. This enables the partnership to strengthen the intervention's evidence base, improve delivery through ongoing learning, and demonstrate impact.
- **Establishing shared protocols.** Particularly when it comes to data sharing, it is key that partners establish and agree on shared practices to enable consistent tracking and measuring of participants' journeys, outcomes and distance travelled during and after participation on the intervention. This is essential to understand if the partnership is effectively supporting its target groups, whether there is a need for tweaking the intervention, and whether there is continuity of support and positive destinations are sustained, so that the impact on service users is not lost following the end of participation.

Further reading

- Wavehill Ltd., 2013, [Engage Project Final Evaluation](#)
- **Evaluation approach** - The approach included a baseline phase, as well as interim and final phases. The baseline phase involved a series of one-to-one consultations with each delivery partner's project team to inform the development of the evaluation framework and to identify what evidence could and should be used to inform the evaluation. The interim and final phases have adopted similar approaches. Relevant documentation, at a policy and strategic level as well as specific, project related documentation was reviewed to place the evaluation in context. The Engage project co-ordinators for each of the partners were consulted and the research team attended several Engage delivery team meetings and sub-group meetings. As part of the final phase of the evaluation an additional online survey was distributed by delivery partners to organisations and staff with an "indirect" involvement for a total of 54 staff responses. Consultations were also undertaken as part of site visits with staff delivering Engage services, participants, and external providers within each of the local partners. A total of 138 participant engagements took place. The evaluation also reviewed project outputs and outcomes contained within quarterly monitoring and led analysis of additional indicators to assess the wider outcomes and impacts from the intervention.



