



CfEY Year 2 Evaluation

An evaluation of the
Mercers' Transitions Special
Initiative



The Centre
for Education
& Youth



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Sam has authored a range of publications, from articles in peer-reviewed journals to books, primarily exploring young people's aspirations and how these are shaped by their neighbourhoods, the experiences of White working-class boys within the education system, and ways in which social science can connect more meaningfully with the communities it studies, drawing on his experience of designing research training for students on the Manchester Leadership Programme. Sam has also written for *The Guardian* and the *New Statesman*, and blogs widely on a range of topics within the social sciences.

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1 Executive summary

Introduction

The Mercers' Company's Transitions Special Initiative began in July 2019 to support young people to make successful post-secondary transitions. The Initiative currently provides funding to seven partner organisations ('partners'), delivering careers-focused work to young people across London. Additional partners will join the Initiative in future years.

Each individual partner is evaluating the impact of its Mercers'-funded work. The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) is evaluating the impact of the Transitions Special Initiative as a whole and drawing together the key lessons learnt from delivering these individual projects.

Delivery

Across the second year of the Transitions Special Initiative, the seven partners worked with 6,649 young people; 62 schools, virtual schools, or colleges; and 270 businesses. Several programmes are targeting and engaging high proportions of students who are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, eligible for free school meals (FSM) or care experienced.

Overall satisfaction

Among the organisations for which we have data, young people, school staff and employers expressed high levels of satisfaction with the partners' programmes.

Self- and organisational-efficacy (how the partners develop young people's life and workplace skills)

Partners' data indicates that the Transitions Special Initiative positively influences young people's soft skill development, such as communication and teamwork.

Aspirations

Partners' data indicates that their programmes positively influence the aspirations of many of the young people on their programmes, for example by introducing them to new career options, connecting them with professionals in the sectors they are interested in, and boosting their confidence to go outside their 'comfort zones'.

Pathway awareness

Partners' data suggests that their programmes positively influence young people's awareness of different pathways into further or higher education and work. Employer feedback indicates that the programmes have improved many employers' understandings of how to support young people through different pathways.

Destinations

The partners who collect data on their young people's post-programme destinations report that many of their participants go on to further education, training, or employment. The most common destination across the programmes for which there is data, is continuing in education, at either school or college.

Intensive Studies

CfEY designed four bespoke research projects ('Intensive Studies'), examining questions the partners identified as important to them.

Intensive Study #1: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

During this Intensive Study, CfEY conducted Listening Circles and Appreciative Inquiry Groups with programme staff and young people in Cohort 1. The Intensive Study revealed two main ways in which the partners in the cohort have needed to adapt their programmes as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic:

1. Adapting delivery, with key challenges for the partners being: (a) delivering programmes virtually; and (b) changing programme timelines and structures. However, partners have also had valuable opportunities to review their programmes and take steps towards diversifying delivery in ways they say could make their programmes more sustainable.
2. Adapting partnerships, with particular challenges for the partners being: (a) accessing schools; (b) engaging employers and volunteers; and (c) communicating with young people and stakeholders. However, there have also been opportunities. The partners have developed new modes of communication and have, in cases, said that their working routines and support for wellbeing have improved.

Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery

During this Intensive Study, CfEY conducted a survey of Cohort 1 partners' virtual provision and ran focus groups with staff and young people. This Intensive Study presents a summary of the partners' virtual provision and outlines the advantages and drawbacks of delivering programmes virtually.

The advantages of virtual delivery include:

- increasing staff collaboration and accountability
- engaging employers from a wider range of industries and locations
- enhancing programme flexibility and engagement
- developing relationships
- improving young people's soft skills.

However, inevitably, moving most if not all delivery online has also presented challenges for the partners. The partners have faced particular challenges in relation to:

- safeguarding
- increased administration
- building relationships
- engaging disadvantaged young people
- digital fatigue
- delivering work experience
- supporting young people transitioning back into school.

Intensive Study #3: Youth Voice

For this Intensive Study, CfEY examined Cohort 2 partners' processes for supporting youth voice, which we defined broadly, including but not limited to mechanisms for collecting feedback from young people. We ran staff and young people's focus groups with the three partner organisations in the cohort.

We found that the following factors help enable youth voice:

- centralised systems for working across the organisation
- staff training and support

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- building positive relationships
- participant self-determination
- use of technology
- dialogue with families and school staff.

The Intensive Study also uncovered a wide range of barriers that impede youth voice, including form fatigue, cultural barriers, and young people's additional needs.

Intensive Study #4: Transition Points in a Young Person's Life

For this Intensive Study, CfEY conducted focus groups with programme staff and young people in Cohort 2. These highlighted the sorts of transitions that young people on the programmes experience, such as moving between schools, moving between year groups, and leaving education altogether.

Focus group participants described some of the factors that can inhibit young people's transitions, including locality, involvement in crime and having a form of special educational need or disability.

However, the focus groups also highlighted factors that support successful transitions. These include:

- early interventions
- mentoring and relationships
- networks
- flexible interactions
- bridging the gap to higher education
- ongoing support
- staff training
- sharing good practice.

2 Introduction

2.1 The Transitions Special Initiative structure

The Mercers' Company's Transitions Special Initiative began in July 2019 to support young people to make successful post-secondary transitions. The Initiative currently provides funding to seven grantee organisations ('partners'), delivering careers-focused activities to young people across London. Cohort 1 consists of four organisations and Cohort 2 consists of three. Additional partners will join the Initiative and be incorporated into the evaluation in future years.

The Initiative's current timeline of support from CfEY is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Timeline of CfEY's support of the Transitions Special Initiative

Cohort	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
1				
2				
3				

2.2 The partner organisations

The four 'Cohort 1' partners are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Cohort 1 partner organisations

Organisation	Organisation type and focus
Career Ready	A charity providing whole-school careers-focused interventions for 11- to 18-year-olds, alongside one-to-one and small-group activities for disadvantaged pupils, including paid internships.
Construction Youth Trust (CYT)	A charity providing activities such as one-to-one coaching and work placements to help 15- and 16-year-olds particularly at risk of becoming 'NEET' (not in education, employment, or training) after leaving school, with a focus on skills relevant to the construction industry.
Drive Forward Foundation (DFF)	A non-profit organisation providing one-to-one and group support to care-experienced young people aged 15 to 18, to help them make positive decisions about their future and assist them in the process of leaving the care system.
EY Foundation	A charity providing activities including careers workshops and paid work experience for young people in Lewisham, including those at risk of becoming NEET, with a particular focus on engaging local employers.

The three 'Cohort 2' partners are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Cohort 2 partner organisations

Organisation	Organisation type and focus
Brentford FC Community Sports Trust (FCCST)	A sports trust offering a portfolio of programmes in education, employability, sports participation, health, and community engagement. The trust works with a wide range of young people, including young carers and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
Dallaglio RugbyWorks	A charity offering a three-year employability skills programme that aims to help teenagers aged 14 to 17 who are outside of mainstream education or at risk of exclusion, to transition successfully from secondary education into a career that matches their skills and interests. RugbyWorks uses the values of rugby, and sport in general, to ensure that disadvantaged young people who are disengaged from learning get the best opportunities to build a positive and productive future.
IntoUniversity	An education charity with 18 years' experience of delivering impact-driven programmes through a network of 34 learning centres that inspire young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve their full potential. Students participate in a holistic programme of support, designed to raise aspirations, broaden horizons, improve attainment, develop soft skills, and provide experience of the world of work.

2.3 Evaluation framework, aims and structure

Each individual partner is conducting its own evaluation of the impact of its Mercers'-funded work. The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) is evaluating the impact of the Transitions Special Initiative as a whole.

2.3.1 Evaluation framework

The seven partners involved in the Initiative deliver very different programmes. In collaboration with The Mercers' Company and the four Cohort 1 partners, CfEY designed an evaluation framework against which to report our findings. This framework provides a basis on which to compare findings year-on-year and across the programmes, while taking into account partners' different modes of delivery and impact.

Our framework explores the Initiative's impact in relation to the following five areas:

1. Delivery (which activities the partners deliver, when and with whom).
2. Self- and organisational-efficacy (how the partners develop young people's life and workplace skills).
3. Aspirations (young people's aims for the future and where they see themselves).
4. Pathway awareness (young people's knowledge and understanding of different academic and vocational pathways into work).
5. Destinations (young people's subsequent places in education or work).

2.3.2 Evaluation aims

CfEY has been guided by the following aims in its work with The Mercers' Company and the partner organisations. We are seeking to:

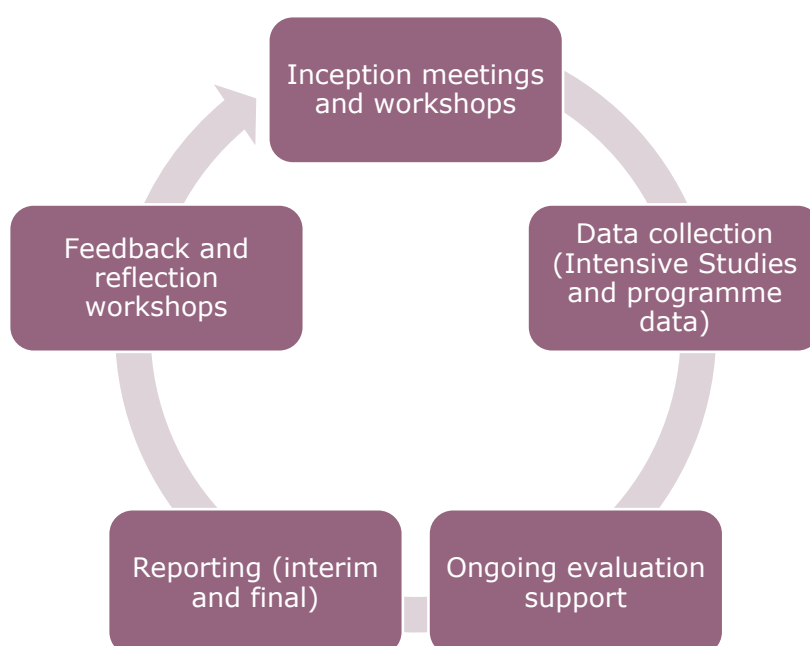
- describe and capture the partners' (very different) work
- explore the work that partners are doing individually, while ensuring we can talk about the Initiative from a 'bird's-eye view'
- compare outcomes across the years.

This evaluation does not seek to provide detailed information about each individual partner's impact. Partners will report separately to The Mercers' Company on their achievements. Rather, the evaluation aims to capture the impact of work underway across the Initiative, providing The Mercers' Company and the partners with a picture of impact in the round, and implications for delivery, evaluation, and programme recommendations in future years.

2.3.3 Evaluation structure

Each year, our evaluation adopts the structure presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Evaluation structure



Inception meetings and workshops

CfEY facilitated two workshops at the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year, one with the Cohort 1 partners and one with the Cohort 2 partners. With the Cohort 1 partners, we reviewed the evaluation's first year, and reflected on implications for delivery in year 2. We used Cohort 2's workshop to introduce the CfEY evaluation team, the evaluation structure and approach, and asked the partners to introduce themselves to one another.

After these meetings, we met each partner one-to-one, asking them about their priorities for the year ahead, and how CfEY could best support them. We also asked each organisation what they would like the year's Intensive Studies to explore.

Data collection

Throughout the 2020/21 academic year, CfEY collected data in two ways:

1. **Intensive Studies.** CfEY designed four bespoke research projects ('Intensive Studies'), examining questions the partners identified as important to them. These Intensive Studies covered: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Virtual Delivery for Cohort 1; and Youth Voice and Transition Points in a Young Person's Life for Cohort 2.

Across the seven partners, the Intensive Study fieldwork involved 16 focus groups conducted by CfEY – nine with staff from the partner organisations and seven with young people involved in the partners' programmes. CfEY also conducted four Listening Circles with young people and three Appreciative Inquiry Groups with staff from Cohort 1. A Listening Circle is a facilitated group in which young people articulate their perspectives on and experiences of a particular issue and plan how to address the issue.¹ Appreciative Inquiry Groups are structured around a four-stage process that seeks to identify existing good practice within organisations and develop this further (explained in more detail in section 9.1.2). We analysed the transcripts of these groups and listening circles to identify the main themes. We present our analysis of the themes and sub-themes from the Intensive Studies throughout this report.

2. **Individual data submissions.** The partners submitted their own, internal evaluation data to CfEY. We synthesised the partners' data to present overarching findings about the impact of the Transitions Special Initiative.

All participants gave informed consent to engage with the research.

Ongoing evaluation support

- CfEY provided partners with individual support in relation to their own evaluations, offering ad-hoc guidance as required.

Reporting (interim and final)

- Each year CfEY will provide a report, summarising the findings from the year's Mercers' Transitions Special Initiative activities. This Year 2 report outlines findings from both Cohort 1 and 2 activities.

Feedback and reflection workshops

- At the end of each year, CfEY will facilitate workshops with the partners providing a space for reflection on the evaluation's findings, and discussing implications for future delivery, evaluation, and wider programme changes.

¹ Hanson, T., Polik, J. and Cerna, R. (2017) *Short-Term Impacts of Student Listening Circles on Student Perceptions of School Climate and of Their Own Competencies*, REL 2017-210, Washington, DC: Regional Educational Laboratory West.

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3 Delivery

Section summary: Across the second year of the Transitions Special Initiative, the seven partners worked with 6,649 young people; 62 schools, virtual schools, or colleges; and 270 businesses. Several programmes are targeting and engaging high proportions of students who are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, eligible for free school meals (FSM) or care experienced.

3.1 Who has been involved?

During the 2020/21 academic year, the four Cohort 1 partners worked with: 5,524 young people; 51 schools, virtual schools, or colleges; and 267 employers.

The three Cohort 2 partners worked with: 1,125 young people; 11 schools, virtual schools, or colleges; and three employers.

The Cohort 1 partners are working across 18 London boroughs and the Cohort 2 partners are working across 12 London boroughs.

3.2 Demographics

Cohort 1 partners work with young people aged between 11 and 18, while Cohort 2 partners work with young people aged 10 to 20 (while the majority of the Cohort 2 partners' work caters to young people aged up to 18, IntoUniversity and Brentford FCCST each run a strand of activities which extends to a small number of 19- and 20-year-olds).

Most of the programmes had more male students than female students, especially in Cohort 2 (see Table 4).

Table 4: Percentage of young people identifying as male, female, and non-binary, Cohorts 1 and 2

Cohort 1 partner	Percentage of students identifying as male	Percentage of students identifying as female	Percentage of students identifying as non-binary
Career Ready	45%	55%	0%
CYT	66%	34%	0%
DFF	61%	38%	1%
EY Foundation	59%	41%	0%
Cohort 2 partner			
Brentford FCCST	84%	16%	0%

IntoUniversity	53%	47%	0%
Dallaglio RugbyWorks	86%	14%	0%

From the programme data we have available, several programmes are targeting and engaging high proportions of students who are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, eligible for free school meals (FSM) or care experienced.²

In Cohort 1, the Career Ready programme was working with the highest proportion of students from BAME background, at 88%. In Cohort 2 this was Brentford FCCST, with 100% of young people on their Kicks Targeted programme coming from BAME backgrounds.

EY Foundation had the highest proportion of young people eligible for FSM in Cohort 1, at 100% across their programmes, while in Cohort 2 62% of Dallaglio RugbyWorks' students were eligible for FSM.

Drive Forward Foundation were the Cohort 1 partner working with the most care-experienced young people (100%), as this is their key demographic, while in Cohort 2 Dallaglio RugbyWorks had the greatest proportion at 28%.

² Please note that we do not have full information about all the partners.

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4 Overall satisfaction

Section summary: Among the organisations for which we have data, young people, schools, and employers expressed high levels of satisfaction with the partners' programmes.³

Large numbers of young people report being satisfied with EY Foundation and IntoUniversity: 95% of the 61 young people on the EY Foundation programme, and between 83% and 100% of the 658 young people across IntoUniversity's programmes, said they were satisfied with their experiences.

Schools and employers working with EY Foundation, and employers working with Career Ready and Dallaglio RugbyWorks, were also largely satisfied with the work. All schools working with the EY Foundation gave a rating above 7 (out of 10) when asked how satisfied they were with their engagement with the organisation and their experiences of the programmes, while all employers gave a rating of 6 and above. Furthermore, 100% of schools and employers said they wish to continue working with EY Foundation.

8 in 10 (80%) employers working with Career Ready, and all the employers (100%) supporting Dallaglio RugbyWorks, reported being satisfied with their experiences. Similar proportions of employers (76% for Career Ready, 100% for Dallaglio RugbyWorks) said they wanted to continue supporting the programmes.

Drive Forward Foundation young people shared informal positive feedback about their experiences of the programme:

"Everything is good. Nothing is bad. Because they make you feel like you are with a family, that you can share whatever you're going through with [them]. So, I think it's very good."

Young Person Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

³ Some of the partners do not collect data on overall levels of satisfaction. CfEY has reported on the data that was made available.

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5 Self- and organisational-efficacy

Section summary: Partners' data indicates that the Transitions Special Initiative positively influences young people's soft skill development.⁴

The partners develop young people's life and workplace skills through self- and organisational-efficacy.

Partners' data indicates that the Transitions Special Initiative positively influences young people's soft skill development. For example, the following proportions of young people said their involvement in the programmes had improved their soft skills (such as communication and teamwork):

- EY Foundation's programmes (100% of 61 young people)
- IntoUniversity's Student Enrichment programme (100% of 14 young people)
- Career Ready (92% of 492 young people)
- IntoUniversity's Secondary FOCUS programme (80% of 411 young people).

"With these programmes ... the leadership one in particular really helped me to boost my confidence, [learn] important communication skills ... [and develop] the skills I'd need in the future. And also, you come to appreciate more communication, eye contact more ... Aside from all my friends and family, this has been a big support."

Young Person Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

"A specific seminar I attended was a careers one and one of the ladies was really helpful in giving us advice [on] how to further yourself in your career, how to use LinkedIn properly, and how to make connections and find the career that suits you."

Young Person Listening Circle, EY Foundation

Teachers (11 in total) of young people on the Construction Youth Trust's (CYT's) Building Bridges to Construction Careers programme reported that it had helped their students to understand what skills employers were looking for and how to develop these skills further.

Drive Forward Foundation's (DFF) staff rate their young people's progress on a scale of 0 to 25. They found that:

- Just over 14% of young people had a score of 25, indicating that they are "very committed, engaged and actively pursue their goals"
- 16% scored between 20 and 25, showing "commitment and good engagement, but a need for more guidance on how to achieve their goals"
- Just over 30% scored between 15 and 20, suggesting they are "moderately engaged and need support to narrow down their goals"
- Just over 30% scored between 10 and 15, meaning they "need a lot of encouragement", "show irregular engagement" and require more support in setting and achieving their goals
- 9% scored below 10, making them "low engagers" who "need a lot of assistance regarding their commitment to the programme and their goal setting".

⁴ Some of the partners do not collect data on soft skill development. CfEY has reported on the data that was made available.

In future years, CfEY recommends that DFF ensures its categories do not overlap, for example by categorising scores as: 21 – 25; 16 – 20; 11 – 15; 10 and below. The team may also want to consider giving young people the opportunity to rate their own progress using the same scale.

6 Aspirations

Section summary: Partners' data indicates that their programmes positively influence the aspirations of many of the young people on their programmes.

By 'aspirations' we mean young people's aims for the future and where they see themselves.

Three of the Cohort 1 partners shared information about how their programmes are affecting young people's future aspirations. Their data indicates that the programmes have helped large numbers of students to feel more optimistic about their future.

For example, 91% of young people on EY Foundation's programmes said they felt more positive about the future after taking part.

"I just wanted to say being part of the EY Foundation was really life-changing."
Young Person Focus Group, EY Foundation

At CYT, data showed that teachers of young people on its Building Bridges to Construction Careers programme felt the programme was boosting students' aspirations. 100% of teachers (11 in total) said they felt it had made students feel inspired about careers in the construction and built environment sector, while 80% said the programme had challenged stereotypes about working in the sector.

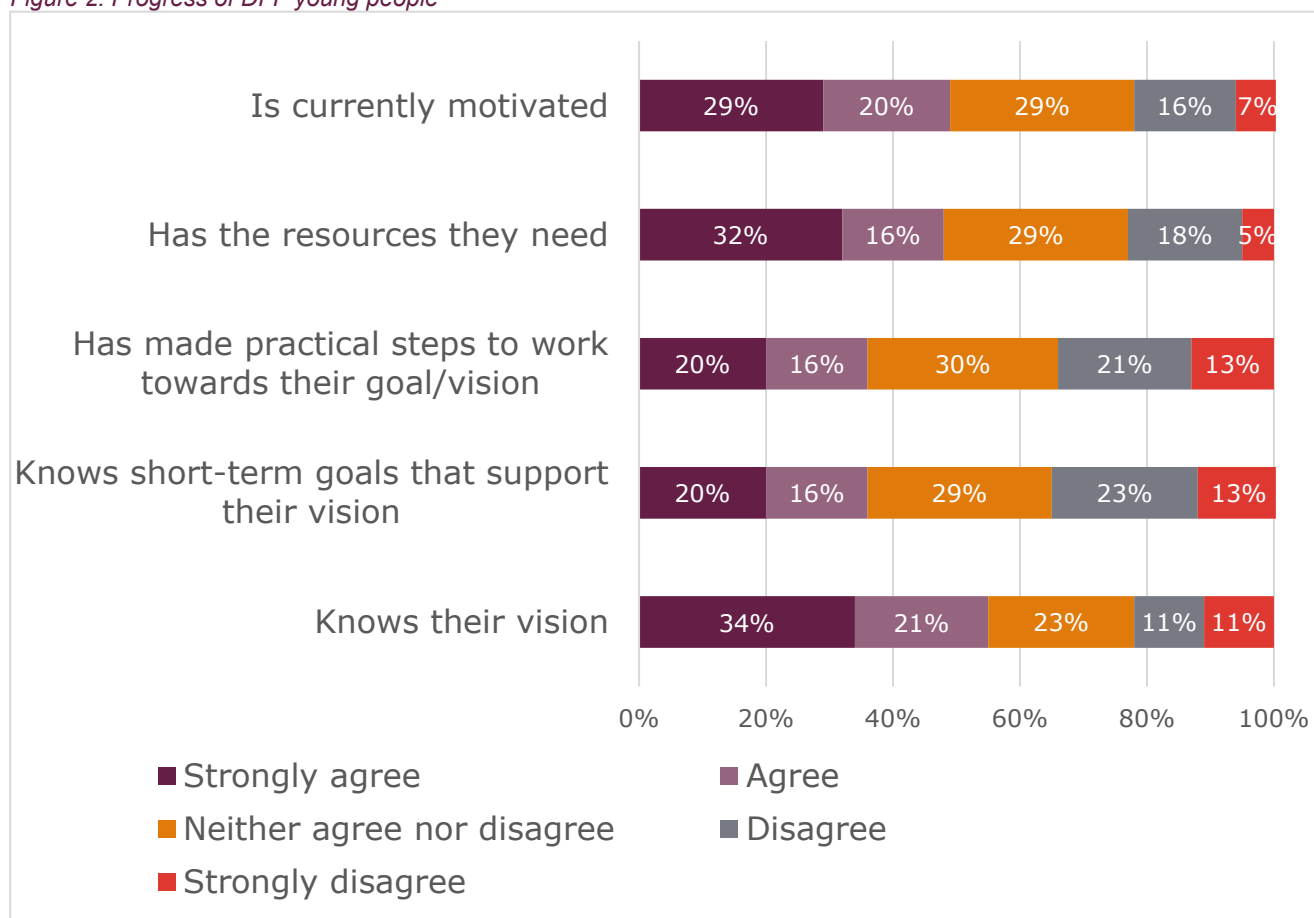
DFF used five categories to assess whether its young people:

- know their own vision (for their future)
- know short-term goals that support their vision
- have made practical steps to work towards their goal or vision
- have the resources they need
- are motivated.

Figure 2 shows DFF's results for the 2020/21 academic year. Half of young people were deemed to be currently motivated by DFF's work (49%), while a similar proportion (48%) had the resources they needed to make progress. Around a third of young people had made practical steps towards their goals (36%), while the same proportion were aware of short-term goals that would help them to achieve their vision for the future. Just over half (55%) had a clear vision for where they wanted to go next.

While these figures indicate positive progress for some young people, they also reveal that a significant number of young people need further support in order to make progress towards their goals. CfEY understands that DFF uses this assessment to better understand what kinds of support their young people need and to identify those that need the most help in order to progress.

Figure 2: Progress of DFF young people



7 Pathway awareness

Section summary: Partners' data suggests their programmes positively influence young people's awareness of different pathways into further or higher education and work. Employer feedback indicates that the programmes have improved many employers' understandings of how to support young people through different pathways.

'Pathway awareness' is young people's knowledge and understanding of different academic and vocational pathways into work.

Partners' data showed:

- 86% of young people on the EY Foundation programme said they felt their networks had grown as a result of participating
- 81% of young people on the EY Foundation programme and 76% on the Career Ready 'Career Builder' programme said their awareness of different pathways after school had improved
- 100% of young people on IntoUniversity's Mentoring programme, 87% of young people on its Academic Support programme, 83% of young people on its Buddy programme and 71% of young people on its Secondary FOCUS programme said their awareness of different pathways after school had improved after taking part.

Young people also described some of the ways in which they had found that Career Ready, CYT and DFF had enhanced their pathway awareness:

"Career Ready providing us a mentor was one of the best things that's happened to me. Because my mentor, he really helped me ... Because no one around me really went to university, and really never had a proper career, and all of that. My mentor showed me what you can do, after you go to university, and the amount of opportunities that are out there."

Young Person Listening Circle, Career Ready

"We heard about apprenticeships, how they work and we also met people that do apprenticeships ... that's why I changed my mind, so I decided after A Levels, I will do an apprenticeship ... I didn't really know too much before ... basically it actually changed my mind."

Young Person Listening Circle, Construction Youth Trust

"I'm interested in dentistry, and my plan is to study dentistry in university, so Claudia helped me. She found two dentists for me. And so, we had Zoom meetings ... It was actually so good, because I missed the opportunity to have work experience in Year 10. But through that Zoom meeting, we asked any questions we had about the dentistry, and they explained about their job, all the information we needed, and it was so helpful."

Young Person Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

Looking at school and employer engagement:

- 100% of schools involved with the EY Foundation programme said it had helped to grow their employer engagement network.

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- 100% of employers supporting the Dallaglio RugbyWorks programme and 75% of employers supporting the EY Foundation programme also said their networks had grown while taking part.
- 100% of employers working with Dallaglio RugbyWorks said they better understood how to recruit, train, and support young people from diverse backgrounds.
- When asked to rate their confidence in supporting young people's transition to the workplace, 100% of employers working with the EY Foundation programme gave a rating of 5 or above (out of 10), with 75% giving a rating above 7.

"I think it's helping me as well because it gives me more opportunities to see a different variety of things that I would probably not see or bother to look at before coming into [the] Breakthrough [Programme]."

Young Person Listening Circle, Drive Forward Foundation

Teachers (11 in total) of young people on CYT's Building Bridges to Construction Careers programme said:

- They (the teachers) felt more confident in recommending a career in the construction and built environment sector to students (with 100% saying this).
- The programme improved their young people's knowledge of careers in the construction and built environment sector (100% said this).
- The programme helped their students to understand how Science, Technology, Engineering or Maths (STEM) subjects apply to the workplace (10 out of 11 said this)
- The programme made their students aware of other paths to work (10 out of 11 said this).

More than 9 in 10 employers (96% of 23 organisations) working with the CYT programme said they felt more confident encouraging a young person to pursue a career in STEM, while more than 8 in 10 (84%) felt more confident encouraging a young person to consider a career in construction.

8 Destinations

Section summary: The partners who collect data on their young people's post-programme destinations report that many of their participants go on to further education, training, or employment. The most common destination across the programmes for which there is data, is continuing on into education, at either school or college.

'Destinations' refers to young people's subsequent trajectories in education or work.

Of the partners who shared data with us about their young people's destinations, there was evidence that high proportions of young people are making positive transitions into the next stage of their journey through education and towards work.

For example, 98% of young people on the Career Ready programme made meaningful transitions after the programme, for example into further education, higher education, employment, or training.

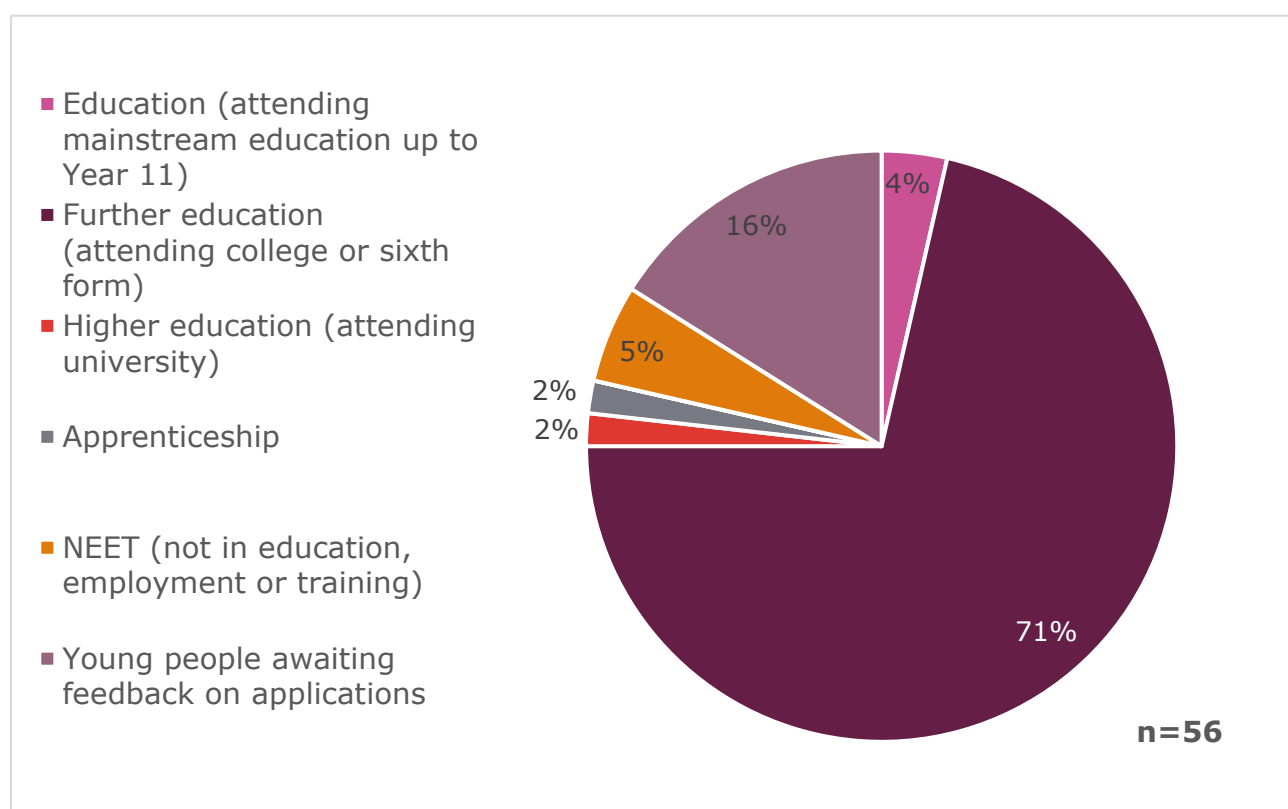
"For me, I feel like I've really learnt about the industry that I want to go into, how it works, and just getting an insight into everything. It's something I've had no idea about before. Because I don't personally know anyone, that really works in business, or finance, or anything like that. So, just getting that exposure to it, you learn a lot, just from talking to people like that."

Young Person Listening Circle, Career Ready

All the young people on the EY Foundation programmes continued their education by returning to their schools after taking part (considered a meaningful destination for those young people).

DFF assessed the proportion of its young people (56 in total) who went on to six different destinations, as shown in Figure 3, with the majority going on to further education.

Figure 3: Proportion of DFF young people in education, employment, or training



9 Intensive Study #1: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Cohort 1 – Year 2

Section summary: During this Intensive Study, CfEY conducted Listening Circles and Appreciative Inquiry Groups with programme staff and young people in Cohort 1. The Intensive Study revealed two main ways in which the partners in the cohort have needed to adapt their programmes as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic:

1. Adapting delivery, with key challenges for the partners being: (a) delivering programmes virtually; and (b) changing programme timelines and structures. However, partners have also had valuable opportunities to review their programmes and take steps towards diversifying delivery in ways they say could make their programmes more sustainable.
2. Adapting partnerships, with particular challenges for the partners being: (a) accessing schools; (b) engaging employers and volunteers; and (c) communicating with young people and stakeholders. However, there have also been opportunities. The partners have developed new modes of communication and have, in cases, said that their working routines and support for wellbeing have improved.

9.1 Methodology

For this Intensive Study, CfEY held Listening Circles and Appreciative Inquiry Groups with staff and students from the four partner organisations in Cohort 1.

9.1.1 Listening Circles with young people

CfEY held four 'Listening Circles', one for each partner, each with a group of young people. A Listening Circle is a facilitated group in which young people articulate their perspectives on and experiences of a particular issue and plan how to address the issue.⁵

During these sessions, we asked the young people about how the partners' delivery has changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and what impact these changes have had on their experiences of the programmes. We also asked them about their experiences during the pandemic and how these have affected their engagement with the programmes.

CfEY facilitated the Listening Circles. Members of staff from the partner organisations listened to young people's reflections and were invited to discuss how delivery might be further adapted in the future.

⁵ Hanson, T., Polik, J. and Cerna, R. (2017) *Short-Term Impacts of Student Listening Circles on Student Perceptions of School Climate and of Their Own Competencies*, REL 2017-210, Washington, DC: Regional Educational Laboratory West.

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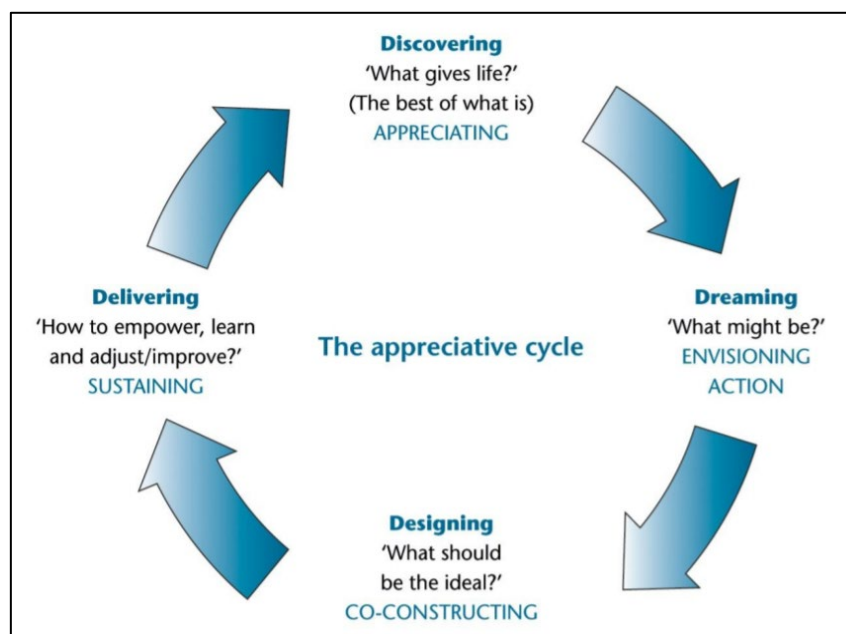
9.1.2 Appreciative Inquiry Groups with partners

CfEY ran 'Appreciative Inquiry Groups' with staff from each of the four Cohort 1 partners, to explore:

- how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on their programmes
- how they have responded to challenges arising from the pandemic (such as lack of access to young people during school closures, poor wellbeing among young people or businesses closing)
- which changes implemented in response to the pandemic they feel have been most effective so far and why.

Appreciative Inquiry Groups are structured around a four-stage process that seeks to identify existing good practice within organisations and develop this further (see Figure 4).⁶

Figure 4: The Appreciative Inquiry cycle⁷



Our sessions involved four phases:

1. The 'discovery' phase, where we asked participants to reflect on and discuss the successful aspects of their responses to the pandemic.
2. The 'dream' phase, where we asked participants to identify common aspirations for the future.
3. The 'design' phase, where we asked participants to discuss actions that could function as a bridge between where they are currently, and the aspirations they have for their organisations in the future.

⁶ Preskill, H. and Catsambas, T.T. (2006) *Reframing Evaluation Through Appreciative Inquiry*, London: SAGE Publications.

⁷ National Foundation for Educational Research (2009) *Using Appreciative Inquiry in Educational Research: Possibilities and Limitations*, Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research, retrieved from <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/aen01/aen01.pdf>.

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4. The 'delivery' stage, during which the participants made commitments for achieving their aspirations.⁸

We adjusted the Appreciative Inquiry methodology in order to also ask participants about the challenges they have faced and the barriers to achieving their aspirations.

9.2 Adapting delivery

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly presented many challenges for the partners, but this Intensive Study revealed how the partners and their young people have also enjoyed successes during the pandemic.

9.2.1 Challenge: Delivering programmes virtually

Virtual delivery is the focus of Cohort 1's second Intensive Study (see section 10). However, we incorporate it here, too, as it was the main challenge facing partners' delivery. The key issues posed by virtual delivery were:

- **Access.** Partners found that not all young people had access to a computer, and some struggled with a bad Wi-Fi connection.
- **Communication.** Young people often did not feel confident communicating via Microsoft Teams and Zoom, and partners reported that many young people would not turn their camera on. Working in smaller, breakout groups sometimes served to increase the pressure on young people to contribute.
- **Finding alternatives to practical work.** Virtual delivery sometimes offered opportunities, such as streamlining mentoring relationships. However, finding alternatives to workplace visits and practical work experience was a particular challenge facing CYT. One young person explained:

"Some people, such as me, have some subjects like construction or we've got carpentry, painting, decorating, and building, but we can't go to them in pandemic times ... We never got to do some of the things like painting and decorating, we weren't able to do bricklaying. We really missed going to a workshop to do building."

Young Person Listening Circle, Construction Youth Trust

- **Young people's motivation and engagement.** Many young people we spoke to found working at home difficult, although this was not universally the case. Some spoke of finding it challenging to establish an effective routine or seek guidance from adults when working online.

9.2.2 Challenge: Changing timelines and structures

The pandemic severely disrupted partners' delivery, including programmes' timelines and structures. In addition to the programmatic and communication challenges described above, partners found planning around uncertainty difficult.

⁸ Bushe, G.R. (2011) 'Appreciative inquiry: theory and critique', in Boje, D., Burnes, B. and Hassard, J. (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Organizational Change* (pp. 87–103), Oxford: Routledge.

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Young people on the DFF programme expressed frustration at feeling like they had “missed out” on things they were supposed to do, although they clearly attributed this to the pandemic and were complimentary about the efforts staff had made to keep the programme running.

The unpredictability and uncertainty made it difficult for the partners to plan in-person events. DFF found using National Youth Agency guidance helped with its programme planning and it nominated members of staff to keep track of updates from the Agency:

“Rather than trying to second-guess and having to cancel, we really did just make sure that we were in tune to when those updates were coming, making sure that one of us was present at the training. Sharing that relevant information, and the same with updates from the government guidelines.”

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Drive Forward Foundation

9.2.3 **Opportunity: Reviewing delivery**

The pandemic has afforded the partners an opportunity to reflect on and refine delivery. As a staff participant in Career Ready’s Appreciate Inquiry session said, changes to “materials, resources and ways of working” were often things they had wanted to make anyway “in an ideal world”:

“It was kind of an opportunity to get these things done, both programmatically and operationally, at a wider level.”

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Career Ready

Likewise, the EY Foundation reviewed programme data, interviewed staff and stakeholders, and has introduced new peer researcher roles to boost its evaluation capacity. DFF has also reviewed its strategy.

9.2.4 **Opportunity: Diversifying delivery**

The partners feel they have adopted more diverse approaches to delivery, and that this will boost their programmes’ sustainability:

“I think our long-term sustainability is strengthened by what we’ve done over the last year ... We have three forms of delivering and working now ... If a student misses a session, they can get the video [from the online session].”

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Career Ready

Other examples of diversification include:

- **Developing structured sessions and resources**, such as Career Ready’s ‘mock classes’, which are templates for sessions that schools can take, adapt and deliver with their pupils. Likewise, the EY Foundation developed a new business consulting case study about a fictional drinks company, and three new projects about digital technology, charity and community work, and the media, respectively, which enable business volunteers to contribute via ‘drop-in’ sessions, rather than needing to run whole programmes themselves. It has also designed online session plans and resources for its mentors to use with young people, covering topics including setting goals, writing CVs and planning for the

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future. EY Foundation staff said that their young people found smaller tasks with clear objectives helpful.

- **Extending programme scope.** EY Foundation has become an approved centre for the Royal Society of Public Health, enabling it to deliver a Level 2 Award in Understanding Emotional Wellbeing with its young people.
- **Meeting key workers.** DFF arranged sessions between young people and key workers such as medical professionals and teachers (whose roles have been covered extensively in the news during the pandemic). These timely encounters provided young people with opportunities to learn more about these jobs, but also to ask questions about other issues, such as the Black Lives Matter movement and employers' engagement with this movement.
- **Developing blended modes of delivery.** DFF used in-person and online delivery, enabling it to work closely with its young people:

"Things weren't necessarily going to be how we envisioned them, but we still did the games, the high-energy team-building tasks, we still were able to get them involved in meeting really valued partners ... Our creativity was still there regardless of everything."

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Drive Forward Foundation

9.3 Adapting partnerships

9.3.1 Challenge: Accessing schools

The lack of access to schools during the Covid-19 pandemic proved a significant challenge for the partners, particularly Career Ready, EY Foundation and CYT, which rely on contact with pupils via schools.

School closures meant finding alternatives to delivering programmes in the classroom. One Career Ready staff member commented that "the school and the face-to-face base interaction can't be replaced by virtual in any way".

Even as schools reopened, partners faced challenges. For example, Career Ready found that many school staff and pupils were still having to self-isolate, making their involvement in in-person mentoring activities impossible.

Career Ready and CYT both found that some pupils went "off the radar" at their schools. For some pupils this was temporary, but others did not return when schools reopened:

"I've had two to three students completely disengage with their school itself. So much so that upon the return this term, they aren't returning ... If they can't even get them back into their formal schoolwork, then we have lost students ... obviously it's frustrating, because the very reason they're on this type of programme is because they're that kind of student who might get lost, but the challenges that Covid has presented in terms of those types of individuals has just made it so much harder."

Staff Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

9.3.2 Challenge: Engaging employers and volunteers

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The Covid-19 pandemic affected many employers' and volunteers' ability to engage with the partners' programmes. Career Ready, the EY Foundation and DFF noted lower engagement from some volunteers and mentors, and one of the Career Ready young people we spoke to described how they had never met their mentor and had not had much contact by email. EY Foundation staff said that they had had difficulties getting timely responses from businesses where many staff members had been put on furlough. They found interacting with smaller employers particularly difficult, acknowledging that the pandemic had made it hard for employers to know what to expect in the future and consequently to commit to volunteering.

9.3.3 **Opportunity: Reaching a wider range of people**

Despite challenges in engaging stakeholders (see section 9.3.4), partners sometimes found that the pandemic had led to ways of working that enabled them to reach a wider range of people. Specifically, partners discussed:

- **Improved accessibility of virtual delivery.** This is something we explore in greater depth in section 10 on Cohort 1's Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery. Virtual delivery made it easier for many young people and other stakeholders such as volunteers to participate in sessions they might not otherwise have been able to attend. Career Ready and EY Foundation staff noted that it had also made linking young people with mentors easier, because it removed the need for travelling to meet each other:

"What struck me was what the students said ... they were able to take part in opportunities that maybe they normally wouldn't have."

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Career Ready

However, as we explore further in section 10, virtual delivery also posed many challenges in terms of access.

- **Increased volunteer numbers.** Career Ready saw its volunteer mentor numbers increase across the country. Staff said that they felt people had seen in the news how the pandemic was affecting young people and that this had encouraged them to get involved and offer help. EY Foundation staff reported a similar experience.
- **Increased stakeholder support.** The EY Foundation said that some of its new business partnerships had been made possible by the reduced demands of meeting young people online. For example, it has forged new connections with the Federation of Small Businesses in Lewisham. Staff at CYT said that during the pandemic it had enjoyed "tremendous industry support", and had found school staff "really supportive", perhaps because these stakeholders believe the pandemic will disproportionately hit CYT's target groups:

"There's an appreciation [among teachers] that [our young people] need as much support as they can to get them through this next phase ... Extra-curricular stuff like this is going to increase their chances of that positive next step. The teachers, for me, have been fantastic."

Staff Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

- **Streamlined onboarding.** EY Foundation staff said that online onboarding (as opposed to young people visiting the EY Foundation offices) meant young people did not have to miss a day of school.
- **Increased geographical reach.** Several partners said that virtual delivery enabled them to schedule more meetings, and meetings involving geographically disparate stakeholders.
- **Improved relationships.** Staff at DFF said that meeting business partners online had enhanced relationships, enabling both parties to see more of one another's home lives.

"I think that even when we go to normal life, I still think a lot of my partners I'll be meeting [online] ... We all have a lot more respect for each other, particularly when it comes to big corporates who are a lot more approachable now."

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Drive Forward Foundation

9.3.4 **Challenge: Communicating with young people and stakeholders**

Losing the ability to meet and communicate with young people in person was perhaps the single largest challenge the partners faced. As we mention above, young people's ability and willingness to participate online presented a stubborn problem.

Furthermore, the pressure facing teachers made communicating with schools difficult. CYT staff said that, as the pandemic hit in March 2020, teachers were "swamped".

9.3.5 **Opportunity: Developing new modes of communication**

Despite the considerable barriers to communicating with young people (outlined below in Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery, sections 9.6.3 and 9.6.4), partners nonetheless described ways in which they had communicated effectively with their young people. These approaches included:

- **Meeting young people 'where they are'.** Young people experienced considerable upheaval and stress as a result of, for example, exams effectively being cancelled in 2020. DFF staff said they found emphasising to young people that "we are all in the same situation" helped to build trust and rapport. Furthermore, DFF found that young people who had just been placed in care or foster homes needed additional support, as they could not see their friends.
- **Regular, light-touch check-ins.** DFF said that weekly calls or messages to their young people helped maintain communication in the absence of in-person meetings.
- **Communicating with other professionals in young people's lives.** Staff at DFF and CYT said they had found communicating with other adults who are supporting their young people, such as social workers, hugely beneficial. DFF staff said this enabled a more joined-up approach to supporting young people. For example, DFF invited social workers to join a virtual session about the experiences of young people in foster care during the pandemic. Staff said that, previously, too much responsibility was placed on young people to access and navigate the services supporting them. DFF now works to help its young people

navigate different services and has received positive feedback on this from a virtual school headteacher in Newham.

- **Working with smaller groups of young people.** Despite facing challenges with virtual delivery (outlined in section 10), EY Foundation staff said that putting young people into smaller groups sometimes helped them communicate more easily and confidently during online sessions.
- **Managing expectations.** The unpredictability imposed by the pandemic made managing young people's expectations important. For example, DFF found being upfront about uncertainty and not making promises about in-person sessions helped ensure young people did not end up disappointed.

9.3.6 **Opportunity: Improving working routines and wellbeing**

Many staff across the partner organisations felt they have been able to work more flexibly because of the pandemic, for example to help employees manage childcare.

Remote working has also given the partner organisations opportunities to unite geographically disparate workforces. For example, online working enabled Career Ready teams across the country to deliver its Skills Festival and virtual work experience programmes. Likewise, moving delivery online has enabled EY Foundation to encourage collaboration between staff who would normally have physically worked in separate, regional offices. The staff we spoke to said they had learnt a lot from working with different colleagues and hoped this approach continues.

Several partner organisations have introduced measures to promote better staff wellbeing. For example, EY Foundation has introduced a 'Better Ways of Working' group, to help staff adapt to working from home.

Alongside the pandemic, the DFF team experienced the loss of founder Martha Wansbrough. Staff said that coming together online (and, restrictions permitting, in person) enabled them to unite and grieve together, giving them "a new sense of drive and motivation, and depth to the work".

During this time, DFF introduced a new 'Wellness' team, to actively support the wellbeing of staff. The team have brought in initiatives such as a month of mindful activities for staff, like painting a picture or learning a new recipe, with the aim of encouraging them to take time to look after their mental health. The DFF team have also taken part in active bystander training, which seeks to develop awareness about protected characteristics and ensure programme work is inclusive for all its young people.

This work has culminated in staff feeling more able to share their feelings, and engage in challenging conversations:

"I feel like we are on a journey of really starting to have difficult conversations with each other. And that's something I really appreciate, and I don't think every organisation does that, but this brings about the culture of being able to talk about things that other people maybe avoid talking about."

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Drive Forward Foundation

9.4 **Future plans**

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Despite the myriad challenges they have faced, the partners are sanguine about the future. They have a variety of plans for the future, including:

- the development of an alumni offer (Career Ready)
- expanding the number of sectors in which young people can access mentoring and work experience (Career Ready)
- embedding hybrid models of delivery for young people, maintaining some aspects of virtual provision alongside in-person opportunities (EY Foundation)
- embedding hybrid, flexible modes of working for employees, encouraging communication and collaboration between colleagues across the country (EY Foundation)
- formalising the wellbeing and feedback mechanisms introduced during lockdown (DFF)
- targeting in-person delivery towards the activities that are hardest to do online, including relationship building (DFF) and practical work experience placements (CYT).

Appendix 1 (see section 14.1) shows how the partners would like people to think of their organisations, and the one thing they would change for the better about their work going forward.

Recommendations

The partners should:

1. Expand flexible volunteering opportunities that include virtual mentoring, to encourage a wider range of employers to support their work.
2. Review which programme elements can continue to be delivered virtually (especially those involving employers and volunteers), to improve cost effectiveness and sustainability.
3. Seek to lock in gains made in supporting flexible working and staff wellbeing, by enabling staff to work from home where possible and appropriate.
4. Continue to develop ways for geographically dispersed staff to collaborate regularly virtually.

10 Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery

Cohort 1 – Year 2

Section summary: During this Intensive Study, CfEY conducted an audit of Cohort 1 partners' virtual provision and ran focus groups with staff and young people. This Intensive Study presents a summary of the partners' virtual provision and outlines the advantages and drawbacks of delivering programmes virtually.

The advantages of virtual delivery include:

- increasing staff collaboration and accountability
- enhancing programme flexibility and engagement
- developing relationships
- improving young people's soft skills.

However, inevitably, moving most if not all delivery online has also presented challenges for the partners. The partners have faced particular challenges in relation to:

- safeguarding
- administration
- building relationships
- engaging disadvantaged young people
- digital fatigue
- delivering work experience
- young people transitioning back into school.

10.1 Methodology

For this Intensive Study, CfEY carried out an audit of the four Cohort 1 partner organisations' virtual provision. We also ran focus groups with staff and young people.

10.1.1 Audit of virtual provision

CfEY designed a short, online audit, covering partners': websites; use of social media; virtual events; virtual mentoring and networking; and virtual training.

We asked partners which elements were in place before March 2020, and which were introduced since the first lockdown began. We also asked about the effectiveness of their virtual provision.

10.1.2 Focus groups with staff and young people

CfEY ran focus groups with staff, and separate focus groups with young people involved in the programmes, to explore elements of virtual delivery, including:

- staff and young people's perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of partners' virtual delivery
- enabling factors for effective virtual delivery
- barriers to effective virtual delivery.

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Young people were invited to discuss different ways to provide feedback, via online tools available through [Mentimeter](#), which were used in conjunction with Zoom to deliver the focus groups remotely.

10.2 Audit of virtual provision

Appendix 2 (see section 14.2) shows the results of CfEY's audit of the four Cohort 1 partners' virtual provision.

Appendix 3 (see section 14.3) shows young people's thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of virtual delivery. CYT young people did not participate in a focus group and therefore are not included here.

Appendix 4 (see section 14.4) shows the partners' priorities for delivering virtual provision.

10.3

Which activities have moved online?



10.4 Which virtual activities have been newly introduced?



Bitesize programme
resources on social
channels, primarily
Instagram



All external resources
repurposed into a virtual
library with 'how to use'
guidelines



Digital volunteering -
employers can upload
videos about career
pathways



Skills Festival – including
employer insights, CV clinics,
tutorials, skills workshops
and interview workshops (for
Year 12 and 13)



Connecting with and
chatting to young
people via Instagram
or WhatsApp



EY Foundation

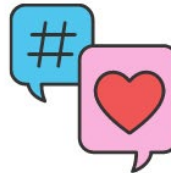
Understanding
Emotional Wellbeing
qualification for young
people



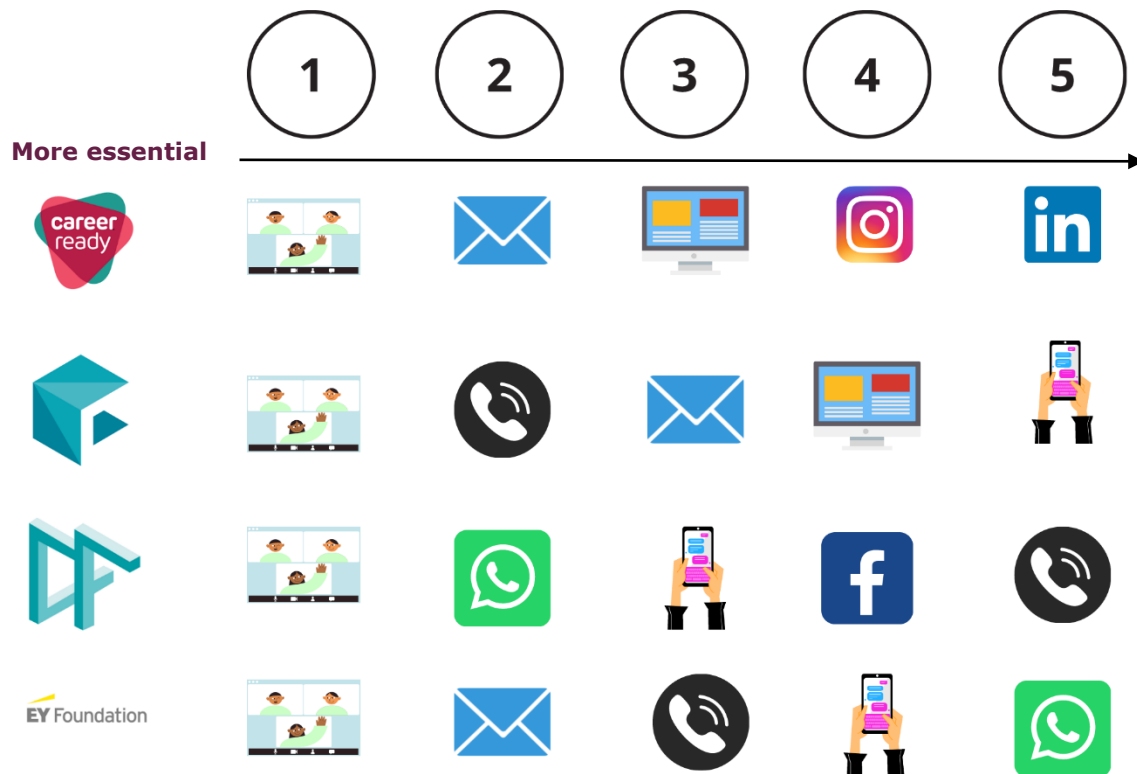
Paid employability training
recognised by the Institute
of Leadership and
Management



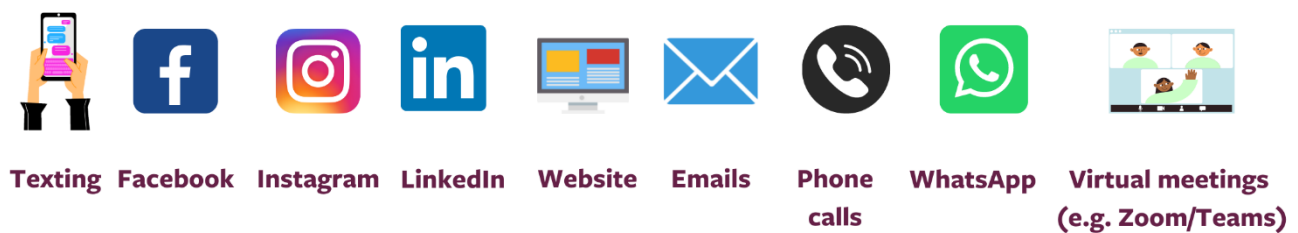
Online social media campaign
offering advice and tips on
employability skills and health
and wellbeing



10.5 What are each of the partners top five methods for the virtual provision of their programmes (since March 2020)?



Key



10.6 Advantages of virtual delivery

In this part of the report, we will explore some of the advantages of delivering virtual programmes that the four Cohort 1 partners told us they had discovered this past academic year (2020/21).

10.6.1 Increasing staff collaboration and accountability

An increased sense of staff collaboration and accountability has been a perceived benefit of working virtually, according to the partners. For example:

- Staff at CYT said they had worked more collaboratively to produce resources:

"I've just been blown away by the stuff that's come out of some working groups ... Everybody gets to have a look at resources and throw their sixpence-worth in before a final decision is made ... We've managed to create resources that we're getting a great response to."

Staff Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

- Staff at the EY Foundation said they felt more accountable working virtually, proactively having to learn how to embed technology into their roles. EY Foundation staff received training in using Microsoft Teams, and young people said they had felt at ease asking for help with virtual tasks:

"You've got to plan and not just sit in ... You're having to do your bit, you're having to come together or you're having to use the tech that we've got to share and distribute, work on, action, all of these different things."

Staff Focus Group, EY Foundation

10.6.2 Enhancing programme flexibility and engagement

Partners said that working virtually had increased flexibility for some of their stakeholders, often by removing the pressure and additional time normally needed to travel. This had benefits including:

- **Engagement with a wider range of stakeholders.** Three partners explained how a move to virtual delivery had helped them engage employers from a wider range of industries and locations. Running virtual workplace visits enabled Career Ready and CYT to involve more schools while also linking pupils with employers outside their immediate locality.

In some cases, staff found that working virtually with young people had improved communication with parents or carers. For example, CYT staff explained that in order to meet safeguarding requirements, when speaking on the phone with young people they must use a speakerphone and have another adult in the room. A spill over effect of this has been improved relationships with some parents:

"It's sort of helped get parents more involved and more on board, ... asking questions and making comments, and just generally geeing their kids up."

Staff Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

- **Greater flexibility for stakeholders.** Virtual sessions, including pre-recorded training content, enabled some schools, volunteers and young people to participate at times that better worked around their schedules. CYT found this enabled it to run sessions with more schools, and staff at EY Foundation said that running mock interviews virtually took up less of volunteers' time. Career Ready found that more members of its local advisory boards were able to regularly attend meetings when these took place virtually, and that introducing mentors and mentees virtually reduced the 'drag' associated with in-person meetings:

"What normally would happen if a mentor couldn't attend the icebreaker [session] at the school, we'd put them in contact with the coordinator at the schools to generate allotted time for the mentor to go in. And sometimes that can drag on for weeks, trying to get that arranged. But with virtual, what we found is ... all the mentors have met with their students for the first time, just were able to put that in place quite quickly."

Staff Focus Group, Career Ready

- **Improved safety.** Young people said that joining sessions virtually during the pandemic made them feel "safe and secure", because there was no need to worry about using public transport, wearing a mask, or carrying hand sanitiser. Several young people commented that participating virtually had saved them money and was less tiring.

10.6.3 Developing relationships

The four organisations in the cohort said they have worked hard to build relationships virtually. While all the partners have found that a lack of in-person contact has made building relationships with their young people challenging, they described some of the ways in which they have mitigated the impact of this. For example, partners described using:

- **Social media.** This has been an especially important part of DFF's communication and relationship-building strategy. DFF staff have learnt how to use platforms commonly used by their young people, such as Instagram.
- **Online tools to support virtual interactions.** Several partners described using the 'breakout rooms' function in Zoom and online tools such as Mentimeter to help young people and programme staff interact. Smaller group discussions could be awkward at first, so the partners found ice-breaker activities useful.
- **Online calendars to share opportunities and events with young people.**
- **Reciprocity to build trust.** Staff at DFF said that while it has been difficult to replicate the atmosphere of in-person contact, they have found that encouraging young people to ask staff questions about themselves during virtual sessions has helped build rapport.
- **Meetings in person where possible.** The partners said that while virtual delivery has advantages, they have also been keen to maintain some in-person contact with their young people whenever restrictions have permitted.
- **Patience.** Staff at DFF felt it had been important to be "patient and consistent", and they said they had messaged young people often even if they were not getting regular responses from them.

"That kind of all-around flexible approach really helps ... for the young people, when they are ready to be in touch with me and for them to know they can approach me whenever they want to."

Staff Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

10.6.4 Improving soft skills

Staff working at several partner organisations felt that virtual delivery had boosted some young people's soft skills. EY Foundation data for this past academic year (2020/21) for around 300 young people showed greater soft skills improvement online than face-to-face (when comparing outcomes from virtual delivery during the year with in-person delivery from previous years).⁹ Likewise, DFF felt there were benefits to virtual delivery, because "a big part of employability in future is going to be probably working from home, being familiar with how to use Zoom, how to use [Microsoft] Teams, how to write emails". Several young people on both programmes described how their confidence in general, and specifically in working virtually, had improved. For example, one young person on the EY Foundation programme said they had valued the new Understanding Emotional Wellbeing qualification, and a young person on DFF's Breakthrough Programme spoke about learning how to write a blog, which they won an award for, and explained how the process had encouraged them to consider a career in writing.

10.7 Challenges with virtual delivery

In this part of the report, we will explore some of the challenges the four Cohort 1 partners told us they had encountered in delivering their programmes virtually during the year.

10.7.1 Safeguarding

One of the main barriers that partners cited was in relation to safeguarding. Particular challenges here were:

- **Resistance among schools to certain activities.** Career Ready found that schools were wary about pupils participating in mentoring when not in school. This meant teachers joined the virtual mentoring sessions. Staff at Career Ready felt this had made it difficult to arrange sessions and meant some pupils could not be as open with mentors as they would have been otherwise. Likewise, staff at CYT tended to favour speaking with young people on the phone, as they needed two staff members on Zoom calls. Some schools had provided pupils with laptops, with the cameras disabled, which inhibited communication.
- **Employer anxiety about safeguarding.** Partners said some employers had been resistant to getting involved in virtual activities because of fears about safeguarding. In response, Career Ready provided guidance for employers to ensure they were compliant with the rules when working remotely with young people, particularly for mentoring and virtual internships.
- **Confusion about safeguarding regulations.** Several partners described being confused about the government's safeguarding guidance, especially as schools

⁹ The team are looking into what has driven this difference and are considering using a control group in the future to explore this further.

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seemed to interpret this in different ways. DFF said that the National Youth Agency's guidance had been useful in clarifying expectations, and CYT has its own internal safeguarding team who helped staff understand their responsibilities.

10.7.2 Administration

While virtual delivery has streamlined some of the partners' processes, it sometimes increased the administrative burden for staff.

Staff across the four partner organisations described spending significant amounts of time establishing new resources and ways of working, putting safeguarding mechanisms in place, and then communicating these changes to schools and employers. For example, EY Foundation staff found distributing laptops and phones to young people time consuming. So too was chasing paperwork; in previous years, staff could process up to 50 students simultaneously in the office, but virtually they had had to arrange separate video calls, which staff estimate triples the time they spend organising the programmes.

Some of the administration associated with enrolling and supporting business partners has also been more arduous. EY Foundation has been collaborating with Goldsmiths, University of London, which has a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) hub. However, Goldsmiths has found engaging small businesses to take part EY Foundation's work challenging because many of the businesses have had to focus their energy on surviving the pandemic:

"It's taken a bit of time to get that up and running, longer than expected, but ... they've been doing an awful lot of firefighting in terms of what's happening with some of these businesses. I think that support that would have originally been there ... was just inaccessible because of the pandemic."

Staff Focus Group, EY Foundation

Partners and young people alike found resolving tech-related issues challenging, with one young person describing technical difficulties as "the hardest thing" they had dealt with.

"If there is a tech issue on your end or their end, it's not something you can necessarily help right there or overcome right there. But it's not really something there's much of a solution for either."

Staff Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

The partners have also faced some challenges in gathering data and feedback about their programmes. This is because, for example, schools have had less ability and capacity to disseminate surveys to pupils, or because young people themselves have been difficult to chase up for responses.

10.7.3 Building relationships

The partners found building relationships virtually, as opposed to in person, challenging. Specific barriers to building relationships virtually that the partners cited included:

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- **Not being able to see the young people.** Partners found that some young people did not have hardware with a camera; others did not want to turn their camera on. Sometimes young people would communicate instead via the chat function. The partners, employers and volunteers found this unsettling in some cases, as it made it hard to tell how engaged the young people were, and difficult to invite and respond to questions. However, while some young people said they sometimes felt embarrassed or self-conscious having their camera on, others in their groups felt frustrated with their peers when they did not turn their camera on or contribute to the sessions:

"Basically, doing my work experience we had group activities and I was trying to talk but nobody was talking back to me ... It made me feel like I was the only one in the room, but it was not true."

Young Person Focus Group, Career Ready

"When you're online, you're basically by yourself. There's not really much you can do. You're kind of restricted. I feel like in person is a lot freer than online, so yeah, I mean in terms of what I actually do in the work, it can be really difficult."

Young Person Focus Group, EY Foundation

- **Building trust.** CYT and DFF said they had found it harder to build trust with young people virtually. Meeting in person makes establishing a rapport easier and can also help young people be more 'present'. Young people said that they felt interpreting body language and facial expressions easier in person, and some said they would appreciate more ice-breaker activities when working virtually.
- **Reduced contact with programme staff.** Several partners have shortened the length of their sessions in order to minimise digital fatigue (see section 10.6.5), consequently reducing the time programme staff have to build relationships with young people.
- **Reduced contact with wider organisational staff.** Some of the partners noted that, normally, young people would physically visit their offices and meet the wider teams (including reception staff). However, virtual provision meant that only the staff directly involved in the sessions met the young people. Both the EY Foundation and DFF said this meant young people missed out on opportunities to engage in and develop social skills.
- **Giving feedback.** Giving young people constructive feedback virtually is harder than in person. For example, CYT works with young people at risk of becoming 'NEET' (not in education, employment, or training), and sometimes needs to speak with young people about their attendance, commitment, or conduct. Doing this virtually is more difficult and increases the risk that young people drop out.
- **Parental influence.** While the partners said that there had been some benefits to virtual delivery in terms of their rapport with young people's families, they also found that parental involvement in virtual delivery had sometimes created friction. For example, staff members said this happened when parental aspirations or attitudes diverged from those supported by the programme. CYT said that sometimes parents had inaccurate or counterproductive views about apprenticeships and vocational qualifications:

"I supported him to apply for a college course, a couple, actually, and he was really happy and became a different sort of presence within the room. And then

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he wasn't with us the next session ... His parents were really angry that he'd applied to do a trade at college because they want him to be a doctor."

Staff Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

- **Engaging employers and other partners.** Despite some benefits to virtual provision, partners found enrolling businesses and volunteers harder without in-person contact. EY Foundation has found this especially challenging in relation to SMEs.

10.7.4 Engaging disadvantaged young people

Partners said they sometimes found it harder to reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people virtually. This has occurred for a number of reasons:

- **Relying on schools for selecting and onboarding young people for programmes.** Career Ready found that schools themselves were facing significant challenges engaging these pupils, making it difficult for schools to enrol the young people who stand to gain the most from involvement in the programmes.
- **Home environments not being conducive to study and meetings.** For some young people, engaging with the programmes from their home during lockdown was challenging. One young person illustrated this by saying they needed to warn their family members in advance when they were taking part in particular activities. The EY Foundation sometimes found that young people were reluctant to turn on their camera because they felt self-conscious about showing their home or family.

"I have to take in[to] account a lot where I am doing my meetings. If I have my camera on, what's in my background? I have [a] loud family and that's a struggle. That's the main difference is knowing that every time I have to say something, I have to make sure there's no one in the background speaking, whereas if it was a one-on-one meeting, I know that would be an easier environment, in a sense, to control."

Young Person Focus Group, Career Ready

- **Supporting young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).** Staff at CYT felt that students with forms of SEND did not consistently receive the support they would normally receive at school, for example from teaching assistants, limiting their ability to engage with the programme. One DFF staff member said they had needed to adapt their online delivery when working with a young person with a hearing impairment, who relies on lip reading and captions, and consequently needed to move meetings from Zoom to Google Meets, because captions were not available via Zoom.
- **Poor internet connection.** Many partners found that young people's internet connections were prohibitively poor. Two partners – EY Foundation and CYT – paid for some of their young people to gain an internet connection.
- **Accessing hardware.** Many of the young people the partners support did not have access to sufficient technology, including laptops. Three partners – Career Ready, EY Foundation and DFF – said they had provided laptops for their young people. DFF said that some young people facing "laptop poverty" had benefitted more quickly than others from government support, resulting from a lack of coordination among professionals and organisations:

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"The government allowed the tools, the money was there, the laptops were there, [but] this inconsistency with who's leading on this, virtual school or social worker ... And was just about the system really not understanding where the responsibility stops."

Staff Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

- **Living in care.** Two partners had found supporting young people in care settings challenging, in part because these young people faced material barriers such as poor Wi-Fi or lack of access to quiet spaces.
- **Lack of confidence in virtual activities.** Young people felt less confident about virtual activities, due to the unfamiliar nature of working virtually. This in turn impacted on their involvement in programme activities. Young people on the Career Ready programme described feeling nervous about contributing to virtual meetings, because they found it hard to anticipate when someone was going to speak, then felt embarrassed if they spoke over someone else by accident:

"It stops other people often wanting to contribute because it's like you just expect someone else to do it, but then if everyone's thinking that then no one just ends up saying anything."

Young Person Focus Group, Career Ready

DFF said it had found that young people were self-conscious on video calls, and some had expressed concerns that other young people might screenshot and share their image on social media. However, some young people told us they were getting used to virtual meetings and starting to find them easier.

10.7.5 Digital fatigue

All of the partner organisations said that their young people had at times experienced digital fatigue. Partners observed fluctuating levels of attendance among their young people, whose concentration and wellbeing were often negatively impacted by the circumstances imposed by the pandemic.

Particular concerns included:

- **young people's attendance**, which, as noted, partners saw fluctuate throughout the year
- **young people's enthusiasm for prioritising the programmes post-lockdown**, when many wanted instead to see friends and family
- **finding ways to make virtual sessions engaging and interactive**
- **"correspondence fatigue" among staff and adults**, who themselves felt overwhelmed by the amount of time they were spending on computers.

"The foster carers themselves weren't necessarily getting back to us or picking up our calls because they'd been on Zoom, Zoom, Zoom, and it's fair ... I noticed as well, just myself, on the delivery, there was one week where I just couldn't call anyone, I was so sick, and I was like 'I'm going to go and just do paperwork', and I hand-wrote most of my notes that week. And then the next week just copied it all because I just couldn't do the computer anymore."

Staff Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

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10.7.6 Delivering virtual work experience

Work experience was one of the most difficult elements of partners' programmes to recreate virtually. Partners said that employers found it difficult to understand how virtual work experience would work, in light of the young people not being physically in a workplace and meeting colleagues in person. One Career Ready staff member commented that "the true impact is getting the young people into the offices, into the buildings, having that face-to-face contact".

DFF ran a two-week virtual work experience placement, which was designed to help prepare young people for an internship programme with a consultancy firm. This involved a structured timetable, team meetings and employability workshops, but DFF felt that the young people were still missing out without the real-life elements:

"I think there's a lot of value in actually going to the place, seeing where people work, and getting that understanding. So, whilst we can do that online, there is something that's lost from not being able to do it in person."

Staff Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

Young people on the Career Ready and EY Foundation programmes said they had missed the chance to see workplaces in person and wanted to get back to "real" experiences where they felt they had a better chance to develop life skills, such as travelling to work on time, being more independent and making connections with people.

10.7.7 Young people transitioning back into school

Partners felt that their programmes may face challenges as young people return to school.

One reason for this is logistical. For example, CYT staff said that young people's return to school made it harder to find times for one-to-one virtual sessions, because they had less free time:

"We have to finish our work with our young people by 5:30pm, so if they're not finishing school till 4:00pm, it's factoring in them getting home and them being able to get an appropriate slot for them to do the work with us."

Staff Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

Another reason is young people's confidence and wellbeing. DFF staff said they had observed some anxiety among young people around stepping out of their "comfort zone" and returning to school. However, young people on DFF's programme told us how supportive they had found DFF staff in helping them:

"I personally feel like everything we're doing already is as helpful as it can get. I mean, they're doing more than counsellors in my school could do. It's just really been amazing. Because I feel like they really put in research into actually getting people to talk to us and get into where we want to get to. I'm already happy with what they're doing with us, already. I don't think I want anything to change."

Young Person Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

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10.8 Future plans

The partners all expressed a desire to continue blended forms of delivery, combining in-person and virtual work with young people. This serves several purposes:

- supporting the transition period back to normality – as schools and businesses get back to normal routines, a hybrid model of delivery will help maintain some flexibility, enabling the partners and their stakeholders to find practical ways of working together and with young people taking the best of both virtual and in-person delivery.

"I mean, there's a lot of things I would love to stay online, but I know that's not really life, because I need experience [too]."

Young Person Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

Recommendations

The partners should:

1. Explore the most effective ways to deliver virtual or hybrid forms of work experience.
2. Review the most effective ways of re-engaging the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and target these young people in the 2021/22 academic year.

11 Intensive Study #3: Youth Voice

Cohort 2 – Year 1

Section summary: For this Intensive Study, CfEY examined Cohort 2 partners' processes for supporting youth voice, which we defined broadly, including but not limited to mechanisms for collecting feedback. We ran staff and young people's focus groups with the three partner organisations in the cohort.

We found that the following factors help enable youth voice:

- centralised systems
- staff training and support
- relationships
- participant self-determination
- technology
- dialogue with families and schools.

Our Intensive Study also uncovered a wide range of barriers that impede youth voice, including form fatigue, cultural barriers, and young people's additional needs.

11.1 Methodology

For this Intensive Study, CfEY examined Cohort 2 partners' processes for supporting youth voice and gathering young people's feedback.

CfEY ran focus groups with staff working at the partner organisations, and separate focus groups with young people on their programmes. During these, we explored the systems that the partners have in place for gathering feedback, how this feedback is currently used, and how these processes could be further adapted.

The staff focus groups were completed by IntoUniversity and Brentford FCCST. Young people from IntoUniversity and Dallaglio RugbyWorks took part in the young people's focus groups.

We found that young people were reluctant to speak during the focus groups. We encouraged them to write responses in the online chat box available in Zoom where they felt too shy to speak. This consequently limited the data we gathered during these sessions.

11.2 What is 'youth voice'?

Programme staff described 'youth voice' as young people expressing opinions about the programmes specifically, and in general. This involves being invited to give feedback formally and informally, and at different stages of the programme.

Young people said youth voice involved them giving feedback, having their thoughts and ideas recognised and appreciated, and consequently informing decision-making.

11.3 How do the partners currently support youth voice?

Table 5 sets out the ways in which the three partners currently support youth voice. We explore some of these mechanisms in greater detail below.

Table 5: How the three partners in Cohort 2 currently support youth voice

Organisation	Processes
IntoUniversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Debriefs' after sessions • Feedback forms, marked automatically using Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) • Student council • Suggestion boxes • Case studies • Informal conversations
Brentford FCCST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular one-to-one sessions • Weekly logs • Informal feedback • Pre- and post-questionnaires • Case studies • Quarterly reports • End-of-project reports
Dallaglio RugbyWorks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people briefings about sessions • Surveys • Informal conversations with session leaders

There are approaches that two of the partner organisations (Brentford FCCST and IntoUniversity) use, and these include:

- **Mid-programme check-ins.** IntoUniversity gathers feedback after each of its sessions and uses Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) – technology that automatically reads and analyses forms containing young people's survey responses (which can be submitted physically and online). During its one-to-one work, Brentford FCCST collects feedback through young people's weekly logs. The organisation also uses three- and six-month check-ins to seek young people's feedback.

"It's important we have that regular contact with them to shape or to form relationships, but also change the sessions as they're going along."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

IntoUniversity has been using standardised OMR forms for 10 years and it has found this form of feedback particularly useful because it enables it to draw comparisons across all programmes over time. Programme staff are responsible for scanning in forms (if completed in person), and a dedicated data team analyse the responses.

"Over the course of 10 years' worth of delivery, we have an enormous library of hundreds and thousands of OMRs, which can give consistent feedback across centres, across programmes. We can do 'deep looks', and also overarching 'whole-network looks', at how programmes are performing with respect to those key performance indicators for OMRs."

Staff Focus Group, IntoUniversity

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- **Post-programme reflections.** IntoUniversity and Brentford FCCST circulate feedback forms after activities, both physically and online. These are valuable in capturing young people's immediate reactions to activities.
- **Mentoring.** IntoUniversity's mentors conduct mid-term and termly reviews with their mentees, to review how the mentoring is meeting the young people's needs. At Brentford FCCST, mentors encourage mentees to discuss their experiences of the programme.
- **Informal feedback.** Both organisations emphasised the importance of ad-hoc, informal feedback from their young people, such as "off-the-cuff" conversations after sessions. Both partners believe this feedback to be "absolutely vital".
- **Case studies.** Both partners create case studies – stories about young people's involvement in the programme. This helps capture young people's experiences, including their interactions with volunteers.
- **Student councils.** IntoUniversity has student councils for its primary- and secondary-age participants. Pupils write manifestos and stand for election. The councils meet to discuss the programme and ways in which they think it can be improved. An IntoUniversity staff member attends the council meetings and feeds back suggestions to the wider staff. Other young people can submit questions, comments, and ideas to the councils via suggestion boxes.

11.4 What is the impact of youth voice?

Partners and young people described a range of ways in which they perceive youth voice to be generating impact. This impact has included:

- knowledge sharing with stakeholders, for example IntoUniversity shares analysis from its OMR forms with universities about the support young people may need
- demonstrating impact to funders
- adjusting programme delivery in light of young people's feedback, with IntoUniversity adapting its after-school programme following student council feedback, by shortening its sessions for secondary-age students and introducing flexible leaving times
- showing young people how their feedback has reshaped programme delivery, for example with IntoUniversity taking comments submitted via suggestion boxes and displaying these with responsive action points, highlighting to young people how their feedback is being used to make changes
- holding the partners to account.

11.4.1 How do young people feel about youth voice?

We asked young people how they feel about youth voice on their programmes. They told us that youth voice can and does make a positive impact on the programmes, informing staff about what is working well, and where improvements can be made. They feel that a variety of processes for gathering youth voice is inclusive, ensuring all young people can have a say.

We asked young people how they prefer to give feedback, and they said they like having a variety of different methods and opportunities. Several young people said they prefer to provide private feedback via surveys, or in one-to-one sessions. Giving

feedback anonymously can also enable them to be more honest. Young people said they like knowing how their feedback is used.

11.5 Enabling factors for supporting youth voice

11.5.1 Centralised systems

Brentford FCCST said that standardising its processes across the organisation had made a significant difference to its ability to capture and use youth voice. To do this, the organisation has developed feedback and evaluation form templates, which teams can adapt as required:

"Now that we're far more up to speed with what other projects are delivering internally, then there is that progression route through. And there are already examples over the last year and a half where young people have come in on a one-to-one session, and now they're doing work experience in a school. And so things like that are brilliant."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

Staff said that the support from The Mercers' Company had helped them to grow rapidly, making it even more important to be working consistently across teams.

11.5.2 Staff training and support

The partners have delivered specific training to staff members to help them collect youth voice. IntoUniversity staff undertake training in how to support young people to complete the OMR forms. Staff undertake this training when they begin their employment and attend refresher training as required.

Staff at Brentford FCCST, whether full- or part-time, receive training in gathering feedback from young people. Furthermore, staff are encouraged to speak to one another about their experiences of working with young people, some of whom are care-experienced and carry trauma:

"It was a lot of information for us as coaches or staff to process as well. So, to be able to offload to someone like ... my manager or project manager ... it was nice to talk to someone about it."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

The importance of this has been amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic. One staff member described how, without the space to process and talk about their own experiences of working with the young people, they felt they would not be able to deliver as effective an experience for students:

"It was nice to be able to talk to them about it or talk to other coaches about it ... just to give similar experiences and see how they dealt with it and how it maybe affected them. But which I thought was very important, or it's either to help with coaches to then help the young people as well."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

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The team noted that opportunities for staff to “offload” had been especially important during the pandemic, because normally they would have more opportunities through face-to-face contact with colleagues.

11.5.3 Relationships

Both IntoUniversity and Brentford FCCST said that collecting youth voice worked best when they had strong relationships with young people and saw them regularly. The close relationships formed through mentoring also supports/ed the collection of valuable feedback.

Brentford FCCST staff said that getting young people’s feedback on a regular basis is “vital”. The organisation builds one-to-one check-ins into its delivery, alongside group sessions, believing these allow young people the space to give “more realistic” feedback and the space for staff to talk through feedback, questions, and concerns.

“The one thing we are, I suppose as an organisation very good at, is we’ve got very good staff and coaches that care about the young people.”

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

Brentford FCCST works with care-experienced young people, who sometimes lack trust in adults when they begin the programme, which makes building relationships crucial if young people are to feel able to give honest feedback:

“That’s what you battle with, trying to build that relationship, that you’re not just another one of those workers that are coming in for six months or a year, just to get some stuff out of them.”

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

11.5.4 Participant self-determination

The partners said that youth voice could be most powerful when it led to immediate changes in delivery. For example, this happens when young people identify the support that they would find most valuable, such as discussing specific career pathways with their mentors. The partners noted that this sort of self-determination is often easier with older students.

11.5.5 Technology

Using technology had helped Brentford FCCST to streamline some of its processes for collecting feedback. For example, young people can complete questionnaires on iPads, which saves the need to manually upload paper responses. Sometimes staff read out questions and input the feedback on participants’ behalf, although this may affect how honest young people feel they can be.

11.5.6 Dialogue with families and schools

The partners said that getting to know young people’s families and schools is a helpful way of generating useful feedback. Feedback from families and schools is valuable, and by developing relationships with families and schools, young people themselves feel more comfortable sharing feedback with the partners.

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"If you do have the buy-in from the family, from the schools, then that young person is going to have a better experience, in my view. In my experience, that's what happens."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

11.6 Barriers to youth voice

During the focus groups, staff and young people mentioned a number of barriers that can impede youth voice. These included:

- **Form fatigue.** Both Brentford FCCST and IntoUniversity said that young people can find completing multiple feedback forms a "turn-off", especially if the same forms are used repeatedly. Young people sometimes see this as a tick-box exercise and may not always answer questions genuinely. Staff at IntoUniversity said that while online forms are easier to administrate, their young people tend to prefer completing hard copies, because it is more personal (with a staff member handing out and introducing the form) or because of technical issues such as accessibility on phones.
- **Data validity.** Feedback data can be more or less useful, depending on when and how it is collected. For example, IntoUniversity staff said that the OMR forms cover a broad range of outcomes and are not tailored to individual programmes and cannot be used to identify specific ways in which delivery should change. Furthermore, it can be difficult to track when and with which programme elements young people have been involved. This can make interpreting data challenging. Sometimes feedback can also be contradictory, and it can be difficult to know how to interpret such results.
- **Cultural barriers.** Sometimes the partners encounter cultural barriers with the communities they serve, and a resistance to providing feedback. Forming relationships with families and schools is an important way of bridging such divides where they exist:

"In terms of the community engagement work, ... we've been trying to gather the data for that. But ... people's circumstances are so difficult, are so different, that we can never really [manage it]."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

"It's hard to break that initial barrier with the young people or the parents. But I felt once you do break the barriers down, it is a lot smoother process. But just to get in there initially, is a very difficult [thing to do]."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

- **Additional needs.** The partners have found seeking feedback from participants who speak English as an additional language, who struggle with literacy or who have forms of SEND, challenging. They have sought to help these participants access feedback forms and participate in wider youth voice activities, by providing visual aids, or by having staff members talk young people through the forms one-to-one. Sometimes staff have written young people's responses for them, although staff have felt that young people still sometimes did not understand the questions being asked of them or might not be as honest in their responses. Staff at both IntoUniversity and Brentford FCCST said that identification is crucial;

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knowing which young people need additional support means the organisations can find ways to provide it.

- **Lockdown.** For reasons explored in our other Intensive Studies, lockdown presented significant barriers to generating youth voice. Digital access and fatigue with online delivery were especially prevalent, and something young people emphasised had put them off providing feedback. Furthermore, staff could not hand out physical forms:

"[One participant] was kind of just sort of getting bored looking at the screen. He was just drifting off. But having that two-week gap, and it was just a simple thing, but it seemed to work. And that's just from the feedback that he gave me."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

- **Data sharing.** The partners have sometimes found that schools' inability to share data with them (due to data protection issues) can impede obtaining feedback on programme activities. For example, Brentford FCCST wanted to obtain demographic data about pupils in order to contextualise their feedback, but the school could not share this:

"When we talk to schools, they're not able to share certain details with us. That's a massive barrier when we're trying to fill out project forms for funders or prove the difference we make."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

- **Young people's hesitancy.** Young people themselves said they find it harder to give feedback or contribute to decision-making if they feel shy or embarrassed. Furthermore, young people said they often did not want to share constructive or negative feedback, for fear of upsetting programme staff. Similarly, they said they felt self-conscious giving feedback when other people – staff or peers – could overhear them. Sometimes young people felt that programme staff were not really listening to them, and therefore did not feel motivated to share their views.

11.7 Future plans

The partners have plans for adapting how they support youth voice, including:

- tailoring evaluation and feedback forms, to make them more activity-specific
- analysing responses by region
- establishing forums for community members, including families, to share feedback
- seeking advice from young people and practitioners with lived experience of youth offending and the care system, to evaluate the organisation's systems
- developing means for mixed methods reporting
- measuring different outcomes including soft skills, and longer-term outcomes including destinations.

Recommendations

The partners should:

1. Review the suitability of different feedback mechanisms, minimising the number of requests and questions they are asking of their young people.
2. Give young people a range of different opportunities for providing feedback, including short surveys and verbal responses.
3. Expand their definition of youth voice beyond simply meaning feedback, and ensure young people meaningfully help to co-design and review programmes.

12 Intensive Study #4: Transition Points in a Young Person's Life

Cohort 2 – Year 1

Section summary: For this Intensive Study, CfEY conducted focus groups with programme staff and young people in Cohort 2. These highlighted the sorts of transitions that young people on the programmes experience, such as moving between schools, moving between year groups, and leaving education altogether.

Focus group participants described some of the factors that can inhibit young people's transitions, including locality, involvement in crime and having a form of special educational need or disability.

However, the focus groups also highlighted factors that support successful transitions. These include:

- early interventions
- mentoring and relationships
- networks
- flexible interactions
- bridging the gap to higher education
- ongoing support
- staff training
- sharing good practice.

12.1 Methodology

For this Intensive Study, CfEY looked at the kinds of transitions that young people on each of the Cohort 2 partners' programmes had experienced, and how the partner organisations had supported them.

CfEY ran focus groups with staff working at the partner organisations, and separate focus groups with young people on their programmes. During these focus groups, we explored:

- the kinds of challenges that arise at transition points for young people
- what systems the partners have in place for supporting young people at these transition points
- what kinds of support young people want most
- guidance or training provided to staff.

The staff focus groups were completed by all three Cohort 2 partners. The young person focus groups were completed by students on the IntoUniversity and Brentford FCCST programmes.

12.2 What kinds of transitions do young people experience?

Together with the partners and their young people, we identified a range of important transitions points. These included:

- moving between school- and home-based learning during lockdowns
- moving between different schools or phases of education
- moving out of or returning to mainstream education
- changing family circumstances
- transitioning out of education

12.2.1 Moving between school- and home-based learning during lockdowns

Partners found that young people have struggled with the transition to and from working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite some benefits to delivering programmes virtually (explored in section 10), the challenges cited by focus group participants included:

- **Sharing a workspace.** Some young people had to share workspaces and resources such as laptops with siblings or other children. To navigate this, IntoUniversity staff said that some young people have worked irregular hours, working early or late.
- **Workload variation between schools.** Staff reported that the amount of work schools were requiring young people to do in lockdown varied considerably. This made coordinating programmes challenging as the partners could not be sure how much work each young person was being asked to complete by his/her school.
- **Mental health.** Some young people found working from home “a big transition”, explaining that they had “struggled with the isolation”. That said, one young person explained that learning at home enabled them to “slow down a bit”, improving their attention span.
- **Behaviour and engagement.** The move from lockdown back to learning in schools had affected some young people’s behaviour and engagement levels. Staff at Dallaglio RugbyWorks said that young people were “more energetic” and “feisty” upon returning to the classroom, making it hard to keep them focused while routines were being rebuilt.

12.2.2 Moving between different schools or phases of education

Young people cited changing schools or moving between educational phases as a significant transition. This can involve **moving from primary to secondary school**. Young people tended to feel this was manageable, because “everyone was in the same boat”. Young people and staff also described **moving between year groups and Key Stages**. There was a general feeling that moving from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 sees young people become more independent, and often busier with more active social lives and responsibilities outside school. This in turn can make engaging with the programmes harder:

“If you already know them in Year 10, it’s much easier to carry that on or you have something to bring it back to if they start displaying different behaviours, but in Year 11, it’s not undoable but it does take a little bit longer.”

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Moving to a new school is daunting for young people, and presents a logistical challenge for the partners, if a young person's new school is not involved in the programme.

12.2.3 **Moving out of or returning to mainstream education**

Making the transition out of or returning to mainstream education was a disruptive experience for young people, especially in instances where they had been excluded. Staff at Dallaglio RugbyWorks and Brentford FCCST said that exclusion was inherently destabilising, especially if young people had been subject to hearings and uncertainty:

"It was just like a whole other school but it's smaller. A different time schedule ... In my class, there would normally be just me and one person or just me and the teacher, one-on-one. Children come in and out, switching from mainstream to the provision 24/7, so you get used to a lot of changes and your timetable changing and not really seeing other people and being connected to the outside world."

Young Person Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

Where young people had recently made a transition to alternative provision, they wanted to try to find a way 'back' into mainstream education, in part so they could remain with their friends. However, young people who had spent longer in alternative provision were more positive, sometimes saying that this provision was better able to meet their needs.

The Dallaglio RugbyWorks team want to be able to be more involved in supporting young people during managed moves from alternative provision back into mainstream education.

12.2.4 **Changing family circumstances**

IntoUniversity staff and young people at Brentford FCCST mentioned transition points triggered by family breakdown. One young person said they had endured the breakdown of their parents' marriage while at home during school closures and had found support from their Brentford FCCST mentor an important means of talking about it. Brentford FCCST staff work with young people moving in and out of care, an inherently stressful and destabilising process.

12.2.5 **Transitioning out of school**

Staff at both Brentford FCCST and Dallaglio RugbyWorks described the challenge that transitioning out of school can present for many of their young people. In the staff's experience, schools sometimes focus disproportionately on exam results and do not give pupils an idea of alternative pathways:

"I've worked in schools for a long time, and I think really schools fail a lot of young people at that point. They're constantly saying, 'You got to get your grades' ... But that's basically it. That's like the crux of the situation. There's no

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transition from a school ... It's just like you come and pick up your GCSE results and that's it."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

12.3 Factors affecting young people's experience of transitions

Focus group participants emphasised several factors that can influence young people's transitions. These include:

- **Local area.** This affects the availability of training and employment opportunities, but also the prevalence of crime and the risk of involvement in nefarious activities such as gang culture.
- **Family experience of similar transitions.** For example, young people said that coming from a family with no experience of going to university or starting apprenticeships made such transitions more daunting. In some cases, this led to them lowering their aspirations or wanting to stay nearer to home.
- **Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).** Young people with SEND face specific challenges when going through transition points. For example, staff at Dallaglio RugbyWorks said they were aware of high numbers of undiagnosed additional needs among young people within Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) settings. Often these needs are not identified until the student is removed from mainstream education, while the behaviour that has led to their transition may be directly linked to undiagnosed SEND. This process can cause feelings of resentment towards the education system among families. Staff added that young people with SEND are often sent to attend provision far away from their homes, which can be disruptive.
- **Crime and gang culture.** Dallaglio RugbyWorks staff had encountered challenges around transitions where young people were involved with gang culture. Young people's local area influences their risk of involvement in gang violence. Having a 'reputation' in a particular area sometimes puts young people at risk of conflict with other students, which can lead to them being moved out of their borough for their own safety. It can be difficult to place young people in alternative provision, where they have potentially dangerous relationships with other students from different areas.

"When a young person is excluded, they can't go to certain provisions if they are people from certain postcodes..."

Staff Focus Group, Dallaglio RugbyWorks

- **Gender.** Staff at Brentford FCCST said that young men and women are sometimes treated differently, with young men being more likely to transition into youth offending services for behaviour that young women might get away with:

"Most of the young boys that I've worked with through YOS [the Youth Offending Service], if they're caught with some sort of knife or something like that, they're immediately permanently excluded ... I've worked with three young girls that have done a very, very similar thing. All three of them were never permanently excluded from their school."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

12.4 Factors supporting transitions

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12.4.1 Early intervention

The earlier the programmes begin working with young people, the more support they can provide in guiding them through transition points.

Dallaglio RugbyWorks intends to work more with pupils in Key Stage 3, in the hope that they will establish closer, longer-term relationships:

"I think that if you've met them and you only do all of your work with a young person in Year 11, you can still fully engage with them, but what they're actually going to get from you and what you can give to them is so much less ... the longer you've had that relationship, the more early you can have that intervention."

Staff Focus Group, Dallaglio RugbyWorks

12.4.2 Mentoring and relationships

Relationships are crucial in supporting young people through transition points. Both staff and young people said this. Empathy and trust are particularly important, making young people more likely to ask for – and be receptive to – help and support.

"Once you build up a relationship or a friendship with the young person that they then confide and trust in you ... They just see a lot of the interventions as tick boxes. Once you've broken that barrier down and shown them that 'I'm actually here for you', then I've got positive feedback and responses from the young person."

Staff Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

"For me, it's made it easier because it's given me someone to talk to, someone to let everything out on. Not physically, but verbally, like talking to them and they understand it. They listen to you, they're not commenting on it, they're not judging you for it ... They try to help you as much as they can. Even if it's the most impossible thing you tell them, they will try and find a way to help to support you."

Young Person Focus Group, Brentford FCCST

12.4.3 **Networks**

The partners said that strong connections with other support networks around the young person were valuable in facilitating positive transitions. Such networks, including with families or other professional services, make it more likely that young people will receive the right support (which is particularly important at transition points). Conversely, the absence of such networks carries a high risk of young people's needs not being met:

"We have had young people who have committed serious crimes outside of school, and the reason for that was they were not given the correct medical intervention at the right time because several agencies failed."

Staff Focus Group, Dallaglio RugbyWorks

Brentford FCCST said the Youth Offending Service (YOS) sets a pathway for young people from their work into what Brentford FCCST is doing, and although joining the programme is ultimately the young person's choice, they are strongly encouraged to take part. Staff at the organisation work closely together to bridge young people's transitions onto the programme.

12.4.4 **Flexible interactions**

Brentford FCCST and Dallaglio RugbyWorks staff said that staying flexible helped to support young people going through transition points.

Dallaglio RugbyWorks staff explained how they developed a "menu" of activities for young people joining the programme, encouraging a sense of agency among new participants.

12.4.5 **Bridging the gap to higher education**

IntoUniversity focuses specifically on the transition into higher education, helping young people to apply for university, and consider their financial and accommodation options.

12.4.6 **Ongoing support**

The Cohort 2 partners aim to offer follow-up care for young people once they transition out of their programmes.

IntoUniversity tracks the destinations of the young people it supports, to assess how their outcomes compare to students from similar backgrounds nationwide. It also has an online platform, which advertises seminars, work experience and job opportunities for young people.

Dallaglio RugbyWorks staff said that they intend to create a platform to support post-16 transitions, which would act as a "safe space" for young people to continue engaging with staff, mentors, and volunteers if they need ongoing support.

12.4.7 **Staff training**

Staff in the partner organisations took part in training that has helped them to support young people through transition points. Staff at the organisations said that they had found training in the following areas helpful in enabling them to support young people's transitions:

- practical skills for working with young people (IntoUniversity)
- Mental Health First Aid training (IntoUniversity and Dallaglio RugbyWorks)
- the SLQ/Sports Leaders 'I Can, I Am' Resilience Education Programme, which provides young people with challenges designed to test and build their resilience, and help prepare them for the return to education in person (Dallaglio RugbyWorks)
- sharing best practice (Dallaglio RugbyWorks and Brentford FCCST)
- how to use EduCare resources – an online training platform for health and safety, safeguarding and child protection (Dallaglio RugbyWorks).

12.4.8 **Sharing good practice**

The partners explained the importance of sharing best practice when supporting young people through transition points, to help each other to improve. This included sharing information:

- between different regional centres
- with schools
- with parents and carers
- with corporate partners.

They had encountered some barriers to this information sharing that they were working on. For example, IntoUniversity said it is easier to share details of in-school programmes than for homework clubs or holiday schemes. Dallaglio RugbyWorks said that while corporate partners are enthusiastic about its programmes, opportunities to work together are limited because they can only be accessed at age 18 or over, not at age 16. They are working with these partners to find ways to bridge gaps for young people.

Recommendations

The partners should:

1. Review the most effective ways of supporting young people moving between mainstream settings and alternative provision.
2. Convene multi-agency working parties involving parents and professional services – including the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and social services – to co-design transition support plans for young people facing challenging transitions, for example when moving between mainstream settings and alternative provision, or out of the YOS.
3. Give special attention to the support available to vulnerable young people with forms of SEND, or who are care-experienced, providing 'menus' of support.

4. Share good practice in building strong relationships with the YOS.

13 Recommendations

This concluding section summarises our recommendations for the future delivery and evaluation of the programmes funded by The Mercers' Company.

13.1 Cohort 1 Intensive Study #1: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The partners should:

- Expand flexible volunteering opportunities that include virtual mentoring, to encourage a wider range of employers to support their work.
- Review which programme elements can continue to be delivered virtually (especially those involving employers and volunteers), to improve cost effectiveness and sustainability.
- Seek to lock in gains made in supporting flexible working and staff wellbeing, by enabling staff to work from home where possible and appropriate.
- Continue to develop ways for geographically dispersed staff to collaborate regularly virtually.

13.2 Cohort 1 Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery

The partners should:

- Explore the most effective ways to deliver virtual or hybrid forms of work experience.
- Review the most effective ways of re-engaging the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and target these young people in the 2021/22 academic year.

13.3 Cohort 2 Intensive Study #3: Youth Voice

The partners should:

- Review the suitability of different feedback mechanisms, minimising the number of requests and questions they are asking of their young people.
- Give young people a range of different opportunities for providing feedback, including short surveys and verbal responses.
- Expand their definition of youth voice beyond simply meaning feedback, and ensure young people meaningfully help to co-design and review programmes.

13.4 Cohort 2 Intensive Study #4: Transition Points in a Young Person's Life

The partners should:

- Review the most effective ways of supporting young people moving between mainstream settings and alternative provision.
- Convene multi-agency working parties involving parents and professional services – including the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and social services – to co-design transition support plans for young people facing challenging transitions, for

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example when moving between mainstream settings and alternative provision, or out of the YOS.

- Give special attention to the support available to vulnerable young people with forms of SEND, or who are care-experienced, providing 'menus' of support.
- Share good practice in building strong relationships with the YOS.

14 Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1: Cohort 1 Intensive Study #1: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic – Appreciate Inquiry Group

14.1.1 Career Ready

How would you like people to describe your organisation?

Mentimeter



What one thing would you change for the better about your work?

Mentimeter



***WPV = workplace visits**

How would you like people to describe your organisation?

Mentimeter



What one thing would you change for the better about your work?

Mentimeter



How would you like people to describe your organisation?

Mentimeter



5

What one thing would you change for the better about your work?

Mentimeter



5

14.2 Appendix 2: Cohort 1 Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery - Audit of Virtual Provision

Key



Twitter

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

Snapchat

TikTok

WhatsApp



Texting

Phone
calls

Website

Emails

Post

Virtual meetings (e.g.
Zoom/Teams)



We have
started
using this



We have used
this more



The amount
we have used
this has
stayed the same



We have used
this less

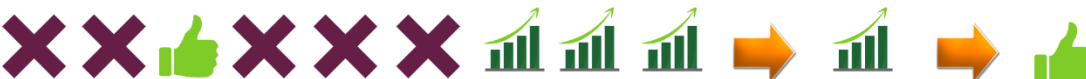


We don't use
this method



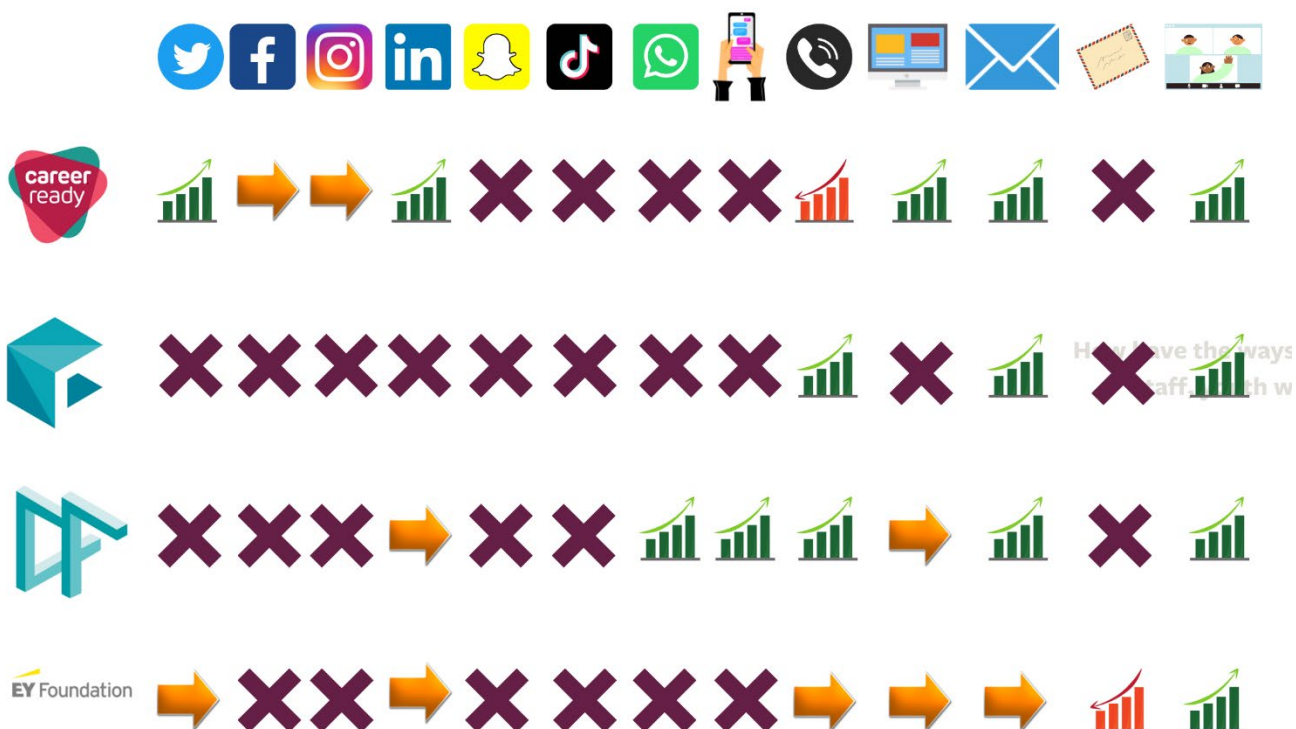
Never collected
data/feedback
about the impact
of this method

How have the ways the Cohort 1 partners reach and communicate with
young people about their programme changed since March 2020?

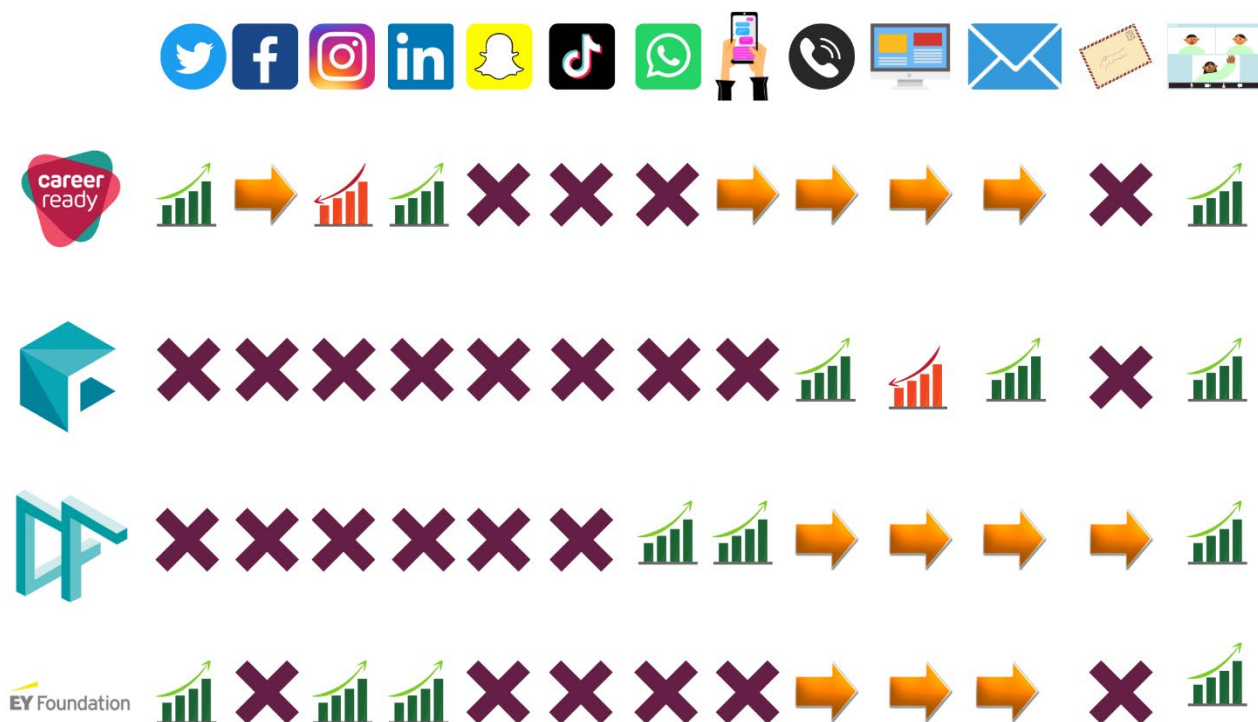


'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

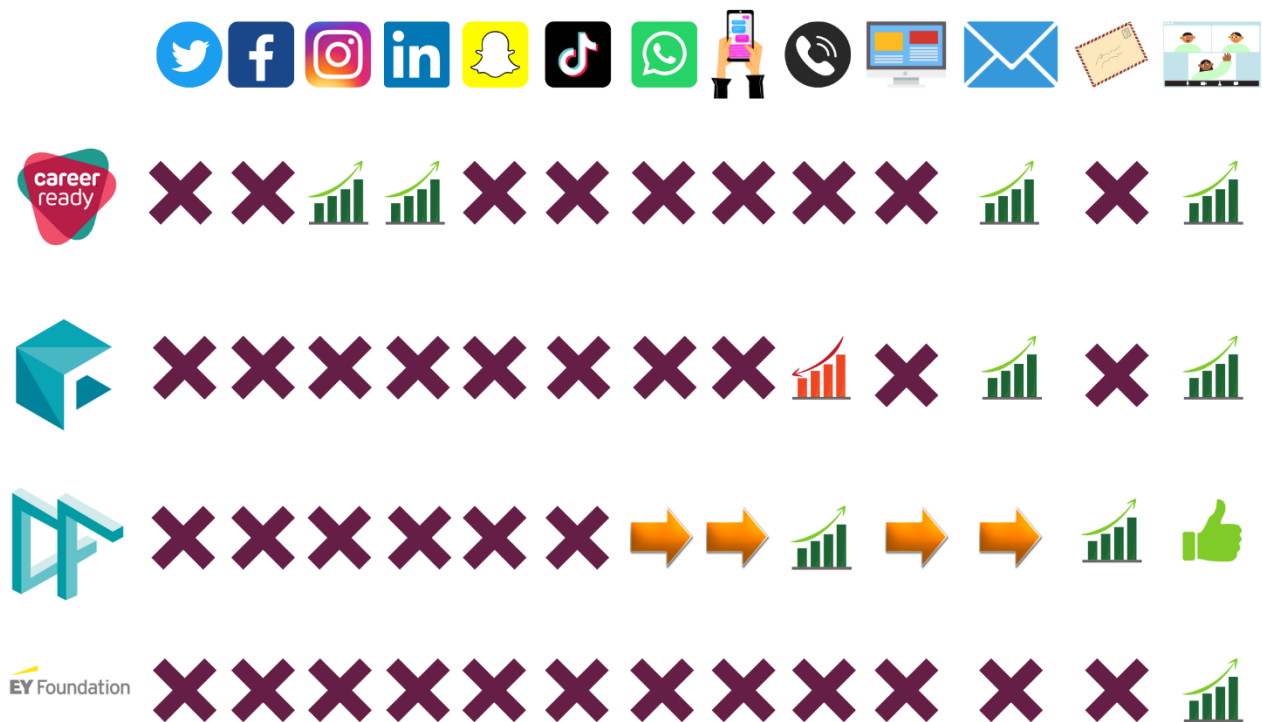
How do Cohort 1 partners reach and communicate with practitioners, including school staff, youth workers and Virtual Heads, about their programme (since March 2020)?



How do Cohort 1 partners reach and communicate with employers and volunteers about their programme (since March 2020)?



How do Cohort 1 partners deliver their programmes to young people (since March 2020)?



How do Cohort 1 partners monitor the impact of each method/platform (since March 2020)?



'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

14.3 Appendix 3: Cohort 1 Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery – Young Person Focus Group

14.3.1 Career Ready

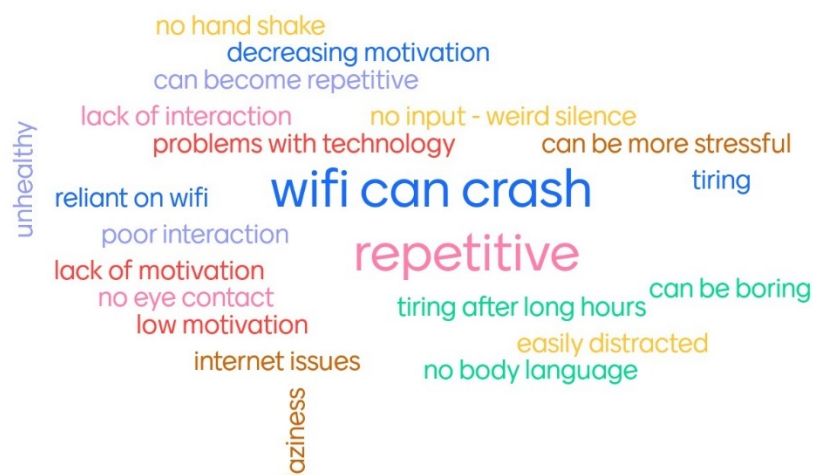
What are the strengths of virtual activities?

Mentimeter

6

What are the weaknesses of virtual activities?

Mentimeter

10

What are the strengths of virtual activities?

Mentimeter



What are the weaknesses of virtual activities?

Mentimeter



What are the strengths of virtual activities?

Mentimeter

A word cloud of strengths of virtual activities. The words are arranged in a circular pattern. The most prominent words are 'no distractions', 'freedom with time', 'increase motivation', 'cost savings travelling', 'flexible', 'communication', 'comfortable in home', 'easy communicating', 'concentration', 'time saving', 'no pressure', 'adapt', 'building trust', 'comfortable', and 'increase motivation'.

4

What are the weaknesses of virtual activities?

Mentimeter

A word cloud of weaknesses of virtual activities. The words are arranged in a circular pattern. The most prominent words are 'fear to speak', 'no motivation', 'lack of experience', 'lack of technically', 'miscommunication', 'easy to be lazy', 'shy on cameras', 'networking', and 'lack of technically'.

5

14.4 Appendix 4: Cohort 1 Intensive Study #2: Virtual Delivery – Staff Focus Group

14.4.1 Career Ready

How would you describe your priorities for delivering virtual provision?

Mentimeter

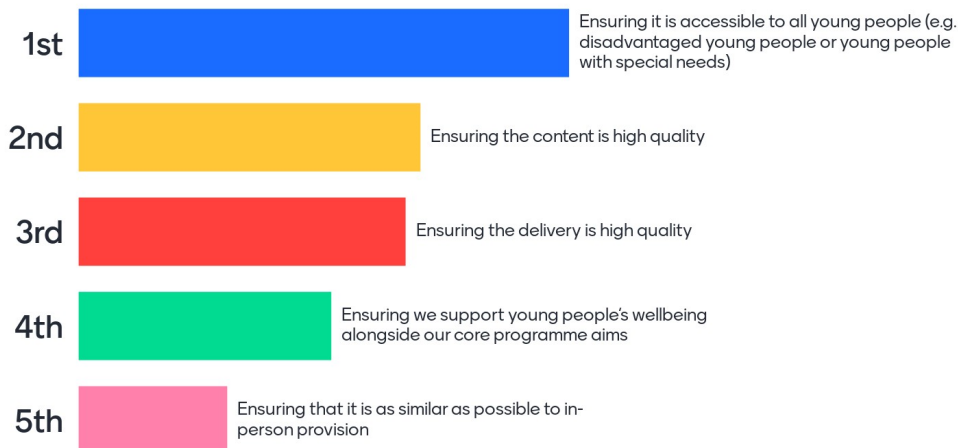


6

14.4.2 CYT

How would you describe your priorities for delivering virtual provision?

Mentimeter



7

14.4.3 DFF

How would you describe your priorities for delivering virtual provision?

Mentimeter



14.4.4 EY Foundation

How would you describe your priorities for delivering virtual provision?

Mentimeter



This report was written by the 'think and action tank' The Centre for Education and Youth. The Centre for Education and Youth is a social enterprise – we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We provide the evidence and advice policy makers and practitioners need to support young people. We help organisations develop, evaluate, and improve their work with young people. We carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.