Evaluation of Getting Ahead: the Symud Ymlaen / Moving Forward Project

ICF in association with Arad Research

Final Report

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Final Report

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in association with

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Executive Summary

1 Introduction

ICF and Arad Research were commissioned in October 2013 to undertake the evaluation of the Getting Ahead Symud Ymlaen / Moving Forward (SY/MF) project in Wales. This final report covers all three years of evaluation activity, building upon previous interim reports produced in 2014 and 2015.

The study methodology featured three main components, repeated in each year of the study:

- Stakeholder and partner interviews – qualitative interviews with the Big Lottery Fund, Welsh Government and the project partners;
- Project case studies – case study fieldwork in eight local authority areas, with interviews with project staff, partners and referrers, employers and participating young people; and
- Analysis of project management information (MI) – to provide an overview of participant characteristics and project performance.

The third year of the study also featured qualitative interviews with a sample of former participants leaving their projects at least three months previously, to identify their destinations/current status, experiences of the project, and the reasons for leaving early.

2 The SY/MF Project

The SY/MF project was designed to support young people aged 16 to 18, not in employment, education or training (NEET) and with histories of local authority care or who were known to the Youth Offending Services (YOS) – a group not well served by existing mainstream provision and for whom specialist provision was rare. Indeed, the study found that in many areas of Wales SY/MF represented the sole source of provision for the target groups.

Utilising £4.8 million from bank and building society accounts dormant for over 15 years, and developed in the context of Welsh Government priorities for supporting young people NEET, the project aimed to help participants move towards and into sustainable employment, and further training and education, by addressing the barriers faced at the individual level.

The project followed a common delivery model across Wales, with tailoring to meet local circumstances and ongoing support throughout the delivery process, and comprising:

- Pre-employability training – an eight week period of training, extended to 13 weeks but in many cases lasting much longer, for young people needing support and preparation for work including bespoke employability and Essential Skills Wales training.
- A paid work placement - for 25 hours per week for six months, paid at the National Minimum Wage, and matched against participants' needs, aspirations and goals.
- Mentor support - each participant was intended to be matched with a volunteer mentor to provide support, a single point of contact and post-project support.

Building upon experiences and learning from delivery, the project model was changed during implementation, including:

- Responsibilities for referral and recruitment reverting to the local projects due to capacity issues - a change which helped streamline the recruitment process, although adding to tutor workloads;
- The project paying placement wages directly to the young people – which reduced the burden of offering placements for employers; and
- Changing the point of mentor engagement to the latter stages of the work placements – to provide support with progression following completion of the placement.

Year 3 of the project also saw changes to the project model, based on the understanding that for some young people recruited progression to a work placement was unlikely within

the time frame available and including additional provision for those least work-ready to address skills needs. A training award of £5 per week was also introduced to support continued engagement, with extended work placements of up to 35 hours per week being permitted when young people were living independently and risked losing out on housing benefits.

SY/MF is delivered through a partnership led by the homeless charity Llamau, and featuring GISDA, CBSA, CYT and Sova. Each partner had a defined delivery role and worked across all 22 Welsh local authorities to provide pan-Wales coverage, with CYT focussing on work placements in the construction sector and Sova on mentoring. The partnership worked well, and showed particular flexibility both locally and in implementing change based on experience of delivery.

4 Participant Characteristics

The young people recruited and subsequently engaging with the project displayed a range of challenges, needs and risks associated with their looked after or known to the YOS backgrounds. Most commonly their support needs related to a lack of work experience and poor levels of skills and qualifications, although others reported being homeless or in temporary accommodation. Poor histories of attendance and behaviour at school were also common – with one in five being excluded from school and almost as many being poor attenders. Analysis of project data showed that differences existed in the share of those with specific additional needs who are known to the YOS, with a history of care, or both. Statistically significant differences at the 95% level or above included:

- Having Basic Skills needs – which were most likely to apply to those known to the YOS and least likely to apply to those with a history of care;
- Lacking up to date qualifications – being most likely to be reported by those with experience of both local authority care and known to the YOS; and
- Being excluded from school and attending a PRU – again most commonly those with experience of both local authority care and known to the YOS.

The young people also displayed a range of risk factors, most commonly associated with histories of violence to the person or property, alcohol and substance abuse and poor mental health – with one in four being at risk of suicide or self-harm, and others being at risk of abuse by others. Statistically significant differences were identified in the risk factors experienced by individuals in the two target groups included:

- Histories of violence, and posing a risk of serious violence to others – with those with experience of both care and known to the YOS being most likely to have histories of violence, followed by those known to the YOS;
- Risk of suicide or deliberate self-harm – highest amongst those with histories of care followed by those known to the YOS; and
- Risk due to alcohol or substance abuse – with those with both a history of care and known to the YOS being most likely to be at risk, followed by those known to the YOS.

The projects reported not differentiating between young people with care or YOS histories, instead providing tailored provision and pathways at the individual level. As shown above, there were some differences between the two groups targeted, with those having experience of both local authority care and known to the YOS being the most likely to report certain support needs and risk factors.

5 Project Performance

Performance against the key performance indicators set for the project is described in Table 1 below, which shows that **1,096 young people were referred to the project, 933 of whom engaged** (defined as completing a Personal Development Plan, PDP) – both considerably in excess of target.

Table 1 SY/MF performance against targets

Key Performance Indicator	Initial Target	Year 3 Target	Achieved (% of target achieved)
Number of project referrals	677	677	1,096* (162%)
Number of Personal Development Plans (PDPs)	605	605	933[1] (154%)
Number achieving an Agored Cymru (OCN) Accredited Award or Essential Skills Wales qualification	546	636	425 (78% of initial and 67% of Year 3 target)
Number starting a 26 week paid work placement	546	446	453 (83% of initial and 102% of Year 3 target)
Number completing a 26 week paid work placement	436	181	150[2] (34% of initial/83% of Year 3 target)

Source: Llamau management information, 30 September 2016 * - includes 123 young people currently engaged, on hold or awaiting assessment

However performance was less positive in terms of:

- **Accreditations achieved** – with 425 participants achieving Agored Cymru or Essential Skills accreditations, below the initial and revised targets. However those achieving accreditations commonly achieved more than one, with 993 accreditations spread across the 425 young people;
- **Work placement starts** – with 453 placement starts, below the initial target but achieving the revised target for Year 3; and
- **Work placement completions** – 150 completions, below the initial and Year 3 targets, although ongoing placements suggest that the Year 3 completion target could be met.

Looking at results by target group,

- **Accreditations** - of the young people achieving qualifications 52% were known to the YOS, 37% had experience of the care system and 10% had experience of both. This means that 49% of all participants with a history of care achieved an accreditation, compared to 46% of those known to the YOS and 39% of those with experience of both.
- Work placements starts - 55% of those starting a placement were known to the YOS, 35% had experience of care and 10% had experience of both. Here young people with a history of care and known to the YOS were significantly **less** likely to start a placement, with just 41% of all participants from this group doing so, compared to 51% of those known to the YOS and 48% with a history of care alone.
- Work placement completions – 62% of all completers were known to the YOS, 29% had a history of care and 9% had a history of both. Here participants known to the YOS were significantly **more** likely to complete their placements – with 19% of those engaged and known to the YOS completing compared to 13% of those with a history of care and 12% with experience of both.

Performance varied between the local authority areas in terms of referral numbers, the share engaged and those achieving accreditation or starting and completing work placements. Several reasons for the variation were identified, including the number of eligible young people in an area, the presence of existing provision for the target groups, a reluctance to refer amongst some organisations and issues of rurality and dispersed populations.

Of the 1,096 referrals received, 823 (75%) **exited prior to completing a 26 week work placement**. Exits took place:

- Between referral and assessment – 166 or 15%;

[1] Since the report was drafted, the latest Llamau MI shows that 1,045 accreditations have been achieved to end December 2016 by 427 participants.

[2] Similarly, the number of young people completing their placements at end December 2016 was 180.

- Between assessment and engagement/PDP production – 109 (10%); and
- After engagement – 548 (50%) – 245 before starting and 303 during a work placement, with those starting a work placement and exiting early doing so within the first six weeks.

In terms of disengagement by target group, young people with experience of both the care system and known to the YOS were the most likely to exit between referral and assessment and after engagement, again suggesting that this group had the greatest support needs.

Individuals could leave their projects early for a range of reasons, including those who left to take up employment opportunities, to progress to further learning opportunities, or others who left the area and so could not continue the provision. Perceived delays in arranging a work placement, or the limited opportunities available, were also cited as reasons for early participant exit. Although data on post-project destinations was limited, there was evidence that many of those leaving early had progressed to positive outcomes. For others, however, the scale and nature of the barriers and challenges faced continued to influence their status and they remained unemployed.

Data on **post-project destinations** was limited to the 150 young people completing their work placements and a share of those leaving early. **Of those completing, an impressive majority (55%) had progressed into employment**, either with their placement host or a new employer, with 8% in further learning and 3% volunteering. The remaining 33% were not in employment, education or training, most of whom were receiving job search support from Careers Wales at the point of exit. Those **leaving early** suggested that 11% had progressed to work and 10% to further learning, although data was available for only 173 of the 823 individuals exiting early.

Consultations with a small sample (38) of **former participants[3] three months or more after leaving** showed that 13 were in work, six in education or training and the remainder were unemployed. Those in work included some retained by the placement host, and others who had found work on their own, showing that for some the impact of SY/MF provision is experienced post-exit – as the examples below show.

Examples of Former Participants in Work

David (not his real name) was referred to SY/MF by the Youth Offending Service, after struggling to find work due to limited previous experience and his criminal record. After undertaking skills and employability training, and achieving Agored qualifications, with the project, he started a placement in construction through CYT. He completed his placement and was taken on by his placement host, although he was later made redundant. However, he subsequently found a new job in landscaping under his own initiative, and stated: *"I wouldn't have this job now if it wasn't for Moving Forward"*, and felt his placement that given him the training and experience he needed to build resilience and find further work on his own. He says that he would *"definitely not"* be in his current job without his time on the project.

Despite having worked previously, when Peter (not his real name) joined SY/MF he was NEET, struggling to find work due to a lack of qualifications, and with a lack of confidence about applying for jobs and attending interviews. He completed the pre-employability training element of the project, and although he left his work placement early he felt that he benefited from his experience, saying that it had built his confidence and left him feeling more motivated, most positive and with improved self-esteem. As he described: "*I was just sick of not working, so I was glad I was out near enough every day doing stuff, even if it was only going to the* [project centre] *– it was better than staying in all day… it made me feel like I was trying more.*" He is currently working part-time in a pub, and feels the confidence gained from SY/MF helped him secure his current job - "[It] *made me a bit more confident – and I went through some interview techniques and that helped me and boosted my confidence*."

[3] Which included individuals who had completed their work placements, and others who had exited at different stages of the project

While the paid work placement was the key attractor for the project, amongst young people and referrers, some young people were reluctant to engage with the employability and skills component. However, those who did engage found the provision useful, and for some the main benefits of participation were gained here. A key finding was that **for many the main benefits of the project were 'soft' outcomes**, including improved confidence, self-esteem and a sense of direction (and belief that they were capable of achieving).

6 Experiences of Implementation

The delivery model was reviewed in detail by step, to identify what had worked well and what less so, and to identify key learning for projects working with similar target groups in future. Key findings by step in the model included:

- **Referral and recruitment** – the number of referrals to the project evidenced both demand for and the absence of alternative options for many young people in the target groups. However in some cases young people were referred with the expectation that they could progress to a work placement immediately, which could cause issues with their continued engagement. Referral organisation strategies varied – in some cases they were selective about the young people they would refer to the project, whereas others would refer all their young people who met the eligibility criteria. In many cases project staff described the young people they worked with as having higher levels of need than expected.
- **Engagement and assessment** – while the individually tailored approach, and high levels of individual support, had worked well for many, a series of challenges to ongoing engagement were identified. In some cases young people could lose out on benefit payments, which made them reluctant to participate. More widely, the continued influence of chaotic lives, low self-esteem and confidence, and associated barriers and risks meant that for many ongoing participation was challenging.
- **Employability and skills training** – strengths of the employability and skills training cited by participants and stakeholders included its bespoke and flexible nature, the emphasis on influencing attitudes and behaviours, and delivery on a one to one or small group basis in a welcoming environment. The commitment and dedication of the tutors was also widely recognised, with many 'going the extra mile' to support the young people and keep them engaged, and the Agored Cymru/Essential Skills Wales qualifications were considered well suited to delivery in short sessions and adaptable to participant needs. However, the initial eight weeks duration, and subsequent 13 weeks, were commonly considered to be too short for some participants, given their distance from being work ready.
- **Work placements** – the ELOs worked hard to develop placement opportunities in their local areas, and to meet participants' expectations in terms of the types of work available. One key factor was that, where young people are ready, they should progress as soon as possible to a placement to avoid the risk of disengagement – although this meant balancing opportunities readily available with meeting participants' preferences.

  A second factor was ELOs engaging with participants during the employability and skills stage, to start the placement process and help sustain engagement. In delivering successful placements, key factors included considering potential risks at the outset, working closely with employers and offering continued support, and helping young people prepare for the practicalities of the work environment.

  One change in Year 3 was the extension of placements for some young people to 35 hours per week. This allowed those living independently to cover any housing benefit claims lost, although this option was only offered to those deemed capable of committing to 35 hours per week.
- **Ongoing supporting for participants** – the offer of ongoing support throughout the project, and during transitions between stages, was a key element of the project. However, this task fell to the tutors and ELOs, which could distract from their individual remits and, in a few cases and despite best efforts, to difficulties in transition. A 'key worker' model may have been more appropriate, allowing other staff to focus on their

roles, although the tutors and ELOs were widely praised for their efforts to support the young people and maintain their engagement.

One aspect of the project that worked less well was the mentoring element, with fewer than 200 mentor and mentee matches being arranged, many of which were short term and of limited intensity. However, examples were identified where mentor relationships were valued by participants, showing that when well matched and resourced mentor relationships can be beneficial in this context.

Finally, while arrangements were made to continue to support young people once they had left the project, project staff were not always clear on responsibilities for post-exit support. New measures were introduced in Year 3 of the project to help ensure that support to implement the exit plans developed was available to all young people following their placements.

7 Conclusions, Recommendations and Key Learning

The project had successfully developed a third-sector led network of provision capable of delivery across Wales, with provision tailored to individual need to address specific challenges and barriers faced. While performance was strong in terms of referrals and engagement, the numbers achieving qualifications, and starting and completing work placements, were below target. Early exits levels were high, with 75% of those referred not completing a work placement.

However, where data on post-project destinations was available, the results were impressive, with over half of those completing placements progressing to employment with former placement hosts or new employers. While one third were found to be still unemployed, the follow-up research with former participants showed several young people subsequently progressing to positive outcomes. While for many the challenges and barriers faced were too great, positive benefits were reported in terms of improved confidence, self-esteem and skills, and belief that they could achieve their goals, which could be built upon in future.

A series of recommendations and key lessons for future provision were provided, drawing on the experience across the three years of implementation. Recommendations included emphasising the importance of:

- Ensuring that all targets set are realistic, capable of being achieved, and based on evidence from similar previous activities. This should include considering the likely duration of interventions required to achieve the selected outcomes for the project target groups.
- Investing time in building relationships with local referral partners – including agreeing minimum information requirements and setting thresholds of need for potential participants;
- Engaging early with young people to maintain their engagement, including introducing the idea of a work placement early and offering work tasters;
- Ensuring that resources are sufficient to support young people with challenging levels of need, and forming links with specialist local provision in advance; and
- Considering following a ‘key worker’ model, to provide consistent support throughout the project and allow other staff to focus on their specific remits.

Given the nature of the target groups served, consideration should also be given to including ‘soft outcomes’ in the project KPIs (as these better reflect the benefits resulting for many), and to introducing routine follow-up with former participants (to capture their destinations and impacts, or to intervene when these impacts are at risk).

1 Introduction

ICF were commissioned, in partnership with Arad Research, in October 2013 to undertake the evaluation of the Getting Ahead Symud Ymlaen / Moving Forward (SY/MF) project in Wales, initially over a two year period to match the duration of the project. In 2015 the project was extended for an additional year, with the evaluation contract also being extended to complete in December 2016. This final report covers all three years of evaluation activity, and builds upon previous interim reports produced in 2014 and 2015.

The SY/MF project was designed to respond to the needs of two groups of young people, aged 16 to 18 and with histories of local authority care or known to the Youth Offending Services (YOS), who account for a disproportionate share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Utilising £4.8 million from bank and building society accounts dormant for 15 years or more, and developed in the context of Welsh Government priorities for supporting young people in Wales, the project featured a combination of employability and skills development. This included a six month, 25 hours per week, paid work placement, with the intention of helping participants move towards, and into, sustainable employment and further training and education opportunities.

1.1 Evaluation Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the study, as set out in the original invitation to tender, was to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the SY/MF project, and in so doing contribute to the evidence base on approaches to tackle unemployment for young people in challenging circumstances.

More specific objectives included:

- Assessing the extent to which the aims and objectives of the SY/MF project were achieved, and the impact and effectiveness of SY/MF at tackling youth unemployment;
- Assessing the impact of SY/MF on participants' confidence, motivation and well-being;
- Assessing the effectiveness of the assistance provided to participants before, during and after their work placement;
- Investigating the differences and similarities in the challenges faced by the two beneficiary groups, and how these were overcome;
- Assess the extent to which the project aligns with other employment initiatives;
- Investigating the destination of participants following their involvement with the project in terms of employment and training opportunities;
- Reviewing the overall management and implementation of the project; and
- Identifying the key strengths, and challenges to its effectiveness; and
- Providing recommendations and gather learning to inform future approaches to supporting disadvantaged young people into employment.

The study was initially intended to include an impact assessment using a quasi-experimental design to assess the counterfactual. However, the numbers of participants completing, and difficulties establishing a robust comparison group, meant this was not taken forward.

1.2 Study Methodology

The study methodology featured three main components, which were repeated in each of the three years of the study:

- Stakeholder and partner interviews – a programme of qualitative interviews with the Big Lottery Fund, Welsh Government and each of the lead partners in the project (Llamau, CBSA, GISDA, CYT and SOVA);
- Project case studies – three rounds of case study fieldwork in eight local authority

areas[4], featuring interviews with project leads, staff, partners and referrers, employers and participating young people; and

- Analysis of project MI – to provide an overview of performance and participant characteristics across the three years of the project.

To replace the quasi-experimental impact assessment, the third year of the evaluation featured a programme of interviews with former participants who left their projects at least three months previously, to identify their destinations/current status, experiences of the project, and, for those leaving very early, what might have made them remain engaged.

1.3 Report Structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the project and the delivery model followed, and the characteristics of the young people participating in it;
- Section 3 reviews the performance of the project, and the outputs and outcomes resulting to the end of September 2016;
- Section 4 reports the findings from the case study fieldwork, and consultations with partners and stakeholders, regarding the implementation of the key stages in the project;
- Section 5 describes the participant experience, drawing upon the case study fieldwork and interviews with former participants;
- Section 6 provides our conclusions and recommendations for similar interventions in future, and consolidates the key learning identified throughout the evaluation.

[4] Case study fieldwork was undertaken in the same eight areas each year – Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea and Wrexham.

2 The Getting Ahead SY/MF Project and its Participants

This section provides an overview of the aims and key features of the project, and the characteristics of the young people participating, to set the context for subsequent sections.

The project was initially intended to operate for two years, between September 2013 and September 2015. However following a slower than expected spend, the project was extended to complete in December 2016, with progression support being provided until March 2017. To ensure young people recruited had the opportunity to complete a six month placement, recruitment to the project ended in June 2016.

2.1 Project Aims and Priorities

The SY/MF project aimed to engage young people aged between 16 and 18 in a programme of activity to motivate and prepare them for a six month paid work placement, in order to increase their chances of progressing into sustainable employment or further learning by improving their employability skills. Priorities set for the project included:

- Funding a single third sector-led initiative offering work placement opportunities paid at the national minimum wage (as appropriate for their age);
- Ensuring that all participants undertake an Essential Skills Assessment, and achieve an Essential Skills qualification;
- Working with Welsh Government, Local Authority Looked after Care and the Youth Offending Service to develop an effective referral process; and
- Providing personal support to young people appropriate to their needs to maximise the benefits of the work placement.

The eligibility criteria for the project were that participants must be:

- Aged between 16 and 18 and not in education, employment or training (NEET);
- Leaving school or unemployed; and
- A young person looked after/in the process of leaving care, known to the Youth Offending Service (YOS), and in or leaving a Young Offenders' Institute.

Consequently the project was designed to work with young people facing specific labour market disadvantage, as described below.

2.2 Delivery Model and Key Features

The £4.8 million Symud Ymlaen/Moving Forward (SY/MF) project (part of the 'Getting Ahead' programme[5]) was designed and implemented against a backdrop of economic recession, and concerns about the longer term impacts of youth unemployment. It formed one of a suite of Welsh Government initiatives to address youth unemployment including: the Youth Guarantee; Jobs Growth Wales; Apprenticeships; and Traineeships.

The project worked across all 22 Welsh local authorities, which were grouped into 18 delivery areas[6], with different partners taking lead and supporting roles across each area as described below

2.2.1 The project partnership

SY/MF is delivered through a consortium partnership led by the homeless charity **Llamau**, who were responsible for overseeing the delivery of the project. Llamau's Learning for Life department was also responsible for the recruitment and delivery elements of the project in **South East and North Wales**, and for providing support to young people as they make

[5] The overall initiative is called ***Getting Ahead***. Getting Ahead funds the ***Symud Ymlaen/Moving Forward*** project.
[6] The local authority areas of Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, Conwy and Denbighshire, Gwynedd & Ynys Môn, and Monmouthshire and Torfaen were grouped to provide the 18 project areas.

transitions towards independent living. The core partners included:

- **Gisda** - a charity working across North Wales to address homelessness amongst young people, and responsible for the recruitment and delivery of elements of SY/MF in North West Wales, and supporting young people throughout the project.
- **Centre for Business and Social Action (CBSA)** – one of Wales' largest business membership organisations, and responsible for recruitment and delivery in South-West and Mid Wales, drawing upon their experience and business networks in Wales.
- **Construction Youth Trust (CYT)** - a charity specialising in helping people facing barriers to work in the construction industry, which along with CBSA was responsible for sourcing and supporting work placements in the construction sector.
- **Sova** - a charity helping vulnerable people steer clear of crime through volunteer networks, which was initially responsible for managing referrals and recruitment, and subsequently for training and managing the volunteer mentors[7].

Both individual providers and stakeholders considered that the project partnership worked well, and showed particular flexibility in arranging local provision and in implementing change across the project based on experience of delivery.

2.2.2 Project content and delivery model

The project initially aimed to work with 605 young care leavers and offenders across Wales – with an expected ratio of 20 care leavers to 80 young people known tom the YOS. Key performance indicators, reviewed in detail in Section 3, included:

- Number of project referrals;
- Number of participant Personal Development Plans (PDPs);
- Number of participants achieving an Agored Cymru or Essential Skills qualification;
- Number of participants starting a 26 week paid work placement; and
- Number of participants completing a 26 week paid work placement.

The project offered tailored, individualised support, and comprised three main components:

- Pre-employability training – for young people needing additional support and preparation for work including: bespoke employability and Literacy, Numeracy and ICT training.
- A paid work placement - for 25 hours per week for six months, paid at the National Minimum Wage, and matched against participants' needs, aspirations and goals.
- Mentor support - each participant was intended to be matched with a volunteer mentor to provide support, a single point of contact and post-project support.

Following referral, the young people were allocated to one of three 'Routes', on the basis of their readiness to undertake a work placement:

- Route 1 – young people considered ready for a work placement immediately;
- Route 2 – those needing basic/Essential Skills training but ready for a placement;
- Route 3 – those not placement ready, needing Essential Skills and other support**.**

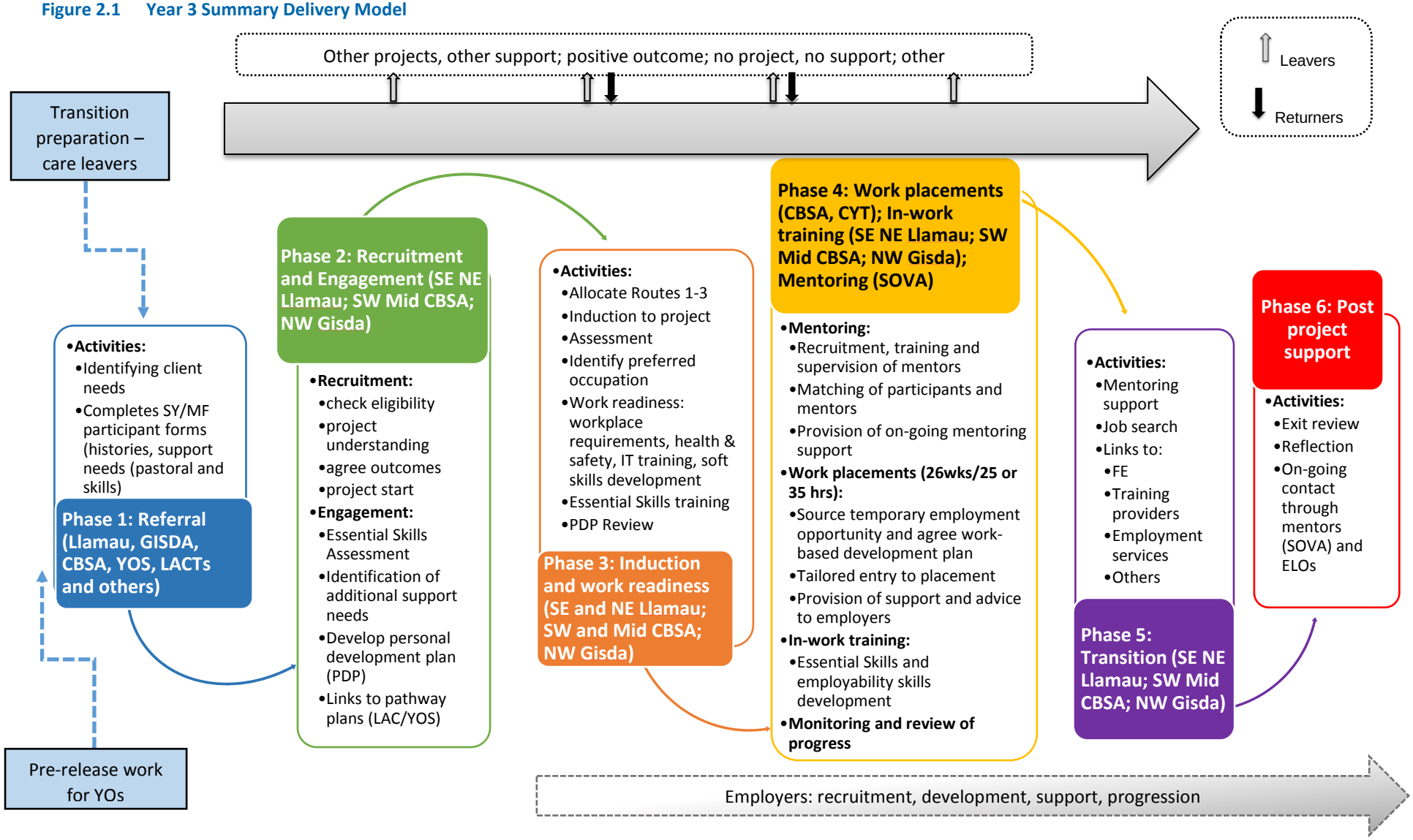
Figure 2.1 below summarises the delivery model for Year 3, by the phases of the participant journey – referral; recruitment and engagement; induction and work readiness; work placements; mentoring and in-work training; transition support; and post-project support.

There were several changes to the model during the implementation period, including:

- A change in responsibilities for referral and recruitment, with local projects taking the lead due to capacity issues at SOVA. While adding to workloads, this was viewed positively in streamlining the recruitment process young people from the outset;

[7] Due to capacity issues the recruitment of young people was undertaken by the local projects, formally in Years 2 and 3 but also throughout much of Year 1.

Figure 2.1 Year 3 Summary Delivery Model



Key to Figure 1.1: YOS – Youth Offending Service; LACTs – Looked After Children Teams; NE - North East Wales; NW - North West Wales; SE - South East Wales; SW – South West Wales

- The project taking on responsibility for paying placement wages directly, rather than via employers –which reduced the burden of offering placements for employers; and
- Changing the point of mentor engagement to the latter stages of the work placements – to provide support with progression following completion of the placement.

In Year 3 a series of additional changes were made, and changes made to the project targets, due in part the realisation that for many of those recruited (especially to Route 3) progression to a work placement was unlikely. The changes included:

- Provision for additional Route 3 participants, and lowering work placement start and completion targets, with a new KPI for Route 3 participants not moving onto a work placement; and improved employability skills provision.
- Recruitment of extra tutors for Route 3 participants, and additional staff to provide administrative support to the ELO's – to allow efforts to focus on supporting participants.
- Introducing a training award of £5 per week for 100% attendance at the pre-employability provision – with the aim of reducing drop-outs and raising attendance.
- Continuing to recruit participants on Route 3 who may not start a work placement, to allow their participation to focus upon engaging with tutors to address their skills needs.
- Allowing work placements of up to 35 hours per week for young people living independently or in supported accommodation – as a response to the finding that those living independently faced a financial disincentive through the loss of housing benefit.
- Increased efforts to capture soft outcomes – for example through the PDP review process, to try to more completely capture the effects of participation on individual distance travelled towards employment.

The impact of these changes in Year 3, and experiences of the implementation of SY/MF by 'phase' from the provider perspective, are provided in Section 4.

2.3 Participants and their Characteristics

At the end of September 2016, **1,096** young people had been referred to the project, **933** of whom had engaged (defined as developing a Personal Development Plan). Comprehensive management information (MI) was collected on the characteristics of the young people participating, including data on demographics, additional support needs and risk factors identified during the assessment process.

2.3.1 Referral demographics

Table 2.1 summarises the key demographic characteristics for the 1,096 young people referred to the project.

Table 2.1 Referral Demographics

	Gender		Disability/health condition[8]		Age at referral[9]			Ethnicity[10]	
	Female	Male	No	Yes	16	17	18	BME	White
Total (n = 1,096)	311	785	951	140	296	538	258	45	1,041
	28%	72%	87%	13%	27%	49%	24%	4%	95%

Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

[8] For five participants disability status was not indicated

[9] The following were excluded: two participants who were 15 years old at referral, two who were 19.

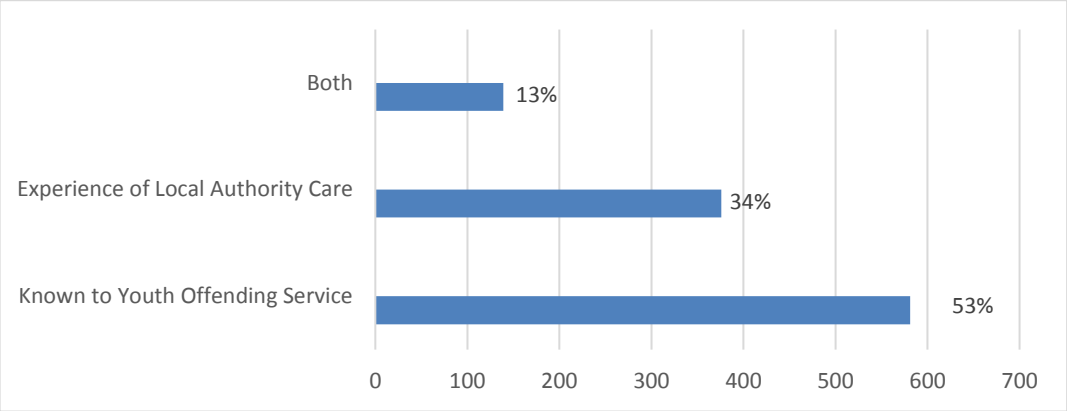
[10] Excludes five young people who indicated they prefer not to say and five blank records

The table shows that:

- The majority of referrals were male – almost three quarters of all those referred (72%);
- Almost half were aged 17 on referral – with the remainder being broadly evenly split between those aged 16 or 18;
- Just over one in ten (13%) reported having a disability or limiting health condition; and
- The vast majority were white – 95% of all those referred.

Figure 2.2 shows the distribution of referrals by those known to the YOS (the majority at 53%), with experience of local authority care (34%), or both (13%). Initially an 80:20 ratio was expected between the YOS and LAC groups, although in practice a higher share of participants had experience of local authority care.

Figure 2.2 Distribution of Referrals by Target Group



Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

2.3.2 Additional support needs and risk factors

Data collected on the additional support needs and the risks associated with the known behaviour of the young people referred provided insights into the issues and challenges they faced. Both provided useful information to support the production of individual Personal Development Plans and inform staff of the risks for the participant or others they may be working with.

Additional support needs

The additional support needs recorded for all 1,096 young people referred to the project, and for those with experience of Local Authority care, known to the Youth Offending Service, and both, are shown as Table 2.2 below.

In most cases (802 or 73%) between one and four additional support needs were identified for each young person, although in a few cases between eight and ten additional needs were identified. Just 96 young people (9%) had no recorded additional support needs.

The table shows that for the cohort overall:

- The absence of work experience was the most common need, followed by current Basic/Essential Skills needs and the absence of up to date qualifications.
- The young people also commonly reported histories of poor attendance and/or exclusion from school, and attendance at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Others received additional support at school, with over 1 in 10 reporting a statement of Special Education Needs.
- In some cases additional support needs were circumstantial, including those homelessness or living in temporary accommodation, or living in rural areas (due to limited opportunities, transport difficulties, etc.).

Table 2.2 Additional support needs identified, number and % of total referred

Additional Support Need	Total (n = 1,096)		Experience of Local Authority Care (n=376)		Known to Youth Justice Service (n=581)		Both (n=139)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No work experience since leaving school	474	43%	152	40%	250	43%	70	50%
Basic Skills need	356	32%	95	25%	207	36%	47	34%
No up to date qualifications	331	30%	65	17%	204	35%	58	42%
Received extra support in school	244	22%	72	19%	134	23%	33	24%
Attended PRU	223	20%	36	10%	141	24%	43	31%
Excluded from school	215	20%	42	11%	132	23%	38	27%
Homeless/temporary accommodation	212	19%	94	25%	81	14%	37	27%
Non-school attender	204	19%	35	9%	136	23%	33	24%
Living in a rural area	176	16%	39	10%	121	21%	15	11%
Statemented	122	11%	31	8%	68	12%	21	15%
Other support need	122	11%	7	2%	10	2%	14	10%
No additional support needs	96	9%	25	7%	67	12%	4	3%

Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

The data suggest that differences exist in the share of those with specific additional needs who are known to the YOS, with a history of care, or both, with statistically significant differences at the 95% level or above including:

- Basic Skills needs – being least likely to apply to young people with a history of care, and most likely amongst those known to the YOS;
- No up to date qualifications – most likely to be reported by those with experience of both, followed by those known to the YOS and those with care histories; and
- Excluded from school and attending a PRU – again most commonly those with experience of both, followed by those known to the YOS and those with a history of care.

Risk factors

The risk factors identified for the young people are shown as Table 2.3 below. While 218 (or 20%) did not report any risk factors, the vast majority described multiple risk factors (474, or 43% referrals, commonly between two and four but some up to 10 risk factors).

The most commonly reported risk factors were associated with known histories of violence (50% reporting a risk), aggression or aggravation to individuals or property (36%) and posing a risk of serious violence to others (27%). Almost half (49%) reported risks associated with alcohol and substance abuse.

Over one in four (26%) reported risks associated with mental health conditions – with 24% being at risk of suicide or deliberate self-harm, and 18% at risk due to neglect or accidental self-harm. More broadly, over one in ten posed a known history of behaviour incompatible with the project (11%), or of non-compliance with medical advice or treatment (13%).

Table 2.3 Risks identified, number and % of total referred

Risk	Total (n = 1,096)		Experience of Local Authority Care (n=376)		Known to Youth Justice Service (n=581)		Both (n=139)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Known history of violence	574	52%	133	35%	336	58%	100	72%
Risk due to alcohol or substance abuse	539	49%	115	31%	323	56%	99	71%
Risk of aggression / aggravation to people/property	393	36%	92	24%	228	39%	68	49%
Risk of serious violence to others	298	27%	59	16%	178	31%	58	42%
Risk due to mental health	282	26%	94	25%	139	24%	47	34%
Participant at risk of abuse by others	276	25%	105	28%	126	22%	42	30%
Risk of suicide or deliberate self-harm	265	24%	111	30%	115	20%	38	27%
Risk of self-neglect or accidental self-harm	198	18%	66	18%	101	17%	29	21%
Known history of non-compliance with medical advice/treatment	143	13%	53	14%	66	11%	25	18%
Known history of behaviour incompatible with SY/MF scheme	118	11%	34	9%	59	10%	25	18%
Other risks	7	<1%	2	<1%	2	<1%	3	2%
No risk factors	218	20%	114	30%	96	17%	9	6%

Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

Reviewed by participant group, statistically significant differences at the 95% level included:

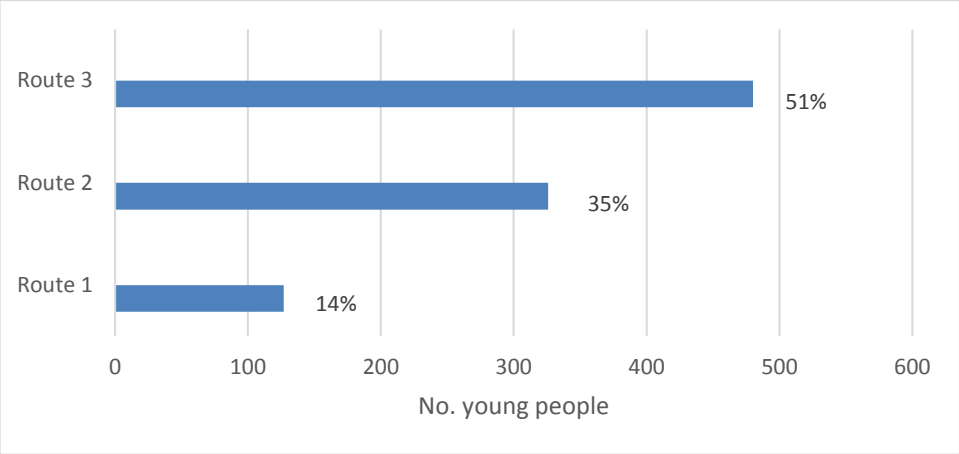
- Histories of violence, and posing a risk of serious violence to others – with those with both experience of care and known to the YOS being most likely to have histories of violence, followed by those known to the YOS;
- Risk of suicide or deliberate self-harm – highest amongst those with histories of care followed by those known to the YOS; and
- Risk due to alcohol or substance abuse – with those with both a history of care and known to the YOS being most likely to be at risk, followed by those known to the YOS.

2.3.3 Route allocated

Young people engaging and undertaking an assessment were allocated to one of three Routes, depending on their 'work readiness' and the support required before they could start a placement.

As Figure 2.3 below illustrates, the majority of young people (51%) were allocated to Route 3, needing most support, with just 14% to Route 1.

Figure 2.3 Young People Engaged by Group 1, 2 or 3



Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

Table 2.4 shows the allocation of routes for young people engaging by their previous history – i.e. experience of the local authority care system, known to YOS, or both.

Table 2.4 Distribution of Young People Engaged by Route and Previous History

	Route 1 (n=127)	**Route 2** (n=326)	**Route 3** (n=480)	**Total**
LAC	40 (12%)	109 (33%)	177 (54%)	326 (100%)
YOS	67 (14%)	179 (36%)	248 (50%)	494 (100%)
Both	20 (18%)	38 (33%)	56 (49%)	114 (100%)
Total	**127**	**326**	**480**	**933**

Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

There was little difference in the distribution of young people by initial Route between the target groups, with the largest share of each target group being allocated to Route 3.

2.4 Concluding Comment

This section has provided an introduction to the SY/MF project, setting out the delivery model and the partnership responsible for delivery across Wales. Changes to the model across the evaluation period were also described, including those introduced for Year 3 of the project, with the partnership showing considerable flexibility to respond to changes in circumstances as they were encountered.

It also reviewed the characteristics of the young people referred and engaged, showing that the majority were facing a range of challenges, singly but most commonly serially, impacting on both their future employment prospects and ability to integrate into wider society.

While the projects frequently described not differentiating between young people with histories of care of known tom the YOS, rather tailoring each intervention to the need of the individual, the analysis of project MI suggested that statistically significant differences existed between them in terms of additional needs and risks faced. In some instances, these suggested that young people with experience of both local authority care and known to the YOS that were the most likely to report certain additional support needs and risk factors.

3 Project Performance

This section reviews the performance of the SY/MF project based on MI to the end of the third quarter of 2016, and in comparison to the performance targets set at the start of the project and for its third year.

3.1 Overview of Performance to End September 2016

Table 3.1 provides an overview of performance against the project's key performance indicators, against the targets set for them at the start of the project and for the third year of delivery. At the end of Q3 2016 a total of 123 young people were 'engaged' with the project, 99 of whom were active, 23 on hold and one awaiting assessment.

Table 3.1 SY/MF performance against targets

Key Performance Indicator	Initial Target	Year 3 Target	Achieved (% of target achieved)
Number of project referrals	677	677	1,096* (162% of initial/Year 3 targets)
Number of participant Personal Development Plans (PDPs)	605	605	933 (154% of initial/Year 3 target)
Number achieving an Agored Cymru (OCN) Accredited Award or Essential Skills Wales qualification	546	636	425[11] (78% of initial and 67% of Year 3 targets)
Number starting a 26 week paid work placement	546	446	453 (83% of initial and 102% of Year 3 targets)
Number completing a 26 week paid work placement	436	181	150[12] (34% of initial and 83% of Year 3 targets)

Source: Llamau management information, 30 September 2016 * - includes 123 young people currently engaged, on hold or awaiting assessment

3.1.1 Referral and engagement

The number of referrals to the project considerably exceeded the target set at the outset and maintained throughout the three years of the project, with **1,096 referrals being received, 162% of target**. Referrals were received from a range of sources, but most commonly the YOS (34% of all referrals), Local Authority leaving care teams (17%), Careers Wales (16%) and Llamau (12%) - which were responsible for over three quarters (79%) of all referrals.

As Section 2 described, young people were most commonly known to the Youth Offending Service (53%), with 34% having experience of Local Authority care and 13% having experience of both.

Of the 1,096 referrals, **933 young people 'engaged' with the project**, defined as completing the initial assessment stage and producing a Personal Development Plan (PDP), and representing 154% of the initial and Year 3 engagement target. As the previous section described, the majority of those engaged were initially allocated to Route 3 (51%), with 35% to Route 2 and 14% to Route 1.

The distribution of the young people engaging by target group remained very similar to those referred – 53% (494) were known to the YOS, 35% (327) to LAC teams and 12% (112) with experience of both.

[11] Since the report was drafted, the latest Llamau MI shows that 1,045 accreditations have been achieved to end December 2016 by 427 participants.

[12] Similarly, the number of young people completing their placements at end December 2016 was 180.

3.1.2 Qualifications and work placements

Performance against targets was less positive, however, in terms of the individuals achieving accredited qualifications or starting and completing work placements.

Qualifications

425 young people achieved Agored Cymru Awards or Essential Skills qualifications, against an initial target of 546 (78% achieved) and an upwardly revised target of 636 (67% achieved) for Year 3, to reflect the revised contract and an emphasis on qualifications for those less likely to progress to a work placement.

While the numbers of young people achieving qualifications was below expectation, it was common for individuals to achieve more than one qualification. A total of **993 qualifications were achieved by the 425 young people**, who most commonly achieved one or two qualifications (300, 71%). In two cases young people achieved 12 qualifications –including three Essential Skills qualifications (maths, English and ICT), and nine Agored Cymru certificates in subjects ranging from Preparation for Work to Digital Photography.

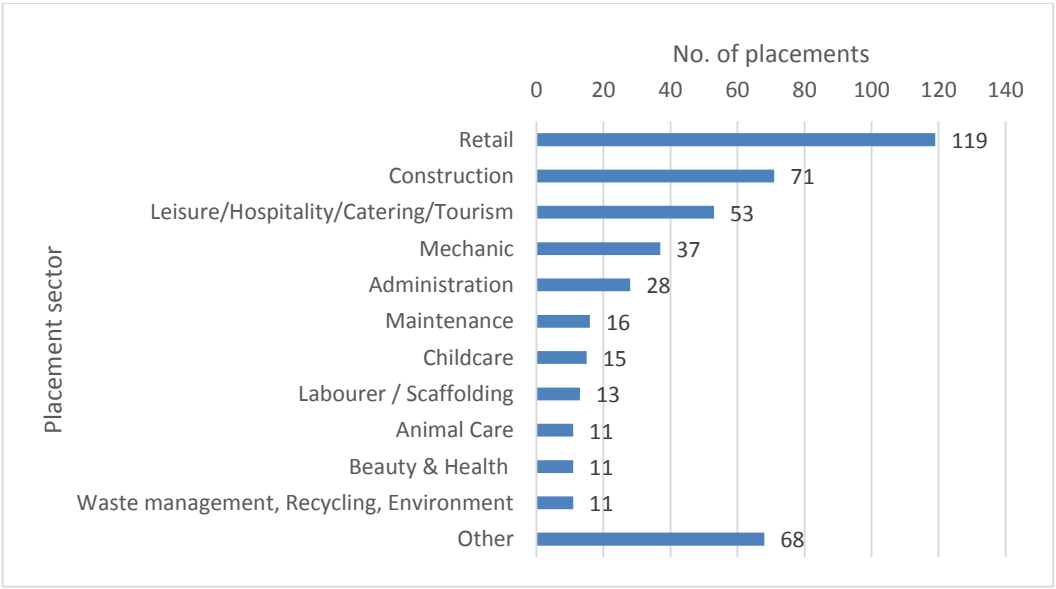
Of the 425 young people achieving Agored Cymru or Essential Skills qualifications, 223 or 52% were known to YOS, 158 or 37% had experience of the care system, and 44 or 10% had experience of both.

Work placement starts

The numbers **starting work placements** was below the initial target, with 453 placement starts against a target of 546 (83% of the initial target). However, the target for starts was reduced to 446 in Year 3, which means that the **Year 3 target was exceeded by 2%**.

Figure 3.1 shows the number of placements by sector, for sectors with 10 or more starts.

Figure 3.1 Number of Work Placements Starts by Sector



Source: Llamau management information, 30 September 2016

As the figure shows, placements were drawn from across a range of sectors, with the most common being in retail, followed by construction and the leisure/hospitality and catering sectors – which collectively accounted for over half (54%) of all placements. Sectors with fewer than 10 placements, shown as 'Other', illustrated the diversity of opportunities identified, and included placements in farming, social care, bicycle repair, music, IT, marketing, youth work and as a stonemason.

Looking at the participants starting work placements:

- **By target group** - 250 (55%) were known to the YOS, 157 (35%) had experience of LAC, and 46 (10%) had experience of both. This meant that 51% of all those engaging known to the YOS started a work placement; compared to 48% for those with a history of care and 41% of those with experience of both. On this basis young people with histories of care and known to the YOS were significantly less likely to start a placement at the 95% level than participants from the other target groups.
- **By Route** - 90 (20%) were initially allocated to Route 1 (representing 71% of all Route 1 allocations engaged); 195 (43%) to Route 2 (representing 60% of all Route 2 allocations engaged) and 168 (37%) to Route 3 (representing 35% of all Route 3 allocations engaged).

Work placement completions

Of the work placement starts, a total of **150 participants had completed the full 26 weeks**, below the initial and Year 3 targets (at 34% and 83% respectively). With the Year 3 target revised down to 181 completions, and 46 ongoing placements at the time of writing, it is possible that the Year 3 target could be met.

When completions are reviewed by target group and initial assessment route:

- **By target group** – 93 (62%) of all completers were known to the YOS, 43 (29%) had a history of care, and 14 (9%) had experience of both. This meant that 19% of all those engaged and known to the YOS completed their placements, compared to 13% of those with a history of care and 12% with experience of both. Participants known to the YOS were significantly more likely to complete their placement compared to those from the other target groups.
- **By Route** – 30 (20%) were initially allocated to Route 1; 72 (48%) to Route 2 and 48 (32%) to Route 3. Placement completers therefore represented 57% of all initial Route 1 allocations, 22% of Route 2 and 10% of Route 3.

3.2 Performance by Local Authority Area

Table 3.2 below summarises performance in each of the 18 local authority areas, in terms of numbers referred, engaged, achieving one or more accreditations and starting and completing a work placement. The table reflects the findings from previous reports in terms of the variations in performance, with the **numbers referred** being particularly strong in Swansea, Cardiff, and Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, with over 100 referrals being received in each and accounting for over one third (35%) of all referrals to the project. Conversion rates to **engagement**, defined by the completion of a PDP, peaked at over 90% in Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly and Neath Port Talbot, and over 80% in 11 of the remaining areas.

The young people **achieving at least one accredited qualification** were numerically highest in Swansea, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, Cardiff, and Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, although accreditation as a share of those engaged was highest in Gwynedd and Ynys Môn and Conwy and Denbighshire (approximately two thirds, or 68% and 65% respectively). Elsewhere accreditation rates were as low as 15% and 16%.

In terms of **work placement starts and completions**, start numbers were highest (by some way, and accounting for 21% of all placement starts) in Swansea, followed by Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, Carmarthenshire, and Conwy and Denbighshire. Starts as a share of engagements, however, were highest in Merthyr Tydfil (at 79%), Swansea (66%), Ceredigion (65%) Conwy and Denbighshire (63%) and Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot (both 62%). Reflecting the picture for the project overall, work placement completion numbers and rates were low, with completion rates commonly being around 30%. Swansea stood out in terms of the number of completions (34, 36% of starts) and Merthyr Tydfil in terms of completion rates (55% - 12 completers from

22 starts). Just six areas achieved 10 or more completions, and in two areas just one completion was reported while in a further two areas none were reported.

Table 3.2 Performance by Local Authority Area

	Referral and Engagement			Achieving Accreditation		Work Placements: Starts		Work Placements: Completers	
Local Authority Area	Referrals	Engaged	% of Referrals Engaged	No	% of Engaged	No	% of Engaged	No	% of Starts
Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly	105	98	93%	50	51%	40	42%	17	43%
Bridgend	75	63	84%	24	38%	19	30%	6	32%
Cardiff	113	95	84%	43	45%	26	27%	9	23%
Carmarthenshire	65	53	82%	28	53$	33	62%	10	30%
Ceredigion	45	34	76%	5	15%	22	65%	8	36%
Conwy and Denbighshire	62	51	82%	33	65%	32	63%	8	25%
Flintshire	28	15	54%	8	53%	4	27%	0	0$
Gwynedd & Yns Mon	71	56	79%	38	68%	34	61%	10	29%
Merthyr Tydfil	32	28	88%	12	43%	22	79%	12	55%
Monmouthshire and Torfaen	25	19	76%	8	42%	4	21%	0	0%
Neath Port Talbot	36	34	94%	15	44%	21	62%	7	33%
Newport	61	47	77%	16	34%	15	32%	6	40%
Pembrokeshire	11	9	82%	2	22%	3	33%	1	33%
Powys	45	37	82%	6	16%	19	51%	6	32%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	69	58	84%	28	48%	29	50%	10	34%
Swansea	163	144	88%	75	52%	95	66%	34	36%
Vale of Glamorgan	61	50	82%	29	58%	25	50%	3	12%
Wrexham	28	25	89%	5	20%	11	44%	1	9%

Source: Llamau management information, 30 September 2016

The case study fieldwork and stakeholder consultations found that local performance can be influenced by a range of factors, discussed in Section 4 but including:

- The size of the target group population in each area – which is not easily defined in the absence of location-specific data sets;
- Existing local provision – although SY/MF met a gap in provision in many areas, in a few a combination of local authority and local project based support was available, particularly for young people leaving care but also where local YOS provision included

basic skills and employability provision. Links were subsequently made with these projects which allowed SY/MF to provide progression routes for young people, for example in Blaenau Gwent where SY/MF provided to support young people progressing from the Pre-VENT project. However anecdotal feedback suggests that in areas with existing provision referrals tended to be for young people with the greatest needs.

- In some areas and in the early stages at least, a slow start to referrals – due in part to a reluctance on the part of local services to refer their clients to a 'new' project until greater understanding of the nature of the project and trust had been established.
- Rurality – providers operating in rural areas with dispersed populations described how delivering away from a 'centre' model brought challenges, including resourcing similar levels of provision to local projects set in more urban areas. The availability of transportation and the availability of work placements were also issues, although these applied in some of the more urban areas too.

3.3 The Early Leavers

As performance against the KPIs shows, the level of drop-out/early leavers from the project was considerable – of the 1,096 young people referred to the project just 150 completed the 26 week work placement (a completion rate of just 14% at end of September 2016), with 123 young people currently being engaged.

At 30 September 2016, some **823 young people had exited the project prior to the completion of a six month work placement (75% of all those referred)**. Table 3.3 summarises the distribution of early leavers throughout the project.

Table 3.3 Early Exits by Point of Exit, Route and Target Group (No's and % of referrals*)

		Initial Route Allocated				Target Group		
Point of early exit	**No Exits**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**Blank**	**YOS**	**LAC**	**Both**
Between referral and assessment	**166 (15%)**	166 (15%)				86 (15%)	51 (14%)	29 (21%)
Between assessment and engagement	**109 (10%)**	7 (6%)	25 (8%)	74 (15%)	3	66 (11%)	34 (9%)	9 (6%)
After engagement	**548 (50%)**	72 (57%)	189 (58%)	287 (60%)	--	272 (47%)	196 (52%)	80 (58%)
■ *Before starting WP*	*245*	*13*	*64*	*168*	--	*212*	*146*	*70*
■ *After starting WP*	*303*	*59*	*125*	*119*	--	*60*	*50*	*10*
Total	**823 (75%)**	**79 (62%)**	**214 (66%)**	**361 (75%)**	**--**	**424 (73%)**	**281 (75%)**	**118 (85%)**

Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

* Exit percentages by Route allocated are based numbers reaching assessment stage (n=933)

As Table 3.3 suggests, young people most commonly exited the project after engagement and starting a work placement (303, or 37%) – with those leaving after starting a placement commonly doing so in the first six weeks. Even so, significant numbers left between referral and assessment (15%), and assessment and engagement (10%).

The distribution of early exits by Route shows that those allocated to Route 1 accounted for a smaller share than Routes 2 or 3 at each stage. Clearer differences emerge between the target groups, with young people with experience of the care system and known to the YOS being the most likely to exit between referral and assessment and after engagement, reflecting the earlier findings regarding this group having the greatest support needs. Those exiting between assessment and engagement were more likely to be known to the YOS.

The project MI, and consultations with staff, showed that those leaving early did so for a combination of positive, and less positive, reasons, and discussed below.

3.4 Post-Project Destinations

While the key performance indicators related to individuals' achievements in their time with their projects, each was intended to improve individual employability and so support progress towards, and into, employment and learning opportunities.

However, project MI on post-project outcomes was restricted in the most part to individuals completing the full 26 week work placement. Where individuals left the project early, data is more scant, and as based on discussions between the providers and the young people relied on participants being contactable and prepared to share this information.

3.4.1 Completer destinations

The destinations of the 150 young people completing their six month work placement, at the time of leaving the project, are shown in Table 3.4 below. As the table shows, **the majority of 'completers' (82, or 55%) moved into employment** – most commonly with their placement host but also with new employers. Completers also reported being in work as part of the Jobs Growth Wales programme (8%), and others as apprentices (5%).

Table 3.4 Completer Destinations at time of Completion

Destination	No	%
Employment	**82**	**55%**
■ Employed by placement provider	42	28%
■ Employed by new employer	21	15%
■ Employment continued under JGW	12	8%
■ Employment continued as an apprentice	7	5%
Further learning	**12**	**8%**
■ Progressed to college/work related qualifications	12	8%
Volunteering	**4**	**3%**
■ Volunteering at placement provider	4	3%
Unemployed	**50**	**33%**
■ Currently unemployed	6	4%
■ Job search support from Careers Wales	39	26%
■ Looking at other employment funding	5	3%
Unable to contact	**2**	**1%**
Total	**150**	**100%**

Source: Llamau management information as of 30 September 2016

While **8% moved into further learning** and **3% continued to work on a voluntary basis** with their placement host, the remaining **33% of completers were unemployed**. Of these the majority continued to receive support from their projects and/or Careers Wales.

3.4.2 Early leaver destinations

As the most common reason for leaving SY/MF reported in the MI was disengagement and/or non-attendance, and many young people could not subsequently be contacted, data on the post-project destinations for many of the 823 leaving early was limited.

However, the available data illustrated that, for some former participants at least, reasons for leaving early could be positive. Of the 173 individuals for whom data was available:

- 91 (11%) left early to take up an employment opportunity; and
- 82 (10%) left to attend college/learning provision, including three leaving to take apprenticeship places.

For the majority early exits were for less positive reasons, including disengagement, withdrawal and failure to attend, and more neutral factors such as leaving the area.

3.4.3 Former participant destinations

As MI on completer and early leaver destinations was collected at the point of exit, it does not capture subsequent or sustained destinations. **Consultations in Year 3 with a sample of 38 previous participants**, each leaving their projects at least three months previously, allowed post project destinations to be explored, as reported in detail in Section 5. In terms of their employment and training status:

- **12 young people were in work**, six of whom had completed six month placements:
  - Three had been employed on a permanent basis by their work placement host;
  - One had been employed by their previous placement host before being made redundant, but had found a new job in a similar sector to his placement;
  - Two had found work with new employers in sectors aligned to their placements; and
  - The remaining six non-completers either left their placements early and found work with new employers or had left the project before starting a placement.
- **Four were in education and training** – either studying for Level 3 qualifications (including one who had found work but decided to return to college), with an additional **two attending alternative provision** secured after leaving the project.

Of the remaining 20 young people, **18 were unemployed** and two refused to disclose their current status.

3.5 Concluding Comment

This section reviewed project performance to the end of Quarter 3 2016, and described how:

- The project exceeded the initial targets for referral and engagement by 62% and 54% respectively, with 1,096 young people being referred and 933 of these engaged.
- However the young people achieving accreditations (425), starting (453) and completing work placements (150) fell well below the initial target, although the revised targets for work placement starts were met.

Performance by local authority area varied considerably against the project KPIs, with factors influencing local performance including existing provision for the target groups, availability of suitable placement opportunities and rurality/areas with dispersed populations.

Some 823 young people, or 75% of those referred, left the project at different points in the delivery model and before completing their 26 week work placements. The majority (50%) left following engagement, and most commonly after starting a work placement.

Data on the post project destinations is restricted in the main to those completing, where over half (55%) progressing to work with their placement hosts or with new employers, and

one third remained unemployed at exit. Where data was available on post-project destinations for those leaving early, 11% reported leaving to take up a work opportunity and 11% to go to further learning – although the majority had left for less positive reasons.

Follow-up consultations in Year 3 of the evaluation with a sample of former participants leaving their projects at least three months previously sought to identify their destinations. Of the 38 individuals contacted, 12 were in work, four in education and training and the remainder were unemployed - showing how, for some participants, barriers and challenges continued to be faced which hindered their onward progression.

It is apparent that the main benefits for many of the young people are not formally captured in the project KPIs. This relates to project impacts, where destination data is restricted to completers and achievements at the point of exit in the absence of formalised follow-up, and to the measures used, which did not capture 'soft outcomes'. While inherently difficult to capture, soft outcomes best represent the most commonly reported benefits of improved confidence, raised self-esteem and aspirations, and a sense of both direction and achievement.

4 Experiences of Implementation

This section draws on the findings across the evaluation to explore projects' experiences of implementation, what was felt to have worked well and what less so, and the key learning points for future interventions. It follows the structure of the project delivery model, starting with referral and recruitment and completing with the support provided to young people during their participation.

4.1 Referral and Recruitment

As previous sections described, the number of referrals received safely exceeded expectation, driven by a high demand for support and confirming that, in many areas, SY/MF was the only provision available designed to work with the two target groups. Referrers consistently highlighted the need for, and current lack of, specific provision, and the unsuitability of mainstream employability provision for young people in the target groups.

Referral levels reflected the relationships established with referral agents, aided when referrers were located close to/in the same building as project staff, facilitating face-to-face contact and making staff easily accessible to clients. Indeed, being set in a well-known and accessible learning centre encouraged take-up – but posed challenges in more rural areas.

Where the project providers were well established locally securing buy-in amongst referrers was straightforward. Developing relationships, and establishing trust, was more challenging when project providers were new to an area, and time needed to be invested in making links and developing relationships. In some cases providers could utilise referrals from their own organisations, e.g. from Llamau's supported accommodation provision. Some also benefited from links with referrers through local networks and partnership meetings, and in some areas attended casework meetings.

4.1.1 Referrer understanding and expectations

In other cases it took time for referrers to develop an understanding of the project and to see the value in it, and in these cases referrals progressed slowly. The volume of referrals could also vary between staff within the same organisation, based on their different views and experiences of the project. Some staff were reluctant to refer their clients to a project they knew little about, or due to perceived and actual delays in clients moving into a work placement. Indeed within the same case study area there were differences in referral organisations' perceptions of the project and their willingness to refer to it, in the early stages at least. In one area, for example, referrals were limited because social service staff viewed the project negatively due to potential impacts on housing benefit. Some looked after children's teams were concerned about their clients using the same service as young offenders, which led to an initial reluctance to refer.

Referrers' expectations also differed regarding the work placement component of the project, with some expecting placements to start straight after referral, and communicated this expectation to their clients. This was particularly the case where referrers had their own 'employability' provision and considered their young people to be 'work ready' – a view not necessarily shared by the projects. Project staff had to work with referrers to further develop their understanding of the project model, and the importance of the employability provision.

In other areas the referral process operated effectively based on joint-working and mutual understanding between projects and referrers. For example, in one area referrers would contact the project to check the appropriateness of referrals, and elsewhere the involvement of the ELOs early in the delivery process set the foundations for continuity for participants.

4.1.2 The type of referrals

Referrers followed different referral strategies, with some being more selective (e.g. not

referring the most volatile, those with serious drugs problems, or with moderate learning disabilities) while others referred all those meeting the eligibility criteria or with the highest levels of need. The project was often seen as something of a 'last chance' for some participants, particularly those with experience of the YOS.

The projects were reluctant to turn any referral away, and so worked with many young people not ready or willing to engage. Project staff acknowledged that this had been a challenge, and a factor in the low numbers starting and sustaining work placements, and recognised the balance between recruiting those prepared for a placement and inclusivity.

4.1.3 Key learning

Referral and recruitment

- Project staff should **develop relationships with referrers early-on**, and be prepared to invest time and resources into this.
- Project staff should build a **clear understanding of the purpose and aims of the project amongst referrers**, and **manage their and their clients' expectations** in terms of progression to a work placement.
- Project staff and referrers should **jointly manage referral numbers and agree protocols on selecting** the clients who would benefit most from the project. This would mean the projects re-considering their policy of accepting all clients regardless of the level of need.

4.2 Engagement and Assessment

4.2.1 Initial engagement in the project

While the prospect of a paid work placement was the primary attractor for young people, this could cause difficulties in terms of meeting expectations. As described above, this could be reinforced by the referring organisation, and led in some cases to young people leaving the project early (25% of all referrals disengaged between referral and engagement/production of the PDP). Consultations with participants leaving their projects early also suggested that perceived delays in arranging placements were responsible at least in part for their actions.

Overall, referrers were positive about the way the project had successfully engaged participants following referral. In many cases, given their high levels of need and chaotic lives, the young people had not engaged effectively with other provision previously. SY/MF offered them something distinctive and supportive – one project worker noted that for some "*SY/MF can work more as a pre-engagement tool. It raises their aspirations and gets them to re-engage with people, however it is too soon for them to get into employment*". Another saw SY/MF as "*a way to get them through the door*". Early engagement worked particularly well where staff visited prospective participants in advance in a care or youth justice setting, or where the young people had an initial visit to the centre to familiarise themselves with it.

However, according to referrers, participants were generally less enthusiastic about the employability skills component at the outset, which deterred some from taking part. One referrer commented: "*It is difficult to get young people to see the bigger picture … so they may be less than enthusiastic about the learning component*". While this could be due to negative experiences of school or other training provision, those participants engaging found the relaxed and informal learning style, the format of provision, and the environment in which it was set, attractive. Participants often reported having a good impression of the tutors and the ethos of care and support they demonstrated.

4.2.2 The challenges to engagement

Young people referred to SY/MF could experience a range of often profound challenges and

barriers, and be exposed to chaotic lifestyles which may preclude or discourage their participation. A combination of financial or circumstantial barriers were commonly identified:

- Families and/or young people can **lose out on workless or housing benefits** when participating, as the skills training is not recognised as formal training provision.
- Participants were in a range of **financial and benefit circumstances**, with some in the care system receiving welfare payments, some Youth Offending Services offering a stipend for skills training (e.g. £1.50 per hour), while others may receive no income during the employability/skills training period. This becomes particularly difficult for participants spending an extended period in Route 3/preparing for a placement.
- Finally, **geographical remoteness and travel barriers**, particularly for those in rural areas, can make centre-based provision challenging, and influenced projects' abilities to serve the young people in their areas.

Other challenges relate to **personal factors**, which while not necessarily precluding participation may prove a barrier for both initial engagement and ongoing participation:

- Low self-esteem and a paucity of aspiration: many "*losing hope and belief in themselves, and their capacity to change*" (tutor);
- Previous negative experiences of learning – at school, college or project-based activity;
- Mental health problems, either diagnosed or undiagnosed, and behavioural disorders or learning disabilities;
- Alcohol and/or substance misuse;
- Chaotic lifestyles and family circumstances; and
- Continued offending and risk taking behaviour.

At the same time some referrals were evidently not willing to make the required commitment to their projects (as one early leaver described they "*just wanted somewhere to come to*"), and often exited the project early on.

4.2.3 Engagement and assessment undertaken by project providers

Initially, Sova was responsible for the engagement and assessment phase of the project, after which participants would be passed to local project staff for support. A lack of capacity within Sova meant that this approach was ineffective, with the inherent need to transition between organisations and support workers going against the principles of seamless support and stability. A change in Year 1, formalised in Year 2, saw initial engagement and assessment transfer to the local project providers. This was widely considered to have streamlined the process, and provided a more direct link for participants between the referral process, assessment and employability skills training.

The change also meant the time between referral and project start shortened, and allowed staff to gauge participants' needs more effectively using their own assessment procedures. This led in some cases to more participants being allocated to the Route 3 category, which was considered a more accurate assessment of their work readiness. One tutor commented that they "*now have a complete picture of the young person*", and another that the project: "*… is far more streamlined now as a programme, everyone knows who does what. It has been a learning curve for all the organisations involved over the three years but it has become a very adaptable project as a result."*

4.2.4 Key learning

Engagement and assessment

- The **paid work placement is the key attractor** for the project, but more than this, in order to engage young people in skills training **a distinctive and supportive learning environment is crucial**.
- Prospective participants can **experience a range of challenges that may preclude or discourage their participation** - some are financial or circumstantial, but others relate to personal factors that may prove too great a barrier for initial and sustained engagement.
- Initial **engagement, assessment and planning is more effectively undertaken by the project** where the young person will receive provision - in order to maximise efficiency, consistency of support, and facilitate appropriate assessment decisions.
- The **ability to respond rapidly following referral** is key to maintaining interest and fostering engagement, and for developing early relationships between young people, tutors and ELOs.

4.3 Employability and Skills Training

Referrers were overwhelmingly positive about the quality, relevance and appropriateness of the employability and learning provision offered by the project. The provision was seen as a unique and distinctive offer for young people who had struggled in traditional classroom environments, and for whom mainstream college provision could be too formal and inflexible. Referrers were clear that there were few other options for their clients to gain accreditations, and participants, once they had engaged with it, also viewed the provision positively.

Projects, participants and other stakeholders identified a series of strengths of the provision:

- Its bespoke and flexible nature, particularly in terms of content and duration, with participants valuing being able "*to take it at their own pace*". This allowed barriers to learning to be addressed on an individual, tailored basis, while also helping develop emotional intelligence and foster appropriate workplace behaviour. As one tutor remarked: "*it is a therapeutic environment, taking account of personal circumstances and health issues*".
- The emphasis placed on influencing attitudes, personal relationships and behaviour as well as specific learning outcomes – with young people also having the opportunity to socialise and build friendships during delivery.
- Delivery on a one to one or small group basis, in a relaxed and informal environment offering a "*homely feel*" and "*a relaxed, open door approach*" – with many finding the idea of a small group learning environment appealing. This also reduced stigmatisation on the basis of academic ability - key for those with low literacy and numeracy levels.
- The quality of the tutors and their ability to engage young people and build trust – underpinned by an ethos of care and close relationships with learners. One referrer praised the tutors for how "*they don't give up on the kids*", and another noted their "*tenacity*" in working with high need young people. One participant described how the tutors "*are easy to get on with, it is a relaxed place. At school teachers were obnoxious and disrespectful. This is way better than school was*".

The Agored Cymru/Essential Skills Wales qualifications also worked well, the modular format being well suited to short weekly sessions and highly adaptable to participant needs. Project staff also saw them as an important means of recognising achievement and progress: "*not only do the Agored Cymru units enable young people to bank the learning they have done, they are also important in recognising the progress they have made and a way of celebrating*

that". Participants also enjoyed components such as money management, cooking, help with form filling, building CVs, achieving maths and English accreditations, and life skills.

Each of the projects reported that while they were able to deliver the employability and skills training, and other aspects of their projects, through the **Welsh language**, demand was very low in most areas. In many cases project leads could not recall ever being asked for provision in Welsh, with Welsh language provision being concentrated in local authority areas in North Wales.

4.3.1 Challenges in the employability provision – the extended Route 3 pathway

Many participants faced a range of profound personal and circumstantial barriers and challenges, with those allocated to Route 3 having high levels of need and often at a considerable distance from education or employment.

This was reflected in the level of early exit, with 15% of those allocated to Route 3 disengaging between the assessment and engagement stages. Participants' high levels of need meant that many continued on the Route 3 pathway for an extended period of time, much longer than the originally envisaged 8 (or 13) weeks. Project staff and participants described a loss of interest and motivation over time – particularly given expectations regarding the availability of work placements.

The extended Route 3 pathway also meant that participants were more likely to present challenging behaviour, which had a negative effect on the learning environment. As one tutor described "*…. small group training is fine, but even then it only takes one disruptive influence*". Some participants described how their peers had bad attitudes, didn't take it seriously, and only wanted to "*mess around*", as one described: "*some people come for the sake of it and drop out – they don't take it seriously. Some treated it like a youth club, which was dead annoying"*.

4.3.2 Different views on the extended Route 3 pathway and achievement of work readiness

Referrers had different views on the extended Route 3 pathway, with some suggesting it was expected given the nature of the target group, and that any form of engagement should be seen as positive. Tutors tended to agree, as one noted: '*some (participants) are never ready – they might however at least develop a qualification or two and ensure that their CVs are up to date*". In most cases tutors commented that an extended period of skills training was essential for some, perhaps with additional hours per week, to help them progress.

Other referrers considered that the provision was disproportionately lengthy and that the projects could be reticent to assess participants as work ready. As one referrer described: "*we are a little disappointed with the proportion of our referrals that have been placed into work; too many are dropping out because of the long time in the learning component".* This view was more likely when a referrer provided their own employability training, and considered their clients to be work ready. Project staff reported that some referrers didn't understand the rationale for the employability component.

One consequence of this was that some referrers, or at least individuals in an organisation, became disinclined to refer. Others had discussions with projects to encourage more rapid progression from Route 3 to Routes 1 and 2, and commented that over time there was more of a willingness to assess young people as Route 1. There were also some examples of good partnership practice developed over the three years, including project staff working with referrers to agree when work readiness was reached.

Differences in views on work readiness were also reported between tutors and ELOs, with some ELOs considering that some of those allocated to Route 1 were not placement ready. As one described: "*a change in Year 3 is that tutors understand better what my expectations are for work ready participants. I set my standards out to them very clearly. So now the ones they refer to me are more appropriate and I can place them. This is because tutors are being straight with them and asking harder questions, like how they would feel getting up early and*

working in the rain." This was most commonly, but not exclusively, the case where ELOs and tutors were from different organisations, and emphasised the importance of common understandings about what constitutes work readiness.

4.3.3 Maintaining engagement in employability and skills training

Effective practice in maintaining engagement with the more challenging participants was identified by the tutors and referrers, and included:

- Tutors providing high levels of active support, including 'hand-holding' with some participants, visiting them at home, taking calls and texts out of hours and driving them to important appointments – although this had resource implications for the staff involved.
- Being flexible on attendance, acknowledging that regular weekly attendance may be unrealistic for some participants, where "*it is important to be flexible, increasing hours gradually and taking account of competing demands in their lives*". However this had to be balanced with structure and discipline – as one tutor described "*managing behaviour is a big challenge and keeping to a structured programme of learning is key …. this means educating participants on having set break times*". Conversely, for some two days a week was too little, and could lead to disengagement if interest was lost.
- Designing the learning programme to be stimulating and varied – as one tutor noted: "*For this group engagement in learning is helped by doing something different each hour. Maybe basic skills, then a workshop on employment, then an Agored Cymru unit."* This was key given the reluctance amongst some participants to study maths and English, and the tutors and referrers emphasised the importance of including practical sessions, such as cookery or photography, to balance the content and maintain enthusiasm.

4.3.4 Changes for Year 3

Two changes to the employability phase were introduced in Year 3 – as described below.

The weekly £5 incentive

In Year 3 an incentive payment of £5 per week was offered to those attending the employability provision. Views on the effectiveness of the incentive varied:

- YOS representatives were sceptical, particularly as they already provide an allowance of £1.50 per hour for attendance.
- Tutors views were mixed, some suggested it encouraged the most disengaged, and others that young people were dismissive of it. One tutor felt the lack of sanctions for non-attendance more of an issue – the only option was not to offer a work placement.
- Participant views also varied – while some interviewed in the final case study fieldwork reported that the incentive encouraged them to attend, others considered that they would have attended anyway, while a third group said it made no difference to them.

In some cases projects offered the £5 incentive to participants on a selective basis. In these cases the incentive was targeted towards those with poor attendance records, with the tutor and young person agreeing realistic targets for future attendance.

Additional Route 3 provision

Additional provision was introduced for Route 3 participants, to maintain engagement and provide a distinct offer for participants unlikely or too late to progress to a work placement. This additional provision included extra accredited employability content (e.g. covering CVs, CSCS cards, workplace behaviour, and interview practice), and a Job Club providing access to IT, and specific support to look for jobs or apply to college.

Year 3 also saw an increased use of work tasters, offered in several areas previously and found to be effective in keeping participants engaged, testing their behaviour in a work

context, and aiding the transition to a full-time work placement. One provider commented that introducing work tasters earlier "*may have worked better for some of the hardest to reach individuals, and may have addressed the high level of drop outs from the placements".*

4.3.5 Key learning

Employability and skills training

- The **employability and skills training works well when** it is bespoke; flexible; emphasises development of positive attitudes and behaviours; addresses specific learning barriers; is welcoming to diverse academic backgrounds; is based in relaxed small group settings with intensive support; and is driven by an ethos of care and trusted relationships between tutors and learners.
- The nature of the client group means that many need to continue on the Route 3 pathway for an extended period of time, which may risk drop-out and disengagement. There is a **balance to be struck between attaining 'work readiness' in its fullest sense and sustaining engagement** in the project.
- Engagement in skills training and the acquisition of some accreditations may be the most that can be expected of some participants in the early stages of their journey to employment. This means that **skills training provision must be flexible and adaptable to reflect participants' capabilities, expectations and ambitions**.
- A **financial incentive to attend is of some value but must be sufficiently priced** and take account of participants' financial and benefit circumstances, and may most usefully be targeted to specific young people.
- Maintaining engagement for Route 3 participants relies on **intensive support, flexibility on attendance balanced with necessary structure and discipline**, and a diverse learning programme.
- **Work tasters** offer an alternative way to engage participants, test their behaviour in a work context, and to transition more smoothly to a full time placement.

4.4 Work Placements

4.4.1 Developing employment opportunities

There was widespread agreement that participants should be referred to an ELO to secure a work placement as soon as they were considered 'placement ready', to minimise the risk of disengagement. ELOs suggested that, by the end of Year 3, that the longest wait to start a placement was four weeks.

ELOs and tutors highlighted to a range of key issues in placing young people, including:

- **Developing relationships:** it took time for ELOs to develop relationships with employers and to persuade them of the value of the project, especially if reluctant to take young people with offending histories. This was particularly problematic in smaller towns or rural areas with few employers, and with large multiples where the ELOs had to approach the HR department at Head Office. However, by Year 3 ELOs had developed strong relationships with a range of employers and able to place participants more easily.
- **Emphasising the provision of support:** it was crucial for employers that support was available from the ELO to act as a 'broker' or 'mediator' between the employer and young person, and allow any issues to be addressed immediately. Also, the payment of wages by the project, rather than the employers as in Year 1, changed the nature of engagement with potential employers and made their involvement easier.
- **Finding quality placements:** ELOs were keen that employers offered interesting and

engaging work while being supportive and understanding of participants' circumstances. This meant disregarding some employers that were seeking a free worker for menial tasks, and again smaller independent employers appeared more likely to offer a higher quality experience. By Year 3 ELOs had developed a good knowledge of local employers, leading to better quality placements in some areas. One ELO described: "*we have a pool of employers that we know will be flexible with* [young people], *give them second chances and call us with problems*". The ELOs also highlighted the importance of getting the right work-place culture for a young person: "*given the knowledge we have built up we can place the right people in the most appropriate place where they will get support. This might mean making sure that shyer young people are placed on quieter sites or that others are put on a site where there is more banter and liveliness*".

- **Meeting the specific preferences of young people**: ELOs frequently tried to meet participants' work preferences, and saw this as the foundation for a positive work experience. In several cases ELOs described spending considerable time searching for a specific opportunity, with varying degrees of success. Inevitably it was not always possible to meet participants' preferences, although many examples of matches resulting from the efforts of the ELOs were found. The most common placement sector was however retail, often charity shops, and accounting for a quarter (26%) of all placements.
- **Finding placements which would lead to permanent jobs:** the ELOs reported trying wherever possible to secure placements which had the potential to lead to permanent employment. However, they acknowledged that not all placements would lead to permanent posts, and that in some areas there were few such opportunities. Smaller independent employers appeared more likely to place young people with future employment in mind and build on their investment in the individual – while permanent opportunities in charity shops were rare, leading some ELOs to question their validity as hosts.
- **ELO capacity:** was an issue at different stages of the project, but in Year 3 particularly in respect of engaging Route 3 participants prior to a placement. Projects saw early ELO engagement as a key means of motivating participants to complete the employability training. One tutor said that: "*the ELO needs to come into the centre so young people can at least see what they are aiming for, and that the work placement is joined up*". ELOs agreed on the benefits of this approach: "*it works well to go into the centre to get to know the young people, to get an idea of their work interests so I can begin to scope out opportunities. It also acts as a carrot for them to see me*". However, ELOs had limited capacity for this during busier periods, and different approaches were followed.
- **Maintaining a pool of employers:** In most cases ELOs were reluctant to follow a 'bank' model for sourcing placements, instead sourcing each placement individually to try and match the participant's preferences. This meant that much time was spent sourcing placements, rather than matching and supporting participants, although this approach meant that employers were rarely kept waiting too long and so remained engaged. Over time, the ELOs built up banks of employers who could be approached based on previous experience. This was considered a pragmatic approach as it was difficult to predict the numbers seeking placements at any one time.

Other considerations highlighted in discussions with ELOs included travel limitations on the part of participants and/or a lack of confidence to travel outside the home area, with one describing how many construction opportunities in Caerphilly could not be taken by young people in Ebbw Vale as they were unable to access them.

4.4.2 Supporting successful work placements

At the end of Quarter 3 2016 around one in three young people starting a work placement had completed the full 26 weeks. Young people could leave their placements for a number of reasons, both positive (finding work or progressing to further learning, accounting for 22% of early exits) and negative (poor attendance, disengagement or behaviour issues, as well as

not enjoying the placement and being better off on benefits, which accounted for the majority of early exits). Other reasons for exit identified included leaving the area or travel problems.

In many cases reasons for placement exit related to barriers associated with young people's continued chaotic lives. According to ELOs, these translated into inappropriate behaviour, not getting on with colleagues, poor attitudes to work, poor time-keeping, non-attendance, and not treating the placement like a real job. Several ELOs suggested that placement starts may identify additional personal issues which needed to be addressed.

For many participants, completing the full 26 weeks or not, the placement was a positive experience. Many examples were identified where employers were very satisfied with both the placement process and the young person placed, with examples from Year 3 including:

- The manager of a garage who reported: "*he does things on his own initiative. We don't need to tell him. He is self-motivated. He'll grab a brush when the floor is dirty without being told*". The benefits for the young person are that he is "*learning how it is to work. He needs a bit more training. He is still a bit shy, but confidence is growing*". The benefits for the employer were the ability to train up someone that they can employ afterwards.
- A local bicycle retailer reported that a key benefit for the shop was to have the extra staff capacity. The participant served customers, built bikes for sale, and worked on the till. While reportedly quite shy initially, the participant needed to be motivated and pushed by the manager, although once he began to apply himself he was very good.

Having good support available during the placement is key, with good practice including:

- **Identifying and addressing potential risks to the placement early in the process:** rather than responding after the event. In some cases projects felt that the ELOs could have acted more swiftly to address problems and prevent work placement breakdown.
- ELOs should **communicate with employers to build understandings of the problems facing a young person**, which may involve negotiating suspensions in cases of events such as loss of accommodation, criminality or illness.
- Support should include **helping young people to prepare for the practicalities of working life**, such as planning travel, appropriate work clothing, and money management, with the discretionary fund available to ELOs being helpful.
- Good support involves **constant communication with young people, and being readily available and accessible to them**. This could entail text messaging to check young people had arrived for work, and some ELOs made themselves available outside normal working hours to support participants at times of crisis.
- **Employers can also play a role:** by adopting a flexible approach to working hours, and keeping in touch with and supporting the placements. One particularly supportive employer described reminding participants to come into work, and monitoring their progress to ensure they were developing skills in line with their interests.

One important finding was that young people often required wrap-around support to help deal with potentially complex issues relating to housing, benefits, substance misuse and mental health problems. This also applied in the employability phase, with ELO's and tutors having limited capacity (and, depending on the issue, capability) to deal with such issues. This means that specialist support must be available locally and known to ELOs and tutors.

4.4.3 Placement duration and changes in Year 3

A continued issue was the extent to which participants were ready and able to undertake a 25 hour per week, six month work placement. Project staff and referrers frequently reported that while 25 hours per week can be too much of a commitment for some participants, others were capable of and would benefit from a longer placement. This was particularly the case for older participants and others where additional wages could be key to sustaining their placement (i.e. where living independently and could lose housing benefits). Although used

intermittently previously, Year 3 saw the formal introduction of 35 hour per week work placements. While not suitable for all, this change had been particularly useful for those aged over 18, living independently, and capable of making the necessary commitment.

ELOs reported that employers were also keen on the 35 hour option as it allowed them to give the participants "*to play a bigger role in the running of a business"*, although it was also acknowledged that it also provided further 'free' labour for employers. The 35 hour week has been embraced by some of the Year 3 participants interviewed, who noted the importance of "a *bigger salary"* and of being able to focus more on their jobs. One tutor spoke for many in describing that *"…the 35 hour weeks have worked out for some, particularly the older ones who are hitting the right targets and have more sense of responsibility and are wanting to turn their lives around ….. a few extra quid can concentrate minds effectively*".

4.4.4 Post-placement support

Year 3 saw a further focus on post-placement support, to address a previous area of weakness and help maintain the momentum established during placements. ELOs worked with participants six weeks before placement end to help with progression routes, often with tutors to sustain participants' engagement. For example:

- One case study project offered participants advice and suggested progression pathways, including taking them to careers fairs and liaising with support workers to find appropriate opportunities. Participants were provided with progression plans, help with job search and mock interviews, and support setting up interviews with prospective employers.
- Another project had also introduced job clubs as part of their post-project support, which offered two hours a week on-site support for leavers to support their progression.

While efforts to enhance post-project support were widely welcomed, and seen as a sensible means of ensuring 'investment' in the young people was built upon, it placed a further strain on staffing capacity, notably as there were fewer ELOs in the latter stage of the project.

4.4.5 Key learning

Work placements

- To minimise disengagement, **work placements should be found quickly for the work ready**. Where placements are not readily available, ELOs and tutors should consider strategies to maintain engagement, e.g. work tasters or extra learning units.
- Engaging employers takes a great deal of work, which represented a challenge early in the project. **ELOs need time to develop relationships with employers**, and to learn which ones are the most suitable for their clients.
- There is a **difficult balance to be struck between meeting participants' placement preferences, which can take time, and providing a swift placement start**. More importantly than the sector in which it is set, ELOs must ensure that the placement will offer a sufficiently supportive and developmental environment.
- It is important to **ensure there is sufficient ELO capacity to deliver their roles** – identifying and securing placements, matching and engaging participants, monitoring and supporting throughout the placement period and providing post-project support.
- Having **good support for young people during the placement is key** to its success, which involves the early identification those at risk of dropping-out, providing wrap-around support, working closely with employers, helping young people with the practicalities of working life, and being readily available to young people.
- **Enhanced post-project support** provides the opportunity to build on the participants' achievements and sustain their engagement with employment and education.

4.5 Supporting Participants throughout the Project

4.5.1 Working with referrers

Partnerships between the projects and referrers have been a key strength of SY/MF. On the whole, tutors have had good communication links with personal advisors, social workers and youth offending officers, which allow client events or barriers to be discussed and ensure that relevant information is shared. Several projects considered that their partnerships with referrers were effectively sustained as the reputation of the project grew.

Referrers tended to agree – for example one noted the effectiveness and reliability of communications and reports, which kept them informed of progress. However, in some areas links with referrers were stronger than in others. A good practice example was Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, where project staff took part in joint-agency case management meetings, where issues such as risk assessment were shared. Challenges were encountered when referral agencies were more closed in their operational culture or where providers were new to an area.

Partnerships between ELOs and referrers were more variable. In some cases contact was limited, while in others ELOs were in close contact with referrers. In good practice cases ELOs and referrers worked to address specific problems collaboratively, for example in cases of re-offending or housing issues, or when a participant failed to attend their work placement. As one ELO commented: "*I make myself known to all the support workers so there is no conflict, duplication or participants playing us off against each other. I contact* [them] *as soon as I know if someone hasn't turned up for work*".

4.5.2 The tutor and ELO roles

Tutors and ELOs together performed a de facto 'key worker' role for participants while on the project. This was particularly true of tutors during the employability phase, where they built strong relationships of trust with participants and in some cases became their first contact points for support. Once work placements began, tutors were expected to step back to allow ELOs to lead on the placement. However, strong relationships had often developed between tutors and participants by this point, in some cases making the transition to the ELO difficult, and so some tutors maintained contact with participants throughout.

While this approach worked well in engaging participants, it brought challenges and stretched the scope of the tutor's role. Tutors described being presented with a host of specialist and complex issues related to mental health, behavioural problems, housing, benefits, money management, family breakdown, offending behaviour and substance misuse. They acknowledge that they did not necessarily have the capacity or know-how to manage such issues, and that there are limits to the support that they can or should offer. While projects generally utilised local support networks and tried to ensure specialist support was available, some tutors reflected that they would benefit from improved links and more systematic referral routes to specialist services. The same is true of ELOs; for example, one ELO reported struggling to know who to assist with a housing crisis, while another found a gap in supporting participants with substance misuse problems.

In some cases support for participants could be disjointed as they transitioned between employability and work placement phases. Projects recognised that support was most effective when there was close working between tutors and ELOs, in particular through face-to-face meetings and when ELO's engaged early with participants. In some areas ELOs commonly met with, and started the placement arrangement process, during the employability phase. This meant that young people were more likely to move smoothly, and rapidly, from one phase of the project to the other - although it required the ELOs to have the time to focus on future placements (at least 2 months away) rather than their existing caseloads. To address the continuity of support, tutors and ELOs suggested that there would be value in following a 'key worker' model in future. This would also allow one

individual to be responsible for managing specialist and more complex issues, and allow the tutors and ELOs to concentrate on their specific remits.

In Year 3 some project areas benefitted from extra capacity for administrative support, which was highly valued in reducing burdens and in freeing up ELO and tutor time. However, several interviewees in the Year 3 fieldwork considered that additional administrative support would have been more useful earlier in the project, when numbers were 'at peak'.

4.5.3 Working with offenders and care leavers

Young people with offending and/or care histories were treated in the same way in SY/MF, with the case studies and stakeholder interviews confirming that projects rarely differentiated between them. While it was recognised that those with offending histories faced specific barriers to work (and work placement) opportunities, experience showed that in practice both groups faced similar challenges. The key issues for projects related to those with particular offending histories (sex offences) which excluded them from certain placements, and where previous records of theft could make employers less willing to take them for placements.

4.5.4 Mentoring

Initially Sova envisaged the mentor role as: "*building a rapport with the participant. They can establish trust and focus on areas of weakness. Sometimes they don't have this kind of consistent support. It is good for them to chat in a way that is different to formal meetings. They can add value to work readiness by explaining appropriate work behaviour*".

The original intention had to been to offer all participants a mentor, although there were fewer instances of matches than expected (196 according to the Quarter 3 2016 MI). From Year 2 Sova mentors were asked to engage with participants late in their work placements, to avoid overlaps with the in-placement support provided by ELOs and assist participants in next steps and job search. Key challenges in the mentoring aspect of SY/MF included:

- Limited availability of mentors in early stages of the project: combined with higher than expected numbers of young people referred and engaged.
- Low participant demand: due to young people not routinely being offered or informed of the mentor offer, and as many didn't feel the need for one given the array of support workers already available to them (including personal advisors, social workers, youth offending officers, and tutors and ELOs). As one tutor described, many young people "*already have a lot of people in their lives, YOT workers, social workers and all that, they see it as interfering rather than someone you can speak to, share concerns with.*"
- From Year 2 on, the lower numbers of work placements starts limited the opportunity for mentors to engage with young people in the latter stages of their placements.
- An initial, and in some cases ongoing, lack of clarity amongst project staff regarding the mentor role - with referrers, tutors, ELOs and participants commonly struggling to describe the mentor role and remit, and the tasks they would perform.

Even when mentors had been matched with young people, the duration and the intensity of the relationship varied considerably. Project MI shows that the average duration of a mentor relationship was 140 days, although this varied between seven days/one week to over 560 days/80 weeks. The intensity of the relationships were often limited – data on mentor-mentee contact time shows an average of 8.5 hours, ranging from just a quarter of an hour to over 90 hours, in three quarters of cases (74%) contact time was eight hours or less.

Communication was also reported to be irregular and inconsistent; in many cases mentees were not in contact with their mentors on a routine basis. This was exacerbated where mentors were available only between certain hours, and as one tutor described "*by which time they would either have done what they were thinking of doing, or the panic is over*".

While consultations with participants identified few active mentor relationships, and so limited benefits, several examples were identified where the relationship had worked well. For example, one young person had a mentor for four months who encouraged them to attend the employability training, while another found their mentor to be helpful in "*sorting out problems*" and helping with money management. In a third example the young person described a good relationship with their mentor, and how they would meet for coffee more as friends than as mentor and mentee. Other examples of brief interventions were identified where, for example, a mentor helped a young person to complete an application form.

Overall, the view across the stakeholders interviewed was that the mentoring component had not worked as well as initially expected. However, despite the challenges, there was some agreement that mentoring had the potential to add value if it was adequately resourced, cleared positioned and communicated to referrers, staff and participants, and targeted towards individuals where it was likely to have the greatest impact.

4.5.5 Key learning

Supporting participants

- Central to the effective provision of ongoing support is **good partnership working between project staff and referrers** (personal advisors, social workers, youth offending officers etc.). This is most effective when it is consistent and systematic.
- Support was most effective through **close working between tutors and ELOs**, which offers consistency of support and shared information, as well as effectively managing the transition between the employability training and work placement phases.
- There would be value in the future projects of this nature to **include a dedicated key worker role**, to provide continuity of support to participants throughout the project and to work with them in managing specialist and complex issues.
- Tutors and ELOs can perform a de facto 'key worker' role, but **this is a major call on their time, distracts their attentions from their intended remits**, and there are limits to their ability to deal with a host of specialist and complex issues.
- **Adequate administrative resources must be ensured** to allow the 'front line' to focus on supporting clients.
- The mentor role was less effective given the combination of limited mentor supply, low demand from participants and a lack of clarity around their overall purpose. **However, mentoring has the potential to add value** if targeted well and adequately resourced.

5 Participant Experiences – Former Participant Follow-up

This section provides the findings from a series of qualitative telephone interviews with former participants in Year 3 of the study, exploring their current destinations, experiences of their projects and benefits resulting, and the reasons for those leaving their projects early.

Previous reports have detailed the experiences of the young people currently participating in the case study SY/MF projects, which provided positive findings for the most part in terms of their experience of the local delivery models (although delays in arranging placements could lead to frustrations) and the benefits expected to result from their participation. These included improved employability and the likelihood of finding work, improved/accredited Essential Skills, and a range of 'soft' outcomes such as improved confidence, self-esteem, motivation to find work and increased belief in their capacity to do so. Current participants commonly reported enjoying and valuing their time with their projects, and while the paid work placements were consistently the main attractor, participants frequently reported benefits from their participation in the employability and skills component.

However, data on post-project destinations are limited to completers at the point of leaving. The follow-up exercise sought to explore a sample of former participants' current employment and learning status, and the extent to which this could be attributed to SY/MF.

5.1 Interviewee Characteristics

The interview sample was constructed to ensure a broad mix of former participants who left their projects at least three months previously, from each of three groups: early leavers, non-completers, or completers. A total of 38 interviews were completed, distributed as follows:

- **Early leavers**: those not completing a qualification or sustaining a work placement for 6 weeks or more – 10 interviewees;
- **The non-completers:** but either gaining a qualification or starting and sustaining a work placement for between 6-25 weeks – 17 interviewees; and
- **Completers**: those completing the full 26 week work placement – 11 interviewees.

The interviewees were evenly distributed across 12 SY/MF regions, with concentrations in Swansea, Bridgend and Cardiff to reflect the distribution of participants, as follows:

- Age – 9 were aged 17, 14 aged 18, 9 aged 19 and 6 aged 20;
- Gender - 26 were male and 12 female;
- Route – two were Route 1, 22 were Route 2 and 14 were Route 3.
- Target group – experience of local authority care (16), YOS (21) and one of both.

On average, the interviewees spent 9 months with their projects, ranging from a couple of weeks to almost 19 months. The interviewees reported a range of barriers to work on joining their projects, most commonly mental health issues, a lack of confidence, their criminal record, or a lack of experience/job opportunities.

5.2 Current Employment and Learning Status

While two of the young people would not disclose their current status, the remainder were:

- **13 were found to be in employment** – in the retail, construction, catering, vehicle maintenance and landscaping sectors. Three had continued to be employed by their placement host, while a fourth had been employed by their host for 12 months before finding another job elsewhere. All were employed in sectors directly or indirectly linked to those in which they took their placements. Half had completed the project, with the remainder leaving early – two after attending for a few weeks. Of those in employment,

nine were known to the YOS and four had experience of the care system.

- **Six were in some form of education and training –** four were studying for Level 3 qualifications in business, childcare, mechanical engineering and teaching, including two who had found work after their projects before returning to college. Two had completed the SY/MF project, while one was a non-completer and the other an early leaver. Two were receiving support under other programmes – one had attended several 'basic skill' courses before joining other local learning provision, and both were non-completers. Of those in education or training, two were known to the YOS and four had experience of the care system.
- **17 were unemployed/NEET** – the majority of whom reported looking for work, four preparing to start college in the 2016/2017 academic year, and five being out of work due to ill health (one who had found work through SY/MF but due to a serious accident was unable to work indefinitely, three with mental health issues and one health problems associated with previous drug use). Of those unemployed/NEET, 10 were known to the YOS, six had experience of the care system and one had experience of both. The majority of those NEET continued to face barriers to work, including a lack of work experience, one as the result of their offending and one with on-going drug misuse, and, as below, limited employment opportunities.

> Michael[13] had a CSCS card prior to participating in SY/MF, and so took a placement in construction. He enjoyed the work placement and saw it through to completion, but since then has been unable to find further work. Although the interviewee considered that he feels more employable and more motivated to find work after his time with SY/MF, he is having trouble doing so due to a lack of opportunities in his local area.

Further examples of routes to work are provided in the box below.

5.3 Benefits and Impacts

Many of those in work or education/training considered that participation in SY/MF had helped them achieve their destination. While some of those currently in work had been retained by their placement host, others in work in similar areas considered that their placement experience had been important in securing their jobs. Others described a wider range of benefits, including increased motivation to, and confidence in, applying for jobs alongside the experience gained from their placements. Several considered that without the project they would most likely still be in the same situation they had been in before it.

Across all the young people interviewed, it appeared that all but those attending for the shortest durations received some form of benefit from their participation, and even in these cases some benefits were still cited, as one early leaver described "[The project] *made me a bit more confident – and I went through some interview techniques and I think that helped me and boosted my confidence. I know I only attended for four weeks, but it counted*". Across the interviewees, the most commonly reported benefits were:

- Increased confidence;
- Improved practical and communication skills;
- Experience that helped them look for work later; and
- Help preparing a CV for job applications.

[13] All names used throughout this section have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Examples of Former Participants in Work

David was referred to SY/MF by the Youth Offending Team, and following the skills and employability training started a placement in construction. Following completion of the placement he was taken on by his placement host, although he was later made redundant. However he subsequently found a new job in landscaping under his own initiative, and stated: *"I wouldn't have this job now if it wasn't for Moving Forward"*, and felt his placement that given him the training and experience he needed to find further work. He says that he would *"definitely not"* be in his current job without his time on the project.

Jane completed both employability and training in care provision, but left the project before starting a placement to take a job. The opportunity was in the care sector, where she has been employed ever since. Although she did not complete the project, she feels that she would not be where she is now without taking part, mainly due to the accreditations she gained: "*The training I got started the process of getting into this job, and I only needed the bare minimum training* [after starting]."

Prior to SY/MF John had no previous work experience. He undertook vocational training in construction before selecting a placement with a construction company through CYT. Although he completed his placement, he left the company after they didn't put him on an apprenticeship previously offered to him, and subsequently found his current job with a different construction company. While he felt he was already capable of working prior to joining SY/MF, the support and training received made him more likely to find work in his chosen profession.

Simon had previously worked as a labourer but, after a 'big gap' during which he didn't work, was referred to Moving Forward. He received work readiness and employability support from the project, and after expressing an interest in bar work was put onto a placement in a pub. However, he left the placement early after finding a job with a charity. He stayed here for a few months before moving to a different pub to train in the kitchen, where he is currently still working. He felt that the project helped improve his chances of finding work, by improving his confidence and enhancing his work experience.

Despite previous work experience, when Peter joined SY/MF he was NEET, struggling to find work due to a lack of qualifications, and with a lack of confidence about applying for jobs and attending interviews. Although he left his placement early due to dissatisfaction with the role he was expected to perform, he still felt that he benefited from his time with the project, saying that it had built his confidence and left him feeling more motivated, most positive and with improved self-esteem. As he described: "*I was just sick of not working, so I was glad I was out near enough every day doing stuff, even if it was only going to the* [project centre] *– it was better than staying in all day… it made me feel like I was trying more.*" He is currently working part-time in a pub, and feels the confidence gained from SY/MF helped him secure his current job in a pub - "[It] *made me a bit more confident – and I went through some interview techniques and that helped me and boosted my confidence*."

Bryony undertook employability and essential skills provision with SY/MF, before undertaking a placement in a supermarket. After completing her placement she stayed on at the same supermarket full-time, where she is still employed. She saw her ELO once a week at the start of her placement, then monthly as she settled in, and said her ELO was the most valuable part of her time with the project and was her main source of support. "*It was really good, the confidence they give you when you go out on the work placement and that, and they would come every month to see how the placement was going*". As she described: "…*if I didn't go on SY/MF, I wouldn't have the job now*".

Views on whether the project helped address the main barriers faced to finding work varied. Some continued to experience the barriers faced previously – such as few job vacancies or poor health - while others felt that SY/MF had helped address previous obstacles, mostly limited confidence or work experience. Most considered that participation had made them:

- Better equipped to find work (22) – through improved skills and employability (having a CV, interview training, experience of the workplace), and more motivated to find work;
- Clearer on the work they want to do in the future (21) – from their placement experience and training, although in some cases they identified what they didn't want to do.
- More confident in their ability to achieve their goals (16) - mainly after completing training modules (and receiving qualifications) and/or participating in a work placement, which demonstrated their capability to achieve and so raised their confidence further.

Some young people also reported outcomes relating to their own wellbeing, mainly that they felt happier/more positive after involvement in their projects (13) as they helped them set realistic goals, start making progress towards them, and so feel more optimistic about the future. In some cases participants reported that simply getting out and about, interacting with a wider range of people and being more active helped improve their outlook and wellbeing.

Examples of the benefits of participation cited are provided below.

Examples of benefits of SY/MF provision

Angela joined SY/MF shortly after leaving school, with no work experience. Her greatest barrier to work was confidence: "… *confidence to deal with people, and confidence to do an interview, because I've never had one*." Following employability training she progressed to a placement in a shop. She found that meeting and interacting with people helped develop her confidence. It also helped her develop an idea of what she wanted to do in the future: "*I met a lot of kids, a lot of kids would come into the shop, and I just thought that's what I wanna do with my life*." Having enjoyed working with children in the shop, she decided she wanted to work in a school. Consequently she applied to a teaching course, and at the time of interview was waiting to start.

Alison joined Moving Forward with no qualifications or previous work experience, and found the employability provision improved her confidence so she could start a placement in a shop. She found the placement challenging - *"I'm not very confident with people, so it was a bit of a shock when I got there. It was a very busy place – you've got to work your section and do the tills…. it's not really something that I'd like to do"*, and she left the placement early citing personal reasons. Although yet to find work, she felt her experience had been useful and she had gained a lot from it. The employability provision was the most useful, receiving an accreditation but also in raising her confidence: "*I think I benefited from the certificate, because it shows you that you can do it".* Her placement helped develop her confidence further: "*It helps being in a place with a lot of people... and as well as work, it's given me confidence to go out into shops and different places, whereas before I wouldn't talk to anyone."*

Edward started SY/MF with no previous work experience or training, and felt that his lack of a CV was the main barrier he faced to progressing. He undertook employability training with the project, but found paid employment before starting a placement. After working in a call centre for six months before going to college, where he is currently studying his second year of a full-time business course. Despite not completing, SWN 092 says the support he received played a key role in helping him get to where he currently is: "*They were the ones who helped me with [making a CV] and getting a job, which made me able to do other things like move out, pay my own bills – which all came from the project… [without it] I would be stuck in the same situation, definitely*."

5.4 The Early Leavers

Interviews with the 10 young people leaving their projects early (i.e. prior to achieving an accreditation or more than six weeks of a work placement) explored the reasons for their early exit, and what if anything would have made them remain engaged for longer.

Those who left early did so **at different stages and for a number of different reasons**: positive, negative and circumstantial. The majority terminated their participation within the first one or two weeks of joining the project, with one leaving prior to, and the remaining two in the early stages of, their work placements. The more 'positive' exits included two leaving early to take up employment opportunities identified independently, and one to take up a college place. While two early leavers refused to disclose their current status, the remainder were not in work and had been inactive since leaving their projects.

While the **reasons for exit** were clear for those progressing to positive destinations, a combination of other reasons were cited. In many cases young people left for reasons beyond the projects' control, such as disruptions in their private lives, moving out of the area or as a result of poor physical or mental health (which had made them unable to progress to a work placement). A small number of individuals described leaving the project after 'losing contact' with project workers – interpreted as disengaging of their own accord.

The most frequently cited reasons for disengagement were, however, associated with the work placements. Some reported dissatisfaction with aspects of their placements, while others left due to a perceived delay in arranging a suitable placement or a lack of local opportunities. In common with the findings current participant interviews, it was clear that the work placement was the main attractor for the early leavers. In several cases it was clear that the young people had expected to move swiftly, if not directly, to a placement opportunity – and when this did not happen or was delayed they decided to leave the project.

Early leaver examples

Calum completed the employability phase before progressing on to a placement, although he left after less than four weeks as he was not given the opportunity to do the work he expected, as was most attracted to, during it.

After leaving the project he found a job working in another sector, before finding a job working in the kitchen of a pub. He attributed his success in finding work primarily to family connections, although considered that his experience from Moving Forward helped a little: "*It probably made me a bit more confident – and I went through some interview techniques and I think that helped me a bit and boosted my confidence. And I know I only had four weeks experience, but that counted a little bit.*"

Jonathan went to college after finishing school, but after being expelled decided to join SY/MF. He took started the employability provision, but was unable to start a placement after several employers turned him down at the last minute and he consequently left the project early. He has been NEET since leaving SY/MF and is currently in receipt of ESA and Disability Living Allowance. However, feels he gained confidence from the employability support and said that despite not getting the placement he was still "*quite satisfied*" with the project.

Consequently the most common suggestion for change, which may have led to the young people sustaining their participation, related to the work placements. The most common complaint was that they had been offered or taken up placements which they found boring, and where they would have preferred to have been offered a wider choice. For others, more rapid progression to a work placement was the main change suggested – although whether their expectations were reasonable given their employability needs remains unclear.

Finally, the early leavers held mixed views about whether, and the extent to which, they had benefited from their participation. In some cases even their limited participation was felt to

have helped them secure their current job or training provision, while others felt that participation had helped increase their confidence, and provided experience that had been useful since leaving the project. Others, particularly those whose involvement had been limited, did not feel they had gained anything from their project.

5.5 Experience of the Project

The early leavers' experiences of their projects were broadly positive, with high levels of satisfaction (averaging 1.9 on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being highly satisfied) and almost all saying they would, and had, recommended the project to their friends.

The former participants commonly found the interview skills and maths and English provision in the **employability stage** the most helpful, increasing their ability to seek work and their confidence and capability of securing it. While only a few had undertaken vocational training, it was valued in helping acquire skills directly relevant to their future work areas.

Participants' views on their **work placements** were generally positive, with the benefits including gaining experience of the workplace, developing personally and increasing their motivation to find permanent work. A few reported problems with their placement providers – either that they did not enjoy their assigned work and/or they felt that they were not being offered the type of work initially promised. Some also felt that the range of placements on offer could have been broader, in terms of location or the range of job types offered.

Experiences of the **mentor provision** were mixed – and evenly split between those who reported never being offered a mentor or that their assigned mentor did not maintain contact with them, and others who regularly saw their mentor (every one or two weeks). Those in regular contact were generally positive about the support received, stating that they provided a point of contact and acted as a valuable and consistent source of support. Others who did not recall being offered a mentor did not feel that this had been a problem for them.

Around a quarter of the interviewees (10) had received provision similar to SY/MF previously, and for most the project compared well, mainly due to the paid work placement. However the use of small learner groups and a clearer support structure were also mentioned. In the few cases where previous provision was preferred, the reasons included other programmes offering a work placement followed by apprenticeship or college training.

Most former participants struggled to think of anything that they would change about the project, apart from the issues with the work placements described above. One additional area for improvement related to the opportunity to do additional vocational training prior to the placement, to enhance individual employability further.

5.6 Concluding Comment

Overall interviewees' experiences of their projects were positive, with even those not completing reporting benefits. Strengths included:

- Compared to some other programmes, learner groups participating in pre-employment support are relatively small, meaning participants feel they are well supported and in receipt of a good amount of personal attention.
- When delivered effectively, the mentoring system can offer positive benefits, and offer an additional source of support if problems are experienced.
- Both the employability provision and work experience placements have played important roles in developing participants' confidence and equipping them with the skills and experience to successfully move on to work of education after the project.

Nevertheless issues were identified in the interviews, providing a series of key learning points:

- Ensuring placements start as soon as possible would help reduce rates of learner drop out. While some placement non-completers left the project due to factors outside the

project's control, others reported leaving when placements were slow in forthcoming.

- Those seeing a mentor regularly were positive about the support offered, but others reported seeing mentors either infrequently or not at all. Those seeing a mentor regularly considered they had benefited, supporting the finding that such provision can be useful.

6 Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons for the Future

This section provides our conclusions and recommendations, and consolidates the key learning from the evaluation for similar projects in future.

6.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the implementation and effectiveness of the Getting Ahead SY/MF project, and the extent to which it has achieved its priorities in terms of:

- Delivering a third sector-led initiative offering six month work placement opportunities, paid at the national minimum wage, to young people participating in the project;
- Ensuring that all participants have undertaken an Essential Skills Assessment, and as required to improve their employability achieved an Essential Skills qualification;
- Developing an effective referral process working with the Welsh Government, Local Authority Looked after Care Teams (LACTs) and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs);
- Providing personal support to young people appropriate to their needs to maximise the benefits of the work placement where this is required before, during and after the 6 month work placement; and
- Improving the life chances of young people aged 16 to 18, NEET, and with histories of offending and/or the care system, and helped them progress into further learning or sustainable employment by increasing their employability skills.

The extent to which these priorities were achieved, and findings on the effectiveness of delivery and the benefits and outcomes achieved by its participants, are provided below. One key finding, reported consistently throughout the study and across all consultees, was that SY/MF represented a unique offer to the target groups it served in most areas of Wales, and offered a valued support option for young people facing particular challenges.

6.1.1 The project model

The project was established to offer provision across all of Wales for target groups whose characteristics and needs meant they were unlikely to benefit from mainstream NEET provision, and for whom alternative provision was limited. The project featured a partnership of third sector providers with experience of supporting young people facing disadvantage to improve their life chances and move towards, and into, employment. A common model was followed across all local authority areas, tailored to fit local circumstances and needs. This represents a considerable achievement, and provides both a template and a series of lessons for similar interventions in the future.

The project 'offer' centred on a 25 hour per week, six month work placement paid at the minimum wage, which followed an preparatory eight week period of employability and Essential Skills provision. The work placement emerged as the primary attractor for the project, for both young people and in many cases the organisations referring them, although the young people referred were commonly found to be some way from being placement (and work) ready. This could lead to unrealistic expectations amongst participants, in some cases fuelled by the organisations who referred them, and which could lead to early exits when they did not progress directly to placements.

The key components of the project model and discussed below.

6.1.1.1 Referral and engagement

The numbers of young people referred to, and engaging with, the project exceeded the targets set for the project by some way. A total of 1,096 young people were referred, of whom 933 engaged, with the referral process working well in general. The projects worked closely with local authority looked after children teams and YOS representatives, and other referrers including Careers Wales, to secure referrals from the outset. Where providers were

known locally, pre-existing relationships allowed the process to operate smoothly, whereas providers new to an area had to take steps to inform referrers of the project offer and develop the necessary trust and understanding to facilitate referrals. In all cases, **investing time and effort in building relationships with local referrers was, and should be, a key priority for the early stages of implementation**. Referral rates by local authority area varied, with challenges faced including competition with existing provision and challenges resulting from rurality and dispersed populations.

A change in project process in Year 1, with local projects managing their own referral and assessment processes due to capacity issues within the partnership, was felt to have streamlined and improved this process. However, while the young people referred met the stated referral criteria, the scale and level of the barriers and challenges they faced exceeded expectation. Challenges faced in securing and maintaining engagement included:

- Continued chaotic lifestyles and family circumstances, and including continued offending and risk taking behaviour, and alcohol or substance abuse;
- Mental health problems, behavioural disorders or learning disabilities; and
- Low self-esteem and a paucity of aspiration – combined with previous negative experiences of learning at school or college.

While the projects' ethos of not turning referrals away was laudable, it is clear that some were not ready, able or prepared to engage to the extent necessary for progression to result, which was reflected in the numbers of young people exiting early. **In future, discussion with referral agents in advance to set 'thresholds of need' may be appropriate.**

For some young people financial barriers were also an influence, as they or their families could lose out on benefit payments as the skills training offered was not recognised as formal training provision. Similarly the loss of housing benefit payments for those taking up placements also presented barriers in the later stages of delivery. **Planning for future interventions should consider how they will influence welfare benefit payments, and seek to minimise any negative effects as far as possible**.

For the most part the referral information received on individual young people was adequate for assessment and planning purposes. However a few instances were reported where key information was missing, for example for an individual with a history of sexual offences which limited potential placement options. While such instances were rare the potential risk they posed was high, and **projects should agree 'minimum information requirements' for young people referred** to ensure such risks are minimised.

6.1.1.2 Employability and skills provision

While the work placement was the main attractor for the majority of participants, the young people often showed limited interest in the employability and skills provision, at the outset at least. However, many of those consulted considered that the skills gained had made an important contribution to helping them move forward, despite their initial reservations.

Frequently, conversely and for many of those participating, the eight weeks (or 13 weeks as introduced later) of employability skills provision was not sufficient to prepare them for a placement, and many remained in this phase of the project for considerably longer. One finding was that it is impossible to be prescriptive from the outset as to the duration, and intensity, of preparatory provision given the range of needs and accompanying factors displayed by the majority of the participants. For some attending provision for two hours a week signified success, while for others the eight week wait for a placement could be off-putting. **The position taken by the projects, which allowed progress to take place at the client's pace while retaining the objective of starting a placement, was correct.**

As well as allowing progress at the individual's pace, strengths of the employability and skills provision included: delivery on a small group or one to one basis; the quality and determination of the tutors, and the establishment of trust between them and their clients; the

use of the modular Agored Cymru/Essential Skills qualifications; and the emphasis placed on influencing attitudes, personal relationships and behaviours as well as specific learning outcomes.

6.1.1.3 *Work placements*

Some 453 young people started placements, 83% of the initial target of 546 and representing 41% of all those referred and 48% of those engaging. Placements were offered in a range of sectors, most commonly retail, followed by construction (where CYT took the lead on identifying and managing placements) and the hospitality and catering sectors. While retail placements were the most common, the use of charity shops could limit the extent to which placement hosts could offer permanent employment opportunities.

Work placement availability was considered to be good by the ELOs, who identified placements individually rather than relying on banks of employers from the outset. While this allowed for a high degree of tailoring, it was inevitable that placements did not always match participants expressed preferences, and took considerable time to arrange. In practice, as time went on, ELOs developed relationships (or continued ones in place already) with employers who had taken placements previously.

Just 150 young people completed their work placements, below both the initial and revised targets of 436 and 181 completions respectively - although the revised target could be achieved on the basis of ongoing placements at the end of September 2016. Young people exited their placements for both positive (such as finding alternative employment) and negative reasons (poor behaviour, lack of commitment and disappointment at the nature of the placement or the absence of support from hosts).

Key factors in supporting placements included: identifying risks early on and intervening to support; discussing the challenges facing a young person placed; frequent communication and encouraging employers to adopt flexible approaches to working hours, at the start of the placement at least. One factor which helped maintain commitment to a work placement was **early engagement with the ELOs during the employability provision**. This allowed the ELO and participant to meet and discuss the type of placement they would like, while evidencing to the participant that steps were being taken to secure their placement so maintaining their engagement. A second tactic followed was the **use of 'work tasters'** – short term placements to introduce participants to the demands of the workplace and help them prepare for a longer term placement.

However, in some cases the young people's continued chaotic lives, variable commitment and lack of preparedness for the demands of the workplace meant that many were unable to complete. **In future, it may be worth considering more flexible placement durations to meet the capabilities of the individuals involved or, as was happening by default in some cases, a succession of placements of increasing duration.**

As described previously, one barrier to placements for participants living independently was the loss of housing benefit, which in some cases made them worse off than before they were receiving a wage. In response, the project introduced the option of a 35 hour a week placement, with employers making a financial contribution, and offered to those who were at risk of financial loss or felt capable of maintaining the additional commitment. This was considered a positive change by all, and allowed some older participants to benefit from the higher salaries and greater responsibility.

6.1.1.4 *Supporting participation*

Young people were supported on their journey through the different stages of the project by their tutors and ELOs, who after the first year of delivery were also responsible for the referral, assessment and engagement stages; transitioning young people between the employability and work placement components; and providing support for young people in a range of circumstances, in addition to delivering their individual remits.

The provision of flexible, tailored and personalised support throughout the project was seen as a key factor and a widely recognised strength amongst referrers, participants and stakeholders, and it is clear that tutors and ELOs have been creative in delivering the core employability provision and extending the services offered to meet individual needs. In effect, the tutors and ELOs took on a 'lead worker' role with participants during their time with the projects. Despite their best efforts, however, the combination of high levels of needs and challenges amongst the participants and the limited time to address them contributed to the high exit rates experienced.

For future projects, it will be important to **ensure that those responsible for supporting young people are adequately resourced to meet the high support needs of the target group**, given the level of need and associated demand for their services. Alternatively, **a 'key worker' model should be considered**, where each participant is allocated a single worker to support them throughout the project, smooth the transition between stages and into post-project support, and allow tutors and ELOs to focus on their specific remits.

One aspect of the project which worked less well was the offer of a **mentor** for each young person. Here capacity issues, combined with limited demand and variable promotion by the projects, meant that few mentor relationships were established and sustained. One commonly cited factor on engagement was that the young people already had a number of individuals in their lives, some of whom played similar roles. However, where relationships were established, benefits for the young person resulted, leading to the conclusion that mentoring can have a role in provision of this nature if it is well resourced and targeted.

6.1.1.5 Post-project support

While arrangements were in place in Years 1 and 2 of the project to develop exit plans with young people, and offer support for their implementation post-project, project staff reported not always being clear on responsibilities for implementing the post-project support. In Year 3 measures were put in place to clarify responsibilities, with ELOs being charged with engaging with participants six weeks before their placements completed. However, the extent to which this was implemented consistently is unclear, with alternative approaches (such as direct support from tutors, and the establishment of a job club) were identified in the final project case study visits. Although it is too early to comment on the effectiveness of these approaches, future projects should **consider the inclusion of comprehensive post-project support, for example through the continued involvement of a 'key worker'**, to help ensure the momentum established during the project is maintained, and that positive outcomes secured are sustained.

6.1.2 Benefits and impacts

As described above, the number of young people receiving accreditations, and starting and completing placements, was below the initial targets set for the project. One challenge in establishing the impacts of the project was the absence of destination data for former participants, outside of that collected for the 150 young people completing their placements and for a small share of those leaving early. However, on the basis of this data post project outcomes were impressive, with:

- Two thirds of those completing their placements securing positive outcomes –over half (55%) progressing to employment on exit, 8% to further learning and 3% to volunteering; and
- Of the 173 young people leaving their projects for whom exit destinations were available, 91 reporting progressing to employment, three to apprenticeships, 44 to college and 38 to alternative learning – although how representative these outcomes are of all 823 leavers is unknown.

Although the extent to which the destinations achieved are sustained is unknown, fieldwork with previous participants showed continued positive progression building upon their project

experiences. Despite this, and illustrating the continued barriers facing many of those referred, one third of the completers remained unemployed on exit.

The project MI failed to capture the breadth of the benefits resulting for many of the participants – first, as described above, due to data on post-project destinations being limited, and second as 'soft' outcomes were not included in the project KPIs from the outset. The evaluation found that, for many of those participating, soft outcomes best represented their achievements under the project, where increases in confidence, self-esteem, the commitment to change and a sense of achievement were reported. Given the characteristics and histories of the young people participating, and their distance from the labour market, this is unsurprising, and further emphasises both the scale of the challenges faced and the **importance of including measures of distance travelled in project KPIs**.

Similarly, the limitations on post-project destination data meant that subsequent progression was not routinely collected, and **introducing routine follow-up with participants 3 to 6 months post exit is recommended**. Such follow-up activity would also allow the opportunity for further post-project support to be offered where an individual participant's outcomes or destinations are at risk, or to re-start their forward momentum.

In conclusion, it is clear that SY/MF has been a highly beneficial for many of the young people participating in it, particularly but not exclusively those completing the full six month work placement. For many, participation has provided evidence that they were able to achieve, perhaps for the first time in their lives, and so established a forward trajectory to be built upon in future. While many of the former participants interviewed for the study exiting early for 'positive' destinations attributed their outcomes to the project, limitations of the MI data available meant that the true scale of impacts resulting cannot be quantified.

6.2 Key Lessons for Future Projects

The evaluation identified a range of lessons for consideration in the planning and implementation of projects working with similar target groups in the future. Findings from earlier sections of this report are consolidated below:

6.2.1 Referral and recruitment

Here project staff should:

- Develop relationships with referrers early-on, and be prepared to invest time and resources into this – particularly when they are new to an area. Establishing trust and mutual ways of working are key to effective referral procedures.
- Agree 'minimum information requirements' in advance to ensure eligibility, inform effective individual planning and minimise any risks by the full disclosure of relevant information.
- Build a clear understanding of the purpose and aims of the project amongst referrers, and manage their and their clients' expectations in terms of activities and potential outcomes achieved (in this case progression to a work placement).
- Jointly with referrers, manage referral numbers and agree protocols on selecting the clients who would benefit most from the project. This could also involve setting thresholds for the levels and types of needs the project can address, and the risks associated with potential participants. In this case this would mean re-considering the policy of accepting all clients regardless of the level of need.

6.2.2 Engagement and assessment

- While the paid work placement was the key attractor, a distinctive and supportive learning environment is required to engage young people in employability and skills training. Although considered less attractive at the outset, on reflection the employability and skills phase provided key benefits for many participants.

- Prospective participants can experience a range of challenges that may preclude or discourage their participation - some are financial or circumstantial, but others relate to personal factors that may prove too great a barrier for initial engagement.
- Initial engagement, assessment and planning is more effectively undertaken by the project where the young person will receive provision - in order to maximise efficiency, consistency of support, and facilitate appropriate assessment decisions. Here the potential to follow a 'key worker' model should be considered, to lead on these areas as well as supporting progression through the project.
- The ability to respond rapidly following referral is key to maintaining interest and fostering engagement, and for developing early relationships between, in this case, young people, tutors and ELOs. This also allows the emphasis to remain on the work placement and allow ELOs to begin the matching process.

6.2.3 Employability and skills training

- The employability and skills training works well when it is bespoke; flexible; emphasises development of positive attitudes and behaviours; addresses specific learning barriers; is welcoming to diverse academic backgrounds; is based in relaxed small group settings with intensive support; and is driven by an ethos of care and trusted relationships between tutors and learners.
- The nature of the client group means that many will need support on an ongoing basis to best prepare for a placement/work. There is a balance to be struck between attaining 'work readiness' in its fullest sense and sustaining engagement in the project – here work tasters may play a useful role.
- Engagement in skills training and the acquisition of accreditations may be the most that can be expected of some clients in the early stages of their journey to employment. This means that skills training provision must be flexible and adaptable to reflect participants' capabilities, expectations and ambitions – both in terms of coverage and duration.
- A financial incentive to attend is of some value but must be sufficiently priced and take account of participants' financial and benefit circumstances, and may most usefully be targeted towards specific young people.
- Maintaining engagement for Route 3/the most disadvantaged participants relies on intensive support and flexibility on attendance balanced with necessary structure and discipline, and a diverse learning programme.
- Work tasters offer a way to engage participants, test their behaviour in a work context, and improve their transition to a full time placement.

6.2.4 Work placements

- To minimise disengagement, it is crucial that work placements are found quickly for those that are work ready – although managing expectations is key to avoid placing those who are not ready. Where placements are not immediately available, ELOs and/or learning providers should consider strategies for maintaining engagement, such as work tasters or additional learning units.
- Engaging employers takes a great deal of work, which represented a challenge early in the project. ELOs need time to develop relationships with employers, and to learn which ones are the most suitable for their clients. Keeping stock of potential placement hosts should be considered to allow placements to be matched rapidly.
- There is a difficult balance to be struck between meeting participants' workplace preferences, which can take time, and providing a swift placement start. While the sector in which young people are placed was important, more important was the ability for the placement to offer a supportive and developmental environment.

- It is important to ensure there is sufficient ELO capacity to deliver their roles – identifying and securing placements, matching and engaging participants, monitoring and supporting throughout the placement period and providing post-project support.
- Having good support for young people during the placement is key to its success, which involves the early identification those at risk of dropping-out, providing wrap-around support, working closely with employers, helping young people with the practicalities of working life, and being readily available to young people.

6.2.5 Supporting participants

- Central to the effective provision of ongoing support throughout the project is good partnership working between project staff and referrers (personal advisors, social workers, youth offending officers etc.). This is most effective when it is consistent and systematic.
- Support was most effective when there was close working between tutors and ELOs, which offers consistency of support and shared information, as well as effectively managing the transition between the employability training and work placement phases.
- Tutors and ELOs can perform a de facto 'key worker' role, but this is a major call on their time, distracts their attentions from their intended remits, and there are limits to their ability to deal with a host of specialist and complex issues.
- There would thus be value in the future projects of this nature including a dedicated key worker role. This would provide continuity of support to participants throughout the project and allow key workers to assist them in managing specialist and complex issues.
- Adequate administrative resources must be ensured to allow the 'front line' to focus on supporting clients.
- The mentor role was less effective given the combination of limited mentor supply, low demand from participants and a lack of clarity around their overall purpose. However, mentoring has the potential to add value if targeted well and adequately resourced.
- Post-project support was under-developed in the first two years and should be considered as an essential element of sustaining engagement and building on the progress of participants in future.

6.2.6 Targets and target setting

Finally, the targets set for the project at the outset were, on reflection, considered to be unrealistic by the majority of the stakeholders. While the high levels of referrals and engagement evidenced both the demand for the project and the absence of similar provision in most areas, the shares expecting to achieve qualifications or progress to, and complete, six month work placements was unrealistic.

It was clear that the project underestimated the influence of the barriers and challenges facing the young people, and their individual and collective distances from the labour market, and in basing the project KPIs on 'harder' outputs and outcomes missed the softer outcomes which represent progress towards longer term impacts. A more realistic approach would be to link targets to the development of soft skills and developing progression pathways as well as placements – work tasters could provide a useful intermediate point – and future KPIs could better reflect this progress.

More widely, future projects should ensure that any targets set are underpinned by evidence from similar interventions, acknowledging that the unique nature of SY/MF made this challenging at the start.