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Evaluation of the PLIAS Step Up programme

Final pilot evaluation report

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Acknowledgements

Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with a £90m endowment from the Reclaim Fund to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change.

PLIAS Resettlement is a community-based not-for-profit organisation and registered charity, located in the London Borough of Brent. Its support services are available to residents of the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow and other Boroughs in West London. PLIAS Resettlement was established in December 2005. Its main objective from the very beginning has been to provide numerous services, primarily targeting offenders and ex-offenders, in order to support their reintegration back into society. The Step Up programme is one of a range of services that PLIAS offers offering education, training and employment support to young people.

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource management. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For 50 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has around 50 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the internet. Our values infuse our work. We strive for excellence, to be collaborative and to bring curiosity to what we do. We work with integrity and treat people respectfully and with compassion.

The Policy Evaluation and Research Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University is a multi-disciplinary team of evaluators, economists, sociologists and criminologists. We specialise in evaluating policies, programmes and projects and advising national and local policy-makers on the development of evidence-informed policy. We work in the UK and Europe for clients and funders including UK government departments, local government, the voluntary sector and the European Commission. What makes our work distinct is our emphasis on methodological rigour, our knowledge of multiple methods, and our broad expertise across different sectors.

The authors would like to thank the staff at PLIAS who supported the evaluation; without their time and insights the evaluation would not have been possible. Tara Benedetti led programme delivery until January 2023 and was the main point of contact during the mobilisation period of the evaluation and the first phase of fieldwork. She was particularly generous with her time and insight. On her departure, Tom Chandler met regularly with the evaluation team. Siobhan Stewart facilitated the team's access to the programme data. We are grateful to the Step Up caseworkers who took part in interviews and also supported with the recruitment of young people and partners. Our thanks go especially to the young people who gave their time to talk to the evaluation team.

Our thanks also go to Youth Futures Foundation for funding this work, to continue our learning and understanding of the ways that disadvantaged young people can be supported into education, training and employment, and for ably steering the research process. In particular, we are grateful to Vera Stiefler Johnson, Jane Mackey, Jonah Champaud and Tanya Basi for their guidance on the evaluation as it progressed. This project benefited from the expertise of Zoe Gallagher and Ehecatl Hunt Duarte at IES in proofing and formatting the report and Clare Rainey for graphic design support and Elizabeth Davies Research Ltd for support with the literature review.

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Executive Summary

PLIAS Resettlement is a community-based organisation located in Brent. The organisation's objective is to provide services, primarily to those at risk of involvement or involved in the criminal justice system (CJS), to support their reintegration into society. It offers information, advice and guidance, mentoring and advocacy, employability skills training, construction health and safety training, employer brokerage and post-employment support through a range of programmes and funding streams.

PLIAS Resettlement was allocated £247,988 by Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) as part of an 'accelerated towards impact' evaluation of the Step Up programme. As part of its first What Works Programme, YFF commissioned 'accelerated towards impact' evaluations where programmes were deemed to have a longstanding support model that could be evidenced within a year.

The Step Up Programme

The Step Up programme was targeted at around 100 young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) and aged 16–24 who were either involved in, or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. The PLIAS team did not have a formal definition of these two groups at the start of the evaluation, and trying to develop greater understanding of the circumstances of young people to build definitions was a component of the research.

The programme aimed to support young people into sustainable education, employment and/or training (EET) outcomes by providing between 6 and 12 months of pre-work support, and up to 13 weeks of in-work support. During the pre-work support phase, Step Up intended to provide one-to-one casework support, information, advice and guidance and pastoral support, as well as employability skills workshops. Training for the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card could form part of the offer. The nature and intensity of support was intended to be tailored to each young person's needs. In-work support was designed to be delivered weekly or fortnightly, depending on each young person's needs.

Partner organisations made referrals into the Step Up programme and were able to provide wider support for programme participants around disclosure (for young people with criminal convictions) and education and training opportunities. Young people were also able to self-refer into the programme.

The Evaluation

This is a report of the findings from the evaluation of the Step Up programme. The main aims of the evaluation were to understand and evidence the theory underlying the Step

Up programme's support model and the mechanisms of change (i.e. the main drivers of outcomes).

The evaluation took a mixed methods theory-based approach. At the outset, the Theory of Change (ToC) was developed in collaboration with the PLIAS team, setting out how the programme was intended to be delivered and to achieve outcomes. It was refined at the end of the evaluation to reflect changes that were made during delivery. This report draws on programme management information data for participants engaged with the Step Up programme between October 2022 and March 2024, including outcomes data through to July 2024. The evaluation also included: qualitative interviews with the PLIAS managers and case workers (eight interviews in total, with some staff interviewed twice) and a total of 12 interviews with 10 young people, with matched case worker interviews for two of these; and eight delivery partners. Analysis of a sample of 30 case notes was also undertaken.

A feasibility study was conducted to understand the feasibility of evaluating Step Up using an impact evaluation. These findings were explored in a separate report.

Summary of Study Findings

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FINDINGS
<p>How was the programme implemented?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, a total of 114 young people started on the Step Up programme from across six London Boroughs. Over two-thirds (78 young people, 68%) were living in Brent, reflecting PLIAS's longstanding work in this borough. The majority of participants were male (98 young people, 86%). Participants represented a range of ethnic backgrounds. Three-quarters of participants were considered to be at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. The 'at risk' group was broad and included young people with wide-ranging characteristics and in varying circumstances. This included factors such as physical ill health, having been excluded or suspended from school or having a previous criminal conviction. Referrals into the Step Up programme most commonly came from Jobcentre Plus (56 young people, 49%) and self-referral (26 young people, 23%). However, referrals came from 18 separate sources in total. This included some

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FINDINGS
	<p>referrals from Youth Offending and Probation Services that were part of a court order which mandated engagement for a series of sessions on how and when to appropriately disclose a criminal conviction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There were two case workers on the Step Up programme, each with a caseload of over 50 young people over the duration of the programme. In practice, this meant that on average they had between 30 and 40 young people on their caseload. ● The evaluation found that some aspects of the Step Up model were delivered as intended. The model offered personalised support, which was generally tailored according to the interests and needs of young people. For young people involved in the criminal justice system, there was education related to employment and disclosure of their criminal record. ● However, case working varied from plan due to staff attrition. Some young people had a change of case worker twice in just a few months. New staff had to build rapport and trust with young people, which was challenging and in some cases, momentum in the support journey was lost. ● Overall, a high proportion of young people disengaged earlier than anticipated from support: 11 young people (10%) withdrew due to personal circumstances and 67 young people (59%) stopped engaging with their case worker. This included some young people who disengaged before receiving six months of support. ● Interviews and case notes indicated that the duration of support ranged from just a few weeks to up to 12 months. ● For most young people who stayed on the programme, support tended to be focused on training for a CSCS card and employability skills training, or employability support for individuals interested in careers outside of construction such as security or retail. There was also some evidence of in-work support developing young people's skills to aid progression, and to identify alternative roles or industries

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FINDINGS
	<p>that would facilitate healthier working lives. These examples were limited, which suggests this was not a major focus of the programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership working with external organisations to meet wider needs such as budgeting, health and drug and alcohol misuse, was relatively limited. Some signposting and referrals took place but this was not widespread. Further referrals were often not appropriate because young people already had many agencies involved in their support and did not want contact with additional services. • The delivery team invested time and effort in building partner and employer contacts and networks where possible. However, this work was limited and relatively small-scale as most of their time had to be spent on one-to-one support of young people. • The programme reached its intended target groups: 75% of participants were classified as 'at risk' of involvement and 25% were involved with the CJS. However, across both of these groups there were high rates of disengagement and a relatively narrow range of support provided (focused on CSCS card training and employability skills support with no enrichment activities and fewer referrals to wider support than planned). This suggests a potential mismatch between young people's needs and the programme offer.
<p>What were the short-term outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is some limited evidence from quantitative and qualitative data sources that the programme has: supported young people to obtain precursors to EET outcomes (such as NI numbers, IDs, CSCS cards and Level 1 qualifications) and improved employability skills. • Evidence on short-term outcomes is more mixed regarding changes in confidence; relationships with family members; and a more positive attitude to possible future pathways. For most of these (such as those measured through motivation, agency, hope, resilience, wellbeing and impulsivity), some positive changes could be observed in

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FINDINGS
	<p>qualitative data, but this was not emulated in the quantitative data.</p>
<p>What were the medium-term outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Step Up programme demonstrated some limited evidence of EET outcomes for young people. One-quarter of participants (28 young people, 25%) achieved a Level 1, 2 or 3 qualification and over one-third (42 young people, 37%) moved into employment or an apprenticeship. ● The evaluation was unable to identify which sub-groups of participants benefited most from the Step Up programme due to limited sample sizes in the quantitative and qualitative research, and the breadth of at risk categories. ● Most of those involved in the criminal justice system were recorded as having left early due to non-engagement. This highlights the significant challenges of engaging and supporting young people involved in the criminal justice system towards employments and suggests a different, potentially more intensive approach, was required.
<p>What were the mechanisms of change?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Several of the key mechanisms within the Step Up programme theory relied on capitalising on a strong, positive relationship between a case worker and a young person. However, the case worker staffing changes affected young people's engagement and meant these mechanisms were not always delivered as intended. ● It was anticipated that other key mechanisms would be case workers educating employers and advocating on behalf of young people and case workers being able to link up other services to help address a full range of needs. In practice, there was limited resource to lead work on this.
<p>What were the lessons for future delivery?</p>	<p>In future programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consideration should be given to how staff retention can be maximised, offering as far as possible pay and terms

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FINDINGS
	<p>and conditions that are more competitive in the local labour market and long-term contracts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tailored one-to-one support needs to be a consistent feature of all participant journeys and it could usefully have a greater emphasis on identifying and building on young people's strengths, assets and interests. ● An alternative model should be developed and tested for young people involved in the criminal justice system as the high rates of disengagement suggested the current programme did not meet their needs. ● Consideration could be given to introducing a partnership management role. ● There could be exploration of whether the model needs to be differentiated for the younger age group of 16–17-year-olds compared to over 18s.

1. Introduction

Background

Insights published by the Greater London Authority's City Intelligence Unit highlight the link between high rates of unemployment and involvement in crime, in particular violent crimes.¹ This phenomenon was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted young people aged 16–24. Industries such as hospitality and retail ceased operation for extended durations and pushed high volumes of young people into unemployment. During this time, Universal Credit (UC) claims increased by 130% across London, with the highest increases seen in the five boroughs with the highest rates of youth violent crimes.

Research conducted by the Metropolitan Police² summarised a range of risk factors young people face ahead of becoming involved, or further involved, in crime and the criminal justice system. These risk factors are present across individual, familial, social and societal levels of their lives and include poor mental health, addiction, growing up in a household experiencing poverty, disengagement from and/or poor experiences of education, living in a community with high levels of criminal activity, and a lack of opportunities.

Further, data published by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) shows over one-quarter of people with convictions reoffend within one year,³ while entering employment is evidenced to reduce the likelihood of reoffending following release from prison.⁴ Despite this, people with convictions have the lowest interview to job outcome conversion rates,⁵ and just 17% of those leaving prison enter employment within six months of release.³ above

In July 2022, The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) was commissioned by the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) to conduct an evaluation and feasibility study of PLIAS Resettlement's Step Up programme. Step Up supports 16–24 year olds (in touch with, or at risk of engaging in the criminal justice system) into and toward employment, education and/or training (EET).

As part of its 'What Works Programme'⁶ YFF provides development grants to youth organisations. These grants are considered to be for the 'capacity building' stage of the

¹ Greater London Authority: Mayor reveals driving factors behind violence affecting young people (2021)

² Met Police: A Problem Profile of Violence, Gangs and Young People (2022)

³ Ministry of Justice: Proven reoffending statistics: April to June 2022 (2024)

⁴ Ministry of Justice: Analysis of the impact of employment on re-offending following release from custody, using Propensity Score Matching (2013)

⁵ Working Chance: Progress and Prejudice (2022)

⁶ Youth Futures Foundation: 'What Works Programme'

Youth Futures Foundation evaluation journey, which precedes the impact pilot and impact efficacy stages. There are typically three types of evaluation approach for development grants: bespoke evaluation support, programme concept testing and accelerated towards impact evaluation. The accelerated towards impact approach is used where a programme, such as this delivered by PLIAS Resettlement, has a longstanding support model that can be evidenced in its first year. Evaluators work with grantees to establish a programme theory and to test the programme ahead of any full scale impact study. PLIAS Resettlement was allocated £247,988.47 by the Youth Futures Foundation as part of an accelerated towards impact grant.

Programme

PLIAS Resettlement is a community-based organisation located in Brent, operating across six London Boroughs (Brent, Barnet, Harrow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon and Ealing). The organisation was established in 2005 with an objective to provide services, primarily to those at risk of involvement or involved in the criminal justice system, to support their reintegration into society. It offers information, advice and guidance, mentoring and advocacy, employability skills training, construction health and safety training, employer brokerage and post-employment support through a range of programmes and funding streams.

The Step Up programme delivered by PLIAS Resettlement was designed to deliver 6–12 months of holistic support to around 100 young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) and aged 16–24 who are either involved in, or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. In practice, most participants were aged over 18 (79.8%) and at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system, rather than involved (74.6%). The PLIAS team did not have a formal definition of these two groups at the start of the evaluation, and developing greater understanding of the circumstances of young people to build definitions was a component of the evaluation (see Methods section). It was anticipated that between 65 and 70% of the cohort would be from an ethnic minority group, and around 70% would have committed a serious offence relating to violence and/or possession of an offensive weapon.⁷ Based on previous experiences of delivering to this cohort, PLIAS expected support needs to be broad, including gang involvement⁸/affiliation, growing up/living in a household experiencing poverty, low

⁷ These figures were identified by PLIAS and based on Management Information from PLIAS's previous experience of delivering similar programmes in the same boroughs.

⁸ It should be noted that the language of gang involvement and use of the term 'gang' has been criticised by some as being an unhelpful label that risks perpetuating racism. Critics point to the fact there is confusion over what activities constitute a 'gang' and that, most importantly, it has racialised connotations, with 'gangs' historically linked to black, Asian and minority ethnic young men. This risks the label of 'gang' being applied to all black, Asian and minority ethnic young men and criminal activity by groups of predominantly white young people not being included in the definition of 'gangs' – see for example '(Re)-Thinking 'Gangs'', Claire Alexander, Runnymede Trust, 2008; and *Isn't it time for forensic psychologists to stop using the term 'gang'*, Jolene Taylor, Forensic Update 144, 2023, The British Psychological Society.

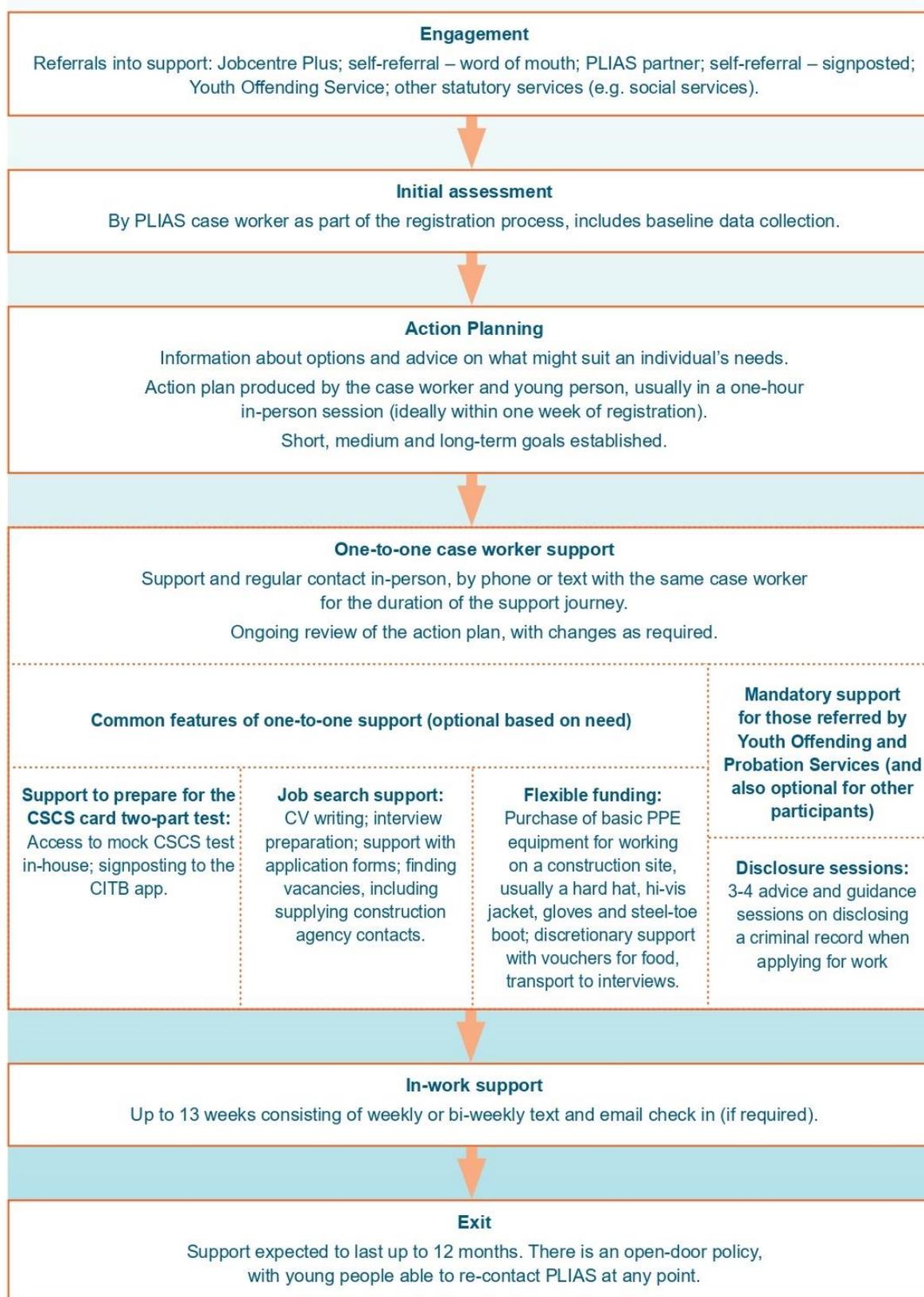
educational attainment, experiences of school exclusion and/or alternative provision, substance misuse and poor mental health.

The programme aimed to support young people into sustained education, employment and/or training (EET) outcomes by providing between 6 and 12 months of pre-work support, and up to 13 weeks of in-work support. During the 6–12 months of pre-work support, Step Up intended to provide one-to-one casework support, information, advice and guidance and pastoral support, as well as employability skills workshops. It was envisaged that the support would lead to short-term outcomes around improved confidence, relationships with family members, employability skills and increased hope and positivity about possible future pathways, as part of the pathway to education and employment. In-work support was designed to be delivered weekly or fortnightly, depending on each young person's needs. If a young person did not sustain employment for 13 weeks,⁹ Step Up case workers could re-engage young people in pre-work support in order to provide additional one-to-one casework support until they achieved another job outcome. At this point, a young person would receive in-work support again lasting up to 13 weeks. The Theory of Change (ToC) underpinning the Step Up programme is outlined in Chapter 3 of this report.

Partner organisations (for example, Jobcentre Plus, Youth Offending Services, local and community organisations) made referrals into the Step Up programme and were also able to provide wider support for programme participants around disclosure (for young people with criminal convictions) and education and training opportunities. Young people were also able to self-refer into the programme. The participant journey map for the Step Up programme is displayed in Figure 1.

⁹ The measure of 13 weeks for a sustained outcome was agreed between Youth Futures Foundation and PLIAS prior to the commissioning of the evaluators. 13 weeks is a common indicator of sustained employment outcomes for young people in the literature and is frequently used in YFF evaluations.

Figure 1: Step Up Programme participant journey



The nature and intensity of support was intended to be tailored to each young person's needs. Participants entered the programme with varying levels of education, interests and experiences of work, and several had additional support needs they were addressing while moving toward work. The programme was largely voluntary, however some referrals from the Metropolitan Police and Youth Offending Services (YOS) were part of a court order which mandated engagement for a series of disclosure sessions. Disclosure sessions provided education on how and when to appropriately disclose a criminal conviction to a prospective employer. These sessions were also offered to any participants who self-disclosed a criminal conviction.

Evaluation Aims

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES), in partnership with Kevin Wong, Reader in Community Justice at the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University, were awarded grant funding to evaluate PLIAS Resettlement's Step Up programme. The evaluation consisted of three key stages: a scoping and mobilisation phase to support development of the programme's existing ToC; a theory informed process study to explore the views of those involved in delivering the support, and those receiving the support; and an exploration of the feasibility of a future impact study.

This report outlines the theory underpinning the programme and the process study. The key aims underpinning the study were to:

- Fully understand the underlying ToC of the Step Up programme and the critical drivers/mechanisms of change.
- Evidence the ToC in consistent data to understand the pathways and drivers of outcomes, which elements of the model are most effective and the impact of contextual factors on outcomes. This included short-term outcomes associated with reduced crime and reoffending behaviours.
- Capture a rich understanding of how and why participants achieve outcomes from the programme.
- Understand which participants do and do not achieve outcomes and what the most important triggers of outcomes are.
- Use ongoing evaluation findings to support PLIAS Resettlement to understand which elements of delivery work most effectively, and to refine practice to support further achievement of education, employment and training outcomes.

The aims of the impact feasibility study, not intended to be published but used to inform YFF's funding decisions, were to:

- Understand the intervention feasibility of the programme.

- To provide recommendations for and assess the feasibility of a future impact evaluation.

About this report

- Chapter 2 – Methodology. This chapter explores the ToC development, as well as the methods and key data sources used in the process evaluation
- Chapter 3 – Programme Theory. This chapter outlines the ToC underpinning the programme.
- Chapters 4, 5 and 6 – Findings. These chapters outline the findings from the process evaluation, including the operation of the model in practice and participant experiences and outcomes of the programme.
- Chapter 7 – Final Theory of Change. This chapter outlines the final ToC underpinning the programme, with amendments informed by evaluation findings.
- Chapter 8 – Conclusions. This chapter provides a summary of key findings, as well as lessons for future delivery.
- The Appendices include: the evaluation timetable; literature review references; risk factors used to identify the programme's target population; the Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) tool; discussion guides; the Privacy Information Notice (PIN); research information briefings.

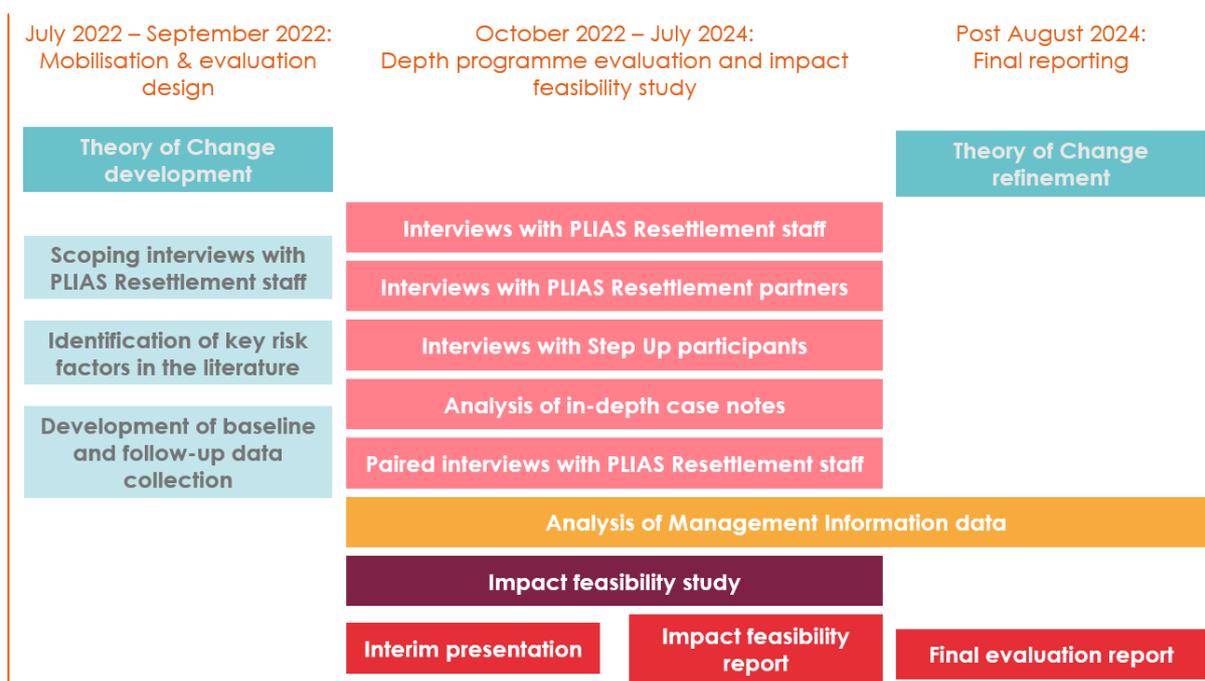
2. Methods

Overview of methods and research questions

This evaluation utilised a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative data collected through Management Information (MI) systems and qualitative data collected through interviews with PLIAS Resettlement staff, Step Up programme participants and partner organisations. In addition to interviews, programme participant case notes were explored to provide further insight into the range of journeys young people experienced with support from Step Up.

An overview of the methods used is displayed in Figure 2, and a timeline of the planned evaluation is displayed in Appendix 1: Evaluation timetable.

Figure 2: Evaluation Methodology



Source: IES, 2024

Purposive Literature Review

To inform the development of a Theory of Change (ToC) and the development of the Step Up Management Information data, a purposive literature review was carried out. This focused on a review of reviews - Rapid Evidence Assessments and meta-analyses on mentoring and other means of engaging and supporting people with criminal convictions, with some papers centring on education and training and young people. A

total of 14 papers were selected for review, references for which are included in Appendix 2: Purposive literature review references. For each of the selected papers, key information was summarised and extracted into a framework that covered: methods used and limitation; evidence rating (strong/moderate/poor); countries/areas covered; target groups in scope; summary of evidence on activities, outputs, facilitators/barriers to change; intermediate outcomes achieved; employment, education and training outcomes and measures for these, including differences for any participant groups or intervention types; conclusions and recommendations.

Theory of Change development

The evaluation team developed a Theory of Change (ToC) articulating the Step Up programme's intention. The ToC was developed based on a review of key programme documentation, the literature mentioned above, interviews with PLIAS Resettlement staff and a workshop with the programme team in September 2022. This initial ToC is presented and discussed in Chapter 3.

The Theory of Change was further reviewed and refined following the delivery period to incorporate insights captured through the process evaluation, as well as changes made to delivery throughout the programme. The final ToC, with refinements, is discussed and presented in Chapter 7.

Data Collection

Table 1 below summarises the main sources of data for the evaluation, including the target and achieved sample size, how this compares to the total population and the main limitations of each data source. This section then describes the approach to data collection for each of these data sources.

Table 1: Summary of primary data sources used in the evaluation

Data source	Target sample no.	Achieved sample (N out of 114)	Achieved sample (% of total population)	Summary of limitations of data source
MI data – participant characteristics and baseline data on key outcomes	114	114	100% of all participants	None - high levels of completion

Data source	Target sample no.	Achieved sample (N out of 114)	Achieved sample (% of total population)	Summary of limitations of data source
MI data – endline data on key outcomes	114	67–71	59% to 62% of all participants (range across 21 questions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Risk of selection bias ● Sub-group analysis not possible. ● Endline data not collected at consistent timepoint.
Telephone interviews with PLIAS manager and case workers	8	8	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None - all key staff were interviewed at least once and some twice.
Telephone interviews with young people	20	10 young people (12 interviews)	9% of all participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited insights into variation in participant journeys and outcomes, including those who disengaged or who quickly achieved an outcome. ● Risk of selection bias as participation was voluntary.

Data source	Target sample no.	Achieved sample (N out of 114)	Achieved sample (% of total population)	Summary of limitations of data source
Matched case worker interviews	6	2	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited cases where we can drill down to understand journeys and outcomes in depth.
Telephone interviews with partners	12-20 (depending on extent of partnership working)	8	% unknown as total no. partners unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspectives of key referral partners missing. Perspectives of partners to whom Step Up case workers made referrals missing.
Analysis of case notes	30	30	26% of all participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young person's voice and experience not captured.

Management Information (MI) data

PLIAS Resettlement used Charity Log to collect, store and manage participant data. Using this database, case workers were able to record young people's personal information (for example, their gender, age, ethnicity and whether they were in touch with or at risk of entering the criminal justice system), their support needs (such as risk factors, housing circumstances and self-reported vulnerabilities related to finances, addiction or gambling), as well as information on the support received and outcomes achieved. Included in this was a series of five questions exploring participants' perceptions of their own employability. Case workers gathered most of this information

through their one-to-one conversations with young people and then recorded the information afterwards on the database.

Data used in this report includes all participants engaged with the Step Up programme between October 2022 and March 2024, including outcome tracking through to July 2024. An outline of the full cohort is presented in Chapter 4.

At the start of the evaluation, the PLIAS team did not have a formal definition for the two key target groups: those 'involved' or 'at risk' of being involved in the criminal justice system. During the set up and mobilisation phase of the current pilot study, the evaluation team discussed with PLIAS staff what 'at risk' might mean and devised a long list of potential risk factors. This was reviewed in light of the literature on risk and protective factors (see sub-section on 'purposive literature review' above). Following the literature review, the evaluation team refined the long-list of risk and protective factors discussed by the PLIAS team and agreed a shorter list of factors that were included in the MI for the current evaluation (See Appendix 3: Risk factors for being involved in the criminal justice system for the long and short list of risk factors that were identified). The short list included risks that were identified in the key literature sources reviewed. In order to make data gathering and recording practicable, some related risks were clustered under a single heading. The aim was to test whether the PLIAS team was able to systematically gather and record data on these factors and to help PLIAS to better understand the circumstances of the 'at risk' young people they work with and build a definition of this group. For the group of young people who are involved in the criminal justice system, there were also no inclusion or exclusion criteria based on a definition. PLIAS reported that it works with all young people, regardless of the type of offence committed and that the types of sentences range from out of court disposals such as cautions to custodial¹⁰ sentences. The evaluation team therefore worked with PLIAS to capture types of offences committed and sentences received by Step Up participants within the MI data. Again, the aim was to test whether it was possible to collect this data systematically to build understanding about the needs and characteristics of the target group.

In addition, the Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) was included in the MI. This instrument was developed in 2019, with funding from the HM Prison and Probation Service, by an independent research team led by RAND Europe, in partnership with ARCS (UK) and the University of South Wales. The IOMI was designed to capture intermediate outcomes directly or indirectly associated with reductions in offending for those taking part in mentoring or arts interventions for people with

¹⁰ A custodial sentence is a period of time spent in prison. Imprisonment is the most severe sentence available in the courts and reserved for the most serious offences, where 'neither a fine alone nor a community sentence can be justified for the offence' (section 230 (2) of the Sentencing Code).

convictions.¹¹ It measures an individual's change over time in relation to a number of 'dimensions', each associated with crime and reoffending behaviours.¹² These include; resilience, wellbeing, agency, impulsivity, motivation to change, hope and interpersonal trust. An additional eight questions, named the 'practical problems' dimension are also included, which capture data on challenges with money, employment, health and fitness, housing, drugs, alcohol, relationships and gambling. This tool was selected by the evaluation team because the outcomes mapped well onto the ToC and although the IOMI has not undergone full validity and reliability testing, the results of initial testing were reported to be positive.¹³ Case workers administered the IOMI on behalf of the evaluation, integrating its use into support sessions. They asked young people the IOMI questions and recorded their responses, rather than young people independently self-completing the questionnaire. This approach was taken to maximise response and to address concerns among the delivery team that asking young people to complete the tool independently might affect their engagement with the programme at a very early stage. However, this does introduce limitations (see below).

The IOMI was intended to be administered to participants within 1–2 weeks of registration and four months after registration. This timeframe was agreed between the evaluation team and PLIAS, based primarily on the delivery team's previous experience of short-term outcomes being realised within four months. In addition, for those who entered into employment or an apprenticeship, case workers were asked to re-administer the questionnaire at 11–12 weeks after entry to employment and for those who did not achieve an employment or apprenticeship outcome, after 12 months of support.

In practice, the dates when endline IOMI data was gathered varied. The largest number of participants (41, 58%) completed their endline assessment between three and six months after their initial assessment, and a further 14 (20%) completed their endline assessment between six and nine months after their initial assessment. Eleven young people (16%) completed their endline assessment within their first three months of completing their baseline assessment. It had been anticipated that some young people would have IOMI data at three timepoints. For example, for those who stayed on the programme without achieving an outcome, it had been planned there would be

¹¹ *Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) toolkit - Guidance notes*, 2019. Mark Liddle, in collaboration with Emma Disley, Mike Maguire, Rosie Meek, and Judy Renshaw. London: Ministry of Justice Analytical Services, HM Prison and Probation Services.

According to the IOMI guidance, although the tool was designed to be used primarily with adult offenders, the evidence gathered during the design and consultation work suggested the instrument was applicable to a wider range of groups, including people at risk of offending or other marginalised/vulnerable groups. The guidance notes that it appears the instrument is accessible across age ranges and the instrument design team took care to ensure that the piloting included providers who worked with young people. Nonetheless, full analysis of the reliability of the tool for use with young people was not carried out.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

baseline data, interim data at four months and then endline data at 12 months. However, where endline data was provided for participants, there was only one set of data, meaning more detailed analysis of progress over time could not be carried out.

The 21 questions forming the seven core dimensions of the IOMI tool are displayed in Appendix 4: Intermediate Outcome Measurement Instrument (IOMI) tool.

The completeness of programme MI data varied across fields. Table 2 summarises the number of programme participants with completed information for key sections of the MI data.

Table 2: Data completeness for key fields

Data field	N	% of programme participants
Demographics	114	100%
Referral route into Step Up	114	100%
Personal circumstances (incl. involvement in the criminal justice system)	114	100%
Perceptions of employability – 5 questions (baseline)	114	100%
Perceptions of employability – 5 questions (endline)	66–71	58–62%*
IOMI – 21 questions (baseline)	114	100%
IOMI – 21 questions (endline)	67–71	59–62%*

*Each of the questions relating to employability and the IOMI domains had slightly different levels of data completion. We have summarised by providing the range in this table.

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

In addition, it is important to note that the MI data intended to capture the most recent date of contact between a case worker and a participant, so that the duration of support could be calculated. However, in practice, this data was not usable because

the delivery team recorded the date of the endline IOMI data capture rather than the most recent contact for support purposes.

Interviews with PLIAS Resettlement staff

At three time points (August 2022, March 2023 and April 2024) in the delivery period IES conducted qualitative interviews with PLIAS Resettlement staff, including programme case workers and the project lead. Interviews covered the successes and challenges associated with programme delivery, any changes to the support offer, outcomes being achieved by programme participants and any improvements that could be made to the programme. Staff were invited to interview via email.

In total, eight interviews were conducted with PLIAS Resettlement staff across the evaluation. This included three interviews with a project manager or lead and five caseworker interviews. This meant that all key staff were interviewed at least once and typically twice or more.

In addition, during the evaluation, fortnightly meetings were held between the evaluation team, the PLIAS delivery team and YFF. During these online meetings, the PLIAS team fed back on implementation, including what was going well and less well. Progress with evaluation activities was also discussed.

Interviews with Step Up participants

The evaluation planned to engage a total of 20 young people in qualitative research in order to understand a range of support experiences and journeys among Step Up participants. The evaluation had originally been designed to carry out interviews with young people at three timepoints: December 2022 to January 2023; October 2023 and March to April 2024. This phased design was intended to enable interviews with young people who joined the programme at different time points (as we expected programme delivery might adapt over time) and who were at different stages of their support journey.

Programme participants were recruited to qualitative interviews by Step Up case workers. IES shared research information sheets, outlining what the interview would cover and their rights in taking part, with case workers, who used these as a tool to discuss the interview with young people. The evaluation team briefed the PLIAS team that the recruited sample should include a range of young people, with varying ages, levels of prior qualifications and genders, and those involved with and at risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice team. When a case worker had secured consent for contact details to be passed to IES, researchers arranged interviews. Planned recruitment processes did not differ for participants aged 16–17.

It was originally intended that the interviews would take place face-to-face on PLIAS premises but the PLIAS delivery team provided feedback that this appeared to be putting off potential interviewees and that telephone interviews would provide greater

flexibility and therefore maximise participation. Consequently, interviews took place by telephone and lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. The interviews captured participants' views on their experiences of engaging with the support and how the programme was supporting them to work towards their goals. A £30 incentive was offered.

In practice, a total of 12 interviews took place at two time points, three months after the programme commenced and during the final six months of programme delivery. Eight young people took part in one interview (at either time point) and two young people agreed to take part in longitudinal interviews and spoke to the research team at both time points.

Interviewees reflected a range of demographics and personal circumstances. There were six males and four females in the sample, all of whom were aged between 18 and 24. Data on interviewees' ethnicity was not collected. The majority had previous work experience and were living at home with family. Those not living at home were either living in supported accommodation or with friends. Education levels varied among interviewees, ranging from leaving school before the age of mandatory participation due to exclusion, to completing college courses. Some young people interviewed had received mandatory referrals from a YOS, indicating involvement in the CJS, however due to the reliance on self-disclosure to the interviewer, the range of involvement in the CJS within the interview sample cannot be confidently identified.

The main reasons that fewer participants than expected were interviewed were:

- A large proportion of participants left the programme within six months of joining and consequently there were far fewer to sample from for the two later research timepoints.
- PLIAS found it challenging to obtain agreement to take part in an interview from those who remained on the programme. The evaluation team and PLIAS worked closely to facilitate participation (for example, offering the option of telephone, face-to-face or video calls at different times of day) and ensuring case workers were confident talking about the interviews with young people but this did not result in increased participation.

In order to try and fill this gap in the research, the evaluation team offered to visit the PLIAS offices and shadow case workers to try and organise interviews immediately after support sessions. However, the delivery team did not feel this was feasible so this approach did not take place.

Matched case worker interviews

The evaluation had originally planned to carry out matched interviews with case workers for six young people interviewed. Insights from these interviews would be combined with information from the MI data and case notes, to develop six detailed case studies

capturing a range of participant and support journey types. However, the challenges in achieving the numbers of young people interviews meant this was not possible.

In practice, two case studies were developed, built on matched young person and case worker interviews. Insights captured through the qualitative interviews with the two young people were combined with insights from their MI record. These matched interviews were with young people who agree to longitudinal interviews.

Using this information, researchers produced a timeline of the young peoples' support journeys. This included the different types of support and interaction the young people discussed in interviews, presented in chronological order. With the young person's permission, this timeline was shared with the young people's case workers. Only factual information was shared and any opinions shared by the young person about the support they had received were withheld. The timeline was discussed with the case worker in an interview conducted via Microsoft Teams. The aim was to use the interviews with the case workers to fill gaps in knowledge and information about the nature of support provided. A key focus was understanding the decision-making process for providing particular elements of support and the effects these had on progress, to understand the critical drivers and mechanisms for change. The paired interviews were used to develop a well-rounded perspective on the support journey.

Case note analysis and follow-up staff interviews

Due to the lower than anticipated number of interviews with programme participants, additional analysis of a sample of 30 sets of anonymised case notes (logged on the Charity Log MI database) was conducted in March 2024 to increase understanding of the nature of the support. In order to capture a range of participants and experiences, the evaluation team specified sample characteristics, which PLIAS used to select a set of case notes to share. The PLIAS team anonymised these notes before sharing with the evaluation team, removing names, specific references to locations and any other identifying information. Following a review of these case notes, researchers selected four participant support journeys that were different to those that had already been explored through qualitative interviews. The case notes and support journeys were discussed in detail in an additional interview with Step Up case workers (using case numbers for reference and avoiding the use of personal data that would make an individual identifiable). Like the matched staff interviews, the focus was on understanding the participant journey in more detail. In particular, why certain types of support had been provided, a more in depth exploration of the support, and the effects of types of support on progress towards outcomes. However, overall the data from this exercise cannot be considered as equivalent to the matched case worker interviews as the young person's voice and experience were missing.

Interviews with PLIAS Resettlement partners

Interviews were carried out with key partner organisations. These included partner organisations that refer into the programme, provide training opportunities to participants, and an employer who had employed Step Up participants. These interviews were conducted in order to understand external stakeholder views on working alongside the Step Up programme. This included their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, how Step Up meets the needs of employers, and how the programme fits into the wider landscape of education, training, employment and wider support for young people.

In total, eight interviews were conducted with PLIAS partners online and over the phone. These partner organisations were selected for interview through discussion between PLIAS and the evaluation team. The evaluation did not achieve the number of interviews with partners and employers it set out to capture. The evaluation team was able to arrange interviews with all partners whose contact details were shared with them but PLIAS only had confirmation from a relatively small number of partners that they were happy for their details to be shared with IES.

Some key referral partners, such as Jobcentre Plus, were not included and there were no interviews with partners to whom Step Up case workers made referrals to meet wider needs. PLIAS indicated that there were concerns among partners about the time required to participate in a 30–45 minute interview. The evaluation team offered shorter, more focused interviews to encourage participation but this did not result in higher participation.

The discussion guides used for all the qualitative interviews are included in Appendix 5: Phase 1 Discussion guides and Appendix 6: Phase 2 Discussion guides.

Ethics and data protection

The research was carried out in accordance with IES internal guidelines on ethical and professional standards, guidance from the Social Research Association and the Government Social Research unit.

Ahead of any personal data collection, a data privacy information notice (PIN) was developed in collaboration with the Youth Futures Foundation, explaining to prospective research participants how their data would be used. It set out that IES, YFF and PLIAS were independent data controllers and that data was being processed to support the evaluation of the Step Up programme. The PIN was included in all research invitation communications. Data held by IES was deleted within six months of publication of this report.

Consent from Step Up participants for their MI data to be shared with the evaluation team was obtained from case workers at registration. This included consent for

information about individuals' needs and the support they received from their case worker to be shared. As such, separate consent for anonymised case notes to be shared was not sought. Names and contact information for programme participants and partner organisations to be contacted for interviews were only shared with IES after PLIAS Resettlement secured consent for this. To support with this process, a research informant sheet was shared with participants. Both the PIN and research information sheets, developed in collaboration with YFF and PLIAS Resettlement, are included Appendix 7: Evaluation Privacy Information Notice (PIN) and Appendix 8: Participant research information sheets.

Around one-fifth of the Step Up cohort was aged 16 and 17. Most had made their own decision to take part in the programme of employment support (with the exception of a small minority who were mandated to take part as part of a court order). They had often approached PLIAS independently and registered by themselves for support. Their parents/carers had not necessarily been involved in the decision. Consequently, the evaluation team judged that 16 and 17 year old participants were old enough, mature enough and had the mental capacity to make an informed decision about whether or not they wanted to take part in the evaluation. The same process for seeking informed consent was used as for those aged 18 and over. Case workers were briefed on the consent process and to be able to explain the information sheet for young people, to ensure they understood so they could seek informed consent. They clearly set out what participation entailed, the risks and benefits of taking part and explained that the support they received from PLIAS would be unaffected by their decision about the evaluation. In practice, no 16–17 year olds were interviewed. As standard practice, informed consent was a continuous and ongoing process, with consent re-obtained at each stage such as the start of the interview and checking during an interview that participants were happy to continue.

Data transfers between IES and PLIAS Resettlement were conducted through a secure SharePoint space. MI data and case notes received by IES did not contain the names of participants and instead included a case reference number. PLIAS Resettlement anonymised case notes to remove names from these files.

Analysis approach

Anonymised MI data from the Charity Log database was analysed at two time points in the evaluation (April 2023 and September 2024) using SPSS. The interim timepoint of April 2023 was selected so that findings from the interim analysis could feed into the feasibility study. This early timepoint also provided the evaluation team with an opportunity to give support and feedback to PLIAS on the MI data quality and to share emerging findings on programme delivery. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the characteristics of programme participants and any differences in support or outcomes between different groups were explored using independent significant tests. These were predominantly t-

tests; however chi-square tests were used in some instances where variables were dichotomous.

For the analysis of the IOMI data, we analysed differences between baseline and endline results for those who had data for both timepoints. Due to the small numbers involved and also the lack of consistency in how dates for the endline IOMI data were recorded, the analysis did not explore whether variations in when the endline IOMI data was collected affected outcomes.

Interview discussions were inputted into an Excel analysis framework, developed using key themes addressed in topic guides. A content analysis was carried out to identify commonalities and differences between interviewees' accounts of how the support model was operating, and of the key elements that support the achievement of outcomes. This analysis was carried out within and across interviewee types. Additionally, the analysis drew out the extent to which interviewees' accounts provided support for the Theory of Change.

For analysis of case notes, a thematic framework was developed, which mapped on to the activities and outcome section of the Theory of Change. The evaluation team extracted relevant case note data into this framework, which was then used to carry out a thematic analysis.

Throughout the evaluation, the quantitative and qualitative data was triangulated to provide greater understanding of specific journeys, elements of support and the outcomes achieved by young people.

Finally, the findings and evidence were mapped to each mechanism and outcome in the ToC and synthesised to provide an overall assessment of the quality of evidence relating to the key components of the ToC.

Evaluation limitations

Limitations of this evaluation should be considered when reading this report, largely related to the sample size for qualitative research.

The smaller than intended sample for the qualitative interviews with young people limits understanding about what the programmes achieves for whom and why. A more diverse range of perspectives would have helped to better understand variations in the participation journey and outcomes. In particular, the achieved sample does not capture the experiences and views of young people who disengaged from the programme or of participants aged 16 and 17. It also does not capture young people who were on the programme for a short period before achieving an outcome and exiting. Further, as participants could decide whether they wanted to take part in the evaluation, those who took part may not be representative of all participants. Their motivation to take part may have been because they had a more positive or negative

experience than was typical. Linked to this, the fact that interviews took place by telephone may have affected participation, with young people who felt less confident or had particular social, communication and language needs not choosing to take part. The additional analysis of programme participant case notes was conducted to try and address this gap; however this does not capture the young person's views on the programme in the same way as qualitative interviewing would.

Evidence around the processes and experiences of referral into the programme is incomplete. The perspective of a key statutory referral partner, Jobcentre Plus, was not captured by the evaluation – a challenge experienced in many evaluations that are not funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. Similarly, the lack of interviews with partners to whom Step Up case workers made referrals means the more complex support pathways that required input from a wider range of partners have not been adequately captured. While these more complex cases with external referrals were in the minority, the evaluation has not been able to fully explore them.

Some fields in the MI data were well-completed but there were gaps in others. Young person's demographics, risk factors and other personal information were almost entirely complete. However, there was data missing for the endline IOMI assessment that was embedded in the MI data, other outcomes data and some data on the type of support provided. It was not always clear if information had not been collected or a young person had declined to take part and provide the data. Although the numbers were sufficient for analysis, the smaller sample size has meant sub-group and multi-variate analysis was not possible. There is a risk of selection bias i.e. those who provided outcomes data were potentially more positive about their experiences because they were still engaged in some way with PLIAS whereas those who had negative experiences are not captured (or vice versa potentially). Also, because endline data was collected at different points, this provides a basic indication of progress over time but limits understanding about when outcomes are typically realised.

The IOMI was administered by case workers during one-to-one sessions with young people. Case workers asked young people the questions and recorded their answers, rather than independent self-completion of the questionnaire by the young person. There is a risk that this led to social desirability bias, where young people provided the responses they thought their case worker wished them to give, rather than providing honest answers. Further, during the evaluation, there was feedback from case workers that they sometimes changed the wording of the IOMI questions when they were reading them out. This lack of consistency undermines the quality of the IOMI data collected.

3. Initial Theory of Change

This section of the report outlines the Theory of Change (ToC) that was developed for the Step Up project at the start of this evaluation. The ToC summarises the inputs,

activities, and the intended short and medium-term outcomes and long-term impacts of the intervention.¹⁴ It highlights how the activities were intended to contribute towards the intended list of outcomes (i.e. the causal or change mechanisms), as well as contextual factors that may support or inhibit the delivery of the intervention.

Inputs

The key inputs for the Step Up project were:

- YFF funding (£247,988), which was used to employ two PLIAS case workers who worked day-to-day with young people and to cover the costs of both the Step Up project manager and a data analyst.
- The professional networks of PLIAS case workers, in terms of their links with local organisations that might refer young people to the project or offer them employment, were identified as another project input.
- The approximately 100 young people aged 16–24 years old who have been involved in the criminal justice system or are 'at risk' of involvement.

The intention was to recruit eligible young people across five London boroughs (Brent, Harrow, Barnet, Ealing, and Hammersmith and Fulham). PLIAS had worked in Brent and Harrow for many years and the other Boroughs were included in Step Up to ensure sufficient referrals to engage the 100 young people. Involvement in the criminal justice system could range from a caution to a prison sentence and also included community resolutions and diversion programmes. 'At risk' had not been formally defined by PLIAS staff at the start of the project. The 'Methodology' section above describes the work the evaluation team undertook with PLIAS to begin to capture data about the characteristics of the target group.

Activities

The activities that were intended to be delivered by PLIAS case workers as part of the Step Up programme included a core offer for those who engaged in the support, and additional elements that might be delivered depending on young people's needs and circumstances. PLIAS case workers also intended to engage with local employers and education providers to source suitable EET opportunities for young people.

The core support offer was described as lasting 6–12 months and would include:

¹⁴ Although the ToC that was developed for the evaluation included long-term impacts, gathering and assessing evidence of these was out of scope for the evaluation.

- A needs assessment to highlight any areas of additional support covering basic skills, job search knowledge and skills, substance and alcohol use, physical and mental health, housing, gambling and money problems, interpersonal relationships, gang-related issues, motivation to change, resilience, agency/self-efficacy and impulsivity/problem solving. No formal screening or assessment of speech, language and communication needs was planned.
- An Action plan, developed from the needs assessment, to set out short, medium, and long-term goals and which took account of the young person's strengths, needs and interests.
- Weekly one-to-one face-to-face sessions with a case worker (1 hour).
- Personalised activities on PLIAS premises. For many, a key component of this would be training for the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card.¹⁵ It was also envisaged that optional enrichment activities would be offered (i.e. sport classes).

The core support offer was expected to be the same for both 16 and 17 year olds and those aged over 18.

Depending on their needs and circumstances, it was intended that young people would also receive additional support from PLIAS in the form of:

- An employability skills workshop (1–2 hours), which was intended to be one-to-one and delivered by the young person's case worker.
- Signposting or referrals to external organisations if needed (for example, for budgeting, health, drug and alcohol support).
- In-work support for 13 weeks for those young people who enter employment (i.e. weekly or bi-weekly email or text check-ins).

It should be noted that young people who have been involved in the criminal justice system are referred to PLIAS by Youth Offending Services (YOS) or probation services (as noted in the participant journey in Figure 1) for 3–4 short mandatory advice and guidance sessions on when and how to make disclosures about their criminal record when applying for work. PLIAS case workers highlighted that they will often try and encourage young people to voluntarily join the Step Up programme following these mandatory sessions, so they can offer the young person additional support to access employment. These mandatory sessions were therefore seen to be part of some young people's journey into Step Up and were included in the range of activities listed.

¹⁵ CSCS cards provide proof that individuals working on construction sites have appropriate training and qualifications. To apply for a card, individuals must pass the appropriate level of health, safety and environment test.

Outcomes

Several short-term outcomes of the project activities were identified. They were seen as necessary precursors for the project's long-term impact and included:

- Preliminary steps to (re)engaging participants in EET opportunities such as obtaining a valid form of ID, obtaining an NI number, completion of functional skills qualifications, taking maths and/or English GCSE, and obtaining a CSCS card.
- Attitudinal and socio-emotional outcomes such as changes in confidence, improved relationships with family members, improvements in employability skills (for example, CV, attending interview skills workshop), and a more positive and hopeful attitude to possible future pathways.

Intermediate outcomes for the programme may then include:

- Entering EET by completing a National Qualifications Level 1, 2, or 3 college course or entering an apprenticeship or employment. It was estimated that 50% of young people would secure an education or training outcome, while 35% would progress into employment.
- Developing and maintaining new pro-social networks and behaviours for young people.
- Sustaining their employment for three months (i.e. establishing themselves in specific careers). This does not have to be three consecutive months in employment. It was estimated that 26% of young people would sustain employment for three months.¹⁶

The long-term impact of the Step Up programme envisaged by PLIAS included:

- A reduction in re-offending behaviour.
- Increased engagement in education.
- Improved access to labour market and progression opportunities.

These long-term impacts were not in scope to be measured as part of the current evaluation.

PLIAS staff were clear that they did not expect to see any differences in the outcomes achieved for different groups of young people (for example, based on age or prior level of involvement with the criminal justice system) but expected that outcomes would vary based on individual need.

¹⁶ These estimates for the proportions of young people achieving education and training outcomes and sustaining employment were agreed between YFF and PLIAS and were based on previous programmes of support and their evaluation, as well as PLIAS's own previous experience of delivering programmes similar to Step Up.

Change mechanisms

The change mechanisms detail how the listed activities were expected to contribute towards the intended outcomes. They highlight how PLIAS want young people to engage with the activities or experience them to get the most out of the programme.

Key change mechanisms identified through the development of the ToC included:

- Case workers motivating and encouraging young people to develop and regularly review an action plan, and young people regularly attending appointments as a result. Without this engagement, it is not possible for young people to receive the support and move towards an EET outcome.
- Helping young people to arrive at realistic job goals. It was noted that young people can sometimes have unrealistic job goals. Case workers will try and manage these expectations and help young people realise the need to progress gradually from an entry level role to their ultimate career goal. This helps the young people have a realistic and achievable action plan.
- Helping young people to express and articulate themselves better (e.g. through mock interview practice) and improve their decision-making through self-reflection and developing 'SMART'¹⁷ goals. This can provide young people with the tools they need to present themselves confidently and gain a better understanding of their attitudes, behaviours and reactions. These tools in turn can help increase young people's resilience in unfamiliar situations and support them to positively engage in EET opportunities.

As with the outcomes, PLIAS staff considered these change mechanisms to be applicable to all programme participants and did not expect them to vary for different groups (for example, based on age or prior experience with the criminal justice system).

In addition to this support, referrals and signposting of young people to other support services to address their full range of support needs, aimed to help them achieve the intended range of outcomes (as appropriate to their circumstances).

In working with employers to create EET opportunities, case workers also intended to advocate on a young person's behalf to help secure these, and where necessary educate employers on working with people with convictions. This would help to avoid a blanket rejection of a candidate with a conviction. It is an important part of how PLIAS staff work with employers, as it shapes their view of PLIAS and helps to establish a relationship of transparency and trust.

¹⁷ SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Enablers and challenges

This section identifies the contextual factors anticipated to influence the delivery of the Step Up programme. Those identified were related to some of the broader ways in which PLIAS operates that are not necessarily specific to the Step Up project.

Some of the enablers identified included:

- PLIAS offering tailored support for any young people who need it, including those who have committed serious offences.
- Young people's access to support in a safe and familiar setting (i.e. local area, home visits).
- PLIAS case workers fostering positive relationships with young people (i.e. working to build rapport, showing genuine care and interest in the young person, and taking a non-judgemental approach and being willing to hear their side of things).
- PLIAS case workers meaningfully engaging with the support agencies young people are in touch with. This helps limit duplication in the support offered, ensures that case workers acquire all relevant information on the young person, and that they are visibly seen to be part of their support network.

Participation in PLIAS EET support is in most cases voluntary,¹⁸ enabling young people to more easily establish personal connections with case workers given that engagement is their choice.

Common challenges that may affect the success of the Step Up model were also identified as part of the ToC development. These included:

- Young people's prior level of involvement with the criminal justice system and the potential entrenchment of these behaviours and social networks for young people who have committed multiple offences.
- Young people's unrealistic job expectations: what line of work they want to go into or the type of role they want to acquire may not align with what they can actually access, which can stall progress.
- The complexity of needs presented: where young people have multiple, complex needs, this can make it harder to make progress due to the nature of the barriers. The demand and nature of engagement with other support services can also make it difficult to prioritise the action plan they agree with PLIAS.
- Young people's motivation and engagement: if young people are not motivated to work towards an EET outcome or if they disengage from the project, progress will stall.

¹⁸ A small proportion of young people were subject to mandatory attendance through their involvement with the YOS and/or police

- Young people can be limited in where they can take up work opportunities due to gang violence in neighbouring areas.
- The strength of relationships between PLIAS and referral partners varies across the five London boroughs in Step Up. If PLIAS staff have to invest time and resource to build and sustain these relationships, this could delay referrals into the programme and divert resources away from support for young people. This points to the importance of adequate resourcing for all of the component activities required for effective implementation.

It should be emphasised that both sets of enablers and challenges detailed above are common for this service user group and evidenced elsewhere, for example see among others, Bateman and Hazel 2013¹⁹ and Wong et al 2018.²⁰

Wider evidence to support the model

A purposive literature review was completed during the set-up phase of this project. It considered the effect of tailored one-to-one support delivery models on participants who have experience of the criminal justice system or those at risk of offending.

The review primarily looked at the features of mentoring programmes, given their prevalence in the sector as approaches to reduce rates of recidivism for individuals with experience of the criminal justice system. Mentoring has been broadly defined as a one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship in which an individual gives time to support and encourage another. In this way it has parallels with the approach taken by case workers as part of the Step Up project.

However, in practice, there is considerable variability in how mentoring can be delivered, which may limit the applicability of these findings to this current project. There are also differences in study populations that affect the applicability of the findings from the literature. This includes differences in where the intervention is delivered (some of the examples in the literature focus on interventions delivered in custodial settings, for instance, while others focus on intervention delivered within the community). There is also a lack of a clear and consistent definition of what constitutes youth 'at risk' of involvement in the criminal justice system.

¹⁹ Bateman, T. and Hazel, N. (2013) Engaging Young People in Resettlement. Beyond Youth Custody Partnership.

²⁰ Wong, K, Kinsella, R and Meadows, L. (2018) Developing a voluntary sector model for engaging offenders. Howard Journal of Crime and Justice, 57 (4). pp. 556-575. ISSN 2059-1098

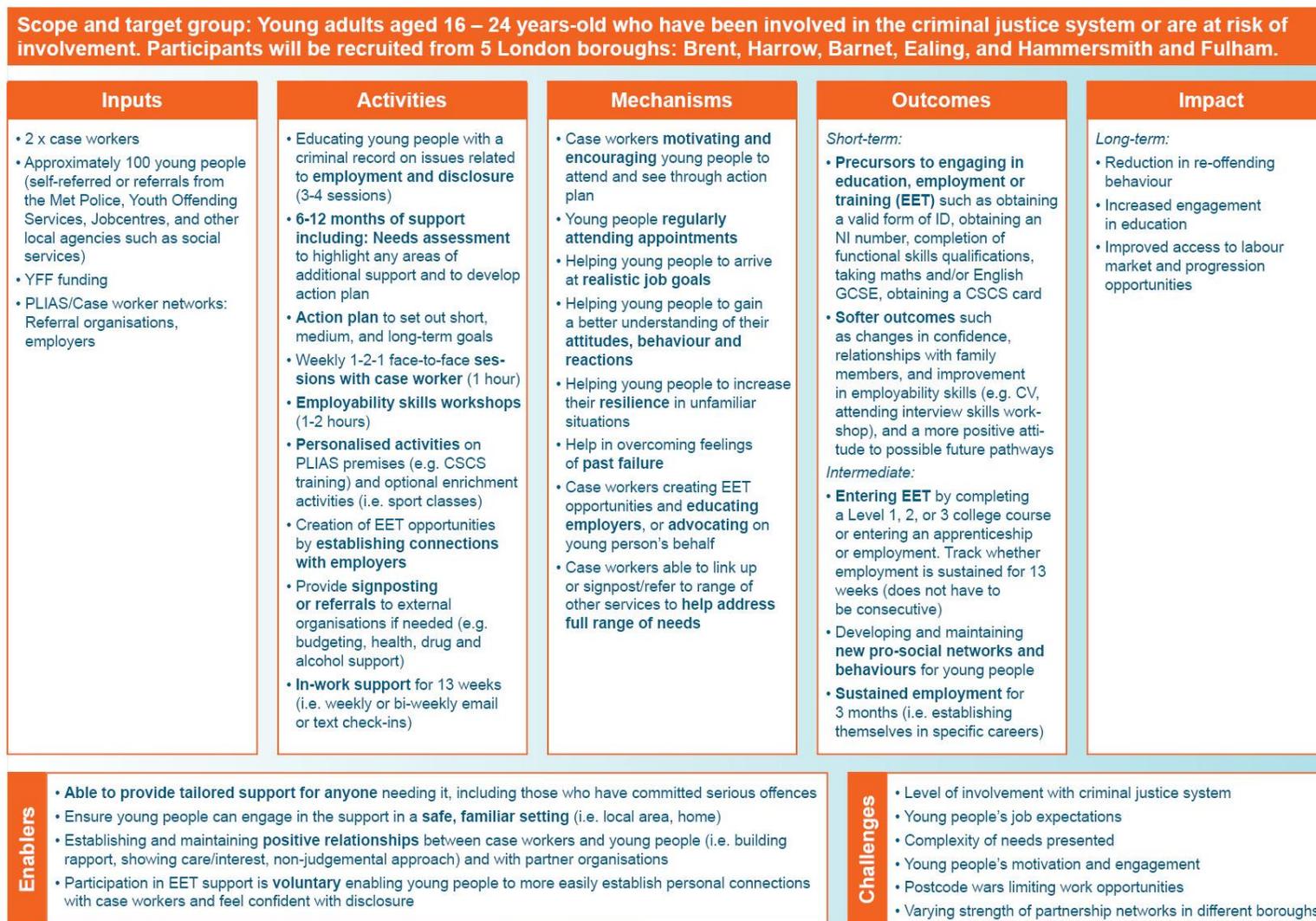
Despite these limitations, several studies included in this literature review provided some limited support for key features of the Step Up support model outlined above. This collection of studies showed:

- Completing appropriate holistic assessments of young people's needs (to determine their level of need, risk factors and to identify appropriate courses of action) are identified as an essential feature of programmes that look to engage young people with a conviction (Mason and Prior, 2008).
- Establishing a trusting and supportive relationship between mentor and mentee was important in supporting mentee's engagement and steadily developing their agency and confidence (Wong and Horan, 2021; Bateman and Hazel, 2013). This in turn could be facilitated by a sense that the mentor genuinely cared and was compassionate and interested in the individual mentee.
- Prior research has identified a need for mentors to adopt a wider advocacy role in supporting young people who have been involved in the criminal justice system into employment (Kirkwood, 2021). Within the Step Up support model, it is intended that case workers will fulfil this advocacy role and educate employers on working with people who have previously had a conviction.
- Previous reviews of studies that considered the impact of mentoring interventions on re-offending rates have shown overall that these interventions may have modest positive effects (Joliffe and Farrington, 2007; Tolan et al., 2013). However, there is significant diversity both in the design of these studies and the types of mentoring interventions considered.
- The findings from these reviews suggest that mentoring programmes may be most effective where mentoring is combined with other interventions (e.g. such as behavioural modification, education or employment programmes) and where mentors/mentees are in frequent contact with one another. Combining mentoring with employment support and being in frequent contact with participants were both intended features of the PLIAS support model. However, it should be noted that within one of the reviews cited (Joliffe and Farrington, 2007), studies that had greater methodological rigour (and therefore less measurement bias) showed that mentoring was less effective at reducing re-offending overall compared with other studies included.
- A review of studies looking at the impact of vocational training and employment programmes (Fox et al., 2021) also showed overall a modest positive reduction in rates of re-offending. However, the types of interventions and research designs included in the review were again diverse, which limits what can be learnt about effective practice in this area.

The literature also emphasised the importance and effectiveness of a strengths-based approach, which recognises the strengths of the individual, including their links to the community (e.g. Wong and Horan, 2021). This was found to be particularly helpful to engage people in the initial needs assessment. Some evaluations (e.g. Mcquire et al., 2010) found that a focus on supporting clients to build self-belief and esteem by identifying skills, strengths and potential, and to consider future plans, was a feature of good practice that helped to build motivation. The Step Up model, as described in the

Theory of Change developed at the start of the evaluation, reflects this evidence to some degree – for example, in the emphasis on aspirations and interests as part of action planning. However, the model also has an emphasis on identifying problems and difficulties, which is more of a 'deficit model' than a strengths-based approach.

Figure 3: Step Up programme initial Theory of Change



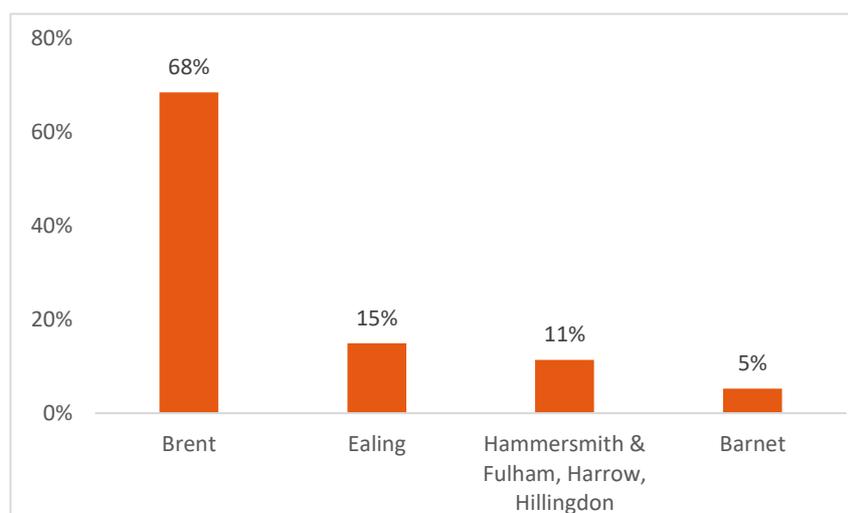
4. Findings: programme implementation

This chapter presents findings related to the 'activities' component of the Step Up Theory of Change. It draws on MI data, review of case notes, and interviews with Step Up case workers and partner organisations of PLIAS to examine the implementation of the programme. It also includes findings from participant interviews about their experiences of the programme. All of these interviewees were aged over 18 and so the perspectives of younger participants are not represented. The chapter includes information on engagement, programme referral routes, delivery of the programme in practice, and attrition.

Engagement and recruitment

Overall, a total of 114 young people started on the Step Up programme from across six London Boroughs (see Figure 4). Over two-thirds of programme participants (78 young people, 68%) were living in Brent, reflecting PLIAS's longstanding work in this borough. The delivery team reported that because they could recruit most of the young people they needed to meet the programme targets from Brent, fairly minimal resource was invested in building partnerships with referral organisations in the other Boroughs. A further 17 young people (15%) of participants were living in Ealing and the remaining 19 young people (17%) were living across Barnet, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow and Hillingdon.

Figure 4: Postal districts of programme participants



Base: 114

Note: Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow and Hillingdon were collapsed to form one category due to low numbers

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

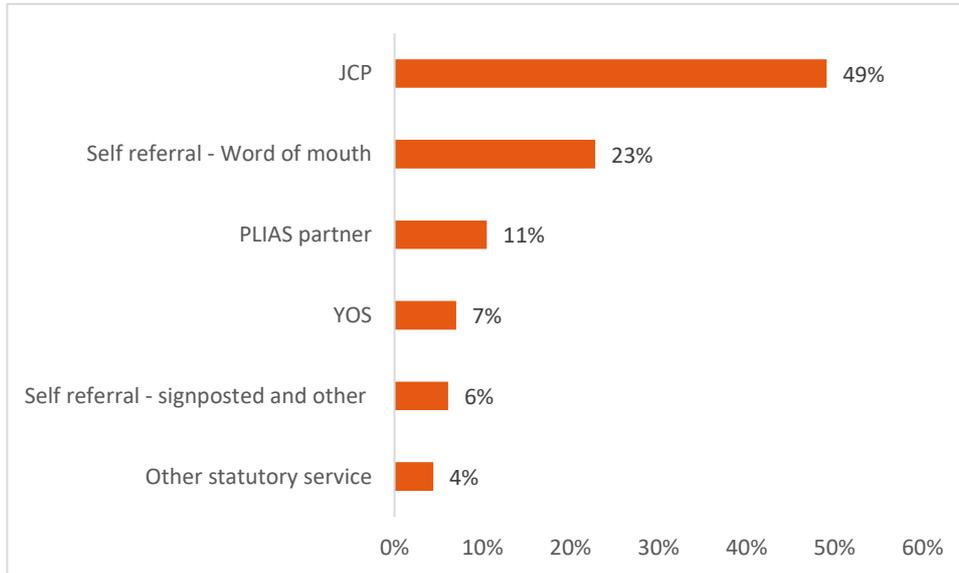
Referral routes

Referrals into the programme came from 18 separate sources (see Figure 5). Almost one-half of participants (56 young people, 49%) were referred by Jobcentre Plus and nearly one-quarter (26 young people, 23%) self-referred following a word-of-mouth recommendation. Around one in ten participants (12 people, 11%) were referred through PLIAS partner organisations. The remaining 20 participants (17%) were referred through Youth Offending Services (YOS), other statutory services (including the Metropolitan Police, local authority children's services and pupil referral units) and other means of self-referral. PLIAS did not collect data on whether someone's referral was on a mandatory basis as part of a referral order.²¹

Interviews with Step Up caseworkers, and programme participant case notes revealed that case workers occasionally co-located at Jobcentre offices to facilitate warm handovers for prospective participants. One of the case workers also worked in a YOS office once or twice a week, so referrals were seamless and could be immediately picked up with a face-to-face contact. This was described as a successful method for gaining initial buy-in from young people and an important first step in setting the relationship.

²¹ A referral order is the community sentence most often used by the courts when dealing with for young people aged 10 to 17, particularly for first time offenders who plead guilty. Referral orders require that a young person must agree to a contract of rehabilitative and restorative activity within the sentence (See 'Fact Sheet: Referral orders: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7597e7e5274a436829876a/fact-sheet-youth-referral-orders.pdf> [last accessed 28.10.24])

Figure 5: Referral routes into the Step Up programme



Base: 114

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Reflecting MI data, several young people who took part in qualitative interviews said that they were introduced to the Step Up programme by their Jobcentre Work Coach. Some mentioned that Step Up case workers were located in the Jobcentre and that their Work Coach had made a referral in person following their regularly scheduled appointments. Young people explained that on introduction Step Up case workers had given them an overview of what the support entails, and the pathways support can lead to.

The reasons for engaging with the programme among interviewees varied. Some young people (including those referred via Jobcentre Plus, the YOS, the Metropolitan Police and those who self-referred after hearing about Step Up through word of mouth) were motivated by an interest in working in the construction industry. Case workers explained to them that Step Up could help them gain a Construction Skills Certification Scheme Card (CSCS) and move into a job in construction, and this was appealing.

“My aim was getting back on the right track... When [my friend] mentioned it, it was a no brainer. I’ll be able to get a job in construction, get into work, and it will keep me away from doing anything stupid.” (Step Up participant)

Other young people interviewed were more open-minded about the sectors they would move into and were interested in the employability support Step Up could offer them.

Qualitative interviews with referral partners explored why they chose to refer into the Step Up programme and their views on the process. Partners explained that they and PLIAS shared a strategic goal of reducing the risk of young people becoming or remaining NEET and working effectively together to prepare young people to move into employment, education or training.

Partners mentioned PLIAS's reputation as a centre for CSCS training and construction pathways as a key driver for them referring into the support. The construction industry was viewed as more inclusive for individuals with experiences of the criminal justice system and lower educational attainment, and for individuals from more complex backgrounds. Consequently, the programme was described to be a good fit for the target groups supported by partners.

In the case of the YOS, young people with a referral order who took part in three mandatory sessions on disclosure to employers offered by PLIAS, could potentially have the length of their referral order reduced. This was a key reason for the YOS referring young people to Step Up and for young people engaging with the support. According to interviewees, while the potential to have the duration of a referral order reduced was considered to positively affect young people's initial engagement with the mandatory sessions on disclosure, they were then less likely to engage with ongoing support if their referral order was shortened and ended.

The referral process was praised by partners, particularly for case workers' efficiency and their sensitive approach to engaging young people. Partners described that in the first instance they typically contacted a Step Up case worker directly to discuss individual young people and the potential for referring them. If it was agreed that the Step Up programme was suitable for the young person, partners would submit referral forms including contact information for young people for PLIAS to contact them directly. Partners explained that often PLIAS would be in contact within 24 hours of a referral form being submitted.

Partners also considered that case workers approached initial conversations with young people in a relatable and sensitive way. Their understanding of the local area and the challenges some young people might face in attending support due to gang involvement, was highlighted as key in securing buy-in from those who had been referred on to the programme.

“[Case workers] understand the terrain they are working in, and if a young person is able to see that, that [they] acknowledge the difficulties of their daily lives, they build a meaningful relationship to deliver effective interventions.” (Step Up referral partner)

Profile of Step Up participants

Table 3 summarises the demographic characteristics of all Step Up participants who enrolled onto the programme. It shows that the programme was successful in reaching its target audience (16–24 year olds in London who are engaged in or at risk of engaging with the CJS). Three-quarters ($n=85$) were classified by case workers as being at risk of involvement, potentially reflecting that the list of risk factors that was tested as part of the evaluation was broad and covered a wide range of circumstances. The remaining 29 programme participants (25%) declared they had a history of offending.

The majority of participants ($n=98$, 86%) were male. Similarly, most participants (91 people, 80%) were aged 18 and over, with 18–21-year-olds making up the largest share of the caseload (51 people, 45%).

Participants were from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Black ethnic backgrounds made up over one-half ($n=61$, 54%) of all programme participants, followed by 18% ($n=21$) from white backgrounds and 16% ($n=18$) from Asian backgrounds. It had been anticipated that between 65% and 70% of participants would be from an ethnic minority group. In practice, the proportion was higher, with around four in five participants ($n=93$, 8%) of participants from an ethnic minority group.

At the time of referral, the majority of participants (91 young people, 81%) were not in education, employment or training. Further analysis found that 79 participants who were NEET on entry to the programme had been unemployed for over three months (94% of those NEET on entry to the programme). Of those who were in EET on entry the programme, the majority of these (17 of 22) were in education or training. Most of those who were in employment had been employed for three months or more.

Table 3 also displays data for participants' housing, learning differences and claimant status.

Table 3: Programme participant demographics

Variable	Categories	Total	%
Gender	Male	98	86
	Female	16	14
Age at registration	16–17	23	20.2
	18–21	51	44.7
	22–25	40	35.1

Variable	Categories	Total	%
Ethnicity	Black	61	53.5
	White	21	18.4
	Asian	18	15.8
	Mixed	7	6.1
	Other	7	6.1
Housing situation	Living with family	97	85.1
	Renting	8	7.0
	Semi-independent living	7	6.1
	No fixed address	#	#
Learning difference	Has a learning difference	11	9.6
	None	103	90.4
CJS involvement	At risk of involvement	85	74.6
	Involved in the CJS	29	25.4
Claiming benefits	Yes	58	50.9
	No	56	49.1
Employment or education status on referral	NEET	91	80.5
	In EET	22	19.5

represents where figures based on fewer than five people have been suppressed due to low counts

Base = 114

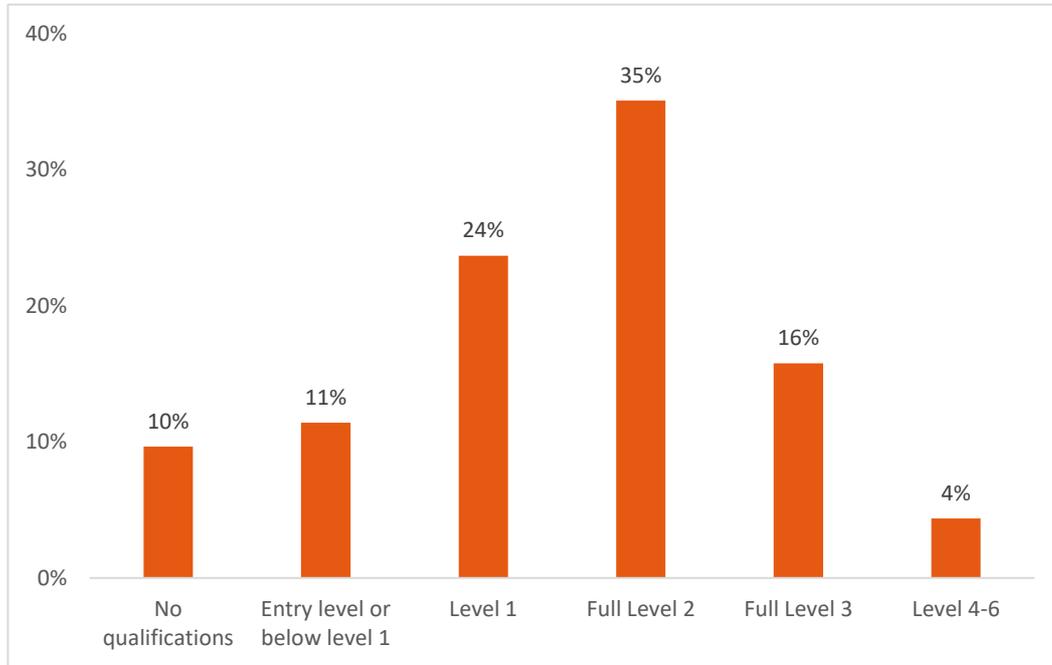
Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Educational attainment

Step Up participant qualification levels varied (see Figure 6). Overall, over four in ten participants had qualifications at Level 1 or below ($n=51$, 45%). This included one in ten with no qualifications ($n=11$, 10%) or entry level or below level 1 qualifications ($n=13$, 11%). Over one-third ($n=40$, 35%) of participants had Level 2 qualifications, and a further

18 (16%) had Level 3 qualifications. A small minority had qualifications between levels 4 and 6 (five young people, 4%).

Figure 6: Qualification levels of Step Up programme participants



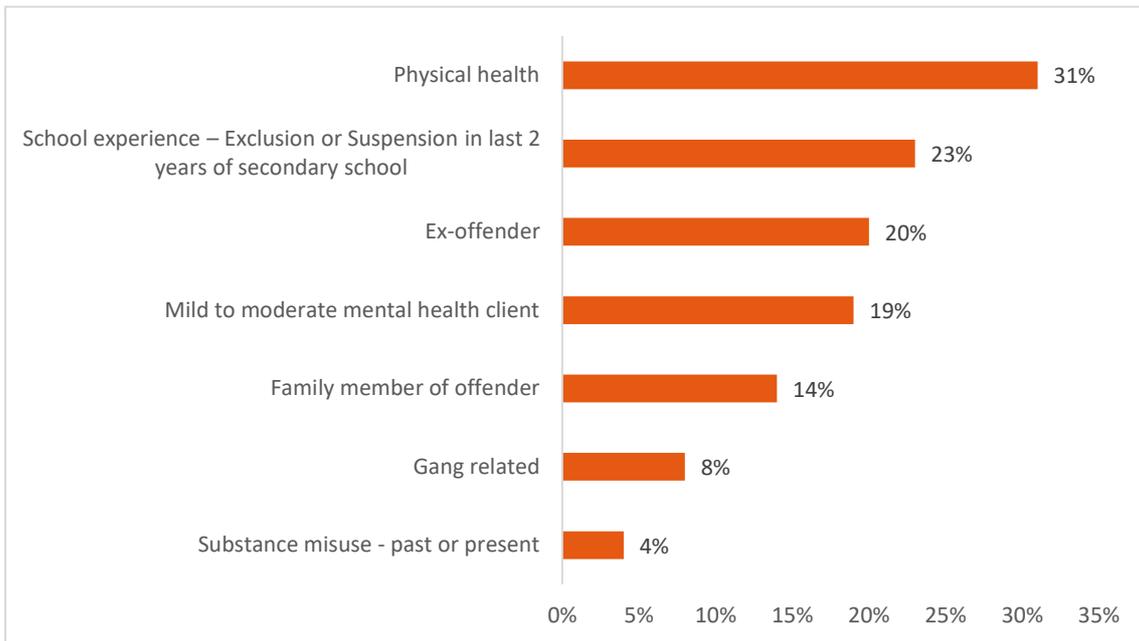
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Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Risk factors

Step Up programme MI data also collected information on individuals' risk factors that determine their 'at risk' status of becoming involved in the criminal justice system, or reoffending. Figure 7 shows that there were a range of risk factors.

Figure 7: Factors determining risk of engaging or re-engaging with the CJS



Base: 135

Note: MI systems allowed for up to three risk factors for each individual, thus the total % does not sum 100% in this graph. Only six individuals categorised as 'at risk' had more than one risk factor recorded.

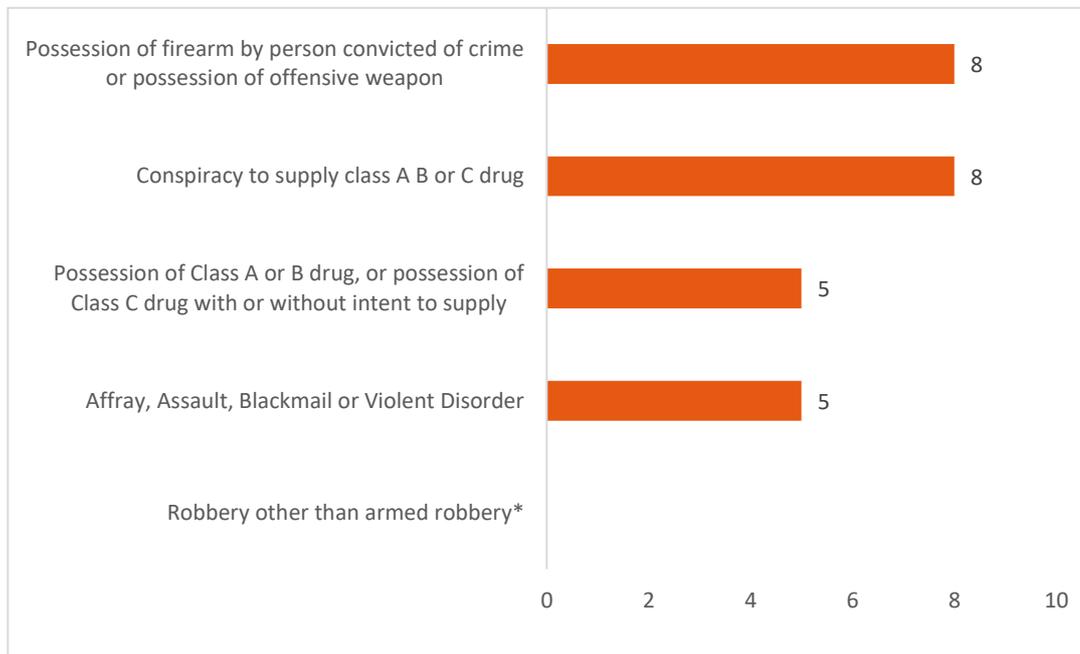
Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Conviction and sentence

Programme participants with a history of involvement in the criminal justice system had information about their conviction and sentence type recorded in MI systems. This was based primarily on self-reported information with, in some instances, confirmation of this from the referral organisation where this was a statutory service such as a YOS or the Metropolitan Police. Case note analysis outlined that where a young person had a criminal conviction, they were generally forthcoming about this. Reflecting this, despite the reliance on voluntary self-report, completeness for these fields was high. Of the 29 people with histories of involvement in the criminal justice system, convictions were unknown for eight individuals, and sentences unknown for five. All five unknown sentences were for people with unknown convictions.

Within MI, case workers could only record one conviction type for each person. The most common were conspiracy to supply drugs and possession of firearms or offensive weapons, each reported for eight of the 29 people with recorded conviction types. Figure 8 displays the full breakdown of conviction types across programme participants.

Figure 8: Step Up programme participant conviction types



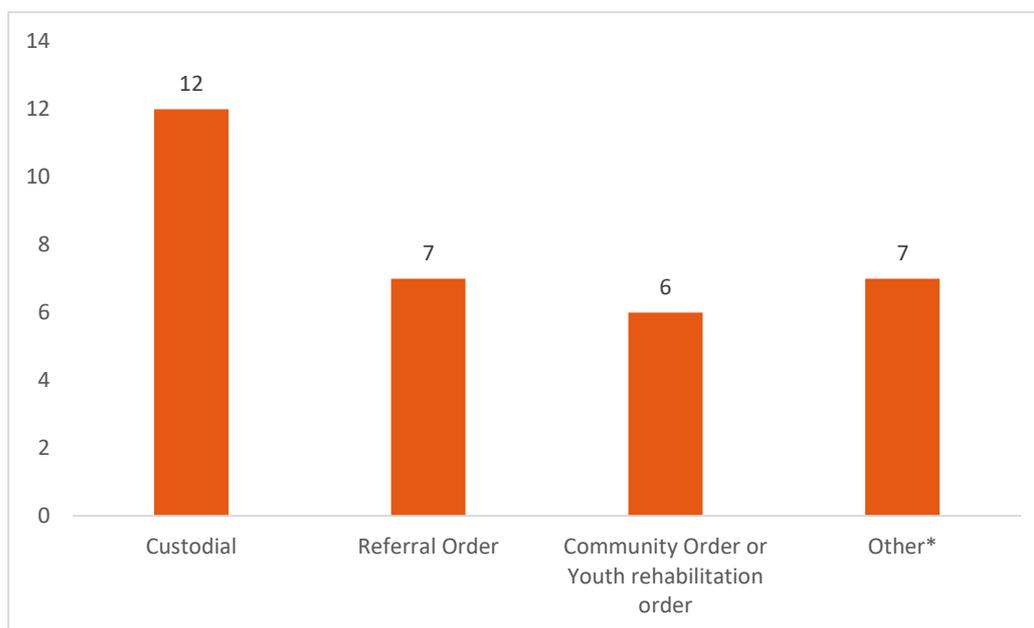
* Indicates where figures based on fewer than five people have been suppressed

Base: 29

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Despite 29 recorded convictions, there were 32 recorded sentences within the programme data. Of these, 12 people had received a custodial sentence. Following this, referral orders were reported for seven people. Figure 9 displays a full breakdown of sentence types across Step Up participants.

Figure 9: Step Up programme participant sentence types²²



Note: The number of sentences is higher than the number of convictions as three participants had a recorded sentence despite not having a recorded conviction.

* Other convictions include: motoring endorsements, youth cautions, conditional discharges and suspended sentences.

Base: 32

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Registration by month

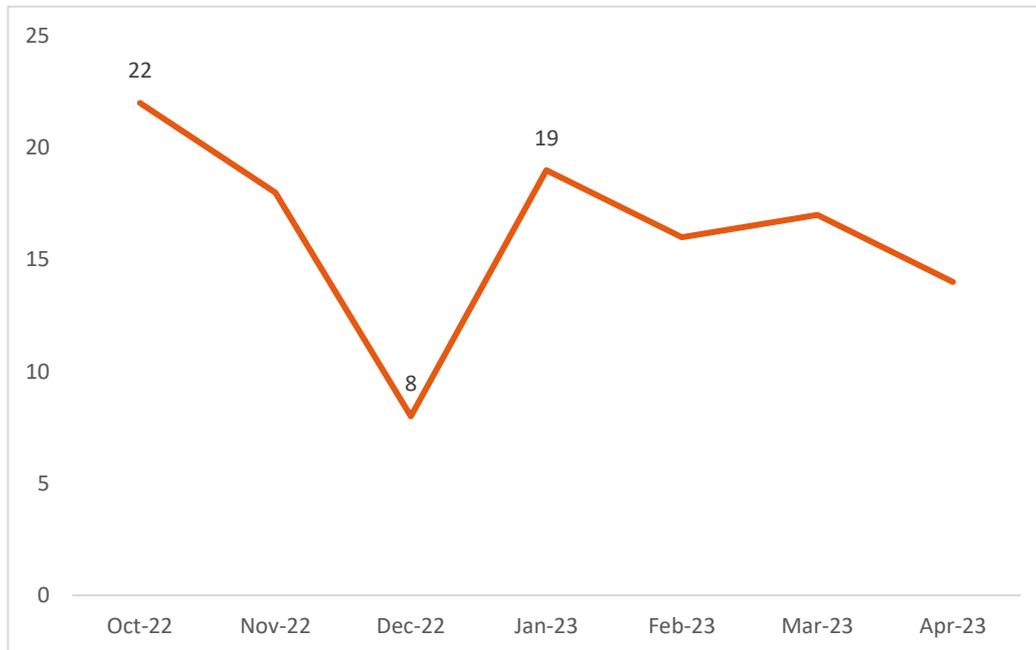
Young people registered onto the Step Up programme between October 2022 and April 2023. Figure 10 displays registrations by month and shows that the first month of the programme achieved the highest number of referrals ($n=22$), while December 2022 received the lowest ($n=8$), likely reflecting closure over the Christmas period. Remaining months remained steady averaging at around 16 referrals per month.

Interviews with case workers suggested that turnover within the Step Up team in early 2023 had negatively impacted the programme's ability to recruit participants. The figure

²² A community order is a sentence that requires an offender to complete certain requirements in the community instead of serving time in prison. Community orders are used when a crime is serious enough to warrant punishment but not a custodial sentence. Youth Rehabilitation Orders are community sentences given to children.

below, however, suggests that recruitment was stable across this period and not impacted by staff changes.

Figure 10: Programme registrations by month



Base: 114

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Operation of the model in practice

Initial assessment and action planning

To understand the individual support needs of each programme participant, an initial assessment was carried out by case workers. This assessment was formed of:

- five questions aiming to understand an individual's confidence with their employability;
- twenty-one questions forming the MoJ's IOMI tool; and
- eight questions comprising the IOMI's 'practical problems' assessment.

At the outset of the programme, the aim was for the assessment to be conducted on entry to the programme and for goals to be defined following the assessment. However, interviews with case workers suggested that it was important to build rapport with young people before asking the needs assessment questions, given the sensitivities within the questions. This allowed case workers an insight into the level of personal information a

young person would be willing to share and to change the way in which the questions were framed. They explained that where they felt a young person would not be comfortable being asked questions upfront, they would embed them into wider conversations they were having. This approach facilitated more honest and open discussions with young people about their life circumstances but it should be noted that this does affect the reliability of the data for evaluation purposes. This is discussed in the 'Limitations' section of the chapter on 'Methodology'. The approach to assessment of needs was the same for 16 and 17 year olds as for young people aged over 18.

Despite this insight, MI data shows that almost two-thirds of programme participants ($n=71$, 62%) completed their needs assessment on the day of their referral. This might reflect the co-located nature of case workers within Jobcentre Plus offices. Similar proportions of young people completed their needs assessment within one week of their referral and between one and three weeks after their referral ($n=12$ for each, around 11%). A small proportion of young people ($n=7$, 6%) did not complete their needs assessment until over three weeks after their referral. The remaining 14 (10%) programme participants were indicated to have had their needs assessment completed up to 90 days before their referral had been registered.

Case workers explained that at the point of the referral, for most young people it was important to communicate that PLIAS is a voluntary – not statutory – service and that the intention of the support is to help young people to identify actions and goals that could help them get them to where they want to. This was considered critical for building trust and was particularly important for engaging young people referred via a YOS. Young people echoed this view. For example, one participant who was referred via the Metropolitan Police described being apprehensive about joining Step Up initially as they thought it was '*part of the police*'. They explained, "*I don't want to work against the police, but I don't want to work with them*" and so felt reassured when they understood that PLIAS was an independent organisation. For a small minority of young people, participation in sessions was mandatory as part of a criminal justice system and so the messages at the point of referral were slightly different and centred around help to get employment.

As part of the needs assessment, case workers emphasised the importance of both the young person and case worker having a clear and shared understanding of the education or employment goal. Case workers asked young people about their previous experiences of education and factored these into goals, as well as discussing the young person's interests and aspirations.

Reflecting the conversational and informal approach taken by case workers, young people interviewed seldom recalled an initial assessment taking place. Some, however, did recall having conversations about their education and work history, their work aspirations and interests and discussing their short-term and intermediate-term goals.

When completing MI data fields, each of the three sets of questions were scored differently. Questions to assess confidence asked participants to rank their level of agreement with five statements on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 7 indicates strongly agree). These included statements around how to look for jobs, how to apply for jobs and career aspirations.

Figure 11 shows that on average, at initial assessment, participants agreed least that they had personal connections that could help them find job opportunities, while they agreed most that they hoped to have a career in the future.

Figure 11: Average score for employability confidence at initial assessment



Base: 114

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

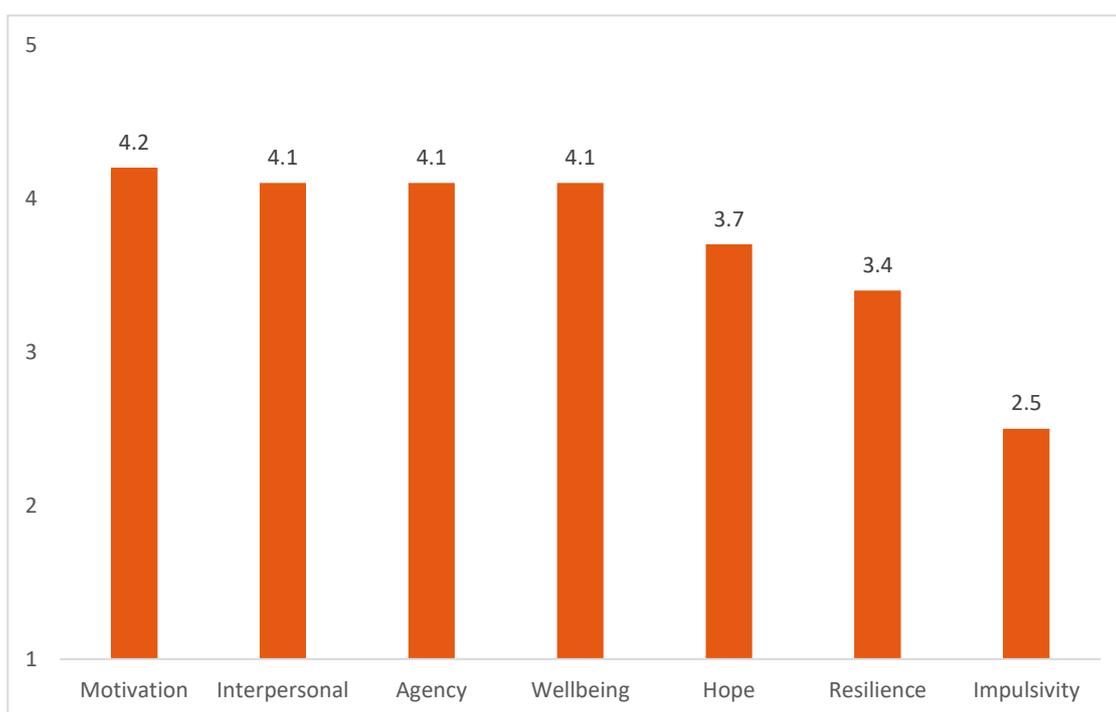
The 21 core IOMI questions use a five-point Likert scale. Answers to these questions were given scores of 5 to 1 for responses ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' respectively, or from 1 to 5 for the same responses if given to the four questions that were reverse scaled. Scores for individual questions were then used to calculate overall scores for each of the key dimensions in the IOMI.²³ The scale and overall scores are designed

²³ Guidance and detail on how scores for each dimension are calculated using the 21 IOMI questions can be found in Section 3 of the IOMI tool guidance notes, available here: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c936a7d40f0b633f9b10ff0/intermediate-outcomes-toolkit-guidance-notes.pdf> [Last accessed 26/11/24].

to be answered and read intuitively. For example, a high confidence score indicates high confidence, which can be perceived as positive, however a high impulsivity score indicates impulsive tendencies, which can be perceived negatively.

Across the seven dimensions, Figure 12 illustrates that at baseline programme participants largest support needs pertained to impulsivity and resilience (mean scores of 3.4 and 2.5 respectively). Conversely, on entry to the programme participants reported high levels of motivation and strong interpersonal skills (mean scores of 4.2 and 4.1 respectively).

Figure 12: IOMI dimension scores at baseline



Note: Dimensions are designed to be read intuitively and therefore higher scores are not always positive. I.e. a higher motivation score indicates higher levels of motivation, while a lower impulsivity score indicates lower impulsivity. Both are positive.

Base: 114

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

In addition, information on the reliability coefficients and Pearson correlations between scales from initial testing of the IOMI tool is available in the IOMI Toolkit report: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c936a40e5274a48e8e48be5/intermediate-outcomes-toolkit-report.pdf> [Last accessed 03/11/24]

Finally, the practical problems dimension of the initial assessment asked eight questions looking to identify support needs related to: employment prospects, money, housing, health and fitness, drug use, gambling and alcohol use. Questions were answered on a four-point scale, ranging from 'No problem at all' to 'a big problem', scored from 1–4 respectively. Average scores did not surpass 1.5 on any dimension, indicating a low perceived need across each of these areas. Interviews with young people seldom uncovered support needs within these areas. However, there were isolated cases of young people sharing that they had recently stopped using drugs or had previously experienced challenges paying for travel to and from work.

One-to-one support from a dedicated case worker

Interviews with Step Up case workers and the review of case notes indicated that personalised one-to-one support was a key element of the Step Up programme. Case workers described developing a tailored package of support for each individual, based on needs identified during the initial assessment. There was no particular difference in approach to support for 16 and 17 year olds compared to 18 year olds.

Tailored support to meet the needs, availability and interests of young people

The personalised nature of the support meant that young people engaged with case workers in a range of modes and locations. This included face-to-face in Jobcentre offices, YOS offices, PLIAS' own office in Brent and through phone calls and text messages. Case workers explained that modes of communication were tailored to the preferences of each young person in order to boost and maintain engagement. The original ToC had anticipated there might be some home visits for young people who required this, but this did not take place.

Additionally, the frequency of appointments varied to reflect each young persons' circumstances, goals, and what they felt would work best for them. This included quick check-ins multiple times a week, to weekly or fortnightly catch ups. Case note analysis also highlighted that the open-door nature of the programme meant that some young people would pause communication for one to two months at a time before re-engaging with the support.

Primarily, one-to-one support focused on progression towards and into education, training and employment outcomes. Case workers described providing programme participants with CV, interview and application support, as well as targeted job search support and working with young people to identify relevant training opportunities. Mock interviews were offered where requested and there was also an example of a case worker attending a job interview alongside a participant who had a speech impediment, to build confidence and provide reassurance. Interviews did not identify

any differences in the support offered to the few people who joined the programme while in employment and those who joined not in employment.

Access to and support with CSCS card training was a key aspect of one-to-one support for many participants. Case workers signposted participants to useful websites such as the Construction Industry Training Board website. They also provided participants with study materials, help with mock tests and one-to-one support with the training if they were struggling. Participants were able to use computers in the PLIAS offices for their training.

Programme participants shared their appreciation for how well aligned the opportunities their case worker suggested to them were with their interests. Some young people compared this with their experience of support from the Jobcentre, and shared that they 'felt seen' by their Step Up case worker. The personalisation of support was also evident within case notes, which indicated that CVs were amended to reflect the industries young people were interested in, and their skills and experience. Feedback from PLIAS partners also chimed with this and commended the case worker's knowledge of the local areas they were working in and how they could embed this into the support they provided.

PLIAS team interviewees also discussed how case workers had flexibility to use funding to help overcome barriers. Examples given included providing vouchers for food banks or using funds to buy young people personal protective equipment (such as safety shoes or hard hats for work on a construction site).

Defining and refining career goals

In some instances, initial goals and the support provided to help a young person achieve this goal, changed over time. Case workers gave examples of needing to re-define goals some weeks in, because the young person was not making progress, and of developing goals after someone was in employment. For example, a participant who moved into an entry-level labouring role in construction was supported to define actions to move into a specific trade. In other cases, case workers reported that as trust increased, a young person shared more information about their needs and circumstances, which required the goals and approach to adapt.

MI data indicates that only around one-third of programme participants ($n=39$, 34%) received information, advice and guidance at least once throughout their time on the programme. Given the qualitative feedback from case workers and participants, this is likely to reflect issues around how information, advice and guidance was understood and recorded by case workers.

The range of support provided by case workers

Some young people interviewed described a narrower range of support. For example, one young person had joined Step Up to obtain their CSCS card and support had been

solely focused on this, without wider support for their CV, job applications or interviews. Their time was mainly spent on self-guided CSCS training and exam preparation. They explained: *“For me, my experience was, I went there, introduced myself, they showed me where the computer was [to do the CSCS training], I did the training and I went home.”*

Case workers described (in interviews and case notes) supporting some participants more holistically, with a wider range of needs. They explained how in some instances a focus on education, training or employment was not appropriate early on and needed to happen later, after more fundamental needs (linked to housing and health, for example) had been addressed. They explained that focusing on education, training and employment before wider needs had been met, could negatively affect rapport and lead to disengagement from the support. It was described that these cases often needed more time and resource, requiring conversations within the Step Up team on how to provide adequate support. Typically, referrals to specialist support from partner organisations were made (see section below on ‘external support’ for further information). There was no evidence from interviews with young people about their experiences of this type of more holistic support.

“When you give them more than they can handle... they shy away and don’t engage. You have to set them realistic goals.”
(Step Up case worker)

PLIAS staff stated that the optional sports classes described in the original Theory of Change were not delivered as part of the support model after an unsuccessful pilot that produced low levels of attendance among the young people invited. This lack of success was attributed to the location of the sports venue which was difficult to get to on public transport and the facilitators not being proactive in getting in touch with young people and encouraging them to attend.

In-work support

Case workers also provided light touch in-work support via an informal ‘check in’ with young people when they moved into employment, either on a phone call or by text. The aim of this was to ensure they were settling in and remind them that they could return to the support if employment was not sustained. This was appreciated by young people, with some indicating their case worker had been in touch in the early stages of their employment outcomes.²⁴ The ongoing support provided a sense of reassurance for some young people.

²⁴ It appears that the MI data on in-work support has not been completed as only one person was recorded as receiving in-work support.

Disclosure information sessions

Analysis of case notes outlined the contents of the disclosure sessions provided to the small number of people referred into Step Up by YOS or probation teams. The first session focused on the young person's aspirations and current circumstances and introduced Unlock²⁵ as a service which provides guidance on disclosing criminal convictions to employers. Following this, the second session provided more detailed information on the types of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (i.e. Basic, Standard and Enhanced) and for which types of jobs each of these would be required. This was supplemented by information on sentences, including: the differences between spent and unspent convictions, custodial and suspended sentences, and which criminal convictions would be displayed on each type of DBS check. Finally, the sessions covered when and how to disclose a criminal conviction to a prospective employer, how to write a disclosure letter, and the importance of doing this prior to a DBS check being conducted.

External support

Given the complexities of some programme participants' backgrounds, case workers explained that in many instances young people already had various services involved in their support (for example, social services, probation/the YOS). Case workers stressed the importance of effective partnership working between these stakeholders to ensure each understood the full context of an individual's current support. They provided examples of working closely with partners in situations where a young person had started to disengage from Step Up. They described, for example, contacting other partners involved in their support to discuss reasons for why this might be and refreshing their approach to re-engaging the individual. Echoing this, some referral partners shared that they would communicate regularly with PLIAS about young people's progress and to ensure they were maintaining engagement.

Case workers explained that often, due to the number of services already involved in their support, young people were apprehensive about additional external referrals. Subsequently, while understanding the boundaries of their own remit, case workers tried to address support needs in-house and only made external referrals where necessary. Referrals were made only with the young person's buy-in, following detailed discussion with them about the relevance of the support the organisation(s) provide.

Reflecting this, MI data indicated that one-third of programme participants received a referral as part of their support. Within this group a total of 160 referrals were made to 53 unique referral organisations. Importantly, in addition to external support organisations, this included referrals to employers and employment agencies. Excluding referrals to employers, employment agencies and education/training providers, nine people on Step Up received a referral. Across these, there were a total of 12 referrals, all to unique

²⁵ Unlock: for people with criminal records. <https://unlock.org.uk/>

organisations. These included referrals for housing support, mental health services and Local Authority services for special educational needs and disabilities support.

Young people interviewed did not tend to recall referrals to external support organisations. One young person, however, described their experience of what they perceived to be an inappropriate referral. They had experience of working in the construction industry and had previous experience of homelessness and various debts that resulted from this. They expressed frustration following a referral to a 9-week unpaid work placement in construction. They felt their case worker had not fully considered their needs and priorities, which was to move into full-time, secure employment. They explained: *"It didn't make any sense because there are jobs out there that are paid... this [work placement] was unpaid, and with rent to pay, that's ridiculous."*

Due to a low number of interviews with partner organisations, feedback from external support organisations was limited.

Work with employers

Overall, case workers spent the majority of their time working directly on a one-to-one basis with young people and a smaller proportion of their time developing and maintaining relationships with employers. Case workers noted that employer engagement activity was resource intensive and they had limited time for this. As such, there was no formal employer engagement strategy, rather case workers would utilise existing networks to support opportunities on an ad hoc basis.

Examples of types of employer engagement work undertaken by caseworkers included: attending job fairs to talk to employers to find out about job opportunities that might be suitable for Step Up participants; working through Jobcentre Plus Local Employer Advisers; talking to employers who happened to be on site at the Jobcentre Plus offices when the caseworker was present; and direct contact with employers (drawing on networks built over time working in employment support). Case workers discussed that a key challenge they faced was employers' apprehension around employing people with criminal convictions. However, the evaluation did not find examples of advocacy and brokerage to change perceptions and mindsets among employers or details of how this was tackled.

Programme exits and attrition

Case workers explained that maintaining engagement and commitment to the programme was one of the greatest challenges they experienced in providing support. MI data categorised programme exits in four key ways:

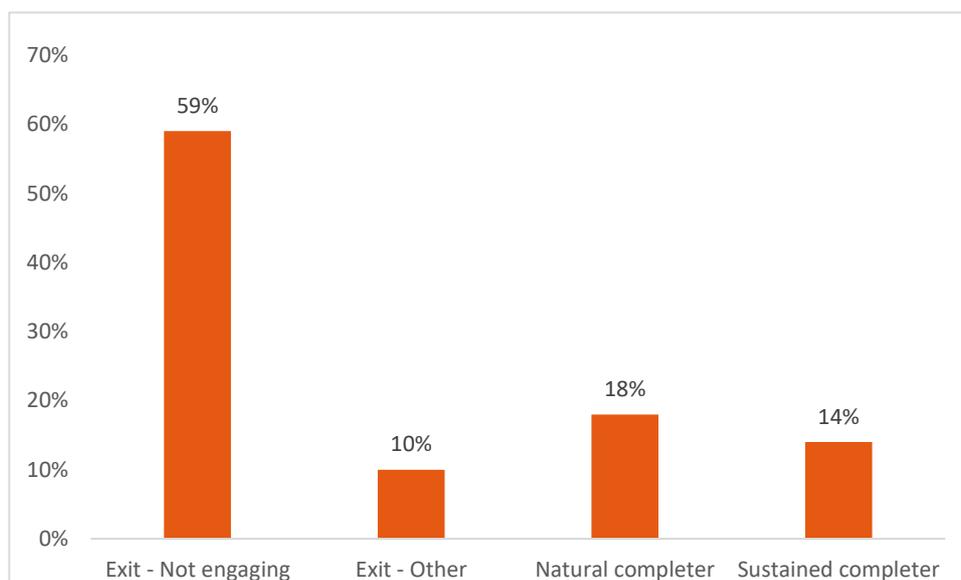
- Natural completer – recorded when the 12-month programme duration has been completed.
- Sustained completer – recorded when a sustained employment outcome (categorised as sustained for 13 weeks) has been achieved.
- Exit by not engaging – recorded when case workers are unable to engage with a young person any further due to no communication or contact made with them, or refusal to engage.
- Exit through other ways – this is recorded when a young person withdraws from the support or exits due to other circumstances, such as moving away or other personal circumstances inhibiting their ability to engage.

Programme exits

Programme activity status at the end of the programme is presented in Figure 13. The largest proportion of young people left the programme by not engaging ($n=67$, 59%) and a further 11 people (10%) left due to other reasons, such as withdrawing due to personal circumstances. Despite leaving the programme before completing the full duration of support or before a sustained employment outcome had been achieved, analysis identified that 38 of the 78 people who left the support early (49%) had secured at least one education, employment or training outcome.

The remainder of participants were recorded as either natural completers ($n=20$, 18%) or sustained completers ($n=16$, 14%), which meant they had either completed the full 12-month programme or sustained an outcome. Among natural and sustained completers, almost all young people (34 of 94%, 36 people) secured at least one outcome.

Figure 13: Programme activity status at the end of the Step Up programme



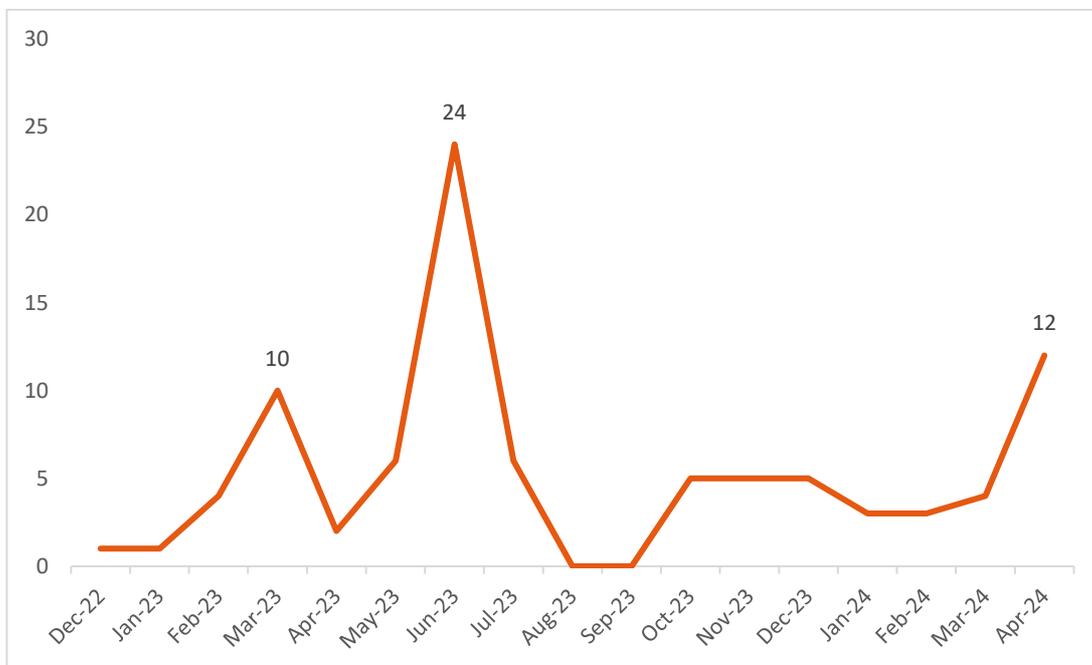
Base: 114

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Analysis of programme exits over time (displayed in Figure 14) shows that the largest number of exits in a single month (24) occurred in June 2023, nine months after the YFF-funded programme commenced. This was followed by April 2024 (12), the final month of the programme, and March 2023 (10).

PLIAS staff attributed this high number of exits in the first half of 2023 to staffing changes within the Step Up case work team. They noted that one caseworker left in January, then another two within the next four months (including the replacement for the first case worker that left). This meant that some young people had a change of case worker twice in just a few months. The Step Up lead discussed challenges in retaining staff due to other, better paid opportunities in similar roles in the local labour market. Given the emphasis in the delivery model on building trust within the one-to-one caseworker relationship to overcome existing suspicion of services, the Step Up team considered that staff turnover contributed to high rates of attrition. This challenge is not unique to Step Up, with other YFF-funded programmes with similar target groups experiencing the same issue (see for example, Mackay et al. (2023) Evaluation of the St Giles Choices Programme – Final pilot evaluation report, Youth Futures Foundation).

Figure 14: Programme exits by month



Base: 114

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Programme participants who had a history of involvement in the criminal justice system were more likely to exit the programme by no longer engaging with the support, than those at risk of offending. While the figure was above 50% for each group, Table 4 shows that most participants who had a history of involvement in the CJS (23 of 29 people, 79%) left through non-engagement, compared to around one-half of participants at risk of involvement (44 of 85 people, 52%). Similarly, 16 young people deemed at risk of offending (19%) were recorded as sustained completers, while there were no instances of people involved in the CJS sustaining outcomes. This evidences the challenges associated with securing outcomes for this group of young people.

Table 4: Programme exit route by CJS involvement

	Exit – Not engaging or ‘other’ reasons	Natural or sustained completion
At risk of offending	61%	39%
Involved in the CJS	90%	#

indicates where figures based on fewer than five people have been suppressed due to low counts

Note: the base sizes for the two groups presented in this graph are different

At risk of offending: 85

Involved in the criminal justice system: 29

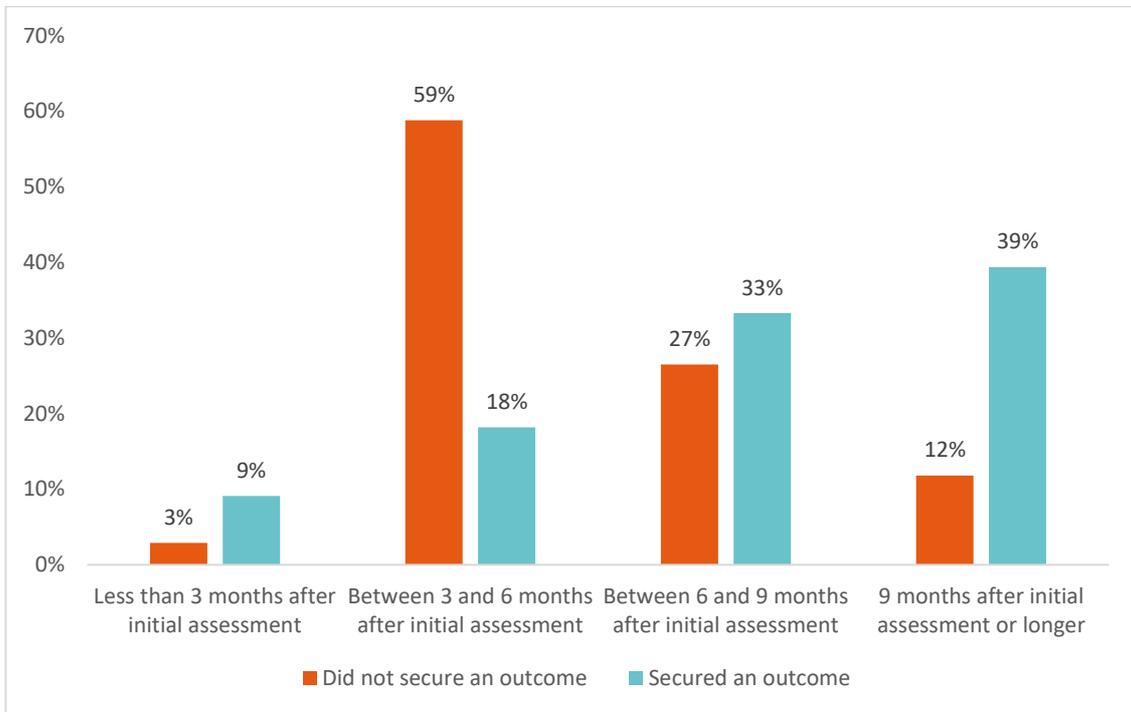
Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Attrition

Case workers outlined their approaches to preventing disengagement and re-engaging young people in interviews and in the case notes reviewed. Phone calls and emails were used in the first instance. If these were unsuccessful, case workers would begin to send text messages reminding young people that the support was available to them. Case workers said they generally attempted to re-engage young people on three occasions before they deemed them to be ‘not engaging’. As described above in the section on ‘external support’, if case workers were in touch with other organisations involved in the individual’s support, they also made contact with these in order to understand external factors that might be contributing to their disengagement.

Of the 67 people who exited the programme by not engaging with their case worker, 34 did not secure an outcome. Most of these people (21) left the programme before receiving six months of support. Comparatively, the largest number of people that exited the programme early and did secure an outcome received at least nine months of support. This demonstrates the importance of longer-term support (and associated engagement) in order for programme participants to achieve outcomes.

Figure 15: Length of time between initial assessment and programme exit by whether or not an outcome was achieved, for programme participants who exited the programme through non-engagement



Base: 67

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

5. Findings: short-term outcomes

Key findings

There is some limited evidence from quantitative and qualitative data sources that the programme has:

- Supported young people to obtain precursors to education, employment and training (such as NI numbers, IDs, CSCS cards and Level 1 qualifications; and also **improved employability skills**).
- Evidence on short-term outcomes related to changes in confidence, relationships with family members and a more positive attitude to possible future pathways is more mixed:
- For most outcomes related to these areas (such as motivation, agency, hope, resilience, wellbeing and impulsivity), the quantitative data sources indicate a potential change in a negative direction although there are qualitative examples of positive change and outcomes.

This chapter presents evidence on the short-term outcomes achieved by Step Up participants following engagement in the programme. The short-term outcomes listed in the Theory of Change and measured included pre-cursors to EET, such as securing IDs, NI numbers and CSCS cards, and changes to employability skills. Additionally, the short-term outcomes of resilience, wellbeing, agency/self-efficacy, impulsivity/problem solving, motivation to change, hope and internal trust were measured. These are outcomes that are directly or indirectly associated with reductions in reoffending over the longer term, which were captured through the IOMI questions embedded into the baseline and endline assessments.

The findings presented in this chapter should be read with the limitations outlined in Chapter 2 on 'Methodology' in mind. Specifically, changes to mean scores reported in the IOMI tool and employability skills, do not represent the whole Step Up cohort (the base number for IOMI dimensions ranged from 65–71 out of the total 114 participants), and qualitative evidence to support quantitative findings was limited. An overview of the strength of evidence used to support claims made is included in Table 5. When

assessing the strength of information, and the number and quality of data sources available to support claims, the following descriptors have been considered:²⁶

- **Emerging evidence:** we have multiple sources to support the claim, both quantitative and qualitative, but limitations remain in that the data is self-reported,²⁷ there are issues with the completeness of some datasets, or there is no comparison group.
- **Some limited evidence:** we have data from one source to support the claim, either quantitative or qualitative. There are limitations with the data such as it being self-reported,²⁷ has a small sample size, potentially unrepresentative or incomplete.
- **Little or no evidence:** to provide a suitable robust assessment that the element of the theory of change works as described/intended, or that the support model contributed to the outcome/impact.

The overall assessment, as set out in Table 5 below, is that some limited evidence exists for the effectiveness of the PLIAS support model although there is also an indication of a negative change to outcomes measured by the IOMI.

²⁶ These descriptors have been adapted from Mackay et al. (2023) Evaluation of the St Giles Choices Programme – Final pilot evaluation report, Youth Futures Foundation

²⁷ As the IOMI tool relies on self-report, evidence from this data source will always be subject to the limitations associated with self-reported data.

Table 5: Strength of evidence summary supporting short-term outcomes

Short-term outcome	Change	Direction of evidence	Strength of evidence	Data source(s)
Precursors to EET.	N/A*	Positive	Limited evidence from quantitative and qualitative data sources that the programme has supported young people to secure NI numbers, IDs and Level 1 qualifications and CSCS cards.	Quantitative: management information data. Qualitative: interviews with PLIAS staff, young people and partners; analysis of case notes.
Changes in confidence, relationships with family members and a more positive attitude to possible future pathways.	Negative changes to mean scores for all but one of the IOMI tool's 7 dimensions, including 3 with statistical significance.	Mixed	Limited evidence from the baseline and endline assessments to suggest that in some areas, behaviours and attitudes associated with crime were exacerbated. This is frequently contrasted by qualitative data, however.	Quantitative: management information data. Qualitative: interviews with PLIAS staff, young people and partners.
Improved employability skills.	Increases between mean baseline and endline scores pertaining to employability skills.	Positive	Limited evidence within MI data and qualitative interviews, that the programme has supported the development of employability skills.	Quantitative: management information data. Qualitative: interviews with PLIAS staff, young people and partners.

* Baseline data did not capture information on whether people had IDs, NI numbers and/or CSCS cards on entry to the programme.

Precursors to engaging in education, employment or training

To support young people's movement towards and into EET outcomes, Step Up helped young people to secure IDs, National insurance numbers and CSCS cards. MI data shows that in total, 13 young people secured CSCS cards and a further three people were assisted to secure an ID and/or a national insurance number. Several of the young people interviewed talked about support to receive the CSCS card.

Of those who were supported to secure a CSCS card, the majority secured this within the first three months of support.

Interviews with PLIAS partners and young people emphasised PLIAS' reputation for construction industry related support. Partners, including statutory services (for example YOS and pupil referral units) and other third sector organisations explained that they referred to PLIAS to quickly secure CSCS training for young people. Similarly, young people referred into Step Up through Jobcentre Plus were introduced to the CSCS training element of the programmes support by their Work Coach.

“They’re not able to get into construction unless they’ve got their CSCS, so PLIAS is a good outlet where there’s a quick turnaround for them to get their CSCS card.” (PLIAS Partner)

With this understanding of PLIAS' reputation, 13 CSCS outcomes appears lower than might be expected. Case note analysis highlighted the ebbs and flows of engagement with CSCS training offered by PLIAS, showing that several young people disengaged from the CSCS training support before securing their CSCS card. Within programme data, CSCS cards were recorded under the same category as education outcomes. Data indicates that 43 young people (37% of the programme cohort) started working towards an education and/or training outcome but did not complete this. Incomplete education and training outcomes were not attributed to a particular subject or vocational area, however triangulating this data with partner and young person interviews, and case note analysis, it can be inferred that these might include incomplete CSCS training.

Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) dimensions

Over two-fifths ($n=71$, 62%) of the Step Up case load completed an endline assessment, which asked young people to score their level of agreement with the same questions

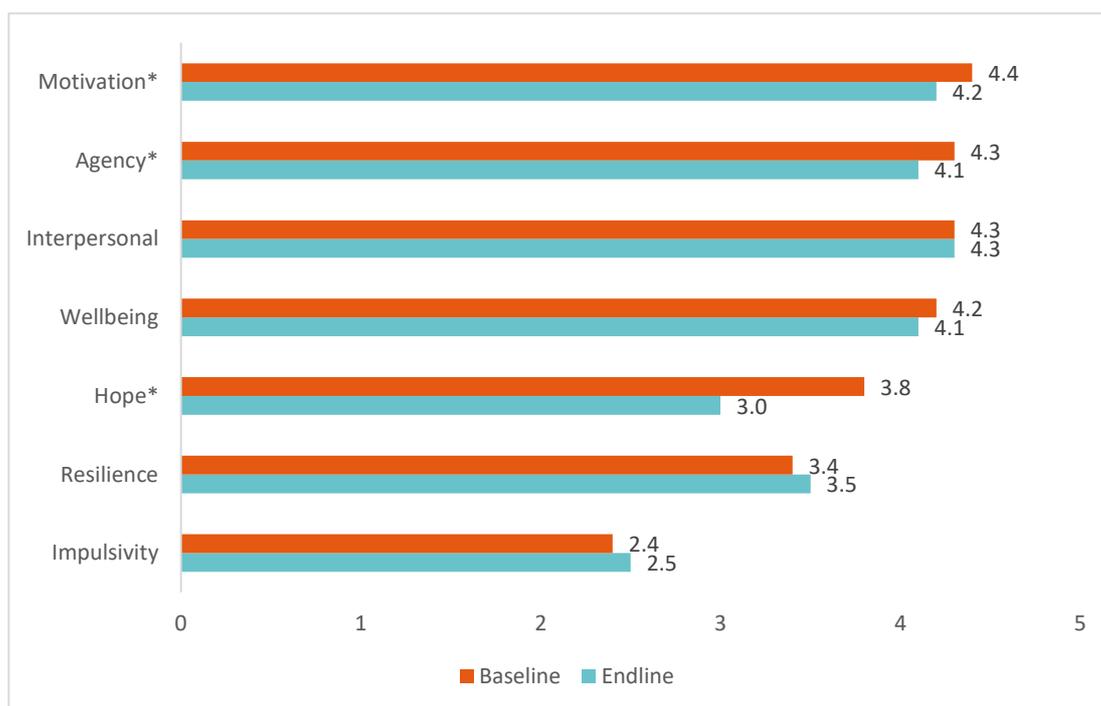
they answered at their initial assessment. As discussed in the previous chapter (see section on 'needs assessment', Figure 12), programme participants generally scored positively across all eight of the IOMI's dimensions at baseline. However, negative trends were observed within all but one IOMI dimension (resilience) between baseline and endline.

As stated previously, the endline assessment was planned to be completed four months after the baseline assessment. Endline assessment dates were recorded for 71 young people (62% of the cohort). Over one-half of those who had completed an endline assessment (43 people, 61%) were recorded as either natural or sustained completers, or exited the programme for 'other' reasons, while 28 (39%) left the programme by not engaging. As a result, the findings from the endline assessment may be biased as they represent a larger proportion of people who were engaged in the programme.

The largest number of participants ($n=41$, 58%) completed their endline assessment between three and six months after their initial assessment, and a further 14 (20%) completed their endline assessment between six and nine months after their initial assessment. Eleven young people (16%) completed their endline assessment within their first three months of completing their baseline assessment. The different timepoints at which the IOMI endline data was collected affects the quality of data and limits the insights that can be drawn.

Figure 16 displays the baseline and endline scores for young people who gave a score for IOMI question at baseline and endline and shows varying increases and decreases by dimension. The direction of change is designed to be read intuitively, so the increase in mean impulsivity score indicates poorer behaviour control, whereas the increase in mean resilience score indicates improved resilience.

Figure 16: Mean IOMI scores by dimension, for programme participants with entries at baseline and endline



Note: Dimensions are designed to be read intuitively, and therefore higher scores are not always positive. I.e. a higher motivation score indicates higher levels of motivation, while a lower impulsivity score indicates lower impulsivity. Both are positive.

* Indicates statistically significant changes in mean score

Base: 65-71

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Motivation to change

There was some limited evidence from qualitative interviews with PLIAS staff and young people that Step Up led to increased motivation to change. This was not, however, evident in the quantitative IOMI data.

Young people interviewed generally expressed that they were motivated when they initially joined the programme. For some people this did not change, with self-motivation remaining high. Others shared that their case workers' support had motivated them even further by discussing the opportunities available to them and breaking down routes into them. For some, the regular contact with their case worker and the encouraging nature of conversations and emails contributed to increased motivation. Similarly, case workers explained that often young people's goals would develop as they learnt more about the range of opportunities within their sector of interest. They felt that this gave them an insight into increased levels of motivation among programme participants.

Figure 16 shows that of respondents who completed both a baseline and endline IOMI assessment most were already motivated to change at baseline, with an average baseline score of 4.4. Between baseline and endline, there was a statistically significant decrease to 4.2 ($n=65$). Despite the decrease, endline scores remain high. The decrease could be interpreted in multiple ways. The slight dip could be related to some young people's relationships with case workers being disrupted due to staff changes or changes in the young person's external circumstances, which are unrelated to the Step Up programme, for example.

Interpersonal trust

There was some limited evidence from qualitative feedback from young people and case workers that Step Up led to improvements in interpersonal trust but this was not evident in the quantitative IOMI data.

Similar to motivation, young people generally had high scores for interpersonal trust at baseline. This did not change across the course of the programme, with both baseline and endline mean scores remaining at 4.3 ($n=71$). The lack of change may be indicative of the fact that interpersonal trust is not as subject to short-term change as some of the other domains measured in the IOMI (e.g. hope and motivation).

Case workers described spending a lot of time trying to build trust as they saw this as key to engagement and progress.

Young people generally spoke highly of Step Up case workers. They emphasised that case workers were approachable, friendly and understanding and commented on the frequency of communication (check in by emails, text and telephone as well as scheduled appointments). A few discussed that they felt their caseworker understood them as a person because they took the time to explore wider circumstances and issues in their life, beyond education and employment.

However, this was not a universal experience and some young people indicated that their interactions were limited to discussing CSCS training. In these instances, young people explained that they did not feel they had a strong relationship with their case workers. There was also an example of perceptions of a negative relationship with a case worker. One young person said they felt 'used' by their case worker because they said they would only provide information about employment support if the young person provided proof of the employment they had gained while on Step Up. They understood that the Step Up team needed to record who had moved into work, but felt in this instance that recording the outcome was prioritised above their support and that this transactional approach did not meet their needs.

Discussions of interpersonal trust in young people interviews tended to be limited to the relationship with their caseworker. There were a few examples, however, of an increased positive attitude to other people or increased connectedness to a wider range of

people. One young person noted that they had previously been quite resistant to asking for help from friends and family but now found this easier, while other young people commented that being on Step Up with a friend or family member had helped to strengthen those relationships.

Agency and self-efficacy

There was some limited evidence from interviews with young people and case workers that Step Up improved young people's sense of agency and self-efficacy but this was not borne out in the IOMI data.

Agency and self-efficacy can be understood as a belief in one's ability to implement plans to effect change and confidence in one's ability to make decisions about the future.

In IOMI data, there was a statistically significant decrease in scores for this domain from 4.3 to 4.1 ($n=71$). Overall, similar to motivation, despite the decrease, scores remained high. The decrease may be explained by young people gaining information through Step Up support that made them consider more realistically the challenges they may face in finding a job, which is common in evaluation of careers guidance interventions.²⁸

Some young people explained in interviews that they found job search support beneficial and explained decisions they had taken about the future and steps they were taking to achieve their goal. For example, one young person felt that as a result of the information, advice and guidance they received, they had a better understanding of the career path they wanted to take. Consequently, they were choosing to work long hours in labouring so they could afford to take time off work to get their Security Industry Authority license, as their preference was to work in that industry. Another described a history of short-term zero-hours construction jobs and how they now wanted more stable employment by securing an apprenticeship. They described working with PLIAS to research and apply for apprenticeship opportunities.

In some cases, young people said that their main goal for engaging with the support was to secure a CSCS card and then they would be confident enough to secure their own employment. They had a good understanding of the need for the CSCS as a pre-requisite for employment in construction and were able to commit to attend training and sitting the test.

²⁸ See, for example, McIntosh, I. & Yates, J. (2019). 'Evaluating employer career interventions in English schools'. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 42(1), 9-17. <https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4203>, which discusses that career guidance interventions seem to have a positive impact on self awareness and career planning and decision-making.

Others, however, commented that they found they were struggling to move beyond the initial stage of job application processes and hoped to improve their CV and interview skills through the support.

Wellbeing

There was some limited evidence of an increase in wellbeing from interviews with participants, although not from the quantitative IOMI data.

Within the IOMI, the construct of wellbeing has a focus on levels of self-regard, self-esteem and confidence. The IOMI guidance notes that wellbeing is typically defined more broadly as an 'overall mental/emotional/psychological health or balance' but that the IOMI is designed to pick up improvements in self-perception and self-worth. Scores for wellbeing fell by 0.1 between baseline and endline, remaining high at 4.1 ($n=71$).

Young people gave examples of feeling more confident, particularly in job interviews and presenting themselves as part of the recruitment process. There was one example of a young person who felt more confident as a person in general, beyond job applications. In another case, a young person described struggling with their mental health and staying at home most of the time prior to their involvement with Step Up. They felt that attending CSCS training at PLIAS premises had provided social interaction and routine, which helped to improve their mental health.

Step Up caseworkers explained that where young people were receiving support from other services, their wellbeing needs were typically addressed there. However, in circumstances where immediate wellbeing support needs were identified this was addressed by Step Up through referrals to organisations such as Mind and Kooth. Interviews with young people suggested that the wider support offer available through the Step Up programme was not widely known. Some felt the full extent of the support should be discussed in more detail, so that young people know what is available to them and they can ask for it if they need it.

Hope

There was overall little evidence that Step Up increased hope among participants.

The dimension of hope is linked to motivation and also self-assessments of agency and efficacy. The IOMI guidance defines it as 'perceived scope for positive future change'.

Hope was the dimension with the largest statistically significant decrease between baseline and endline assessments, falling from 3.8 at baseline to 3.0 at endline ($n=65$). This decline could be perceived to be a byproduct of decline in other dimensions of the IOMI or of the effects of external factors such as the cost of living crisis. It may also be that young people were more honest about how they felt at endline because they knew their case workers better.

Alternatively, a decline in hope might reflect a mismatch between young people's expectations of the support and what they received in practice. In interviews, young people explained that on introduction to the support they were provided information on the range of support the Step Up programme could deliver and the outcomes that could be achieved. Some suggested that the support they received was not consistent with these early descriptions and instead support focussed on CSCS training.

In interviews, people tended not to discuss their hopefulness about the future, therefore qualitative data to support changes in this IOMI dimension is limited.

Resilience

There was some limited evidence from IOMI quantitative data and qualitative interviews with young people that Step Up contributed to improved resilience.

Resilience was the only IOMI dimension that positively increased for programme participants. Within the IOMI, resilience is defined as:

'a complex skillset or capacity which allows an individual to recover from adversity, and to move on in a positive manner to reconstruct or begin again. It is related to individual coping skills (and efficacy), but also to wider relationships and support networks'.²⁹

There was a small increase in resilience between baseline and endline IOMI mean scores, from 3.4 to 3.5 but this was not statistically significant ($n=71$). Evidence from interviews suggested improved resilience was limited to job search and applications. Young people often shared that they viewed unsuccessful job applications differently than they would have prior to engaging with the support.

“[My case worker] has given me a lot of motivation... and it did work because I did get an interview. I might not have got the job but it was still an experience I could learn from.” (Step Up participant)

Impulsivity

Overall, there was some limited evidence of a reduction in impulsivity based on qualitative interviews with young people although this was not evident in the quantitative IOMI data. It is important to note that reduced impulsivity was not included

²⁹ Liddle et al., 2019. *Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) toolkit- Guidance notes*. London: Ministry of Justice Analytical Services, HM Prison and Probation Services.

in the original ToC for Step Up and given the age range of 16–24 year olds, when brain development is incomplete, it is in some senses an unrealistic short-term outcome.

Within the IOMI, impulsivity relates to lack of reflection and planning, poor problem-solving skills and therefore to a lack of attention to consequences. IOMI data indicated that participants' impulsivity increased slightly throughout the programme. This was marginal, increasing from 2.4 at baseline to 2.5 at endline and not statistically significant ($n=71$). As the IOMI is designed to be read intuitively, this is a very small change in a negative direction.

However, interviews with Step Up case workers and young people contradict this finding. In some cases, young people explained that they had a better idea of the steps they needed to take to reach their long-term goals, giving them a plan to follow. Others discussed that they were more able to focus on the actions they had agreed with their case worker. Often this was discipline to revise for and complete their CSCS card training because they were motivated to obtain the license to allow them to work. Similarly, Step Up case workers shared that in addition to confidence, the most immediate outcome observed within young people was an improved sense of direction. With support from their case worker, young people were more able to make choices from different options.

“Because of PLIAS I’ve got a plan”. (Step Up participant)

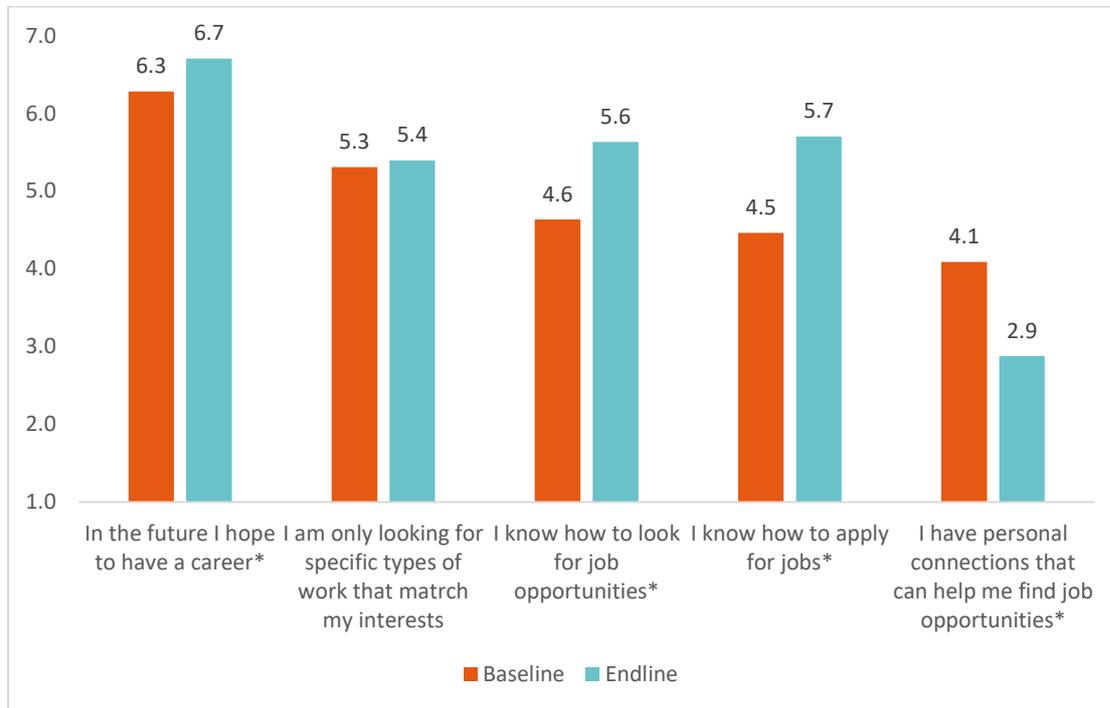
Improved employability skills

There was some limited evidence that Step Up contributed to perceived improvements in employability skills.

Participants were asked a series of questions used to capture how they perceive their employability skills. This data was collected at baseline (soon after registration on the programme) and endline, at the same time as data collected for the IOMI tool. Consequently, data on changes to employability skills is representative of the same people for whom baseline and endline IOMI data is available.

Statistically significant differences between baseline and endline assessments were highlighted in four of the five statements, three of which had increased and one had decreased. A full breakdown of mean scores at baseline and endline are displayed in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Perceptions of employability skills, for programme participants with entries at baseline and endline



* Indicates statistical significance

Base: 66-71

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

The largest increase was in participants' perception of their ability to apply for jobs. At baseline, on average, participants scored around the mid-point of the 7-point scale (4.5), suggesting mixed views within the cohort on their ability to apply for jobs. At endline, the mean score had increased by 1.2 points to 5.7, indicating that young people perceived an improved ability to apply for jobs. Evidence from interviews with staff and young people echoed this and identified that support with interview skills and how young people should present themselves to employers were key aspects of employability support provided by the programme.

“[My case worker] kind of understood maybe why I wasn’t getting a job. So [they were] giving a lot of advice about what to do in interviews, and just motivating me.” (Step Up participant)

A similar statistically significant increase was observed in participants' awareness of how to apply for jobs, rising from 4.6 at baseline to 5.6 at endline. Interviews with young people highlighted the relationship between knowing how to look for job opportunities and confidence with their application skills. Some interviewees explained that previously

they were sending numerous job applications off through jobs boards³⁰ and getting no or very limited responses. There was evidence of case workers supporting people to print their CVs and take them directly to employers and as a result, young people said they noticed an increase in the number of call backs they got from employers.

“Usually I would always apply online... but [my case worker] printed out my CV and I went into [a shopping centre] and I actually handed out my CV. There was people who actually got back to me, for so long people barely got back to me on jobs. I guess that’s when I saw a different outlook on how I could look for retail jobs.” (Step Up participant)

Other young people described how their case worker sent them links to a wider range of job search sites and vacancy listings, of which they had previously been unaware.

While IOMI data suggests hope decreased across the course of the programme, hope related specifically to having a career increased. There was a statistically significant increase from 6.3 at baseline to 6.7 at endline in relation to the final statement about hoping to have a career in the future. Echoing earlier comments, young people and Step Up case workers highlighted the success of the support in helping to identify clear and logical pathways to reach long term goals.

A decrease in mean score was observed within one employability statement between baseline and endline. Falling from 4.1 to 2.9, young people expressed at endline that they agreed less that they had personal connections that could help them find work. Interview data did not capture detailed insights exploring why this might be. However, in a few cases young people explained that they felt they would be comfortable contacting their case worker should they find themselves out of work or in need of support at a later date. This change might reflect a shift in the way people view the value of their networks in managing job searches. For example, at baseline people have viewed their close networks as important sources of advice and guidance, but gained a different perspective on these through the targeted employability support offered by Step Up.

The final statement, *‘I am only looking for specific types of work that meet my interests’*, received a similar mean score at both baseline and endline assessments (5.3 and 5.4 respectively). This reflects a recurring theme in interviews, that young people joined the programme looking to secure a CSCS card ahead of moving into a job in construction

³⁰ A jobs board is an online platform where employers list job vacancies and job seekers apply for positions.

and received light-touch support to achieve this, or they received support to boost employability within their area of interest.

Review of Programme Theory

In the programme theory, it was assumed that five key mechanisms underpinned the achievement of short-term outcomes.

Table 6 below lists these mechanisms and summarises the extent to which they were evidenced through the evaluation. Each mechanism is then taken in turn and discussed in more detail.

Table 6: Summary of review of ToC mechanisms for short-term outcomes

Mechanism	Evidence	Assessment of mechanism
Case workers motivating and encouraging young people to attend and see their action plan through.	Case worker and young people interviews.	Evidence suggests mechanism was partially working as intended. The one-to-one relationship between case workers and participants was central to support but was not universally experienced as positive.
Young people regularly attending appointments.	MI data, case worker interviews.	Evidence suggests this mechanism was partially working as intended. Some people regularly attended but there were also high levels of attrition.
Helping young people to gain a better understanding of their attitudes, behaviours and reactions.	Case worker and young people interviews.	Evidence suggests this mechanism was not working as intended. This was not a common theme in interviews.
Helping young people to increase their resilience in unfamiliar situations.	Case worker and young people interviews, MI data.	Some evidence that this mechanism was working as intended. Examples of young people being effectively supported in recruitment scenarios and a small increase in resilience scores in the IOMI.

Mechanism	Evidence	Assessment of mechanism
<p>Help in overcoming feelings of past failure.</p>	<p>Case worker and young people interviews.</p>	<p>Evidence suggests that this mechanism was not working as intended. In practice, support did not appear to go deep into individual pasts but participants did still gain self-esteem.</p>

Case workers motivating and encouraging young people to attend and see their action plan through

Case worker and young people interviews provided examples of the importance of the one-to-one relationship between a young person and case worker. Case workers described tailoring their approach depending on the needs and circumstances of young people to encourage and motivate them to work on actions in their action plan. Some young people interviewed commented on the encouragement they received and for some this motivated them to attend but this was not a universal experience.

Staff turnover during the programme delivery period had discernible effects on engagement and attendance (see data related to attrition, Figure 13), and the relationship between young people and their case workers. Case workers noted that short handover periods between case workers joining and leaving meant they were not able to seamlessly take over provision of support. Case workers commented that sometimes the trust between the young person and Step Up was affected and there was a breakdown in communication, and in several cases disengagement from the support. Some young people interviewed commented on the change of staff and this appeared to affect their perceptions of the case worker model.

Young people regularly attending appointments

There are some examples of young people attending appointments regularly to support achievement of their goals. For many, this was attending revision and practice sessions for their CSCS card.

However, 40 young people (35%) disengaged/withdrew from support before achieving an education, training or employment outcome, which was likely in part due to the staff changes at PLIAS. This includes 18 of the 29 people with histories of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Additionally, PLIAS re-located their offices to another area in Brent during delivery of the Step Up programme. Some young people reported that this changed the way they were able to interact with the support. For some of the more vulnerable young people who had current or previous involvement in gangs and postcode rivalries, it was not

feasible for them to attend the new site. This caused them to either leave the support or experience a light touch support offer consisting of telephone calls and text messages.

Helping young people to gain a better understanding of their attitudes, behaviours and reactions

In some cases the breakdowns in communication and trust caused by changes in case worker inhibited the case workers' abilities to help young people understand their attitudes, behaviours and reactions, or overcome feelings of past failure. The foundation for more sensitive, personal conversations was not there. Generally, young peoples' ability to understand their attitudes, behaviours and reactions was not a common theme in interviews with staff or young people (even when the relationship between a case worker and young person was maintained) and appears not to have been a key mechanism.

Helping young people to increase their resilience in unfamiliar situations

Case worker and young people interviews provided examples of young people being effectively supported in job interviews and other recruitment scenarios (for example, through mock interviews, coaching and guidance, and less frequently, a case worker attending with a young person), which resulted in increased confidence in these situations. While there was only a very small increase in IOMI scores in resilience between baseline and endline (0.1), some young people interviewed reflected on being able to accept and learn from setbacks.

Help in overcoming feelings of past failure

This was not a common theme in interviews with staff or young people.

Young people often described an employment history characterised by low pay, short-term, precarious work. Some had negative experiences of formal education, including exclusion. However, for some, Step Up appears to have been primarily a way to access funding for the CSCS card and so more intensive work on attitudes to the past and how these affect the present were not relevant. The case worker staff changes may have also contributed to this being less of a focus, as again, a foundation of trust and familiarity was not present. Nonetheless, it is evident from interviews with some young people and case workers that many of those young people who did achieve education and employment outcomes gained self-esteem and pride.

6. Findings: medium-term outcomes

This chapter presents evidence on education, employment and training outcomes achieved by Step Up programme participants (i.e. the intermediate outcomes in the Theory of Change).

Similar to the previous chapter, the context of the evaluation limitations should be considered when exploring the medium-term findings. Particularly in this chapter of the report, base numbers of quantitative analysis are low due to the focus on those who achieved outcomes. Further, the limitations of the small qualitative sample size remain important to consider. The nuances in personal experiences both within and outside of the programme, combined with the relatively low number of interviews are not to be considered representative of the entire Step Up cohort. Using the same descriptors as in the previous chapter, an overview of the strength of evidence used to support medium-term outcome findings is included in Table 7.

Table 7: Strength of evidence summary supporting medium-term outcomes

Medium-term outcome	Change	Direction of evidence	Strength of evidence	Medium-term outcome
Completing a college course	One-quarter of programme participants completed a college course, of which over one-half were construction related.	Positive	Limited evidence within quantitative data sources that Step Up supports young people to enter and complete college courses.	Quantitative: management information data.
Employment outcomes	Just under two-fifths of programme participants moved into employment or an apprenticeship following engagement with the support.	Positive	Limited evidence from quantitative and qualitative data sources to indicate that the Step Up programme supports young people into employment and apprenticeship opportunities.	Quantitative: management information data. Qualitative: interviews with PLIAS staff.
Sustaining employment for three months	Over one-quarter of the Step Up cohort sustained an employment outcome. More specifically, of those who moved into employment, nearly three-quarters sustained this outcome.	Positive	Limited evidence within quantitative and qualitative data to suggest that the Step Up programme supported young people to sustain employment outcomes.	Quantitative: management information data. Qualitative: interviews with PLIAS staff.

Medium-term outcome	Change	Direction of evidence	Strength of evidence	Medium-term outcome
Re-offending	72% of young people who had previous experience of the CJS had not reoffended by the time of their endline assessment.	Positive*	Little or no evidence to suggest the programme contributed to reduced re-offending rates within the cohort.	Quantitative: management information data.

* While data can be viewed as positive, there was a reliance on self-report for re-offending with no robust for case workers to externally validate and record whether an individual had re-offended.

Completing a Level 1, 2 or 3 college course

Programme MI data shows that a total of 28 young people (25%) achieved a qualification at levels 1, 2 or 3 while engaged with the Step Up programme. This is lower than the anticipated 50% of young people securing an education or training, included in the original Theory of Change, although the figure is higher and almost at target if completion of CSCS card training is included (49%).

Table 8 shows that excluding CSCS training, of the 28 people that secure education outcomes while on the Step Up programme, 21 completed courses that were at Level 1, while the remaining 7 completed either Level 2 or 3 courses. Within this, 15 were construction qualifications. The remaining 13 were in other subject areas, including business and management and functional skills. Almost all of these outcomes (20 out of 28) were secured in the first three months of joining the programme.

Education outcomes were secured by six people with histories of involvement in the criminal justice system and spanned across Levels 1–3 qualifications.

Table 8: Level of college courses completed by Step Up participants

Qualification level	Number achieved
Level 1	21
Level 2 or 3*	7

* Within MI data these were collected separately, however due to low counts in each these have been combined.

Base: 28

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Employment or apprenticeship outcomes

Entering employment or apprenticeships

The Step Up programme successfully moved over one-third of young people ($n=42$, 37%) into employment or an apprenticeship, which is well-aligned to the estimate of 35% in the original Theory of Change. The majority of these moved into employment.

Under 18s made up around 20% of the Step Up cohort ($n=23$), however, there were particular challenges in achieving employment outcomes for young people aged under 18. Employers were described to be reluctant to hire people under 18 and case workers reported that young people were reluctant to explore volunteering opportunities to build experience. Case workers and PLIAS partners explained that this may have been due to the combination of high levels of deprivation in the communities young people were living in, and the impact of the rising cost of living on household and personal finances at the time of the evaluation.

When talking specifically about young people with offending histories, comments from PLIAS partners highlighted the risks of child criminal exploitation:

“Young people might not be bringing home a massive wage [through work] and drug dealing can make a lot of money very quickly. When you're struggling to pay the rent it's a very quick fix...”

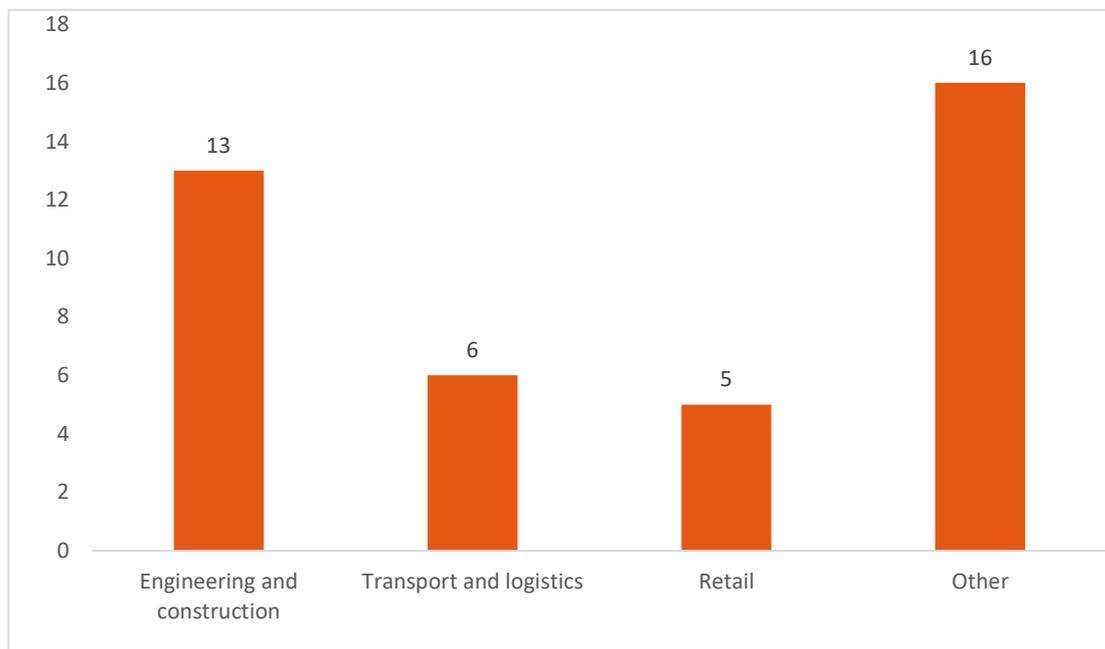
This highlights the significant vulnerabilities of young people in the PLIAS target group and the safeguarding risks present, which also acted as barriers to engagement and progress on Step Up.

Further, analysis of employment outcomes by group highlighted a statistically significant difference between those involved in the criminal justice system and those who were at risk of offending. Almost one-half of those who were deemed at risk of offending (39 of 85, 47%) moved into employment or an apprenticeship, accounting for almost all of Step Up's employment outcomes. This highlights the challenges people with histories of involvement in the criminal justice system experience in accessing the labour market.

The sectors in which young people secured employment varied widely. Figure 18 shows that the 13 people secured outcomes in the engineering and construction sector. This was followed by transport and logistics ($n=6$) and retail ($n=5$). The largest number of people moved into 'other' sectors. These included hospitality, entertainment, education, industrial, marketing and electronics.

This reflects interviews with PLIAS staff, who highlighted the organisation's history in securing outcomes in the construction industry and the greater availability of opportunities in construction for the cohort Step Up supports. Case workers explained that employers within construction were often more understanding and willing to employ individuals with criminal convictions or low levels of qualifications.

Figure 18: Sectors young people secured employment or apprenticeships in



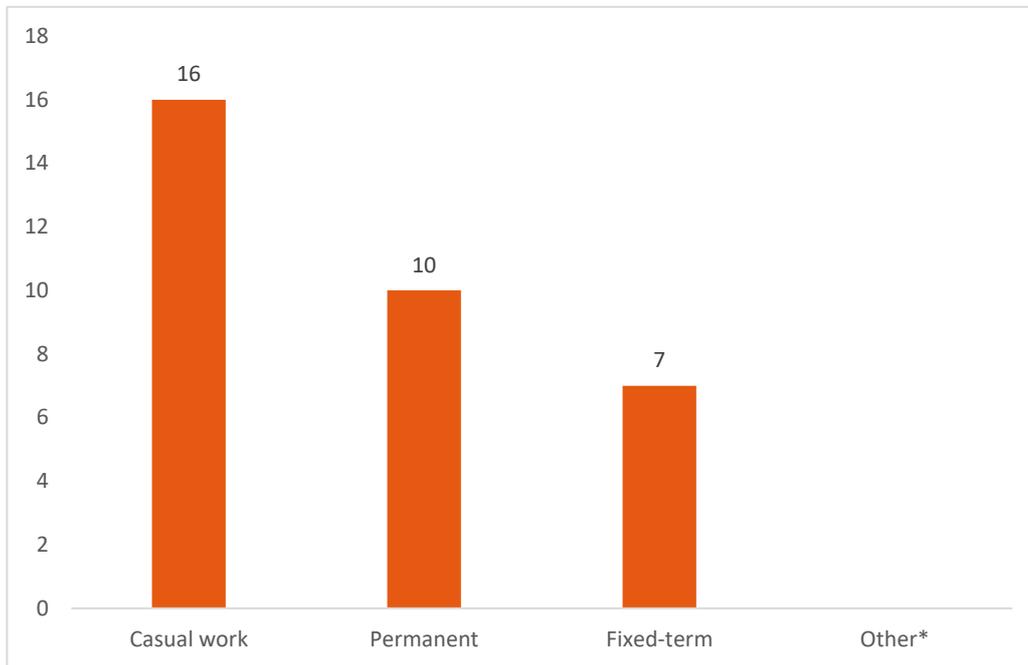
* Due to counts of fewer than 5, some sectors were collapsed into 'other' sectors. This included: hospitality, entertainment, education, industrial, marketing and electronics

Base: 40

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Information about contract type was recorded for 35 of the 42 individuals who moved into employment or an apprenticeship. Casual work was the most common contract type, secured by 16 people. This was followed by permanent employment (both full-time and part-time), secured by 10 people (see Figure 19). Interviews with young people reflected this, with several saying that they had applied for numerous temporary and short-term opportunities through construction agencies supplied to them by Step Up case workers. Contract types were spread evenly across sectors.

Figure 19: Contract types of employment and apprenticeship outcomes



* Represents where figures based on fewer than 5 people have been suppressed due to low counts

Base: 35

Source: Step Up Programme Management Information Data

Some young people explained that, following conversations with their case worker, they viewed using casual and fixed-term work as a way to earn money and work towards longer term goals. Examples included saving to be able to have a short period off work to attend training course, or to be able to afford to start an apprenticeship.

A small number ($n=7$) secured a second employment outcome while on the programme. Largely, this reflected movement from casual employment into permanent employment and/or movement into different sectors. While this represents a small number of employment outcomes secured through the programme, movement between outcomes throughout time on the programme might reflect the high proportion of casual employment contracts secured.

Sustaining employment and apprenticeship outcomes

Within the whole Step Up cohort, PLIAS anticipated that 26% of young people would sustain employment for three months. This target was met, with 27% of young people (30 of 114) sustaining an employment outcome.

Of those who moved into employment or an apprenticeship, almost three-quarters (31 out of 42, 74%) sustained this outcome for three months. Every young person who

Case study, from paired interview: Fabian

Fabian joined Step Up following a referral from the Jobcentre. He had been fired from his two most recent jobs prior to joining the Jobcentre. After hearing about Step Up from his work coach he decided to give the support a go, with a goal of securing his CSCS card.

He met with his case worker for the first time in the Jobcentre and then began meeting them weekly in PLIAS' Brent Offices. On top of this, Fabian attended the offices one or two more times a week to revise for his CSCS test. In between appointments and office visits, his case worker checked in and provided motivational support. After quickly passing his CSCS tests, his case worker was able to supply him with work boots, a high-vis jacket and a hard hat. Fabian then moved through a raft of short-term labouring roles.

The physical demands of labouring were taking their toll, causing back and knee pain, and on top of this Fabian did not enjoy the precarity of agency and temporary work.

Through continued communication with his case worker, he expressed these concerns. He was able to secure a referral into an SIA training course and quickly secured their license. Fabian now enjoys working less physically demanding shifts. He has a zero hours contract and is hoping to continue getting experience so he can find and secure a permanent role.

entered a second employment outcome sustained this outcome, representing nearly one-quarter ($n=7$, 23%) of sustained outcomes.

Re-offending

Due to the reliance on young people disclosing reoffences, there was no robust way for case workers to record whether programme participants re-offended while engaged or immediately following engagement in the programme. MI data indicates that 20 young people involved in the criminal justice system had not re-offended (72%), however it was 'unknown' whether the remaining 28% had re-offended.

Review of programme theory

In the programme theory, the achievement of medium-term outcomes was underpinned by three key mechanisms. Table 9 below lists these mechanisms and summarises the extent to which they were evidenced through the evaluation.

Each mechanism is then discussed in more detail in Table 9.

Table 9: Summary of review of ToC mechanisms for medium-term outcomes

Mechanism	Evidence	Assessment of mechanism
Helping young people to arrive at realistic job goals.	MI data, case note review and interviews with case workers and young people.	Evidence suggests mechanism was working as intended. Although the need to manage expectations around job goals was not great, there were examples of this being done where required.
Case workers creating EET opportunities and educating employers, or advocating on a young person's behalf.	Case note review and interviews with case workers.	Evidence suggests this mechanism was not working as intended. This was primarily due to the fact there was not sufficient capacity within the PLIAS team to undertake intensive advocacy or brokerage work.
Case workers able to link up or signpost/refer to a range of other services to help address their full range of needs.	MI data, case note review, interviews with young people, case workers and partners.	Evidence suggests that this mechanism was only partially working as intended. There was some signposting and referrals to other services but this was not widespread.

Helping young people to arrive at realistic job goals

Limited evidence from MI data, case note reviews and interviews suggests that only in very few cases did case workers have to manage expectations surrounding a young person's job goals. Instead, the support was described to successfully identify manageable steps to be taken to move into an individual's sector of interest. In a few cases, light-touch communication following a young person's move into employment was able to support young people to identify more suitable job opportunities, or specialise their skills within their chosen industry.

Case workers creating EET opportunities and educating employers, or advocating on a young person's behalf

Interviews with case workers and case note reviews highlighted that educating employers and attempting to change mindsets around employing individuals with histories of offending is important as this can be a significant barrier. However, interviews

suggested that overall this was not a significant focus for the delivery team, with most time spent on one-to-one work with young people. There was not sufficient capacity within the PLIAS delivery team to undertake intensive brokerage or advocacy work with employers in addition to one-to-one support for young people, although there were examples of case workers building relationships with employers to find out about vacancies that might be suitable for their caseloads. Because employer engagement was a case worker responsibility, staff turnover meant that key points of contact with PLIAS case workers were unclear, causing contact with some employers to be lost. As a consequence, this limited the opportunities available to Step Up participants.

Case workers able to link up or signpost/refer to a range of other services to help address their full range of needs

While MI data and interviews with young people suggest it was limited, there was some evidence of signposting and referrals to other services where needs were identified. Overall, the two case workers needed to spend the majority of their time on one-to-one work with young people, meaning limited capacity to manage and build partnerships. Many young people were said to already be involved with multiple services and in these cases there was no or limited onward referral, partly driven by young people's reluctance to have even more services involved in their lives. Young people interviewed did not discuss signposting or referral or the case workers' ability to link up support, as part of their experience or contributing to outcomes. Partners interviewed commented that the case worker staffing changes affected partnership working, with lack of clarity about key points of contact and delays in communication.

7. Final Theory of Change

Figure 20 below presents the refined ToC for the Step Up programme. The section below summarises the amendments made and the reasons for these suggested changes.

Inputs

The inputs remain unchanged apart from the addition of the project manager and data manager roles. This was added to acknowledge the importance of case worker supervision and management to ensure a consistent approach.

Activities

The flexible use of funding to help overcome immediate barriers to employment – such as buying safety equipment required for a labouring job or paying someone's travel

expenses for an interview – was relatively common. From young people's perspective, this practical, financial support was highly valued and is likely to have contributed to increased trust and engagement. This has therefore been added as a new activity.

The original ToC indicated that there would be 6–12 months support provided as part of the Step Up programme. In practice, a high proportion of participants withdrew within the first six months and some were on the programme for a shorter period, particularly those who were focused on obtaining the CSCS card to enable employment in the construction sector. The duration of support has been amended to be 'up to 12 months' to reflect this.

Development of employability skills through CV creation and refinement, interview skills coaching and training, and support with job search and self-management was a central element of Step Up support. Case workers and young people described a personalised approach, typically undertaken as part of the one-to-one sessions. To reflect this, 'employability skills workshops' has been re-named and included within 'personalised activities'.

The optional enrichment activities, such as sports classes, did not take place so this element has been removed from the ToC.

In addition, there was limited evidence of the creation of education, training and employment opportunities by establishing connections with employers. There were some examples of case workers finding out about vacancies that employers had and of case workers sharing details of construction recruitment agencies with young people but this was light-touch support, as opposed to brokerage and advocacy. Consequently, this has been removed from the ToC.

Mechanisms

Findings from the evaluation suggest that the two main mechanisms that contribute to the achievement of short-term outcomes (such as changes in confidence, improved employability skills and more positive attitudes to the future) are:

- case workers motivating and encouraging young people to attend and see through action plan; and
- young people regularly attending appointments.

Some of the other mechanisms in the original ToC are linked to the relationship of trust and respect with a case worker:

- helping young people to gain a better understanding of their attitudes, behaviour and reactions (in relation to employment and training);
- helping young people to increase their resilience in unfamiliar situations; and
- help in overcoming feelings of past failure.

These were only partially evidenced in the evaluation (with evidence primarily around helping to build resilience), which may partly be explained by case worker turnover. These mechanisms remain in the final ToC but would benefit from further exploration.

The two mechanisms relating to the achievement of intermediate outcomes in the original ToC have also been retained in the final ToC:

- case workers creating EET opportunities and educating employers, or advocating on young person's behalf; and
- case workers able to link up or signpost/refer to range of other services to help address full range of needs.

Although referrals and signposting did take place, there was limited evidence that Step Up had a focus on addressing a full range of needs and that this contributed to education and employment outcomes, or the development of pro-social networks and behaviours. This may be due to the small qualitative samples achieved and so we suggest this could be researched further in future.

The research did not identify any additional mechanisms for change that were not in the original ToC.

Short- and medium-term outcomes

The evaluation evidence suggests the short- and medium-term outcomes remain appropriate and relevant and so they are the same in the final ToC as in the original, apart from 'developing and maintaining new pro-social networks and behaviours for young people', which has been moved to be a longer-term outcome. There were some very limited, emerging examples of improved relationships but there was limited evidence of pro-social networks being maintained.

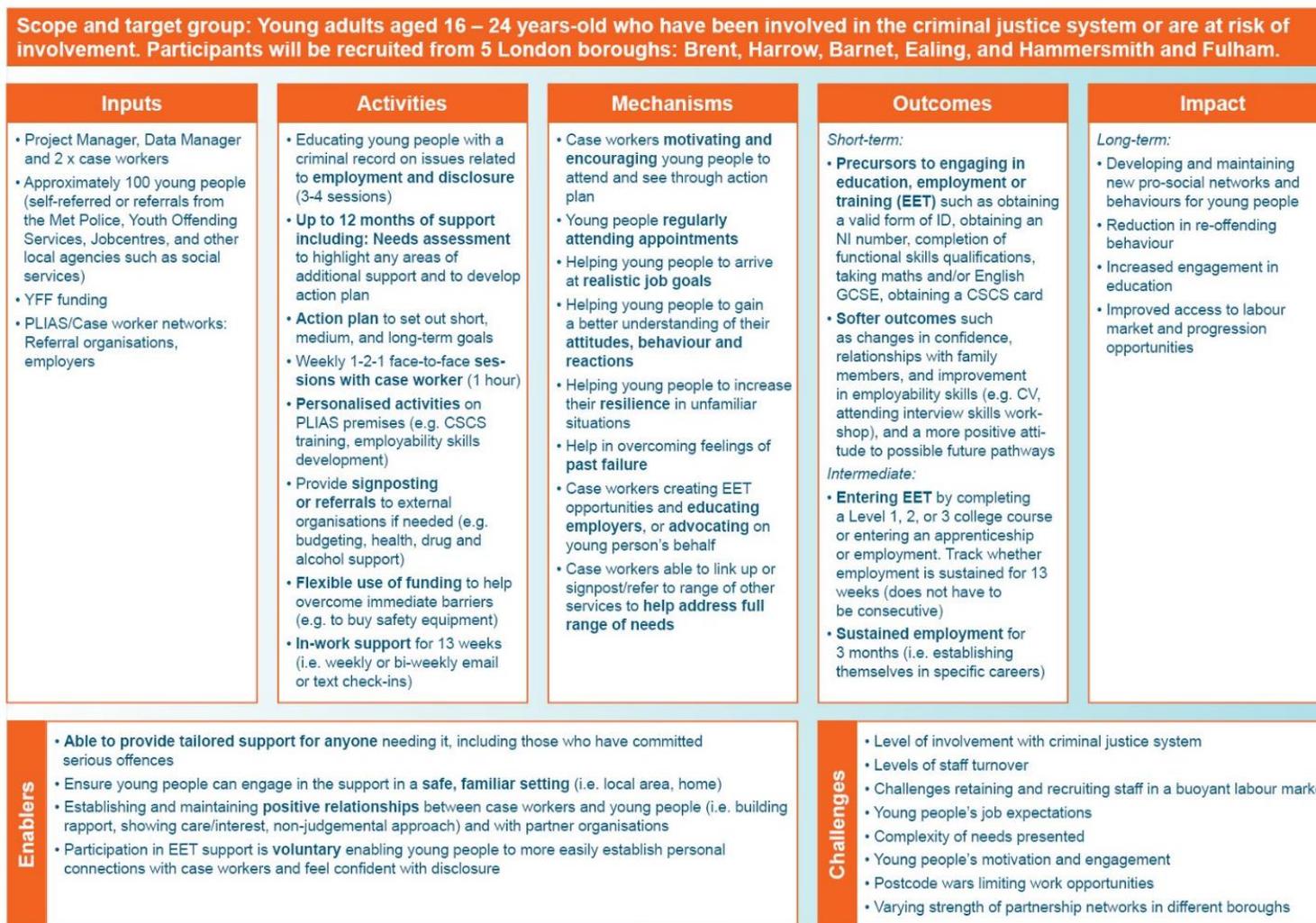
Impacts

The anticipated impacts from the Step Up programme identified at the outset of the pilot are unchanged. They were not in scope for this evaluation.

Enablers and challenges

Levels of staff turnover and challenges retaining and recruiting staff in a relatively buoyant labour market have been added to the ToC, reflecting the challenges Step Up faced with this. The other enablers and challenges identified remain relevant.

Figure 20: Revised Theory of Change



8. Conclusion

This report has summarised the findings of the mixed methods evaluation of PLIAS Resettlement's Step Up programme. To close the report, this final chapter presents conclusions in relation to the extent of evidence for the programme's Theory of Change, including limitations within the data to support claims, considerations for future delivery of the Step Up and similar programmes, and considerations for future evaluations of similar interventions.

Evidencing the Theory of Change

Programme implementation

The evaluation found that some aspects of the Step Up model were delivered as intended. The model offered personalised support, which was generally tailored according to the interests and needs of young people. For young people involved in the criminal justice system, there was education related to employment and disclosure of their criminal record.

However, programme implementation was affected by staff turnover within the case worker team. New staff had to build a rapport and trust with young people, which was challenging, and in some cases, momentum in the support journey was lost. Overall, a high proportion of young people disengaged earlier than anticipated from support.

For young people who stayed with the programme for a reasonable period, support tended to be focused on CSCS and employability skills training (for those interested in careers in construction) or employability support (for individuals interested in careers outside of construction, such as security or retail). There was also some evidence of in-work support developing young people's skills to aid progression, and to identify alternative roles or industries that would facilitate healthier working lives. These examples were limited, which suggests this was not a focus of the programme.

Partnership working with external organisations to meet wider needs such as budgeting, health and drug and alcohol misuse, was relatively limited. Some signposting and referrals took place but this was not widespread. Further referrals were often not appropriate because young people already had many agencies involved in their support and did not want contact with additional services. In these situations, case workers still tried to work closely with partners, for example to understand the young person's wider circumstances and how this might be affecting engagement in Step Up.

Resourcing also appears to have affected the extent of partnership management and employer engagement activity that took place. The frontline delivery team comprised of two case workers, who had a caseload of over 50 young people each in total. The team understood the importance of relationships with partners and employers; they invested time and effort in building partner and employer contacts and networks where possible. However, this work was limited and relatively small-scale as most of their time had to be spent on one-to-one support of young people.

In terms of the target group, both young people in the criminal justice system and those 'at risk' were recruited. This was in principle as intended. However, across both of these groups there were high rates of disengagement and a relatively narrow range of support provided (focused on CSCS card training and employability skills support with no enrichment activities and fewer referrals to wider support than planned). This suggests that a potential mismatch between young people's needs and the programme offer.

Outcomes

The Step Up programme demonstrated some limited evidence of education, training and employment outcomes for young people. One-quarter of participants (28 young people, 25%) achieved a Level 1, 2 or 3 qualification and over one-third (42 young people, 37%) moved into employment or an apprenticeship.

There was also some limited evidence of improvements to employability skills over the course of the programme, in relation to areas such as perceived ability to apply for jobs, awareness of how to apply for jobs and hope around having a career in future.

In relation to the intermediate outcomes measured by the IOMI – motivation, agency, interpersonal trust, wellbeing, hope, resilience and impulsivity – there was emerging evidence of negative change, though small, and just one dimension demonstrating a positive increase. The limitations of this should be considered however and in particular the fact that the IOMI was not administered in a consistent or standardised manner - the wording of questions and mode (in person/telephone) sometimes varied. It is also important to note that only three of the decreases in score between baseline and endline were statistically significant and also that, in some instances, the qualitative evidence offered contrasting examples of positive change in relation to the IOMI dimensions.

Overall, the evaluation was not able to identify which sub-groups of participants benefited most from the Step Up programme. Most of those involved in the criminal justice system left the programme early due to non-engagement. This highlights the significant challenges of engaging and supporting young people involved in the criminal justice system towards employments and suggests a different, potentially more intensive approach was required. The 'at risk' group was broad and included young people with wide-ranging characteristics and in varying circumstances. Due to sample sizes, both in the quantitative and qualitative research, and the breadth of at risk

categories, the evaluation was not able to narrow down particular pathways or outcomes for different at risk groups.

Similarly, the evaluation was not able to understand in any detail the experiences and outcomes of 16 and 17 year olds. The findings about the operation of the model in practice indicated that the same approach was taken for this younger age group and over 18s. Although there was tailoring of support to suit individual circumstances, a differentiated programme for 16 and 17 year olds that takes into account different developmental stages, may have been more appropriate. However, this could not be fully explored in the evaluation.

Mechanisms, enablers and barriers

Several of the key mechanisms within the Step Up programme theory relied on capitalising on a strong, positive relationship between a case worker and a young person. However, the case worker staffing changes affected young people's engagement and meant these mechanisms did not always occur as intended. There were examples of communication between case workers and young people breaking down and young people disengaging from the programme after their case worker left. The new case workers had less influence to encourage and motivate young people to attend appointments and engage in the support and begin addressing their support needs. This reduced the case workers' ability to support young people to understand their attitudes, behaviours and reactions towards employment and other areas of life and overcome their feelings of past failure.

It was anticipated that other key mechanisms would be case workers educating employers and advocating on behalf of young people, and case workers being able to link up other services to help address a full range of needs. As discussed above, the small team had limited capacity to undertake this type of more intensive work. In addition, changes in case worker staffing had negative effects on relationships with partners and employers, as new case workers had to build up relationships with partner organisations afresh.

Lessons for future delivery

In future programmes, consideration should be given to how staff retention can be maximised. As far as possible offering pay and terms and conditions that are more competitive in the local labour market and offering long-term contracts. In the event of staffing changes, it is important to ensure there are adequate handover periods between case workers to allow time for new case workers and young people, partners and employers to become familiar with one another. This can preserve continuity of

support and help prevent breakdown of communication between key stakeholders. Building in longer notice periods to contracts could potentially help.

Additionally, evidence around the importance of one-to-one support within similar programmes is widely documented. With some young people suggesting that Step Up felt less like a programme and more like a means to secure a CSCS card; it is important in future delivery to ensure one-to-one support is a prominent element of an individual's journey. Within this there should be a broad exploration of individual circumstances, which is periodically revisited, in order to ensure all support needs are being adequately met. This has the potential to support sustained engagement through an improved case worker and young person relationship, and by addressing any barriers to engagement that might arise throughout the duration of the programme. Further, it can support the notion of key mechanisms for change underpinning the programme theory.

Further, one-to-one support in future delivery could usefully have a greater emphasis on identifying and building on young people's strengths and assets. The literature highlights the importance of a future-focused, strengths-based approach. Elements of this appeared to be present in Step Up (e.g. exploring interests and strengths in the initial assessment, focusing on action plans, and building skills) but a strengths-based ethos was not at the heart of support. A greater focus on existing capabilities and resources, reduced emphasis on risks and difficulties, and a clear focus on future aspirations could help to improve outcomes and avoid instances of young people being provided with support they did not want.

In some cases, a focus on intensive one-to-one support may not be appropriate if this is already provided by other services that the young person may already be involved with. The young person may not desire this or may not have the capacity to engage with multiple services. In these circumstances, a befriending and liaison role until they are able and ready for education, training and employment support is likely to be most appropriate.

The cohort of young people Step Up and similar programmes aim to support are susceptible to additional vulnerabilities, including increased risk of harm in particular postcode areas. A change in PLIAS' office location inhibited in-person engagement for some young people for this reason. Similar to staffing changes, this is not always avoidable. In order to overcome the challenges that some young people might face in coming to a new location, delivering support in a hybrid style may support sustained engagement. The pros and cons of this should be weighed up and there should be careful consideration of what support is best provided virtually and in-person, to ensure the support provided remains at a high standard. This is also particularly important if PLIAS scales up delivery of the Step Up programme to additional boroughs. To avoid increasing travel times for those further afield there would be benefit in taking support to young people's local communities rather than expecting them to travel to a centralised location. This would likely make referrals easier too, with greater possibility for co-location and 'warm handovers' from referral agencies to PLIAS.

Rates of disengagement from the programme were higher for those with a history of involvement in the criminal justice system. Overall, 29 young people (25%) were involved in the criminal justice system and 26 (89%) disengaged from the programme and two (7%) moved into work. This suggests that the existing delivery model did not meet the needs of this group effectively and that an alternative model should be developed and tested for these young people.

Finally, partnerships with employers and wider support organisations are integral to providing a holistic support offer and brokering opportunities for people with offending histories and risk factors pre-empting involvement in the criminal justice system. Consideration could be given to the role of a partnerships manager for future delivery. This role would take the resource intensive task of developing and maintaining relationships and brokering jobs, away from case workers, allowing them to focus primarily on delivering support. This responsibility could be given to a dedicated team member but that may potentially extend the risk of contacts and relationships being held by one person. Therefore, similar precautions and steps should be taken as suggested with case worker turnover, to ensure partnerships remain with PLIAS and not an individual member of the team.

Future research and publications

To expand the evidence base on what works in supporting young people in touch with, or at risk of engagement with the criminal justice system, it is important to understand the limitations of evaluations such as this and adapt future evaluations to increase the breadth and strength of the evidence collected.

The evaluation has not been able to substantially further knowledge about which sub-groups of young people particularly benefitted from the support or how their participant journeys varied. This was in part due to the broad inclusion criteria for 'at risk' which were tested in the project. The intention had been that testing a broad range of criteria might identify key sub-groups that were recruited and supported by PLIAS, which could then be used to build knowledge about what works for whom. In practice, young people with widely varying needs and circumstances were involved and no particular sub-groups were identifiable. In future pilot interventions, there would be benefit in avoiding broadly-defined 'at risk' young people as the target group and instead focus on one or two more narrowly defined groups.

Engagement in the qualitative element of this evaluation was limited. Consideration should be given to how young people can better be engaged in evaluations, particularly where there is an anticipated lack of trust in and/or negative experience of working with stakeholders. This could include meeting with young people within the support environment to facilitate a warm introduction, rather than reaching out via text/telephone call as in this evaluation. Alternatively, other methods to capture insights

into the support could be considered. This could include digital ethnographies of support journeys or observations of support in real time.

To ensure greater standardisation in data collection for intermediate outcomes, the evaluation team could have worked more closely with the delivery team. For example, while the evaluation team met regularly with the project manager and data officer – more regular meetings with case workers could have helped to increase buy-in to evaluation activity and improve understanding about how to gather and record MI data. There would be value in building this in to future evaluation.

Appendix 2: Purposive literature review references

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Wales Prison and Probation Service," *European Journal of Probation*, 13(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/20662203211024105>

Wong, K., Kinsella, R. and Meadows, L. (2018) "Developing a voluntary sector model for engaging offenders," *Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 57(4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hojo.12284>

Appendix 3: Risk factors for being involved in the criminal justice system

The table below lists risk factors for being involved in the criminal justice system, identified through discussion with PLIAS and also through the purposive review of literature. In developing this list, the research team drew in particular on two key documents:

- Crow, I., France, A., Hacking, S., and Hart, A (2004) *Does Communities that Care work? An evaluation of a community-based risk prevention programme in three neighbourhoods London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.*
- Guidance from the Youth Justice Board on assessing young people: Youth Justice Board (2006) *Onset Assessment Guidance.*³¹

Risk factors identified by PLIAS	'Communities that care' evaluation	YJB guidance on Onset guidance
Social surrounding	Opportunities and rewards for pro-social involvement (community, school, family)	Living arrangements
Economic background	Family attachment	Family and personal relationships
Peer groups	Community disorganisation and neglect	Statutory education
Victimisation	Availability of drugs	Neighbourhood
Location	High turnover and lack of neighbourhood attachment	Lifestyle
Absence guardianship	Aggressive behaviour including bullying	Substance misuse
Poor family relations	Lack of commitment to school and truancy	Physical health
Gender	School disorganisation	Emotional and mental health
Stop and Search	Poor parental supervision	Perception of self and others
Ethnic background	Family conflict	Thinking and behaviour
Cultural background	Family history of problem behaviour	Attitudes to offending

Stereotype	Parental condoning of problem behaviour	Motivation to change
Disabilities	Alienation and lack of social commitment	
Substance misuse	Attitudes condoning problem behaviour	
Lack of support	Early involvement in problem behaviour	
Health needs	Friends involved in problem behaviour	
Mental health needs		
Truancy from School		
School suspension or exclusion		

This longlist was reviewed and used to develop a short list of risk factors, which included risk factors that were common across the sources. This was then used to develop the programme's MI data. The short list was:

- Individual views and attitudes (socially informed) - Attitudes towards offending, motivation to change.
- Family relations/attachment – strength of ties with family, opportunities for sharing thoughts and feelings, asking for help.
- School experiences – school disorganisation, lack of commitment, truancy, suspension, or exclusion.
- Peers – influence and level of involvement in offending behaviour.
- Neighbourhood/location – in the literature this is spoken about as community disorganisation and neglect, or there being many opportunities for offending in the area.

Appendix 4: Intermediate Outcome Measurement Instrument (IOMI) tool

1. I have close friends I can trust	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. I don't really think about what I'm doing, I just do it	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
3. There are people who really understand me	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4. My problems will dominate all of my life	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5. I often do the first thing that comes into my head	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6. There are people I can turn to when I have a problem	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
8. I make good decisions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
9. I feel confident	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
10. I feel hopeless about my future	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
11. There are some people who I trust	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
12. I feel good about myself	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13. I feel capable of making decisions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
14. I have a hard time making it through stressful events	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
15. I owe it to myself to change	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
16. My life is full of problems which I can't overcome	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
17. Anyone can talk about changing themselves; I'm actually going to do something about it	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
18. I often do things without thinking of the consequences	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
19. I usually deal with problems well	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
20. I am confident that I can cope with unexpected events	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
21. I am really working hard to change my life	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Appendix 5: Phase 1 Discussion guides

Young person discussion guide

Introduction to research

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me today.

Hi, my name is xxx, I am a researcher at the Institute for Employment Studies. We're an independent research organisation, so we are not connected to PLIAS or Step Up in any way.

IES has been asked to speak to young people involved in the 'Step Up' programme. We want to understand more about people's experiences of this support. The aim of the research is to help improve the programme for young people.

Our discussion today will cover:

- How you heard about Step Up, and why you decided to take part;
- The support and activities you have taken part in with your Case Worker;
- Whether you feel the support has been helpful in preparing you for work, education or training;
- How, if at all, you feel the support could be improved.

If you agree, we may contact you again as you progress through your time at Step Up to catch up on how things have been going and to check in on the support you have received. You do not have to agree to this, if you do you can change your mind at any time.

This conversation will last around 30-45 minutes.

This conversation is completely private and anything you say will not be shared with your Case Worker or anybody else working at PLIAS. Any information we do use from this conversation will be reported anonymously (so we will not identify who said what).

Taking part is entirely up to you. You can decide you no longer want to take part at any point during this conversation, and afterwards by contacting Rakhee Patel [contact info on research briefing document / consent form].

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation today. I'll be taking notes, but recording our conversation will help make sure I don't miss anything. This will be stored securely by IES and not shared with PLIAS or anyone outside the research team.

At the end of our conversation, we will arrange for your £30 shopping voucher to be sent to you via email, text message or by post, depending on which suits you best.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Once recording begins, ask participant to give verbal consent to go ahead with the interview and recording

Background and intro to Step Up (c.5 minutes)

1. Could you start by introducing yourself and telling me a little bit about what you're doing day-to-day at the moment?
2. What is your current living situation? *Probe for: where living, who with, how long lived there, any caring responsibilities*
3. It would be good to hear a little bit about any education and work history you might have had?

Probe for when left school/college, circumstances if left early? If work history, types of work, when experience was gained...

4. When did you begin receiving support from Step Up?
 - a. How did you hear about the Step Up programme?
 - b. What information were you given?
 - c. What made you want to take part in the programme?
 - d. Was there anything you were concerned or worried about when you were deciding whether you would take part?
5. What did you hope to get out of this support?
 - a. Where do you hope to be after receiving support from Step Up?
 - b. How does this fit in with your long-term goals?
6. Before you joined Step Up, were you receiving any other support from other support organisations?

Probe for: housing support, financial support, health and wellbeing support, YOS team etc...

- a. How long have you been receiving this support?
- b. Does this have any overlap with the support you are receiving from Step Up?

Support received from Step Up (c.15 minutes)

7. How often do you meet with your Case Worker at Step Up? *Probe: Too frequent? Not frequent enough?*
8. How long do your meetings usually last? *Probe: Long enough? Not long enough?*
9. Where do you and your Case Worker meet? Is it always in the same place?

Probe: Does this work for you?

10. Have you been seeing the same Case Worker since you started receiving support from Step Up?
11. What do you and your case worker usually talk about when you meet?

Probe: Do you find these conversations useful? Do you feel that your Case Worker understands your situation? Do they understand your aspirations and goals?

12. How would you describe your relationship with your Case Worker?

Probe for reasons why, including how their approach contrasts with other organisations they're in touch with

We would like to create a timeline of activities that you have been involved with throughout your time at Step Up. We can move this around and adjust as you remember new things, and if you agree to take part in further conversations throughout your time at Step Up, we can continue to add to this.

13. What did you and your Case Worker discuss during your first meeting together?

- a. What questions did they ask you during your first meeting?
- b. Was it explained to you why these questions were being asked?
- c. How did you find this early discussion?

14. Have you and your Case Worker made an Action Plan together?

An Action Plan, informed by the discussion in the first meeting, sets out short-, medium-, and long-term goals for the individual receiving support from Step Up.

- a. When did this take place?
- b. What did this involve?
- c. Can you remember any of the actions you and your Case Worker agreed in your Action Plan?
- d. How did you find this process?
- e. How has your Action Plan influenced the support you are receiving as part of Step Up?

15. What other activities have you been involved in and supported with since joining Step Up?

Probe for: Employability Skills Workshops, CSCS training, Enrichment activities (i.e. sports classes), Signposting or referrals to external support organisations, Introduction to employers or training providers...

16. For each additional activity:

- a. How did you find out about this activity?
- b. Why did you decide to do it?
- c. Do you remember when it took place?
- d. How long did it last?
- e. Did you enjoy it? *Probe for why*
- f. Do you feel it has been helpful for you? *Probe for how/why*

Before moving on, confirm with the participant that the timeline looks correct, and activities are in the right place.

17. [If signposted or referred to any other support organisations] What other support have you been able to access through your Step Up case worker?

- a. How have you found this? Has this been useful at all?
- b. How long have you been receiving this support?
- c. Do you talk to your Case Worker about the support you receive here?

Outcomes and conclusions (c.10 minutes)

18. Since joining Step Up, how have you begun to prepare to enter employment, education or training?
 - a. Is there anything you have needed to get in place so you can access employment, education or training opportunities? *Probe: Valid ID, NI number, CSCS card*
 - b. How has your case worker supported you to get these in place?
 - c. How have you found this process?
19. Have you noticed any changes in yourself since joining Step Up? *Probe: confidence, self-assurance, motivation...*
 - a. What has led to these changes?
 - b. Has the support you have received from your Case Worker helped at all?
 - c. Has your confidence in yourself changed since joining Step Up? *Probe: Range of future pathways and attitudes to work?*
20. Has taking part in the Step Up programme affected your relationships with family members and friends in any way? How?
 - a. Has Step Up supported the development of any new relationships?
 - b. What elements of the support have helped with this?
21. Have you explored or applied for any employment, education or training opportunities since joining Step Up?
 - a. If yes, what opportunities?
 - b. How did you decide which employment, education or training opportunities you wanted to apply for?
 - c. Did your caseworker support you in identifying relevant opportunities? How did you find this process? What did you discuss?
22. How did you find applying for these opportunities? *Probe: difficulty compared to pre-Step Up applications, confidence in application, support received from caseworkers*
23. Were you successful in any of these applications?
24. [If no] What do you need to do next to (re)enter employment, education or training? *Probe: Confidence in CV and application writing, interview skills...*
 - a. How confident do you feel about this?
25. [If yes] Why do you think you were successful in this application? What made the difference?
 - a. What has your experience been like so far? What do you like/dislike about it?
 - b. How do you get on with your colleagues / manager / peers?
 - c. Have you stayed in contact with PLIAS? Have you received any further support/advice from them?
 - d. How helpful has this been?

Reflections on support received (c.10 minutes)

26. Overall, do you feel the support you have received through Step Up has helped you in any way? How?
 - a. What part of the support has been most useful? Why is this?
 - b. Has anything been less useful? Why?

- c. [If not covered] Do you think the support you have received will be helpful for you when looking for employment, education or training opportunities?
27. Do you feel the support you have received so far from Step Up has met your expectations?
- If yes, how?
 - If no, why not? What could be done to improve the support?
28. Are there any other improvements you feel could be made to Step Up that would help you?
29. Is there any other support you would like or feel could be useful that you have not been offered?
- Why would this be useful?
 - How do you feel this would help meet your goals?

Close

That's the end of my questions, thank you for answering these. Before we close, are there any questions you would like to ask?

We are hoping to speak to some people again as they progress through their time at Step Up, would you be willing to be contacted again for another conversation? You do not have to agree now, you can change your mind at any time.

Stop recording

Gather address / email / mobile number for incentive payment

Thank and close

PLIAS Staff: Discussion Guide

Introduction to research

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me today.

Hi, my name is xxx, I am a researcher at the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). As you are aware, IES has been commissioned by the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) to carry out an evaluation of the 'Step Up' programme delivered by PLIAS.

The research aims to explore the ways in which the 'Step Up' programme is supporting young people move towards, and into, employment, education and training (EET), including how you engage with young people, work with employers and local support organisations, and the outcomes young people achieve as a result of the Step Up support

We are interested in your experiences of working on Step Up since October 2022.

Our discussion today will cover:

- The circumstances of young people entering the Step Up programme, and how you engage with and support them,

- How you build relationships and work with other local support organisations to support young people,
- How you engage with employers to secure work opportunities for young people,
- The outcomes young people achieve through the Step Up programme.

Our conversation today is completely confidential. Anything you say will not be shared with anyone else working at or receiving support from PLIAS. We will produce reports which will include information provided in this interview, however this will be done anonymously, and you will remain unidentifiable within these.

This conversation will last around 45-60 minutes.

Taking part is entirely up to you. You can decide you no longer want to take part at any point during this conversation, and afterwards by contacting Rakhee Patel [contact info on research briefing document / consent form].

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation today. I'll be taking notes, but recording our conversation with help make sure I don't miss anything. This will be stored securely by IES and not shared with PLIAS or anyone outside the research team.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Once recording begins, ask participant to give verbal consent to go ahead with the interview and recording

Introduction (c.5 minutes)

1. Could you tell me a bit about your role and responsibilities at PLIAS?
Probe: length of service, volunteer/staff, case load size...
2. And what were you doing before you worked on Step Up?

Target groups and referrals (c.10 minutes)

3. Could you tell me about the different groups of people supported through the Step Up programme since October 2022? *Probe: age, ethnic minority groups, gender, disability, backgrounds...*
4. Could you outline some of the circumstances young people that have recently joined Step Up are experiencing?
 - a. Are there common support needs presented by young people engaging with Step Up? *Probe: substance misuse, housing, health, gang involvement etc...*
5. How are young people referred into Step Up?
 - a. Who are the main referral partners? Does this differ by Borough?
 - b. Are there any other ways young people can enter Step Up's support?

6. In which Boroughs is Step Up currently providing support to young people?
 - a. How do referral networks differ by Borough?
 - b. How are new referral networks in London Boroughs where Step Up is newly operating in being established? *Probe: successes, challenges*
7. What is working well about referrals into Step Up? What is working less well? *Probe on differences between different referral pathways and partners and also extent to which referrals from agencies match the referral criteria for the programme*
8. Are there any particular groups of young people it is harder to encourage to take part in Step Up than others? *If so, why? How do you try and overcome this?*

Support for young people (c.10 minutes)

9. What support do you provide young people throughout their time at Step Up? *Probe: action plans, needs assessments, enrichment activities, one-to-one mentoring?*
 - a. How do you work with young people to agree realistic job goals to inform their action plan?
 - b. Do you find that young people have different levels of engagement with each support activity?
 - c. Which activities do you feel are most important in the support provided?
10. How flexible is the Step Up support to individual's circumstances? *Probe: does support follow a set structure? Is the support largely flexible?*
 - a. What determines the pace of support provided? Are there set milestones in an individual's journey with Step Up?
 - b. What determines the activities you conduct with young people?
 - c. How much time can you spend with each person on your case load? *Probe: Do you think this is sufficient? Are you able to spend more time with people who need more support? Is there a limit to the amount of time you can spend working with any individual? How much can this vary?*
 - d. How much time can young people spend completing additional activities with PLIAS? (i.e. CSCS training, employability workshops, sport classes) How much can this vary?
11. How do you build relationships with young people during their time at Step Up?
 - a. What challenges do you experience when building relationships with young people? How are these overcome?
 - b. Have you identified any particularly successful methods at building and strengthening relationships with young people?
 - c. How are you able to support continued engagement in the Step Up programme?
12. How well in your view are the needs of young people being met through the support activities you have described?

13. What happens if a young person disengages from the programme?

Probe: What do you do? What do others in the organisation do? Are there any examples?

- a. How, if at all, is the support varied, when the young person re-engages?
- b. Are there any particular groups of young people who are more likely to disengage from the programme?

Referrals to other support organisations (c.10 minutes)

14. What external organisations do you work with to support young people engaged with Step Up? *Probe: education and skills, employability, support for housing, substance misuse, gang involvement, health and wellbeing etc...*

- a. How well established are these partnerships? *Probe on how this varies by organisation and area*

15. What influences your decision to make a referral to an external support organisation?

- a. Is the young person involved in this decision? What information about the organisation / support do they receive prior to a referral?
- b. What is the process for making a referral? *Probe: introductions / handovers, ensuring young person's engagement, disclosure*

16. How receptive to receiving additional support are young people engaged with Step Up?

- a. [if low reception] why do you think young people are not very receptive to receiving additional support?
- b. How do you increase a young person's buy-in for receiving additional support?

17. How do you build relationships with local support organisations?

18. Have you established any new relationships with support organisations since October 2022?

- a. [if yes] What was the process for this?
- b. How was the programme communicated to potential partners?
- c. What made this successful?
- d. Was this approach unsuccessful in any cases? Why?

19. How effective is partnership working with other organisations?

- a. What is working well?
- b. What are the main barriers/issues in relation to partnership working?
- c. Could anything be done to improve partnership working with other support organisations?

20. How does working with other local support organisations add to the support Step Up provides?

21. Do you feel there are any additional organisations or services required that you currently do not have access to?

Working with employers (c.10 minutes)

22. How do you identify employers that are suitable for the young people you work with?
 - a. Are there any particularly successful ways of identifying suitable employers?
 - b. What are the challenges of identifying suitable employers?
23. How do you engage with employers to find opportunities relevant to individuals on the Step Up programme?
 - a. How do you explain the programme and the support PLIAS offers to them?
 - b. How open are employers to recruiting and training individuals who are receiving support from Step Up?
 - c. What advice/guidance do you provide to employers to help them work with/support the Step-Up employers?
 - d. Where employers are less open, why is this? How do you try and address this?
24. Have you began working with any new employers since October 2022?
 - a. How was this new relationship formed?
 - b. How long was the process of bringing them on board?
25. What sectors are the employers you are engaging with working across?
 - a. Are there any particular industries / sectors that are more engaged with the Step Up programme / PLIAS? If so, why is this?
26. What is working well in relation to your work with employers?
27. What are the challenges faced when engaging with employers?
 - a. How can these challenges be overcome?
 - b. How do these challenges affect the opportunities available to young people on the Step Up programme?

Outcomes (c.10-15 minutes)

28. What short-term outcomes do you typically see in the young people that progress through the Step Up programme?
 - a. Employment, education or training (EET) outcomes?
 - b. Soft outcomes (confidence, outlook, motivation to find EET, improved personal relationships)?
 - c. Any other outcomes?
29. What is contributing to the achievement of these outcomes?
 - a. Support from PLIAS? Which aspects of the programme design?
 - b. Ability to provide support alongside other local support organisations?
 - c. Young person's engagement in the support provided?
 - d. Changes in young people's attitudes and behaviours over the course of the programme? What drives these?
30. What are the main challenges you experience when supporting young people engaged with Step Up? *Probe: young persons' engagement, working with support organisations, time / case load pressures*
 - a. How do these challenges affect the outcomes individuals achieve through Step Up?

- b. Do these challenges vary by groups of young people? If so, how?
 - c. How can / have these challenges been overcome?
31. Overall, how effective do you think the Step Up programme is at moving people toward employment, education and training? Is this the same for all groups of young people?
- a. Which types of participants is the programme working well for and why? *Probe on conviction type, close to the justice system vs in touch with, ethnic groups.*
 - b. Which types of participants experience greater challenges moving into education, employment and training?
32. To what extent is the cost of living crisis affecting the outcomes you achieve? Why?
33. What additional support not already provided by Step Up do you feel could increase outcomes for young people? How could this increase outcomes?
34. What are the challenges (if any) of recording information on outcomes, meeting referral criteria and other records on individuals supported through Step Up? Close

That's the end of my questions, thank you for answering these. Before we close, are there any questions you would like to ask?

Stop recording.

Thank and close.

Partner: Discussion Guide

Introduction to research

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me today.

Hi, my name is xxx, I am a researcher at IES. IES is an independent research organisation, so we are not connected to PLIAS or Step Up in any way.

We are carrying out an evaluation of the 'Step Up' programme delivered by PLIAS resettlement. The 'Step Up' programme and this evaluation is being funded by the Youth Futures Foundation.

This research aims to understand how the 'Step Up' programme works in practice and achieves its target outcomes for young people, as well as how the current support offer could be improved.

Our discussion today will cover:

- How you currently work with PLIAS

- What employment opportunities, services or referrals you currently provide to the organisation
- Your experiences of working with young people that are part of the Step Up programme, including the main success and challenges
- What outcomes are being achieved for the young people you work with and how this can be improved.

This conversation will last around 45 minutes.

This conversation is completely private. Any information we do use from this conversation will be reported anonymously (so we will not identify who said what).

Taking part is entirely up to you. You can decide you no longer want to take part at any point during this conversation, and afterwards by contacting Rakhee Patel [contact info on research briefing document].

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation today. I'll be taking notes but recording our conversation will help make sure I don't miss anything. This will be stored securely by IES and not shared with PLIAS or anyone outside the research team.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Once recording begins, ask participant to give verbal consent to go ahead with the interview and recording

Background and intro to Step Up (c.5 minutes)

1. Could you start by introducing yourself and telling me a little bit about your current job?
2. Could you tell me a little bit about the organisation you work for?
Probe for: geographical scope (e.g. structured by borough, whole of London, etc.), size and sector of employer, any specific support delivered, whether refers to/receives referrals from PLIAS.
3. In your role, how do you work with young people with histories/ at risk of criminal convictions?

Local partnership network and relationship with PLIAS (c.5 minutes)

4. When did you begin working with PLIAS?
 - a. How did this partnership come about?
5. What is the aim of your partnership with PLIAS? How does this fit in with your organisation's goals?
6. How do you work with PLIAS currently?
 - a. Which groups of service users do you support?

[FOR EMPLOYERS ONLY] Support given to Step Up participants (c.15-20 minutes)

7. What kind of work opportunities have you provided for young people working with PLIAS?
 - a. What approach do you take to working with these employees? (i.e. induction process, performance management)
 - b. Does this differ at all to how you work with other employees? How and why?
 - c. Are you aware of what support these young people receive from PLIAS during this time?
 - d. Do you draw on any other sources of support to help these young people in the workplace?
 - e. How long do these opportunities typically last?
8. What has been your experience working with these employees?
 - a. What do they bring to the business/workforce?
 - b. Have there been any difficulties/challenges?
9. Has your [organisation's] approach to working with people with criminal convictions or at risk of involvement in crime changed at all since engaging with PLIAS?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. Has working with PLIAS staff influenced this approach? How?
 - c. Have you received any guidance from PLIAS on what type of job roles in your organisation would be suitable for young people, depending on the nature of their conviction? [Probe for ways in which PLIAS may have helped with guidance on day to day management/overseeing such individuals]
10. Has your experience of working with PLIAS led to any changes in your organisation's hiring and management practices?
11. What works well in relation to your partnership working with PLIAS? Is there anything that could be improved?

If employer, skip following section until Outcomes.

[FOR SUPPORT PARTNERS ONLY] Support given to Step Up participants (c.15-20 minutes)

Referrals

12. How do you refer young people to PLIAS, or how are participants referred onto your organisation?
 - a. What are the eligibility criteria for referrals?
 - b. How are young people identified that may benefit from support (from either PLIAS or the interviewee's organisation)?
 - c. What information is given to young people at this time?
 - d. What information is shared with / do you receive from PLIAS caseworkers?
 - e. How effective is the referral process? [Probe for any specific successes/challenges]
 - f. [If receiving referrals from PLIAS] What other organisations do you receive referrals from?

Details of support

13. What kind of support do you provide for PLIAS young people?
 - a. What does this entail?

- b. How long does this support typically last?
 - c. How frequently do you see the young people over this time?
 - d. Who delivers this support? [volunteer, paid staff etc]
 - e. Where is this support delivered?
 - f. How is this support received by young people? *Probe for differences based on personal circumstances*
14. Do you know what (if any) support young people are receiving from PLIAS during this time?
- a. How does this fit with how you work with the young person? [Probe on complementarity/any points of duplication]
15. Do you remain in contact with PLIAS caseworkers while supporting young people?
- a. How often are you in contact?
 - b. What information do you share? What do you discuss?
16. How do you try and maintain a young person's engagement in the support?
- a. What happens if a young person disengages?
 - b. How is this communicated to PLIAS caseworkers?
17. What works well in relation to your partnership working with PLIAS? Is there anything that could be improved?

Outcomes and conclusions (c.10-15 minutes)

18. What outcomes do you tend to see for the young people you work with? E.g.
- a. Changes in their financial literacy/planning?
 - b. Social relationships?
 - c. Resolution of health, substance issues?
 - d. Educational or training outcomes?
 - e. Work outcomes? Sustainment in employment? Progression in the workplace?
 - f. Changes in attitudes and behaviours, such as greater self-awareness, changes in confidence, resilience, changes in attitude to work?
 - g. Anything else?
19. Does young peoples' likelihood of achieving these outcomes differ based on their personal circumstances?

Probe for: differences in their level of involvement with the criminal justice system, differences in complexity of needs, differences in professional expectations, differences in engagement levels...

20. How often are these outcomes sustained?
- a. What challenges are there in sustaining these outcomes?
21. Is there any additional support you feel you could have received from PLIAS or other partners to help these young people progress?
22. Overall, do you feel that there is adequate support available for the young people you work with to meet their full range of needs?
- a. Are there any gaps in support currently?

Close

That's the end of my questions, thank you for answering these. Before we close, are there any questions you would like to ask?

Stop recording

Thank and close

Appendix 6: Phase 2 Discussion guides

Young person discussion guide: First interview

Introduction to research

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me today.

Hi, my name is xxx, I am a researcher at the Institute for Employment Studies. We're an independent research organisation, so we are not connected to PLIAS or Step Up in any way.

IES has been asked to speak to young people involved in the 'Step Up' programme. We want to understand more about people's experiences of this support. The aim of the research is to help improve the programme for young people.

Our discussion today will cover:

- How you heard about Step Up, and why you decided to take part;
- The support and activities you have taken part in with your Case Worker;
- Whether you feel the support has been helpful in preparing you for work, education or training;
- How, if at all, you feel the support could be improved.

If you agree, we may contact you again as you progress through your time at Step Up to catch up on how things have been going and to check in on the support you have received. You do not have to agree to this, if you do you can change your mind at any time.

This conversation will last around 30-45 minutes.

This conversation is completely private and anything you say will not be shared with your Case Worker or anybody else working at PLIAS. Any information we do use from this conversation will be reported anonymously (so we will not identify who said what).

Taking part is entirely up to you. You can decide you no longer want to take part at any point during this conversation, and afterwards by contacting Rakhee Patel [contact info on research briefing document / consent form].

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation today. I'll be taking notes, but recording our conversation with help make sure I don't miss anything. This will be stored securely by IES and not shared with PLIAS or anyone outside the research team.

At the end of our conversation, we will arrange for your £30 shopping voucher to be sent to you via email, text message or by post, depending on which suits you best.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Once recording begins, ask participant to give verbal consent to go ahead with the interview and recording

Background and intro to Step Up (c.5 minutes)

1. Could you start by introducing yourself and telling me a little bit about what you're doing day-to-day at the moment?
2. What is your current living situation? *Probe for: where living, who with, how long lived there, any caring responsibilities*
3. It would be good to hear a little bit about any education and work history you might have had?

Probe for when left school/college, circumstances if left early? If work history, types of work, when experience was gained...

4. When did you begin receiving support from Step Up?
 - a. How did you hear about the Step Up programme?
 - b. What information were you given?
 - c. What made you want to take part in the programme?
 - d. Was there anything you were concerned or worried about when you were deciding whether you would take part?
5. What did you hope to get out of this support?
 - a. Where do you hope to be after receiving support from Step Up?
 - b. How does this fit in with your long-term goals?
6. Before you joined Step Up, were you receiving any other support from other support organisations?

Probe for: housing support, financial support, health and wellbeing support, YOS team etc...

- a. How long have you been receiving this support?
- b. Does this have any overlap with the support you are receiving from Step Up?

Support received from Step Up (c.15 minutes)

7. How often do you meet with your Case Worker at Step Up? *Probe: Too frequent? Not frequent enough?*

8. How long do your meetings usually last? *Probe: Long enough? Not long enough?*
9. Where do you and your Case Worker meet? Is it always in the same place?

Probe: Does this work for you?

10. Have you been seeing the same Case Worker since you started receiving support from Step Up?
11. What do you and your case worker usually talk about when you meet?

Probe: Do you find these conversations useful? Do you feel that your Case Worker understands your situation? Do they understand your aspirations and goals?

12. How would you describe your relationship with your Case Worker?

Probe for reasons why, including how their approach contrasts with other organisations they're in touch with

We would like to create a timeline of activities that you have been involved with throughout your time at Step Up. We can move this around and adjust as you remember new things, and if you agree to take part in further conversations throughout your time at Step Up, we can continue to add to this.

13. What did you and your Case Worker discuss during your first meeting together?
 - a. What questions did they ask you during your first meeting?
 - b. Was it explained to you why these questions were being asked?
 - c. How did you find this early discussion?
14. Have you and your Case Worker made an Action Plan together?

An Action Plan, informed by the discussion in the first meeting, sets out short-, medium-, and long-term goals for the individual receiving support from Step Up.

- a. When did this take place?
- b. What did this involve?
- c. Can you remember any of the actions you and your Case Worker agreed in your Action Plan?
- d. How did you find this process?
- e. How has your Action Plan influenced the support you are receiving as part of Step Up?
15. What other activities have you been involved in and supported with since joining Step Up?

Probe for: Employability Skills Workshops, CSCS training, Enrichment activities (i.e. sports classes), Signposting or referrals to external support organisations, Introduction to employers or training providers...

16. For each additional activity:
 - a. How did you find out about this activity?
 - b. Why did you decide to do it?
 - c. Do you remember when it took place?
 - d. How long did it last?

- e. Did you enjoy it? *Probe for why*
- f. Do you feel it has been helpful for you? *Probe for how/why*

Before moving on, confirm with the participant that the timeline looks correct, and activities are in the right place.

- 17. [If signposted or referred to any other support organisations] What other support have you been able to access through your Step Up case worker?
 - a. How have you found this? Has this been useful at all?
 - b. How long have you been receiving this support?
 - c. Do you talk to your Case Worker about the support you receive here?

Outcomes and conclusions (c.10 minutes)

- 18. Since joining Step Up, how have you begun to prepare to enter employment, education or training?
 - a. Is there anything you have needed to get in place so you can access employment, education or training opportunities? *Probe: Valid ID, NI number, CSCS card*
 - b. How has your case worker supported you to get these in place?
 - c. How have you found this process?
- 19. Have you noticed any changes in yourself since joining Step Up? *Probe: confidence, self-assurance, motivation...*
 - a. What has led to these changes?
 - b. Has the support you have received from your Case Worker helped at all?
 - c. Has your confidence in yourself changed since joining Step Up? *Probe: Range of future pathways and attitudes to work?*
- 20. Has taking part in the Step Up programme affected your relationships with family members and friends in any way? How?
 - a. Has Step Up supported the development of any new relationships?
 - b. What elements of the support have helped with this?
- 21. Have you explored or applied for any employment, education or training opportunities since joining Step Up?
 - a. If yes, what opportunities?
 - b. How did you decide which employment, education or training opportunities you wanted to apply for?
 - c. Did your caseworker support you in identifying relevant opportunities? How did you find this process? What did you discuss?
- 22. How did you find applying for these opportunities? *Probe: difficulty compared to pre-Step Up applications, confidence in application, support received from caseworkers*
- 23. Were you successful in any of these applications?
- 24. [If no] What do you need to do next to (re)enter employment, education or training? *Probe: Confidence in CV and application writing, interview skills...*
 - a. How confident do you feel about this?
- 25. [If yes] Why do you think you were successful in this application? What made the difference?

- a. What has your experience been like so far? What do you like/dislike about it?
- b. How do you get on with your colleagues / manager / peers?
- c. Have you stayed in contact with PLIAS? Have you received any further support/advice from them?
- d. How helpful has this been?

Reflections on support received (c.10 minutes)

26. Overall, do you feel the support you have received through Step Up has helped you in any way? How?
 - a. What part of the support has been most useful? Why is this?
 - b. Has anything been less useful? Why?
 - c. [If not covered] Do you think the support you have received will be helpful for you when looking for employment, education or training opportunities?
27. Do you feel the support you have received so far from Step Up has met your expectations?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, why not? What could be done to improve the support?
28. Are there any other improvements you feel could be made to Step Up that would help you?
29. Is there any other support you would like or feel could be useful that you have not been offered?
 - a. Why would this be useful?
 - b. How do you feel this would help meet your goals?

Close

That's the end of my questions, thank you for answering these. Before we close, are there any questions you would like to ask?

We are hoping to speak to some people again as they progress through their time at Step Up, would you be willing to be contacted again for another conversation? You do not have to agree now, you can change your mind at any time.

Stop recording

Gather address / email / mobile number for incentive payment

Thank and close

Young person discussion guide: Longitudinal interview

Introduction to research

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me today.

Hi, my name is xxx, I am a researcher at the Institute for Employment Studies. We're an independent research organisation, so we are not connected to PLIAS or Step Up in any way.

IES has been asked to speak to young people involved in the 'Step Up' programme.

You might remember that we spoke back in [add month].

Again, you might remember that we want to understand more about people's experiences of this support. The aim of the research is to help improve the programme for young people.

In our discussion today we would like to ask about:

- Your situation at the moment and if you're still [tailor based on previous interview: looking for work, doing some training, in your job as] and what has changed since then.
- If you have taken part in any support and activities with your case worker since we last spoke and, if so, your experiences of these.
- [If relevant] any in-work support you have received since moving into employment.
- Whether you feel the support has been helpful in your journey into, or toward work, education or training.
- How, if at all, you feel the support could be improved.

If you agree, we may contact you again next year to catch up on how things have been going and to check in on the support you have received. You do not have to agree to this, if you do you can change your mind at any time.

This conversation will last around 20-30 minutes.

We may also talk to a member of staff about the support and activities you have been offered. This is to help us understand more about the activities that you have been offered. It is not a test for you or your caseworker. Nothing else from our conversation will be shared with Step Up staff.

We will not tell your caseworker or anyone else working at PLIAS anything you tell us about your experiences of taking part in support or activities. Any information we do use from this conversation will be reported anonymously (so we will not identify who said what).

Taking part is entirely up to you. You can decide you no longer want to take part at any point during this conversation, and afterwards by contacting Rakhee Patel [contact info on research briefing document / consent form].

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation today. I'll be taking notes, but recording our conversation with help make sure I don't miss anything. This will be stored securely by IES and not shared outside the research team.

At the end of our conversation, we will arrange for your £30 shopping voucher to be sent to you via email, text message or by post, depending on which suits you best.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Once recording begins, ask participant to give verbal consent to go ahead with the interview and recording

Background and intro to Step Up (c.5 minutes)

1. Last time we spoke you mentioned you were [recap from Framework notes]. Has anything changed in your day-to-day?
 - a. If yes, probe for changes (now working, in a different job, now in education/training, looking for work, caring).
2. Has your living situation changed at all since we spoke? *Remind customer of living situation outlined at first interview if needed.*
3. Are you still receiving support from the Step Up programme?

For those not in education, training or employment and still receiving support from Step Up (c.10 minutes)

4. Since we last spoke, how often have you been meeting with your Case Worker at Step Up? *Probe: Any changes to frequency of meeting? Too frequent? Not frequent enough?*
5. Have you been seeing the same Case Worker since you started receiving support from Step Up?
6. How long do your meetings usually last? *Probe: Long enough? Not long enough? Have your meetings got longer/shorter over the course of your support?*
7. Where do you and your Case Worker meet? Is it always in the same place?

Probe: Does this work for you?

8. What support have you received from your Step Up case worker since our last conversation?
 - a. How have you found this? Has this been useful at all?
 - b. How long have you been receiving this support?
 - c. Have the types of conversations you have with your Case Worker changed since the beginning of your support?
9. How would you describe your relationship with your Case Worker?

Probe for reasons why, including how their approach contrasts with other organisations they're in touch with. Any difference between caseworkers? Do you feel that your Case Worker understands your situation? Do they understand your aspirations and goals?

10. Since we last spoke, have you received any support from organisations other than PLIAS / Step Up?

Probe for: housing support, financial support, health and wellbeing support, YOS team etc...

- a. When did you start receiving this support?
- b. How did you come to start receiving this support? *Explore PLIAS role in signposting/referral*
- c. How have you found this support?
- d. Do you talk to your case worker about the support you receive there?
11. Since we last spoke, how have you begun to prepare to enter employment, education or training?

- a. Is there anything you have needed to get in place so you can access opportunities? *Probe: Valid ID, NI number, CSCS card*
 - b. How has your case worker supported you to get these in place?
 - c. How have you found this process?
12. Have you applied for any employment, education or training opportunities since joining Step Up?
- a. If yes, what opportunities?
 - b. How did you decide which employment, education or training opportunities you wanted to apply for?
 - c. How did your case worker support you (*explore role in identifying opportunity, supporting with application or interview, any liaison with the employer?*) How did you find this process? What did you discuss?
13. What do you think are the main things preventing you from moving into work at present? *Explore barriers such as skills, training, caring, travel to work, lack of right sorts of jobs in local area*
- a. Do you think you have the support you need to help with these things?
 - b. Is there any support you need from your case worker?
 - c. From others?

Education / training (5-10 mins)

Explore for all education and training since the last interview

- 14. What course/training have you done?
- 15. Why did you decide to do this course/training?
- 16. Did your Step Up case worker help you to arrange the course? How?
- 17. What did the course involve?
 - a. Who ran the course?
 - b. Days/times they were attending
 - c. Format – f2f/online/hybrid
 - d. Facilities and equipment
 - e. Information and advice provided?
- 18. What did you think of the course? What did you like/dislike?
- 19. Were you in touch with your Step Up caseworker while you were doing the course?
 - a. What support was received?
 - b. Was this helpful or not? Why?
- 20. Did you complete the course? Was there anything that created challenges for you to take part in the course? *Explore:*
 - a. Reasons for non-completion
 - b. Fit with other commitments/caring
 - c. Ease of access (e.g. travel to work area)
 - d. Right level of previous experience
- 21. [If completed the course] How prepared did you feel for finding employment after the course? Why?

Employment (10 mins)

Explore for all roles since the last interview

- 22. How did you hear about and apply for the job? (i.e. was it through Step Up or done independently?)
- 23. Why did you apply for that job?

24. What was the role that you got? (*Probe on: Occupation, hours, job tasks, location, travel to work time, permanent / fixed term contract/zero hours*)
25. Why do you think you were successful in your application? What made the difference?
26. Were you satisfied with the pay? Was it what you expected?
27. What do you like/dislike about the job?
28. Have you required any support / adjustments from your employer? *Probe for flexible working hours due to other responsibilities, start/finish times, carving of certain job tasks.*
29. After you got the job, were you in contact with your Step Up case worker?

If so:

- a. How often have you spoken? Has this frequency been appropriate?
- b. What have you spoken about?
- c. How useful was this contact? Why?
30. Have you discussed continuing to develop your skills to support you in your role/any future jobs?
 - a. If yes, how do you feel this conversation went? What was discussed? What has happened since you discussed this?
 - b. Is this something you would be interested in? Would you find this useful?

If not:

- c. Would some contact with your Step Up case worker have been useful or has it not been required? Why?
31. Are you still in that job?

If not, why did the job come to an end? *Probe: end of contract, chose to leave, difficulty maintaining the work (barriers such as caring, travel, ill health)*

If so, do you think you will continue in this job? Why/not?

32. Have you explored or applied for any progression opportunities in with your current employer, or elsewhere?
 - a. If yes, what opportunities?
 - b. Has your caseworker supported you in identifying and applying for these opportunities?
33. How did you find applying for these opportunities? *Probe: difficulty compared to pre-Step Up applications, confidence in application, support received from caseworkers*
34. Were you successful in any of these applications? (*If yes, go on to explore new job through questions above*)
35. [If job ended and no longer in employment] What do you need to do next to re-enter employment, education or training? *Probe: Confidence in CV and application writing, interview skills...*
 - a. How confident do you feel about this?
 - b. Do you know where to go to get help with this if you need it?

Outcomes and conclusions (c.10 minutes)

36. Have you noticed any changes in yourself since joining Step Up? *Probe: confidence, self-assurance, motivation,*
 - a. What has led to these changes?

- b. Has the support you have received from your Case Worker helped at all?
 - c. Has how you think about work and the options available changed at all?
37. What skills do you think you have gained as a result of taking part in the Step Up project? *Probe: technical skills e.g. through training, employability skills.*
- a. What elements of the Step Up support were most important in developing these skills?
 - b. What elements were least helpful?
38. Has taking part in the Step Up programme affected your relationships with family members and friends in any way? How?
- a. Has anything changed in your relationships with friends/family?
 - b. Has Step Up supported the development of any new relationships?
 - c. What elements of the support have helped with this?

Reflections on support received

39. Do you feel the support you have received so far from Step Up has met your expectations?
- a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, why not?
40. What has been most helpful? And least helpful? Why?
41. What could be done to improve the support that PLIAS/Step Up provide?
42. Is there any other support you would like or feel could be useful that you have not been offered?
- a. Why would this be useful?
43. What are your goals for the future? What do you see as happening next?
44. Would you recommend that other eligible young people who want to find work?

Close

That's the end of my questions, thank you for answering these. Before we close, are there any questions you would like to ask?

We are hoping to speak to some people again as they progress through their time at Step Up, would you be willing to be contacted again for another conversation? You do not have to agree now, you can change your mind at any time.

Stop recording

Gather address / email / mobile number for incentive payment

Thank and close

Partner discussion guide: Longitudinal

Introduction to research

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me today. As a reminder:

My name is xxx, I am a researcher at IES. IES is an independent research organisation, so we are not connected to PLIAS or Step Up in any way.

We are carrying out an evaluation of the 'Step Up' programme delivered by PLIAS resettlement. The 'Step Up' programme and this evaluation is being funded by the Youth Futures Foundation.

This research aims to understand how the 'Step Up' programme works in practice and achieves its target outcomes for young people, as well as how the current support offer could be improved.

Our discussion today will be similar to our previous conversation. We would like to ask for:

- An update on how you are working with PLIAS and, in particular any changes that may have occurred since we last spoke in Feb/March 2023.
- What employment opportunities, services or referrals you currently provide to the organisation.
- Your experiences of working with young people that are part of the Step Up programme, including the main success and challenges.
- What outcomes are being achieved for the young people you work with and how this can be improved.

This conversation will last 20-30 minutes.

This conversation is completely private. Any information we do use from this conversation will be reported anonymously (so we will not identify who said what).

Taking part is entirely up to you. You can decide you no longer want to take part at any point during this conversation, and afterwards by contacting Rakhee Patel [contact info on research briefing document].

With your permission, I would like to record our conversation today. I'll be taking notes but recording our conversation will help make sure I don't miss anything. This will be stored securely by IES and not shared with PLIAS or anyone outside the research team.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Once recording begins, ask participant to give verbal consent to go ahead with the interview and recording.

Background and intro to Step Up (c.5 minutes)

1. Has anything changed about your role since we last spoke?
2. Have there been any organisational changes since we last spoke that have affected how you are working with PLIAS?

Local partnership network and relationship with PLIAS (c.5 minutes)

3. How do you work with PLIAS currently?
 - a. Has this changed since we last spoke with you in Feb-March 2023?
 - b. Do you still support the same groups of service users?

[FOR EMPLOYERS ONLY] Support given to Step Up participants (c.10 minutes)

4. What kind of work opportunities have you provided for young people working with PLIAS since March 2023? *Explore any changes to:*
 - a. What types of roles have you offered to PLIAS candidates (skills / attributes required, location, typical length of contracts)
 - b. What approach do you take to working with these employees? (*i.e. induction process, performance management*)
 - c. What development and progression is available for recruits once employed by your organisation? *Probe: training and development opportunities, including any shadowing/mentoring, apprenticeships*
 - d. Does this differ at all to how you work with other employees? How and why?
 - e. Are you aware of any support these young people receive from PLIAS while they are employed by you?
 - f. Do you draw on any other sources of support to help these young people in the workplace?
5. What has been your experience working with these employees who are also working with PLIAS?
 - a. Do PLIAS candidates have the skills, knowledge and experience necessary for the roles you have?
 - b. What do they bring to the business/workforce? (*probe for skills, knowledge, expertise, motivation for role*)
 - c. Have there been any difficulties/challenges?
6. Has your [organisation's] approach to working with people with criminal convictions or at risk of involvement in crime changed at all since March 2023, when we last spoke?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. Has working with PLIAS staff influenced this approach? How?
 - c. Have you received any guidance from PLIAS on what type of job roles in your organisation would be suitable for young people, depending on the nature of their conviction? [*Probe for ways in which PLIAS may have helped with guidance on day-to-day management/overseeing such individuals*].
7. Has your experience of working with PLIAS led to any changes in your organisation's hiring and management practices?
8. What works well in relation to your partnership working with PLIAS? Is there anything that could be improved?

If employer, skip following section until Outcomes.

[FOR SUPPORT PARTNERS ONLY] Support given to Step Up participants (c.10-15 minutes)

Referrals

9. Has anything changed about how you refer young people to PLIAS, or how participants are referred onto your organisation since we last spoke in Feb-March 2023?
 - a. What are the eligibility criteria for referrals?
 - b. How are young people identified that may benefit from support (from either PLIAS or the interviewee's organisation)?
 - c. What information is given to young people at this time?
 - d. What information is shared with / do you receive from PLIAS caseworkers?
 - e. How effective is the referral process? *[Probe for any specific successes/challenges]*
 - f. *[If receiving referrals from PLIAS]* What other organisations do you receive referrals from?

Details of support

10. What kind of support have you provided for PLIAS young people since Feb-March 2023?
 - a. What does this entail?
 - b. How long does this support typically last?
 - c. How frequently do you see the young people over this time?
 - d. Who delivers this support? *[volunteer, paid staff etc]*
 - e. Where is this support delivered?
 - f. How is this support received by young people? *Probe for differences based on personal circumstances*
11. Do you know what (if any) support young people are receiving from PLIAS during this time?
 - a. How does this fit with how you work with the young person? *[Probe on complementarity/any points of duplication]*
12. Do you remain in contact with PLIAS caseworkers while supporting young people?
 - a. How often are you in contact?
 - b. What information do you share? What do you discuss?
13. How do you try and maintain a young person's engagement in the support?
 - a. What happens if a young person disengages?
 - b. How is this communicated to PLIAS caseworkers?
14. What works well in relation to your partnership working with PLIAS? Is there anything that could be improved?

[ALL] Outcomes and conclusions (c.5-10 minutes)

15. What outcomes have you seen for the young people you work with in the last six months? E.g.
 - a. Changes in their financial literacy/planning?
 - b. Social relationships?
 - c. Resolution of health, substance issues?
 - d. Educational or training outcomes?
 - e. Work outcomes? Sustainment in employment? Progression in the workplace?

- f. Changes in attitudes and behaviours, such as greater self-awareness, changes in confidence, resilience, changes in attitude to work?
 - g. Anything else?
16. Thinking about the last six months, do young peoples' likelihood of achieving these outcomes differ based on their personal circumstances?

Probe for: differences in their level of involvement with the criminal justice system, differences in complexity of needs, differences in professional expectations, differences in engagement levels...

17. How often are these outcomes sustained? *Probe: outcomes seen in the last six months – have these been sustained?*
- a. What challenges are there in sustaining these outcomes?
18. Is there any additional support you feel you could have received from PLIAS or other partners to help these young people progress?
19. Overall, do you feel that there is adequate support available for the young people you work with to meet their full range of needs?
- a. Are there any gaps in support currently?

Close

That's the end of my questions, thank you for answering these. Before we close, are there any questions you would like to ask?

Stop recording

Thank and close

Appendix 7: Evaluation Privacy Information Notice (PIN)

Research into PLIAS Resettlement Ltd.'s Step Up programme

Data protection legislation and personal data

Data protection legislation determines how, when and why any organisation can process personal data. **'Personal data'** means any information which can identify someone. **'Processing'** means any actions performed on personal data, including: collection, storage, alteration or deletion. These laws exist to ensure that your data are managed safely and used responsibly. They also provide you with certain rights in respect of your data and creates a responsibility on the **Youth Futures Foundation (YFF)** and the research organisations it works with to provide you with certain information.

This privacy notice sets out the legal basis for processing data in relation to this research project, which is being completed by the **Institute for Employment Studies (IES)**. This includes who will have access to your personal data, how your data will be used, stored and deleted, your legal rights and who you can contact if you have a query or a complaint.

The legal basis for processing personal data

The legal basis under which IES processes personal data and 'special category data', such as information about your racial or ethnic origin, disability, and criminal allegations, proceedings or convictions, is to fulfil **YFF's** legitimate interests as funder of the Step Up from 2022-2024.

This legal justification applies to this research project, which is an evaluation of the Step Up programme of support at **PLIAS Resettlement Ltd**, examining how it works to improve job, training and education outcomes for young people with experience or at risk of experience of the criminal justice system. The study will involve **IES** leading analysis of young person data that **PLIAS Resettlement Ltd** collects, and conducting in-depth interviews with Step Up programme participants, staff and partner organisations, and employers.

IES will analyse a version of the young person data held by **PLIAS Resettlement Ltd** collected from signing up to leaving the Step Up programme that has been stripped of identifiers such as name. **IES** will receive information covering personal characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity etc), Step Up support and activity information, young person's outcomes and destinations post Step Up for all young people eligible for Step Up who provide consent. Young person data will be pseudo-anonymised by **PLIAS Resettlement Ltd** before it is shared with **IES**, meaning it will not contain personal details such as your name, address or date of birth. Despite this, you may still be identifiable based on the potentially unique set of information held about you. This data will be transferred and held securely on **IES** servers. It will not be published in this format at any time.

In addition, **IES** will review and analyse a sample of action plans that **PLIAS** advisers develop with young people. **PLIAS** will grant **IES** access to selected action plans via the Charity Log database – a secure system used by **PLIAS** to record and store data. **PLIAS** will only allow access to the action plan (not the full record for the young person). This will be identifiable i.e. **IES** will see the name of the young person whose action plan it is. **IES** will not use this personal data in any way and will only analyse the types and range of actions recorded. No data will be downloaded or saved from the database. **IES** access will be withdrawn after an agreed period (two weeks).

IES will use the young person data to do the following:

- Understand the experience and outcomes of young people on the **PLIAS Resettlement Ltd** Step Up programme.
- Collect baseline and endline information in a survey which will be embedded on **PLIAS** systems and be completed, subject to agreement, in planned meetings with their caseworkers.
- Select young people to invite to take part in interviews about their experience and outcomes.

If you are selected to be invited to interview, your name and contact details (phone number or email address) will be shared with the **IES** research team in order to arrange these interviews. This personal information will only be processed for the

purposes of completing this research. Participation in the research is completely voluntary – just because you are contacted, does not mean that you have to take part and you can decline the invitation without having to give a reason.

Who will have access to my personal data?

The contact details for young people invited to interview will be stored on the IES encrypted server, with access restricted solely to members of the research team at IES. Even after these contacts details have been shared with the research team, you are free to withdraw from the research and can decline to take part in an interview without having to give a reason.

If you agree to take part in a research interview, any information you provide will be summarised in a pseudo-anonymised format – this means we will remove key personal information that could be used to identify you.

How will my data be treated?

If you are invited and choose to take part in an interview, the information you give will only be used for purposes of this study. **IES** will produce progress reports summarising the main findings from the interviews. These will be shared with **YFF** but is not intended for wider publication, though it could be shared with other stakeholders. Individuals will not be named in the reports, nor will any information be included that could reveal their identity.

When the interviews are completed, we will produce a final report drawing together the findings from the evaluation. This report will be made publicly available. We will also produce a final report on feasibility to take forward a further evaluation which will be shared with **YFF**.

Data protection law requires that personal data are kept for no longer than is necessary. We will pseudo-anonymise the information you provide as soon as we practically can (i.e. within two weeks of the interview date). The personal data we used to contact you will be securely deleted from the IES systems six months after the project is complete (currently estimated to be October 2024).

At the end of the research period, **IES** will transfer the pseudo-anonymised, numeric young person data to the **YFF** data depository; that is, information covering personal characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity etc.), Step Up support received, outcomes and destination. It will not contain any identifiers, so will not include the code-identifier that **PLIAS Resettlement Ltd** uses. The data from the interviews will not be transferred to YFF. The data stored in the YFF data depository will only be used for research purposes that have been approved by YFF. More specifically:

Your data will be securely shared with the project funders, Youth Futures Foundation, to be held in a data depository for the purposes of evaluation and research to help young people. To fulfil these purposes, the data may also be shared with other organisations who manage the archive, evaluate outcomes or conduct further research that is associated with Youth Futures' vision and values. Youth Futures will process your data in accordance with data protection law which includes keeping it secure and only using it where there is a fair and lawful basis to do so. For more information, please see Youth Futures' [privacy policy](#).

Who can I contact if I would like to withdraw my interview or learner data?

You have rights under data protection law to make the following requests the personal data held about you that is being processed for this research, including:

- to request access to this data
- to amend any incorrect or inaccurate information
- to restrict or object to your data being processed
- to destroy this data
- to move, copy or transfer your data.

You have the right to withdraw the information you have provided as part of the interviews up to two weeks after the interview date. After this point the information will have been pseudo-anonymised and will no longer be treated as personal data.

If you have taken part in an interview but would like your data withdrawn or have consented to share data PLIAS Resettlement Ltd hold about you and want to change your mind, please contact: Rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk

Who can I contact with a query about how my data will be used?

If you have any questions about how your data will be used, please contact Rakhee Patel, Project Manager at IES: Rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk

Who can I contact with a complaint?

Further information on the rights available to you is also available from the Information Commissioner's Office - the independent body responsible for regulating data protection within the UK. They can also deal with any complaints you may have regarding our use of your data:

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Email: casework@ico.org.uk

Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF

Appendix 8: Participant research information sheets

Programme participant information sheet

Research into 'Step Up'

What is this project about?

- The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) is speaking to young people who have received support as part of the Step Up programme, delivered by PLIAS. The research is being completed by IES for the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) who fund the Step Up programme.
- The research will help us understand young people's experiences of the Step Up programme. The aim of the research is to help improve the programme for young people.

- We want to hear what you think of the support and activities you have taken part in, whether they have helped in your search for employment and how they can be improved.
- If you agree, IES may contact you again in future to ask if you'd like to take part in another discussion. We will be interested to find out how you are getting on and ask about anything else you've done with your case worker.
- You do not have to take part in any of these interviews if you do not want to.

What happens if I decide to take part?

- We will arrange a private conversation between yourself and a researcher at IES. This conversation will last up to 30 minutes and will take place via telephone at a time that suits you.
- We will ask you some questions about yourself and what you do as part of Step Up. During the interview we will make a note of the support and activities you have taken part in. If you're no longer in touch with Step Up, we'd like to ask about what you've been doing since being on the programme.
- The conversation will cover:
 - How you heard about Step Up, and why you decided to take part.
 - What support you have been offered by your caseworker and other organisations to help you move into work, education or training.
 - What you think about the support and whether you feel it has helped you.
 - How you feel the support could be improved (if at all).
 - If you are on a course or have a job, your experience of this.
- We may also talk to a member of staff about the support and activities you have been offered. This is to help us understand more about the activities that you have been offered. It is not a test for you or your caseworker. Nothing else from our conversation will be shared with Step Up staff.
- As a thank you for your time, we can offer you a £30 shopping voucher (Amazon or high street shopping voucher).

What are my rights if I take part?

- It is up to you whether you agree to take part in this research. Whether you take part or not will not affect the support you receive from PLIAS or any other organisations.
- If you agree to take part, your contact information will be passed to us by your caseworker at PLIAS. You will have already agreed for this information to be shared with IES.
- You have the right to decide what information you share during our conversation and the speed of the conversation. You can also take breaks at any point if you would like or stop the conversation if that feels right for you.
- You have the right to privacy. We won't share anything that will identify you (like name or address) with anyone outside of the research team. When we write our

report, we might include quotes from our conversation, but we will not include your name.

- You have the right for your data to be held safely and securely. We will make sure that there is no way you can be identified by taking part and that your privacy is not compromised.
- You have the right to change your mind if you no longer wish to take part. This can be before, during or after our initial conversation.
- If you decide afterwards that you do not want the data you shared to be used, email rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk and ask us to delete your data. This can be done up to two weeks after the interview date.
- You also have the right to ask questions, or get in touch if you have a complaint at any time. These can be directed to rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk

What happens to the information I share?

- If you agree to take part, we would like to audio record our conversation and take notes.
- We will only keep 1 file with your name and other sensitive information (like your phone number) so we can contact you. This is held securely by IES and is not shared with anyone outside of the research team. Anything else you share will be anonymised.
- Findings from the research will be put into a report that people will be able to read. Your name and personal details will not be included in any reports.
- To protect your privacy, we will delete any personal data, including the audio recording, and any information you provide 6 months after the project is completed. This is currently estimated to be September 2024).

Who do I contact if I have any questions?

- If you have any questions about the research, or would like to remove the information you have provided, please contact:

Institute for Employment Studies

Rakhee Patel, Principal Research Fellow

rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk

PLIAS Resettlement partner and employer information sheet

Research into 'Step Up'

What is this project about?

- The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) is completing an evaluation of PLIAS Resettlement's 'Step Up' Programme. The research is being completed on behalf of the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF), the programme funder.

- The research will help us understand how the 'Step Up' programme works in practice and achieves its target outcomes for young people, as well as how the current support offer could be improved.
- We want to hear from partner organisations that work closely with PLIAS and support this programme. We would like to understand more about how you work with PLIAS to achieve positive outcomes for young people, and how these ways of working can be improved (if at all).

What happens if I decide to take part?

- We will arrange a private conversation between yourself and a researcher at IES. This conversation will last around 45 minutes and will take place either online or over the phone depending on your preference.
- The conversation will cover:
 - How you currently work with PLIAS
 - What employment opportunities, services or referrals you currently provide to the organisation
 - Your experiences of working with young people that are part of the Step Up programme, including the main success and challenges
 - What outcomes are being achieved for the young people you work with and how this can be improved

What are my rights if I take part?

- It is up to you whether you agree to take part in this research. Whether you take part or not will not affect your relationship with PLIAS.
- If you agree to take part, your contact information will be passed to IES by PLIAS staff.
- You have the right to decide what information you share during our conversation and the speed of the conversation. You can also take breaks at any point or stop the conversation if that feels right for you.
- You have the right to privacy. We won't share anything that will identify you (like name or address) with anyone outside of the research team. When we write our report, we might include quotes from our conversation, but we will not include your name or organisation.
- You have the right for your data to be held safely and securely. We will make sure that there is no way you can be identified by taking part and that your privacy is not compromised.
- You have the right to change your mind if you no longer wish to take part. This can be before, during or after our initial conversation.
- If you decide afterwards that you do not want the data you shared to be used, email rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk and ask us to delete your data. This can be done up to two weeks after the interview date.

- You also have the right to ask questions, or get in touch if you have a complaint at any time. These can be directed to rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk

What happens to the information I share?

- If you agree to take part, we would like to audio record our conversation and take notes.
- We will only keep 1 file with your name and other sensitive information (like your phone number) so we can contact you. This is held securely by IES and is not shared with anyone outside of the research team. Anything else you share will be anonymised.
- We will write a report based on the information we collect from PLIAS staff, partners, employers and people on the Step Up programme. This report will say what works well in the Step Up programme, and highlight areas that could be improved. This report will not include anything that identifies you.
- To protect your privacy, we will delete any personal data, including the audio recording, and any information you provide 6 months after the project is completed. This is currently estimated to be September 2024).

Who do I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions about the research, or would like to remove the information you have provided, please contact:

Institute for Employment Studies

Rakhee Patel, Principal Research Fellow

rakhee.patel@employment-studies.co.uk