

# **Mercers' Transitions Special Initiative**

## Year 1 Evaluation Report

Alix Robertson, Will Millard and Sam Baars, **The Centre for Education and Youth**



**Alix Robertson** is an Associate at The Centre for Education and Youth. She brings both journalism and teaching experience to the team, where she has developed short films about special educational needs and disabilities for the Department for Education and Whole School SEND. She has also explored the barriers that Latin American young people face in accessing UK higher education for King's College London and worked on evaluations for Action Tutoring and The Mercers' Company.

She started out as an English teacher at a secondary school, where she ran a student magazine and mentored vulnerable pupils. A desire to interrogate challenges in the education system led her to go on to take an MA in journalism. She then worked for sister papers FE Week and Schools Week, winning awards for her investigations and reporting on subjects including college finances, multi-academy trusts, and the experiences of women and LGBT people in education.

Alix volunteers with the charity Keen London, helping to organise and run activities for young people with disabilities.



**Will Millard** is Head of Engagement at The Centre for Education and Youth. He has extensive experience designing and implementing research projects, and above all strives to ensure this research leads to action that will improve the lives of young people. Will has led major projects on careers education and work experience, assessment, oracy and the achievement of disadvantaged groups.

He is experienced in helping organisations enhance their impact on young people, and is currently leading a three-year evaluation of careers programmes across London, funded by the Mercers' Company. Will also led our three-year Arts Council England-funded evaluation of creative writing in schools. Will presents and blogs extensively on a wide range of issues affecting children and young people. A qualified teacher, Will began his career working in a large secondary school in North West London. He is a founding trustee at I Can Be, and has two Masters degrees in public policy.



**Dr Sam Baars** is Director of Research and Operations at The Centre for Education and Youth. Sam has particular interests in youth research, area-based inequalities and social science impact. He has experience designing and conducting research projects drawing on a range of methods, from film-based participatory research to systematic literature reviews and large-scale survey analysis. Sam believes that robust, innovative social research is the key to tackling the barriers that prevent some young people from making fulfilling transitions to adulthood, and he channels this belief into his role overseeing research at The Centre for Education and Youth. Sam has recently been involved in projects for the Department for Education, Ambition School Leadership and King's College London.

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

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

# 1 Contents

1	Contents .....	1
2	Executive summary .....	1
3	Introduction.....	4
4	Delivery .....	9
5	Self- and organisational-efficacy .....	35
6	Aspirations, pathway awareness and destinations .....	42
7	Implications.....	45
1	Career Ready .....	47
2	EY Foundation.....	48
3	Drive Forward Foundation .....	48
4	Construction Youth Trust .....	47
1	Defining 'seldom heard' and 'disengaged' .....	50
2	Factors leading young people to become 'seldom heard' and/or disengaged .....	51
3	Engaging and inspiring 'seldom heard' and/or disengaged young people.....	53
4	References .....	62

## 2 Executive summary

### Introduction

The Mercers' Transitions Special Initiative was established to support young people to make successful post-secondary transitions. The Initiative provides funding to four partner organisations ('partners'), delivering careers-focused work to young people across London. Additional partners will join the Initiative and be incorporated into the evaluation in future years.

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

### Who has been involved?

Across the first year of the Transitions Special Initiative, the four partners have worked with 12,813 young people, 58 schools, 17 Virtual Schools and 190 businesses<sup>1</sup>.

### Which young people are involved?

The Transitions Special Initiative is focused on improving transitions from education into training and employment for young people experiencing disadvantage across London. Correspondingly, the four partners' work focuses primarily on 'seldom heard' young people, meaning those who are:

- Lacking supportive relationships
- Holding 'misaligned' aspirations
- Care-experienced
- Experiencing poor health and wellbeing
- Experiencing systemic disadvantage (such as racism and poverty)

### What are the partners' objectives?

While the four partner organisations take different approaches to delivery, they share a number of objectives in terms of supporting 'seldom heard' young people. They seek to:

- Support future planning for young people, including boosting understanding of possible pathways and identifying suitable options
- Provide new opportunities that the young people would otherwise not access
- Build networks with employers and people who can provide support and advice
- Develop workplace and life skills, such as confidence, motivation, and communication

### How do partners recruit 'seldom heard' young people?

The four partners use a range of different approaches to recruit 'seldom heard' young people onto their programmes, including:

- Promotional materials
- Recommendations by trusted contacts
- One-to-one communication
- Recruitment events and visits
- Self-selection

---

<sup>1</sup> These figures are based on evaluation data submitted by the four partners. The figure for businesses represents organisations rather than individuals.

### **How do partners tailor delivery for 'seldom heard' young people?**

The partners tailor their delivery in order to meet 'seldom heard' young people's needs through offering:

- One-to-one support
- Group activities
- Experiential learning

### **What are the success factors for programme design?**

Programmes highlighted a range of factors that underpin effective delivery, as well as barriers that can impede it. Despite the partners' differing models, there was considerable overlap in the success factors they highlighted, and these include:

- Connecting with existing local provision
- Making stakeholders' lives as easy as possible
- Codesigning and refining interventions with young people and other stakeholders
- Meeting young people's learning needs and access requirements
- Developing trusting partnerships

### **How have partners adapted delivery in response to Covid?**

The coronavirus pandemic has profoundly affected the four partners' work with young people, and in particular has led to the:

- Cancellation or postponement of events
- Cancellation of in-person support
- Destabilisation and demotivation of young people
- Disruption to communication with stakeholders
- Disruption to data access and documentation
- Disruption to internal staffing

The partners have responded to this by, for example:

- Moving to remote forms of contact, primarily involving online and telephone calls, but also using social media to communicate
- Changing the focus of communication with young people, providing them with counsel and support to help come to terms with the pandemic
- Networking with local businesses online to fill shortfalls in employer support

### **How do the programmes shape young people's self-efficacy?**

Throughout the year, the programmes have contributed to improvements in young people's self-efficacy in the following areas:

- Growing confidence and wellbeing
- Developing work- and life-relevant skills
- Building networks
- Understanding what employers want

### **What are schools' experiences?**

The teachers we spoke to were overwhelmingly positive about the programmes' impact on young people, highlighting how the combination of activities have improved their pupils' confidence and focus.

### **What are employers' experiences?**

Employers' feedback was also positive, and partners' evaluation data and our own conversations with employers indicates that they:

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

- Are willing to re-host participants
- Use the young people's perspectives to refine certain business functions
- Perceive the programmes as a means of developing the talent pipeline
- Believe supporting the programmes can help current employees develop their skills

**How do the programmes shape young people's aspirations, pathway awareness and destinations?**

The partners' combined work has led to gains in young people's:

- Awareness of specific jobs and industries
- Awareness of different academic and vocational pathways
- Career planning
- Aspirations
- Destinations

### 3 Introduction

#### 3.1 The Transitions Special Initiative structure

The Mercers' Transitions Special Initiative was established to support young people to make successful post-secondary transitions. The Initiative provides funding to four partner organisations ('partners'), delivering careers-focused work to young people across London. Additional partners will join the Initiative and be incorporated into the evaluation in future years.

*Initiative structure*

Year	Involvement		
	Cohort 1 (x4 partners)	Cohort 2 (x3 partners)	Cohort 3 (TBC)
2019-20			
2020-21			
2021-22			
2022-23			

#### 3.2 The partner organisations

The four 'Cohort 1' partners are:

*Table 1: Mercers' Transitions Special Initiative partner organisations*

Organisation	Focus
Career Ready	Providing whole-school careers-focused interventions for 11 to 18-year-olds, alongside one-to-one and small group activities for disadvantaged pupils, including paid internships.
Construction Youth Trust	Providing activities such as one-to-one coaching and work placements to help 15- and 16-year-olds particularly at risk of becoming 'NEET' (Not in Education, Employment or Training) after leaving school, with a focus on skills relevant to the construction industry.
Drive Forward Foundation	Providing one-to-one support to care-experienced young people aged 15 to 18, to help them make positive decisions about their futures.
EY Foundation	Providing activities including careers workshops and paid work-experience for young people in Lewisham, including those at risk of becoming 'NEET', with a particular focus on engaging local employers.

Further information about each partner and its approach is presented in Appendix 1.

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

### 3.3 Evaluation framework, principles and structure

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

#### 3.3.1 Evaluation framework

The four partners' work is very different. In collaboration with Mercers' and the four partners, CfEY has designed an evaluation framework against which to report our findings. This framework will provide us with a basis on which to compare findings year-on-year and across the programmes, while taking into account partners' different modes of delivery and impact.

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

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

Our report is structured around these five areas. As subsequent cohorts join the Initiative, their impact will be reported against this same framework.

This year's evaluation has focused on delivery, so we have combined 'aspirations', 'pathway awareness' and 'destinations' in this report (Section 5).

#### 3.3.2 Evaluation principles

CfEY has been guided by the following principles in its work with Mercers' and the four Cohort 1 partners. Our evaluation sets out to:

- Describe and capture the four partners' (very different) work
- Explore the work partners are doing individually, while ensuring we can talk about the Initiative from a 'bird's eye view'
- Enable us to compare outcomes across the three years

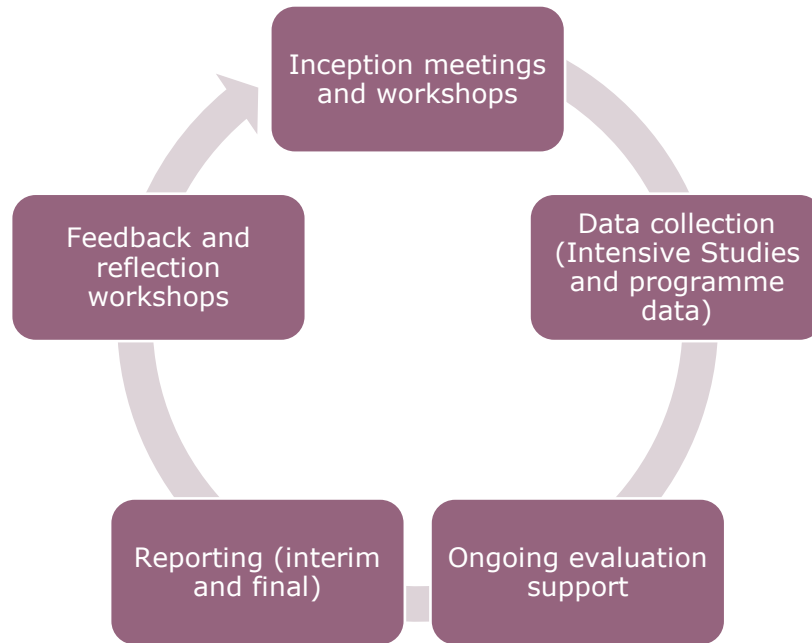
This evaluation does not seek to provide detailed information about each individual partner's impact. Partners will report separately to Mercers' on their achievements. The evaluation captures the impact of work underway across the Initiative, providing Mercers' and the partners with a picture of impact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

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



### 3.3.3 Evaluation structure

Each year, our evaluation adopts the following structure:



#### Inception meetings and workshops

CfEY facilitated a workshop (hosted at The Mercers' Company offices) with the four partners in July 2019. This provided an opportunity for CfEY's evaluation team to introduce themselves, and the evaluation. The partners introduced themselves and learnt about one another's programmes.

After this meeting, we met each partner one-to-one, asking them about their priorities for the Mercers'-funded work and how CfEY could best support them. We requested that partners submit their theories of change, evaluation frameworks, and data and safeguarding policies in order to audit their existing provision.

We also asked each organisation what they would like the Year 1 Intensive Study to explore.

We reconvened the four partners in October 2019, to agree the overarching evaluation framework (see above), and the focus of our Intensive Study.

#### Data collection

Throughout the 2019-20 academic year, CfEY collected data in two ways:

1. **The Intensive Study.** CfEY designed a bespoke research project or 'Intensive Study', examining a question the partners identified as important to them<sup>2</sup>. This year's Intensive Study explores the question:

---

<sup>2</sup> Our plan was initially to undertake two Intensive Studies. However, instead the partners identified one, larger Intensive Study.

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

***How should we (and our stakeholders, including employers) inspire and engage 'seldom heard' and/or disengaged young people?***

For this year's Intensive Study, CfEY:

- a. Reviewed the existing evidence on engaging and inspiring 'seldom heard' and disengaged young people (see Appendix 2)
- b. Interviewed four experts (including practitioners and academics):
  - *Hardip Begol, CEO of Woodard Academies Trust*
  - *Jacky Lumby, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southampton*
  - *Fatema Chowdhury, Skills Project Officer in the Education Unit of the Department for Community & Children's Services at the City of London*
  - *Luke Billingham, Youth & Community Worker at Hackney Quest*
- c. Interviewed the four Cohort 1 partners
- d. Interviewed 13 stakeholders working with the partners, including teachers and employers
- e. Held four focus groups with 24 young people involved in each programme

All participants gave informed consent to engage with the research.

We analysed the raw data from the Intensive Study fieldwork in two stages. Firstly, we tagged all the interview transcripts (totalling over 170,000 words) with a pre-determined set of tags or 'codes' to identify the main themes. This resulted in 1,500 tagged extracts of data. We then coded each of these extracts again, highlighting sub-themes. We used tests to make sure our judgments about which tags to use were consistent between multiple researchers in the team. We present our analysis of the themes and sub-themes from the Intensive Study throughout this report.

This year's Intensive Study was identified prior to the Covid pandemic. However, we refer specifically to how the pandemic has affected partners' work in Section 4.8 and draw lessons for next year's delivery and evaluation throughout our report.

Each year, CfEY will undertake one or two Intensive Studies (depending on scope and scale), for each cohort. As in Year 1, future Intensive Studies will explore an issue or theme identified by the cohort partners during the inception workshops and one-to-one meetings.

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

**Ongoing evaluation support**

CfEY provided partners with individual support in relation to their own evaluations. This involved ad hoc guidance as required (for example, about the appropriate tools for measuring certain outcomes), as well as designing resources so that partners could undertake evaluation activities more easily. For example, we designed resources including a data sharing agreement, model ethics and consent forms, and model data storage and protection pro formas.

**Reporting**

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

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

**Feedback and reflection workshops**

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

## 4 Delivery

### 4.1 Who has been involved?

Across the first year of the Transitions Special Initiative, the four partners have worked with 12,813 young people, 58 schools, 17 Virtual Schools and 190 businesses.<sup>3</sup>

	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
Partner	Number of young people		Number of schools/virtual schools/colleges		Number of employers	
Career Ready	No target	12,000 (Whole school programme)	45	44	No target	154
	500	512 (Plus programme)				
CYT	50	45	No target	6	No target	28
DFF	80	65 (Enrolled)	32	17	No target (Employer engagement key focus for Years 2 and 3)	1
	60	47 (Frequently engaged)				
EY Foundation	300 (Employability workshops)	179 (Employability workshops)	6	8	120 (Business Volunteers)	93 (Business Volunteers)
	45 (Our Future programme)	12 (Our Future programme)				

Below, we outline what this involvement looked like for each of the four partners.

#### Career Ready

Career Ready worked with 12,000 young people through its whole school programme.

512 students were involved in the Plus Programme, of which around a third report being eligible for free school meals. Many of the pupils on the Plus Programme are BAME, and over half have parents who did not attend university.

Career Ready worked with 44 schools across London and the South East, and over 1,000 employers nationally with 154 of these coming from London.

#### Construction Youth Trust

The Construction Youth Trust (CYT) worked with 45 young people. Around two thirds were boys. Over half of the students involved declared their ethnicity as Black, mixed or 'other', and a quarter were eligible for free school meals. Two-thirds had been identified

<sup>3</sup> These figures are based on evaluation data submitted by the four partners. The figure for businesses represents organisations rather than individuals.

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

as at high risk of becoming NEET, and a small number are care-experienced, have a disability, or have previously been in trouble with the police.

CYT worked with six schools in London and had 53 unique volunteers from 30 different organisations that supported the young people attending the course. Of the 30 organisations involved, 28 were employers.

### **Drive Forward Foundation**

Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) had 65 care-experienced young people enlisted on its Breakthrough programme, 47 of whom were frequently engaged. (DFF is monitoring the progress of the remaining 18)<sup>4</sup>.

This year DFF has worked with 17 Virtual Schools in boroughs across London. DFF is currently working with one employer for the Breakthrough programme, with other relationships in the pipeline.

DFF is working with one cohort of young people across three years.

### **EY Foundation<sup>5</sup>**

Twelve young people were involved in the first year of the Our Future programme. All were from BME backgrounds and all had been eligible for free school meals. 179 young people took part in within-school workshops.

The EY Foundation has worked with eight schools. Through Our Future, young people have participated in 21 work placements with seven different employers. The EY Foundation also secured 16 business volunteers from 14 organisations to take part in its Our Future virtual business experience week in July.

## **4.2 What challenges do the young people face?**

The Transitions Special Initiative is focused on improving transitions from education into training and employment for young people experiencing disadvantage across London. Correspondingly, the four partners' work focuses primarily on 'seldom heard' young people who are:

- Lacking supportive relationships
- Holding 'misaligned' aspirations
- Care-experienced
- Experiencing worse health and wellbeing
- Experiencing systemic disadvantage (such as racism and poverty)

---

<sup>4</sup> In addition to its core Breakthrough programme, DFF runs other activities. We include these separately here, as some young people attend multiple sessions (and may therefore be double-counted in aggregate figures). DFF delivered 121 meetings in-person and online, and three Saturday Link Up sessions were attended by 74 participants (moving from in-person to online after lockdown). 25 young people attended Career and Insight days.

<sup>5</sup> The figures given here show EY Foundation's recruitment for Year 1 of its work, which ran from May 2019 to January 2020. Since then it has recruited additional cohorts for Year 2.

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

The four partners in Cohort 1 consequently identified the following question as the focus for this year's Intensive Study<sup>6</sup>:

***How should we (and our stakeholders, including employers) inspire and engage 'seldom heard' and/or disengaged young people?***

We refer to our findings from this year's Intensive Study throughout this report, drawing on our literature review (Appendix 2) as relevant. In this section of the report, we define the terms 'seldom heard' and 'disengaged' in the context of partners' work, highlighting who the four partners support, and the key barriers facing these young people.

#### **4.2.1 Defining 'seldom heard' and 'disengaged' and barriers to participation**

A wide range of factors can contribute to a young person becoming 'seldom heard' or 'disengaged'. Our Intensive Study explored how the terms 'seldom heard' and 'disengaged' are defined both in the wider literature, and by the four partners and their stakeholders.

Importantly, the partners expressed a preference for the term 'seldom heard', which is more attuned to the systemic barriers young people can face. Conversely, 'disengaged' (alongside terms such as 'hard to reach') can imply that young people are in some way at fault. Some young people *do* become disengaged with their education, but this tends to be because the system has failed them. Throughout our evaluation we therefore use the term 'seldom heard'.

'Seldom heard' young people are not a homogenous group; young people can become 'seldom heard' for a wide variety of reasons, and we explore these, below.

##### **Lacking supportive relationships**

'Seldom heard' young people often lack support that their peers take for granted. This can lead to them becoming disengaged from their education.

Access to experiences and guidance (for example, from people in employment able to offer advice about specific pathways) is crucial in providing young people with relevant and timely support. Young people we spoke to highlighted that they can feel ostracised from such networks, and that involvement in careers programmes can help ameliorate this:

***"I want to be a lawyer but if I didn't have Career Ready or other programmes that my college offered me I wouldn't be able to reach out to people to gain the experience, the internships, the work experience that I need to put me [the] extra step ahead. [These programmes reach] out to students who want and try hard to gain the qualification for the profession and gain the experience but don't necessarily have the network or the facility to do so."***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Career Ready

Young people who have experienced marginalisation throughout their lives "need a warm, caring, consistent, persistent, reliable relationship with an adult who can really

---

<sup>6</sup> Our methodology for this Intensive Study is described in Section 2.

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

show that they care”, explained youth worker Luke Billingham from Hackney Quest. Unfortunately, these same young people can lack trust because of what they have experienced growing up, which can make forging relationships with adults challenging. For example, CYT works with young people who are close to or have already dropped out of school, meaning they feel disengaged and lack trust in the system. Building trust with these young people presents a significant challenge.

CYT said that a lot of the young people they work with “are crying out for a role model”. Feeling affinity with role models can help keep young people engaged in their education, and re-engage them if their motivation slips, aiding their transition out of secondary schooling. This was corroborated by Hardip Begol, CEO of Woodard Academies Trust, and Jacky Lumby, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southampton. Crucially, role models help widen children’s reference points for what is possible:

***“Certain young people [...] just can’t see themselves doing certain roles or working in a certain industry or just working in a certain organisation.”***

Fatema Chowdhury, Skills Project Officer in the Education Unit of the Department for Community & Children’s Services at the City of London

Often these young people do not feel listened to, and this limits their willingness and ability to build relationships. This can be an issue for both ‘loud’ and ‘quiet’ young people, with the former perceived as ‘challenging’ and the latter as “just getting on with things”. Hardip Begol explained that for both groups their conduct is misunderstood and consequently their needs are not met. The partners therefore face a challenge in getting to know young people, and identifying how best to support them.

### **Holding ‘misaligned’ aspirations**

When professionals such as teachers feel young people’s aspirations are ‘misaligned’, it can lead to them imposing their own views about what is ‘correct’. Definitions of ‘success’ are deeply rooted in class, race and gender (and other structures), and can result in young people feeling pressure to abandon aspirations their teachers feel are inappropriate:

***“You can have success but only if you switch to seeing value in things that you didn’t grow up seeing ... What you thought was great suddenly is seen as somehow tacky.”***

Professor Jacky Lumby, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southampton

Practitioners’ biases can lead to young people being funnelled towards inappropriate pathways. For example, Hardip Begol warned against assuming poorer students may in some way be better suited to practical jobs, and richer ones to more academic routes. As our literature review explores (see Appendix 1), evidence indicates that practitioners’ biases can affect young people in all sorts of ways, from their achievements through to their pathways post-secondary school.

Misaligned aspirations can affect young people with both high and low prior attainment. One interviewee said unless young people are part of the “top, top group”, they are “written off”. However, young people with high prior attainment may be overlooked because they are not perceived as ‘needy’ enough, and therefore become disengaged because they are not sufficiently stretched. That said, interviewees said that sometimes

***‘Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood’***

young people's ambitions are inappropriate or unfeasible (becoming a professional footballer, for example), and need to be challenged so that the young person develops a back-up plan. The partners occupy difficult territory, balancing the need to open horizons and shift aspirations, whilst honouring young people's interests and values.

'Seldom heard' young people are sometimes unable to capitalise on appropriately ambitious opportunities when they do arise. For example, Luke Billingham explained that a fear of failure can lead to young people making "snap decisions" resulting in them "passing up more appropriately-ambitious opportunities". In other circumstances, young people may reject opportunities that they feel are not for 'people like them'. For example, being asked to change the way they talk, walk or dress because it might be viewed negatively by employers can lead young people to feel like outsiders, and lead them to believe that certain settings are not for them. Interviewees suggested this can disproportionately affect young people from BAME backgrounds.

Partners face a challenge in balancing the realities of the working world (with its dress codes and behavioural norms), while making it accessible to young people.

'Seldom heard' young people are at increased risk of becoming NEET, and therefore pursuing risky avenues to earn a living. For instance, Luke Billingham spoke specifically about the drug market in certain areas of London. For some young people this can seem "a lot more achievable, appealing, and kind of accessible" than trying to build a career through legal means.

### **Being care-experienced**

Being care-experienced is an important way in which young people can be 'seldom heard'. This is particularly relevant to DFF, whose work focuses on young people in care.

Being in care presents a barrier in terms of young people's involvement in the programmes. This can be logistical, for example getting permission from foster carers to participate, or paying for transport or food while on placements. Care-experienced young people are more likely to have been involved in crime and substance abuse<sup>7</sup>, and this past behaviour can limit future opportunities when completing application forms that ask about criminal histories, or completing blood tests for work placements (for example, on construction sites). Juggling time with birth and foster or adoptive families can impede young people's time to engage with the programmes.

Challenges can also be emotional: care-experienced young people often carry trauma and accompanying feelings of anger and distress, and this can impede their ability to engage with programmes.

This issue is compounded because professionals including education and youth practitioners, and employers, often do not understand what it means to be care-experienced, which inhibits their ability to respond to challenging behaviour:

---

<sup>7</sup> See for example: Aynsley, A; Bradley, R; Buchanan, L; Burrows, N; Bush, M. (2017). Childhood adversity, substance misuse and young people's mental health. Retrieved from <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1547/ym-addaction-briefing.pdf>

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



***"[Young people's] ability to manage and organise themselves is often limited. Their responses may be unpredictable and often appear to be much more aggressive and defensive than you would expect them to be."***

Helen Priest, Headteacher Of Bromley Virtual School, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

Care-experienced young people are especially at risk of becoming NEET, or of being exploited by gangs.

### **Experiencing worse health and wellbeing**

The partners work with young people with forms of special educational need or poor mental health. These young people are quite literally less likely to be 'heard' by practitioners when the young person is unable to communicate in the way others are used to, or if the adults around them are unsympathetic to their needs.

Inappropriate access arrangements can make communication more difficult, and this can lead to young people internalising feelings of shame and embarrassment.

### **Experiencing systemic disadvantage**

Poor living conditions and financial hardship dramatically increase young people's chances of becoming 'seldom heard'. One teacher working with students on Career Ready's programme described their situation as "basically surviving and not really living". Interviewees noted that these young people's circumstances mean accruing work experience or other extra-curricular opportunities that will help them stand out to colleges and employers is more challenging.

Furthermore, these young people can face material barriers to education, in terms of access to places for quiet study, or reliable internet connections.

Young people on EY Foundation's programmes highlighted other systemic barriers, including experience of racism, and holding refugee or asylum seeker status.

### **Implications**

- Organisations and policymakers should resist any temptation to define young people's circumstances in broad brush strokes. 'Seldom heard' young people are not a homogenous group, have a wide range of different experiences and face many different combinations of challenges and barriers.
- Organisations working with these young people must actively seek to understand the contexts from which children come, and how this may affect their needs.
- Organisations must provide these young people with opportunities to explain their needs and ambitions.
- Organisations should avoid imposing their own views and preconceptions on young people, in order to enable students to develop their own personal aspirations.

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

## 4.3 What are the partners' objectives?

While the four partner organisations take different approaches to delivery, they share a number of objectives in terms of supporting 'seldom heard' young people. They seek to:

- **Support future planning** for young people, including boosting understanding of possible pathways and identifying suitable options
- **Provide new opportunities** that the young people would otherwise not access
- **Build networks** with employers and people who can provide support and advice
- **Develop workplace and life skills**, such as confidence, motivation, and communication

### 4.3.1 Support future planning

All of the partner organisations seek to support young people in planning for the future. This involves improving young people's awareness and understanding of possible pathways, and then identifying suitable options.

However, this goes further than simply choosing a job. The partners talked about the importance of helping young people reflect on what would make them happy, and identifying pathways that align with their values:

*"[Young people say] it's very important to them in their careers that they want to have a positive impact and make a difference so we're doing an event with the GLA around what they do, volunteering opportunities, how they can feed into policy and also as well careers longer term in the GLA."*

Partner Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

There is a balance to strike between the goal of expanding young people's horizons through improving their knowledge and providing constructive criticism, while also building their self-esteem:

*"They are getting their self-esteem being impacted positively ... [T]heir sense of self and their self-esteem is being developed through this programme ... it is doing what it set out to do which was to give them a broad experience that will help them to focus on their futures and hopefully that focus will then secure their present for them a little bit more."*

Helen Priest, Headteacher of Bromley Virtual School, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

### 4.3.2 Provide new opportunities

All four partners seek to provide young people with experiences and opportunities that they otherwise would not access:

*"Anything, absolutely anything that can give them a glimpse of what the future might hold for them and give them a hook to hang their lives on and their futures on, that will keep them on track: that's very, very important."*

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

Helen Priest, Headteacher of Bromley Virtual School, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

We look at what these approaches are, and how they impact upon young people, below in sections 4.5 and 5.1. A big emphasis for the partners is letting young people experiment with different options and providing a safe space in which participants can explore ideas.

Another way in which the partners seek to provide young people with new opportunities is by working with employers to shift attitudes towards recruitment:

***"We get young people ready for work and careers ready for young people. The vision is that young people furthest from the labour market have the opportunity to pursue a meaningful and fulfilling career."***

Partner Focus Group, EY Foundation

Partners also seek to indirectly create opportunities through working with schools to improve the careers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) they offer young people:

***"A good example would be that we know that in industry there are loads of unfilled jobs within construction. Teachers don't recognise construction as a high-paying or a career-fulfilling sector that students will do well in."***

Partner Focus Group, Career Ready

### **4.3.3 Build networks**

Networks and social capital are hugely important for young people breaking into the jobs market. All the programmes seek to help young people build their networks with employers and people who can provide support and advice.

An important aspect of the partners' work is linking young people with large employers, as this gives valuable experience that young people can use to stand out when applying for work in future. This is an incentive for young people to join the programme:

***"I feel like through Career Ready I can build a nice bond with big companies and in the future... it's a good way to actually make [employers] more interested in you, and [lead to] them employing you rather than other people."***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Career Ready

Some partners focus directly on building relationships. For example, relationships sit at the "core" of DFF's work. Others focus on relationships more indirectly, building up connections through young people's involvement in a variety of different activities. DFF describes its programme staff as "midway between a carer, a teacher, a social worker".

### **4.3.4 Develop workplace and life skills**

Helping young people to develop both life and workplace skills is a central goal for all of the partners. The partners aim to improve young people's:

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Focus and motivation
- Knowledge of job applications and interviews

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

- Knowledge of workplace behaviours and etiquette
- Problem solving and analytical skills
- Communication
- Leadership
- Understanding of employers' expectations
- Practical life skills, such as how to handle money

## 4.4 How do partners recruit 'seldom heard' young people?

The four partners use a range of different approaches to recruit 'seldom heard' young people onto their programmes, including:

- Promotional materials
- Recommendations by trusted contacts
- One-to-one communication
- Recruitment events and visits
- Self-selection

### 4.4.1 Promotional materials

The promotional materials the partners use to attract 'seldom heard' young people onto their programmes include hard copy materials such as flyers and leaflets, and online materials including websites and videos.

DFF sends publicity materials by post, and this helps engage 'seldom heard' young people by giving them a clear introduction to the organisation, its aims, key personnel and programme structure without needing access to the internet, which some of its target service users do not have. However, DFF sometimes finds foster parents (whose details DFF has been given by the borough) are reticent to open post.

Career Ready publishes case studies from young people who have completed the programme on its website and social media. One young person explained they had seen a video about the Career Ready programme, shown during a school assembly. The video featured "one of the cool kids" from their school speaking about how he had got an apprenticeship following the programme, as well as meeting "amazing people" and "learning new skills". The pupils said this video had motivated "a lot" of her peers to sign up to the programme.

The EY Foundation staff said that young people on the Our Future programme prefer face-to-face interactions over promotional material, such as presentations in school settings.

### 4.4.2 Recommendations by trusted contacts

Recommendations from trusted figures in the young people's lives are an important way the partners recruit 'seldom heard' young people. Such figures include peers, family members and trusted professionals.

As we discuss, above in Section 4.2.1, these young people have often been through negative experiences that have eroded their trust in adults. In these cases, support or recommendations from trusted adults are all the more valuable because they make the young person feel safe and secure in getting involved.

We spoke to young people on the Career Ready, CYT and DFF programmes who mentioned the programme had been recommended to them by friends, siblings or older children who had been in previous cohorts. Again, this was helpful for 'seldom heard' young people, reassuring them that a peer had 'tested the water' before they tried getting involved themselves.

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

In some cases, trusted contacts can take some persuasion because they are protective of the young person or people they support. For example, the EY Foundation has had to win over teachers concerned that the programme might be too challenging for their pupils. In these instances, emphasising young people's agency – that they can choose *not* to be involved – is an important way of winning these adults round, while also ensuring the young people themselves do not miss out.

Some partners communicate with other stakeholders to gather information about young people and build buy-in. For example, DFF communicates via email and in-person with children's Virtual School Heads, asking how the programme can augment support already on offer in the area where the child lives. DFF works with local authorities to identify children who might benefit, but contacts foster families directly as sometimes there can be mistrust between families and social services. DFF then asks foster carers to introduce the programme to their child, before requesting they invite DFF staff to the house to meet the family.

EY Foundation works with other service providers including sports clubs, as candidates for its Our Future programme often have low school attendance rates. Meanwhile the Smart Futures programme uses information from schools in order to seek out young people who sometimes are not perceived as "deprived enough" for other programmes:

***"They're not risky enough ... That's not to say their voice isn't worth something, but where do they go in the system?"***

Partner Focus Group, EY Foundation

#### **4.4.3 One-to-one communication**

Partners stressed that websites and social media are key for recruiting 'seldom heard' young people, offering a 'direct line' to young people themselves.

The partners work with vulnerable young people, and consequently have to gain the trust of gatekeepers. For example, DFF invests considerable energy in building rapport with children's foster carers. While it used to gather foster carers together at one event, DFF now adopts a one-to-one approach, convening meetings at locations convenient for families; often their homes. DFF has found that while this is more labour intensive, it is a more effective way to build rapport with foster carers and has resulted in a higher conversion rate of young people joining the programme. During meetings, staff clarify the programme's aims, and what it offers young people:

***"The language used with the child is: 'I'm not here to make decisions about your life, I'm not a social worker. We're here to do this for you.'"***

Partner Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

EY Foundation uses a wide range of in-person and electronic communication including social media, phone calls, emails and in-person presentations and meetings. Such a diversified approach suits the Foundation's target audience, who can be hard to reach via any single channel of communication, with some of the most disadvantaged young people unable to pay for data on their phones.

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

#### 4.4.4 Recruitment events and visits

Events including recruitment fairs and in-school presentations not only get young people interested but help to secure buy-in from teachers and school leaders, who hear first-hand from young people about the benefits. Career Ready said this helps schools see how the programme will add to existing provision, and CYT said that where they can become a trusted partner of a school, "recruitment is easy". Their young people gave lots of examples of the team coming to visit them at school, which they said they found "reassuring" and "inspiring".

***"[CYT were] involved in a class, and our teacher kind of made sure that we really took to them, and we enjoyed the way that they taught and we understood them, and they were easy to speak to, and [we] wanted them to come back. And then they just worked with us from there."***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

One of the programme staff also commented on the value of school-based events from a parent's perspective:

***"Being a parent myself, I think when you see that type of employer engagement from the school where students are having internships and mentors coming from the City or from a diverse range of sectors, it's a big pull for a parent."***

Partner Focus Group, Career Ready

Career Ready conducts interviews for some of its programmes in young people's schools, and one teacher explained this can be beneficial for 'seldom heard' young people, bypassing any challenging relationships they have with their teachers.

DFF invites young people to attend a pizza night where they can find out more, and one participant said this was "really cool" because it made them feel valued.

The young people we spoke to said they particularly appreciated hearing from programme alumni.

#### 4.4.5 Self-selection

Young people can self-select onto DFF's programmes. This has benefits, meaning participants are more likely to be engaged throughout the programme. However, this approach also has drawbacks. For example, one interviewee said that self-selection can mean the young people who might benefit the most will not put themselves forward:

***"This is really important, this child needs to do it. Because I'm absolutely sure that more of our children could have taken it up and would have benefitted."***

Helen Priest, Headteacher of Bromley Virtual School, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

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

### Implications

- Organisations should adopt a multi-pronged approach to recruitment involving online and hardcopy materials and in-person sessions. This approach is greater than the sum of its parts, making organisations more likely to reach 'seldom heard' young people than they are with any single approach.
- Organisations should use social media, as it provides a direct line to 'seldom heard' young people. However, this method should not be relied upon in isolation, given some young people do not have easy access to the internet.
- Organisations should encourage recommendations by trusted contacts, which provide a powerful means of recruiting 'seldom heard' young people. Sharing success stories involving popular peers and engaging trusted adults such as teachers, youth workers and carers appear particularly effective.
- Organisations should work closely with other agencies including local boroughs, schools and charities to identify and recruit 'seldom heard' young people. Speaking with multiple agencies makes 'catching' the young people most in need more likely, especially if their school attendance is low.
- While face-to-face contact remains limited, organisations should still invest time in one-to-one contact with young people and trusted contacts. This is labour intensive, but appears to yield a high conversion rate.
- Organisations should use self-selection with caution, and perhaps alongside recommendations from other professionals to ensure the young people who will benefit most join the programmes.



## 4.5 How do partners tailor delivery for 'seldom heard' young people?

The partners tailor their delivery in order to meet 'seldom heard' young people's needs through offering:

- One-to-one support
- Group activities
- Experiential learning

### 4.5.1 One-to-one support

Each partner deploys one-to-one support, involving catch ups with programme staff (in-person or over the phone).

Several programmes involve mentoring, providing young people with a bridge between their current lives and the world of work:

*"I think the mentors are there to support them with general employability, understanding how they manage their career and how they think about their skills in relation to their career and what the world of work looks like."*

Partner Focus Group, Career Ready

*"The other thing about volunteers and the sessions that we've developed is how we can relate subjects that they're learning at school to life, to real life experiences, especially in the construction industry."*

Partner Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

We look in Section 4.6 at how partners ensure mentoring is effective.

### 4.5.2 Group activities

The partners' programmes also involve group activities, which are designed to meet young people's needs by focusing on:

- **Career-relevant knowledge**, such as CV writing and 'Introduction to the workplace' workshops with Career Ready
- **Making constructive decisions**, such as DFF's knife crime workshop with the Ben Kinsella Trust, visiting a mock jail, and sleeping 'rough' to learn about homelessness. Young people said they found these activities engaging because they perceive these risk areas as relevant in their lives
- **Career-relevant skills**, such as watching and delivering presentations, as per EY Foundation's employer 'pitches', designed to model good presenting to the young people and equalise power relationships:

*"We change the dynamics around. Rather than the young person pitching to the employers for work, the employers will pitch about their different businesses and why the young person should work for them. It's nice because it changes the relationship a little bit between the young person and the employer."*

Partner Focus Group, EY Foundation

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

Many of the young people commented that they had found these group sessions useful in helping them learn how to work as part of a team, communicating their ideas clearly as well as learning how to listen properly to others:

*"They helped me with like leadership skills and teambuilding skills with various different workshops, and they taught me how to get my voice across and listen to other people."*

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

The DFF team emphasise the importance of young people enjoying fun activities together in order to bond with their peers and coaches. For example, young people on the Breakthrough programme attend a 'Go Ape' climbing experience. These activities matter, because developing trust and positive relationships is key to keeping the young people engaged with the programme.

### 4.5.3 Experiential learning

Young people participate in a range of experiences designed to help them develop skills and competencies for transitioning effectively into further training or employment. This experiential learning involves:

- **Workplace visits.** These give young people a feel for new and unfamiliar environments, and can therefore help prepare them for internships.
- **Internships and work placements.** These longer placements give young people the opportunity to work in a particular setting or industry. The partners support their young people on internships in a number of ways, and we outline these, below in Section 4.6.5.
- **Job application and interview practice.** The partners help young people locate and write applications, and prepare for interviews, for example in interactive workshops and through mock interviews. Again, we examine success factors for this, below in Section 4.6.5.

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

## 4.6 What are the success factors for programme design?

Programmes highlighted a range of factors that underpin effective delivery, as well as barriers that can impede it. Despite the partners' differing models, there was considerable overlap in the success factors they highlighted, and these include:

- Connecting with existing local provision
- Making stakeholders' lives as easy as possible
- Codesigning and refining interventions
- Meeting young people's learning needs and access requirements
- Developing trusting partnerships

### 4.6.1 Connecting with existing local provision

Linking with existing local provision is an important aspect of the partners' work, and something that enables programmes to support 'seldom heard' young people. This involves:

- **Liaising with local authorities.** For example, DFF works with councils to identify and recruit care-experienced young people.
- **Working with schools.** For example, Career Ready plans activities a year in advance with its schools, to ensure proposed activities fit around their timetabling, and CYT designs activities in collaboration with its schools, to ensure activities fit with students' and schools' curriculum planning. Partners also said that having a 'link' member of school staff acting as a single point of contact helps the programmes run smoothly.

DFF works with Virtual Schools, because these are so closely involved in young people's lives and well placed to help DFF design programme content that will augment existing provision.

- **Working with other youth service providers.** For example, CYT communicates with local authority teams in order to access young people whose school attendance can be low. The EY Foundation maps existing youth provision in the areas in which it operates, to ensure it augments rather than duplicates existing provision.
- **Working with local employers.** The partners all talked about the importance of forging strong relationships with local employers able to support their programmes, for example by providing mentors or hosting work placements. For example, the EY Foundation in particular has established relationships with SMEs in Lewisham to enable it to achieve its programme aims.

This work can be labour intensive, partly because it relies upon employers' goodwill:

***"They're giving their people and their time and often giving their money as well to support the organisation."***

Partner Focus Group, Career Ready

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

This contact with employers is an important success factor for the young people enrolled on the programmes because 'seldom heard' groups often find it hard to get access to good quality work experience or internship opportunities, as we explore in more detail in Section 4.6.

The partners stress that working with employers does not stop once they have signed up to provide mentors or host work experience. The partners support employers throughout the programme, and we look at some approaches to this below in Section 5.3.

#### 4.6.2 Making stakeholders' lives as easy as possible

Recruiting stakeholders such as schools and employers is a critical part of the partners' work, and they can face challenges in persuading stakeholders to participate. Partners said that in order to recruit and retain schools and businesses, they do lots of the 'behind the scenes' work to minimise the burden on these stakeholders. Actions the programmes take to streamline schools' and businesses' involvement include:

- **Making the case.** Schools and employers value partners making it clear how involvement in the programme will benefit young people. Something schools particularly value is the links partners offer to employers, and the specialist input for certain students in need of additional support (for example, those at risk of becoming NEET). Employers value the programmes' support in meeting their corporate social responsibility goals, young people's input on specific issues (such as communications and marketing), and the 'common good' of improving the talent pipeline.
- **Managing the recruitment process,** handling applications and coordinating interviews. This includes hosting sessions at school or another location convenient for young people wherever possible.
- **Providing 'ready-made' information packs** for schools, employers and parents about the programmes, and support materials to mentors and volunteers to help them structure their interactions with young people.
- **Reducing financial costs** to schools and businesses as much as possible. Career Ready no longer charges school fees, and this has been a "game changer", enabling the organisation to target schools because of young people's needs, not because of schools' ability and willingness to pay (which is often a barrier). These costs have been covered through sponsorships from funding partners.
- **Centralising HR processes** including insurance, health and safety assessments, and DBS checks, as these are all technicalities that can put schools and employers off getting involved.
- **Communicating clearly and promptly.** One stakeholder praised DFF for being "always accessible":

*"[Francis will] always email me back at any time, or contact me if I call him. So, yes, he's been brilliant in terms of contact."*

Catherine Doyle, Head of School at Newham Virtual School for looked-after children, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

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

Conversely, employers said it was frustrating when information about young people is shared late, as it leaves them with insufficient time to prepare for supporting them on work placements.

Career Ready and EY Foundation host employer networks, at which employers discuss the programmes, their needs, and how they can continue to best support the young people involved. Employers value support in designing suitable objectives for the young people they work with.

- **Keeping appropriate data on the young people involved**, and sharing this safely. Collating data about the young people involved means that the programme teams can brief stakeholders (such as volunteers and host employers) accordingly. However, obtaining this information in the first place can be challenging. Individual schools can struggle to collate data, for example coordinating students' applications to join programmes. One college's Work Placement Officer explained that even in her own setting, she found keeping track of students' information challenging:

*"I'm not the tutor, I'm dealing with lots of tutor groups. It's not easy for me to communicate and find these students because they're scattered all over the place."*

Juliet Atkins, Work Placement Officer at Lewisham College, Stakeholder, EY Foundation

A stakeholder working with DFF said that young people's achievements should be more systematically shared back with their social workers.

- **Aligning with stakeholders' timetables.** Ensuring programmes align with stakeholders' timetables is one of the biggest challenges the four partners face. In addition to the logistical challenges of timetabling, schools are also concerned about the opportunity costs of involvement and the fact students will not be in lessons, a problem exacerbated in settings where staff do not consistently view careers education as a priority:

*"If you're going to have a partnership or you're going to take on a project like Career Ready, because it's a massive consumption of time, you think about all the masterclasses, all the actual internships, the ones that get there, the recruitment process, the interviews, the amount of hours and time that takes is quite large."*

Carl Kemp, Careers Coordinator at George Greens School, Stakeholder, Career Ready

This can also be stressful for young people, and in particular in year 11 prior to their exams. Some young people must also balance involvement with the programmes with part-time jobs. Career Ready ensures that the programme can be embedded within the school timetable and sessions can be broken down into bite-size chunks to make this process easier.

### 4.6.3 Codesigning and refining interventions

Each programme codesigns interventions with their young people and other stakeholders. For example, the partners work with young people at programme

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

inception to identify their aspirations and objectives, by interviewing them and asking them to complete questionnaires. This means provision can be planned that meets individual young people's needs, such as finding work placements that relate to their areas of interest.

Furthermore, the programmes liaise with other stakeholders including teachers (Career Ready, CYT and EY Foundation) and social workers and Virtual School Heads (DFF) to identify suitable activities for their young people.

Programmes also respond flexibly, adapting delivery where required. For example, staff at CYT said they do not deliver activities simply because they are 'in the diary', and will rearrange these if students need more time to prepare. The EY Foundation and Career Ready both discussed adjusting activities in order to fit around changes in school timetabling, meaning young people could still attend the activities. This also means programmes can intervene when a young person's engagement dips:

***"If we feel like there's a lack of motivation from that young person, there will be an open conversation with the teacher or the year leader or the careers advisor about that. What can we do together?"***

Partner Focus Group, EY Foundation

Young people commended DFF for finding new opportunities, where the organisation's existing network did not meet young people's needs (see below in Section 6.1). Another important part of the DFF programme is 'pacing', adapting activities so that young people feel able and willing to engage:

***"Going to them where they're at, being willing to travel to them for those early stages, meeting them where they're at. We call it 'pacing'; we're going at their pace. 'We'll come to your house, we'll come to your school if you're happy, we'll do it at a time that suits you.'"***

Partner Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

#### **4.6.4 Meeting young people's learning needs and access requirements**

The partners each take steps to meet their participants' learning needs and access requirements. This involves:

- **Personalising learning.** For example, the partners talk with young people at programme inception to identify learning goals and objectives. They also regularly gather feedback (see section 3.8). For example DFF uses feedback from its Saturday Links Ups to review young people's progress and refine their objectives.

Young people particularly value sessions that meet them 'where they are', acknowledging they may have never applied for an internship or job before, or written a CV.

- **Supporting specific access needs.** For example, DFF was praised for helping young people to arrange transport so they could safely get to events. EY Foundation staff said that when they realised some young people do not have access to a computer or email, they responded by lending them a laptop. They

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

also have a crisis fund, enabling programme staff to provide young people with financial support:

*"Some 'Our Future' young people have said to us, 'I don't know if I'm going to spend my money on food for my family, or travel to my job'. We'll be like, 'hang on a minute, let's have a conversation'. The travel for the young person to the programme location [...] is covered by us. We do have a crisis fund and we will intervene."*

Partner Focus Group, EY Foundation

Stakeholders said that getting paid work experience makes a significant difference to 'seldom heard' young people. This can be particularly important for young people who take time off from their part-time job to attend the programmes:

*"Even though [a young person] was on the course, he found it hard interacting with people because he needed to go back [to his job] to make his money. All he kept thinking about was how much money he is losing by being here."*

Construction Youth Trust, Partner Focus Group

Partners, stakeholders and young people cited written and verbal communication as a key challenge for some of the young people involved. This is a particular challenge for students speaking English as an additional language, and for those more used to communicating via social media than more formal channels such as email.

- **Regularly checking in.** The programmes ensure teachers and employers are regularly checking in with programme participants. For example, Muhammad Hussain is assistant lead for sixth form at Petchey Academy, and supports Career Ready students in weekly meetings. He checks in with them to ensure they have remembered key events, and to help them plan their time. He also uses this time to help them to complete applications.

Luke Collins, a teacher at Pimlico Academy, does the same for his students on the CYT programme. He explained that this sort of support can be especially valuable for young people with additional needs.

#### 4.6.5 Developing trusting partnerships

Every partner emphasised how individual partnerships are key to ensuring young people's experiences on the programmes are rewarding, and that they stay engaged.

##### Mentoring

Mentoring is an important relationship on these programmes. Partners said mentoring relationships are more effective when they:

- **Get off to a good start.** Initial conversations between mentors and prospective mentees help to set the tone of future meetings, and helps the mentor understand what the young person wants to get out of the relationship. For example, Career Ready mentor Simon Stern said this helped him to understand young people's backgrounds and ambitions:

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

***"It does come down to that personality and that ability to communicate at all levels, because we're not communicating with chief executives or banks or whatever, we're communicating with 17-year-old students."***

Simon Stern, Mentor, Career Ready

Partners often provide mentors and mentees with structured activities in order to scaffold these initial meetings and help the relationships get off on the right foot. For example, Career Ready gathers mentors and mentees at a group mentoring event, before mentoring commences. The pairs engage in ice-breaking activities, such as writing and presenting a short pitch 'selling' a simple product.

- **Openness and balance.** Mentoring relationships are more effective when they are open: where the mentee feels they can ask candid questions, and mentors can offer real-life experiences, advice and encouragement, and challenge myths about careers such as needing to find a 'job for life'. For example, Carl Kemp said:

***"When you see corporate organisations it's like these big scary companies, but actually there are normal people that work in there that went to school, that have children, that went to university or went down the apprenticeship route etc. [...] It becomes less scary."***

Carl Kemp, Careers Coordinator, George Greens School, Stakeholder, Career Ready

Career Ready endeavours to match young people to professionals from industries or backgrounds that can support them on their career journey.

Where young people lack confidence or struggle to form trusting relationships with adults, they can be particularly nervous about mentoring relationships as these feel intimate and exposing.

- **Establish clear expectations about commitment.** While partners try to streamline stakeholders' involvement to make it as easy as possible, they also have to set clear expectations for volunteers who do sign up. Sometimes they drop out, which has a potentially damaging effect on the young people involved:

***"Volunteers can be tricky to recruit. Like young people, they can drop out at the last minute unfortunately."***

Partner Focus Group, EY Foundation

### **Internships and placements**

Partners help to ensure internships and work placements are meaningful for 'seldom heard' young people and host organisations in a number of ways.

Firstly, they provide supervision from company and programme staff, ensuring young people feel supported in relation to their professional duties and if any personal matters arise. This involves on-site visits to the young person from programme staff as their internship commences:

***"When they're on their internship placement they also have a supervisor to support them if they have any kind of personal issues or things which may come out of their life which may be a barrier for them to be on internship."***

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



### Partner Focus Group, Career Ready

Secondly, partners link internship and placement opportunities to young people's interests. For example, at CYT, Pearl O'Keeffe had worked hard to support young people to prepare for applying for apprenticeships by arranging practice interviews with someone from the relevant trade.

Thirdly, partners provide information to the hosting employers, so that the employer can sufficiently support the young person. This includes information about the young person's interests and aspirations, and procedural information about what to do if the young person is late or absent during the internship.

DFF take this a step further, visiting settings before placements begin to ensure the young person will find the setting safe and supportive, and that the employer is prepared to give young people leeway if they are occasionally late or ill-prepared.

Where necessary, partners need to refine young people's expectations about work placements if their desired role is unrealistic given their age, or because of safeguarding or health and safety limitations. This issue is more specific to CYT because of the unique challenges posted by hosting work placements on construction sites.

#### **Buddy systems**

Another important type of relationship on the programmes are 'buddy' relationships between young people. CYT and EY Foundation employers have introduced buddy systems where the 'buddy' is separate to the young person's line manager, and on hand to talk informally about concerns or questions (such as where to find different rooms in the building). CYT sometimes buddies its young people with apprentices, providing role models:

*"They brought in a guy who was just starting his apprenticeship. They both really hit it off. So, we tried to keep that relationship going. [The young person] works really well with people a little bit older than him. You know, if anything, he needs a bit of a mature role model in his life."*

Luke Collins, Teacher, Pimlico Academy, Stakeholder, Construction Youth Trust

#### **Partnerships with trusted adults**

Several organisations partner with adults already known to the young people. For example, youth workers attend some of DFF's sessions, and the organisation works closely with Virtual School Heads, who help design DFF's provision. Working with adults with whom young people already have relationships also offers them greater consistency. The EY Foundation works with a commissioner of young people's services across different London boroughs, who is able to act as a broker between the Foundation and the young people. Collaborating in this way helps secure coherence and consistency for the young people. As Careers Coordinator at his school, Carl Kemp asks teachers for their insights on particular students, enabling him to "join up the dots" with Career Ready.

#### **Implications**

- Organisations targeting 'seldom heard' young people should aim to design their programmes in accordance with these principles, in

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

order to: connect with existing local provision; make schools' and businesses' lives as easy as possible; codesign interventions and adapt flexibly as required; meet young people's learning needs and access requirements, and; develop trusting relationships.

- Organisations should connect with existing local provision, liaising and partnering as relevant with local authorities, schools, employers and other youth service providers. This will help ensure provision augments rather than duplicates other local support.
- Organisations should make stakeholders' lives as easy as possible through taking on generic procedural and administrative tasks. This will free up schools and employers so that they can provide the support partners cannot.
- Organisations should codesign and refine interventions, working with young people and adults who know them well to identify the most relevant support and adapting this as required in light of young people's experiences on the programme.
- Organisations must meet young people's learning needs by personalising learning, supporting specific access requirements, and regularly checking in with participants in person and remotely (for example, online).
- Organisations must ensure their young people develop trusting relationships, and can support this through mentoring, internships and placements, buddy systems and partnerships with trusted adults.

## 4.7 How do the partners capture their impact on 'seldom heard' young people?

In the table below, we summarise how the partners capture feedback:

Data function	Feedback on young people's progress								Contextual data				
Data	Annual audit	Ad hoc verbal/written feedback from young people	Ad hoc verbal/written feedback from stakeholders	Formal verbal/written feedback from programme staff	Baseline, midpoint and endpoint data on impact	Young person surveys	Mentor surveys	Employer surveys	Follow-up interviews / destination data	Student demographic data	Case studies	Personality quiz	Attendance
Partner	Annual audit	Ad hoc verbal/written feedback from young people	Ad hoc verbal/written feedback from stakeholders	Formal verbal/written feedback from programme staff	Baseline, midpoint and endpoint data on impact	Young person surveys	Mentor surveys	Employer surveys	Follow-up interviews / destination data	Student demographic data	Case studies	Personality quiz	Attendance
Career Ready	Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
CYT		Y	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y
EY Foundation	Y	Y	Y	Where and if required	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
DFF		Y	Y	Y		Y		Y					

### Implications

- Feedback from the partner organisations to stakeholders, including school staff, volunteers and employers, was one area that could be developed further across all partner organisations.
- Response rate was a challenge in some cases, with the number of young people giving feedback decreasing as they move through the programme. The partner organisations should try to be flexible in the ways they gather feedback from young people, for example by making more use of alternative communication channels such as social media, in order to boost these data sets.
- Following up on employer feedback with the young people could be a way to make the most of this information and ensure that young people receive feedback they can put into practice.
- Going forward our evaluation should examine efficient, light-touch ways to standardise data collection, with partners gathering a 'common core' of data, within the co-created framework.

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

## 4.8 How have partners adapted delivery in response to Covid?

The coronavirus pandemic has profoundly affected the four partners' work with young people, and in particular has led to:

- Cancellation or postponement of events
- Cancellation of in-person support
- Destabilisation and demotivation of young people
- Disruption to communication with stakeholders
- Disruption to data access and documentation
- Disruption to internal staffing

The partners have responded to this by, for example:

- Moving to remote forms of contact, primarily involving online and telephone calls, but also using social media to communicate
- Changing the focus of communication with young people, providing them with counsel and support to help come to terms with the pandemic
- Networking with local businesses online to fill shortfalls in employer support

The coronavirus pandemic has inevitably disrupted partners' work. While we did not set out to explore the impact of the pandemic, our ongoing communication with the partner organisations, and the fieldwork underpinning the Intensive Study, gave us insights into some of its effects on the programme.

Here, we highlight some of the ways in which Covid has affected partners' delivery, and how partners have sought to mitigate against the disruption and uncertainty.

Key ways in which the partners' work has been disrupted include:

- **Cancellation or postponement of events.** This has affected Career Ready, EY Foundation and CYT's work placements, and DFF has had to postpone trips (for example to Thorpe Park).
- **Cancellation of in-person support.** Lockdown and social distancing have necessitated a move to exclusively remote interactions with young people, including online correspondence via zoom and email, phone calls and social media. Building relationships online has been difficult, and some young people have limited access to the internet, impeding their ability to participate. However, online forms of support have gone some way to ameliorating the pandemic's impact. EY Foundation currently intends to run all its services online until the end of 2021.
- **Destabilisation and demotivation of young people.** Unsurprisingly, the lockdown has affected young people profoundly. Many have found this destabilising and demotivating, adding to the stress and pressure they feel at an already important juncture in their education. The programmes target disadvantaged young people particularly likely to benefit from in-person activities, and it is these groups that have been hit hardest during the pandemic. While they were disappointed about missing out on planned activities, young people working with DFF said they felt stressed and anxious about the idea of in-person activities resuming. DFF is using its online platforms to work through these concerns with the young people.

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

- **Disruption to communication with stakeholders.** With schools closing and many companies furloughing staff, partners have found it challenging maintaining communication with their stakeholders. Some organisations have retracted support they had pledged over the summer. Again, there is no easy fix. EY Foundation is re-initiating conversations with businesses as employees return, about the future of their working relationship and focusing in particular on organisations who have previously hosted placements. EY Foundation has also recently linked with Lewisham-based SMEs who have increased capacity now that their business models have shifted to more online interactions.
- **Disruption to data access and documentation.** With documentation in locked offices, some partners have been unable to access data for their programmes. For the EY Foundation, this documentation was predominantly volunteer, school and participant feedback from community workshops, as this was collected in paper hardcopies.
- **Disruption to internal staffing.** Some partners have had to furlough their own staff, affecting internal capacity.

Young people talked in focus groups about the work the partners have done to keep the programmes in place:

*"Even in these difficult times, [programme staff have] stayed in contact and really reassured us that, just because this has happened, they've not dropped us and they're still with us until the very last step."*

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

Young people on the Drive Forward Breakthrough programme said staff had "been really helpful during the quarantine", sending out daily messages and making weekly calls to check in with them. They said this had made them feel reassured, especially when they were missing attending the face-to-face sessions.

#### Implications

- Future evaluation work should explore partners' ongoing responses to the pandemic in greater depth.
- The effects of lockdown and ongoing disruption to young people and partners' stakeholders could form the basis of the next Intensive Study.

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

## 5 Self- and organisational-efficacy

### 5.1 How do the programmes shape young people's self-efficacy?

Throughout the year, the programmes have contributed to improvements in young people's self-efficacy in the following areas:

- Growing confidence and wellbeing
- Developing work- and life-relevant skills
- Building networks
- Understanding what employers want

#### 5.1.1 Growing confidence and wellbeing

Young people on all four programmes talked about gaining in confidence. For example, young people attending DFF's Saturday Link Up sessions said they felt more confident and in control of their own lives after attending, citing the sessions' calming atmosphere as especially important, but also the one-to-one work they undertook with coaches. Feedback included:

*"I learnt that nothing is holding you back besides yourself. Don't make up barriers that don't exist."*

*"I learnt that I can be really social."*

Young people on the DFF programme particularly value how it helps them plan for coping with "difficult situations", while also providing a safe space in which they can relax and be themselves. One young person said: "I could be comfortable there; it is like a break." One stakeholder observed:

*"I just couldn't believe what I'd seen. [The young person's] confidence had totally grown, has totally changed into a different young person as a result of the programme. There's no doubt in my mind about that."*

Catherine Doyle, Head of School at Newham Virtual School for Looked-After Children, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

While the young people found DFF's meet up sessions calming, the focus group revealed that they experienced some stress while approaching the immersive experiences (including sessions on homelessness and knife crime). While this was not a concern across the board, some young people would benefit from more opportunities to discuss their apprehension before taking part, to ensure they fully understand what to expect and how the team will support them:

*"I was nervous about ... I think there is this one where they like leave us alone in like a house for three days or something ... it was something about like when care leavers, a lot of them get themselves into debt and stuff and I think there was some sort of experience to say like what it's like to have debt collectors coming to your door and stuff. They were going to do something to do with that, and I was like, "Oh my God." I was a bit worried about that."*

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Drive Forward Foundation

Young people said their confidence to try new things, explain their ideas and collaborate in teams had increased while on the CYT programme, with the gains most pronounced

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

for young people initially lacking confidence. This extended to writing CVs, cover letters and job applications. The young people also reported feeling more optimism about the future:

***"I've learnt how to be patient. For example, if you've applied for an apprenticeship and they take long to get back to you, they eventually will, and you can just explore more opportunities if they don't."***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

Career Ready programme staff reported seeing significant improvements in young people's confidence, attitude towards learning and focus at school as the programme went on. They gave an example of one young person who at the beginning was too shy to speak to a shop assistant when buying milk, but subsequently gave a presentation in front of 150 employers. Some young people on the EY Foundation programme said carrying out presentations "in front of some important people" had boosted their confidence and shown them that they were more capable than they had thought.

Feedback from young people on EY Foundation's Our Future programme suggested lower levels of confidence regarding presenting and interview technique. However, this could indicate that the exercises within the programme challenged young people's perceptions of their own work and acted as a 'reality check' on the standards expected by employers. It is important to note, however, that evidence is lacking on the definite cause of this change – this might be an area EY Foundation wishes to explore further in the coming year.

### **5.1.2 Developing work- and life-relevant skills**

Over 70% of pupils in years 7, 10, 12 and 13 (50% across all year groups) involved in Career Ready said they agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned about the skills and attitudes needed to be successful at work, and a majority (60%) felt what they had learned on the programme would help them in their future job.

One of the main benefits for young people at CYT was putting what they learnt at school into practice in a real-life context.

***"I was excited because I'd finally got a chance to see – like, we wasn't really looking at like what the construction world was like from our classroom, but the Construction Youth Trust gave us that opportunity to see what the construction world was like from the real world."***

Young Person's Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

Young people on the DFF Breakthrough programme said it had helped them learn new skills, such as how to get out of debt, what it means to be complicit in a crime, and where to seek help if in trouble. The DFF team explained that they believe that working on self-development and wellbeing is the priority in the first year, enabling the removal of potential blocks when it comes to employability work in the cohort's second and third years on the course.

### **5.1.3 Building networks**

Many young people involved on the programmes described expanding their personal networks. Young people said the EY Foundation and CYT's respective activities had helped them to develop confidence in meeting new people, and build relationships that

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

would help them get a job. Three quarters (73%) of young people on EY Foundation's programmes said they felt more confident networking with people from business, and networking with professionals was the experience they valued most highly.

Young people on the Career Ready programme said they felt they had made positive connections with big companies, which would make them more employable in the future.

Some of this impact appears to endure after programmes complete. For example, Career Ready's team noted that former mentees continue to meet with their mentors, years after their involvement on the programme finishes.

As well as networking with employers, participants said how beneficial they found group work and working in teams with their peers during the EY Foundation's employability activities. Being able to share experiences with other care-experienced people appeared to be a positive aspect of the Drive Forward Foundation programme for the young people involved. At school they often do not feel able to talk about being in care and were grateful to have access to an environment where they could seek advice from people who have had the same kinds of experiences. This was something a Virtual School Head noted:

***"[It] is about young people really coming to terms with and owning their care status. One of the most significant ways to support them to do that is to bring them in touch with other looked after young people so that they're not quite so different as they think they are. They're not quite so isolated as they think they are. Their experience is not quite so unusual as they think it is."***

Helen Priest, Headteacher, Bromley Virtual School, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

Young people working with DFF also said they felt more confident about socialising and judging which peers would be right to spend time with and have a positive influence on them.

#### **5.1.4 Understanding what employers want**

Young people involved in CYT explained that their understanding of how to get into work in the construction industry had improved.

***"They've helped me explore all the different opportunities and explained to me what I have to do to get into that specific industry, and they have helped me build my CV."***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

This is exemplified by 84% of young people completing at least one of their objectives for the programme by the end of the Autumn term, and 69% at least two (targets included 'research local college offer and complete at least three applications', and 'write a CV').

Young people in the Career Ready focus group said the programme also benefited those who had "lived quite a sheltered life", and therefore did not have the experience of extra-curricular activities or other activities that look good on a CV. Young people

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



explained the programme helped them “become more professional”, for example by speaking more formally:

***“If you’re from an area which is more urban and more diverse, you may be speaking more slang or informally, but after joining these kind of activities it enables you to actually become more professional and without you realising it you will be ready for the work life.”***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Career Ready

It is less clear from DFF’s session feedback whether the young people involved gained a clear awareness of the skills, qualities and behaviours that will make them employable. However, one stakeholder explained that young people’s attitude and conduct visibly improved during the programme, with disruptive students becoming more participatory by the of the day.<sup>8</sup>

EY Foundation feedback indicates that young people’s ‘knowledge of developments and news in the business and commercial world’, ‘awareness of careers in professional services’, and ‘self confidence in a business environment’ increased while on the programme. Young people particularly valued group tasks, as these were fun while also showing young people what employers value:

***“The programme helped us to understand how to build the connection between us and our manager or colleagues or the customers. This was really helpful.”***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, EY Foundation

According to school staff working with the Career Ready programme, young people find rejection (for example, unsuccessful internship applications) disheartening, and receiving feedback from employers about why they have been unsuccessful can help them improve their next applications.

---

<sup>8</sup>DFF’s employability learning takes place in the second and third years of their programme, and therefore they currently have limited information in this area.

***‘Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood’***

## 5.2 What are schools' experiences?

The teachers we spoke to were overwhelmingly positive about the programmes' impact on young people, highlighting how the combination of activities had improved their pupils' confidence and focus.

Teachers we spoke to said they value their involvement in the programmes because of what they offer young people. For example, the Career Ready programme had been running for six or seven years at the Petchey Academy and had "grown from strength to strength" in this time:

***"It's always been positives from the students. I mean, the programme is designed in such a way that each component compliments the other, and the students see that. They value it. I haven't had anything negative said by the students."***

Muhammad Hussain, Assistant Lead for Sixth Form at Petchey Academy, Stakeholder, Career Ready

Teachers interviewed as part of our Intensive Study stressed that it is the combination of activities the programmes support that make them impactful.

Engagement in different activity types was also linked with positive impact for young people on the CYT programme. One teacher noted they particularly appreciated the site visits, and said that students seemed more motivated to focus on school work, appreciating why it is important. This extended to their views of uniform and compliance, and teacher Luke Collins observed that students' punctuality, speaking and listening skills and teamwork had also improved.

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

### 5.3 What are employers' experiences?

Employers' feedback was positive. Partners' evaluation data and our own conversations with employers indicates that they:

- Are willing to re-host participants
- Use the young people's perspectives to refine certain business functions
- Perceive the programmes as a means of developing the talent pipeline
- Believe supporting the programmes can help current employees develop their skills

#### 5.3.1 Willing to re-host participants

In general, employer feedback for the Career Ready programme was very positive, with 80% saying they would be prepared to host another Career Ready participant. Career Ready's internship hosts were also extremely positive. 90% (n=50) said the intern had added value to their team, and three-quarters said they would offer the intern part- or full-time work, were it available. Hosts remarked on interns' energy, attitude and insight:

*"[Our intern] was amazing! She had an excellent energy and attitude and was able to provide insight and ideas from a younger perspective."*

*"Great end of internship presentation and lots of useful work throughout, helping to make everyone's jobs considerably easier."*

*"Fresh perspective. Professional mentality. Diligent and hard working."*

While the comments were overall very positive, employers who had had less successful experiences with their students cited problems including the young people having a "lack of interest or application" or taking breaks that lasted too long. Some also said the internships had felt too short for the young people to get properly involved in tasks. These challenges may be suitable topics to explore further in upcoming intensive studies.

Employers working with other programmes praised students' willingness to learn, and ability to use technology.

Employers working with young people through the EY Foundation's programmes enjoyed hosting the young people. Employers noted young people's punctuality and initiative:

*"They were a joy to have on site, all members of the core team made it their business to welcome them and give them a general overview of their prospective roles, which further opened their minds to opportunities."*

United Living, Community Development & Social Value Team

Two employers working with Career Ready were less happy, citing the young people's lack of confidence in undertaking the tasks set. However, on another placement, a young person had been mistaken for an employee because she was so well prepared.

#### 5.3.2 Using young people's perspectives

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

Furthermore, some employers cited benefits of working with young people, including gaining a fresh perspective on how to use social media:

***"Great creative from a young person's point of view particularly in relation to social media, video content creation."***

CYP Engagement Manager, The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

An employer working with the EY Foundation said his student had been a "voice of reason", and a company working with Career Ready said the young person offered them a "really fresh perspective on their business".

Employers working with Career Ready said they had found their involvement a "good opportunity to discover future talent".

Volunteers including EY Foundation mentors commented that they felt the opportunity had enabled them to develop their own skills in communication, as well as providing an enjoyable activity to participate in with the young people.

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

## 6 Aspirations, pathway awareness and destinations

The partners' combined work has led to gains in young people's:

- Awareness of specific jobs and industries
- Awareness of different academic and vocational pathways
- Career planning
- Aspirations
- Destinations

### 6.1 Awareness of specific jobs and industries

Young people's awareness of jobs and specific career pathways appeared to have improved during their involvement on programmes. 80% of the young people surveyed (n=383) by Career Ready said this, and two thirds of young people involved in the Skills Festival through Career Ready (involving a total of 2,340 young people) said the activities had increased their understanding of different sectors.

The majority (83%) of teachers surveyed (n=30) by Career Ready said students' awareness of the world of work had increased after working with the programme.

In focus groups, young people said they found trips "very inspiring", particularly those to well-known places such as Canary Wharf and companies such as Bloomberg. They said these trips also helped them to make up their minds about the kind of career they wanted to pursue, through exposing them to different sorts of workplaces.

At DFF, Youth Programme Manager Francis Taylor was commended for finding new opportunities when a young person's interests were not catered for by the organisation's existing bank of contacts. His connections across different sectors mean he has been able to arrange activities making "a lot of the kids light up". One example was arranging for a young person to visit the O2 to use the flight simulator:

***"He had practically a whole day there where they did far more and above what they were being paid [to do], for this child for that afternoon's activity. [The child] met some pilots and they did a lot of work with him, and he's been put in touch with a pilot mentor who is going to support him to raise his own funds for his pilot training and so on."***

Helen Priest, Headteacher of Bromley Virtual School, Stakeholder, Drive Forward Foundation

CYT's Pearl O'Keeffe was also praised for her efforts to hunt down the kinds of work experience young people really wanted:

***"I told Pearl that I wanted to be a plumber when I'm older and she managed to sort me out some work experience with Pimlico Plumbers. After completing the work experience with [Pimlico Plumbers], it really kind of made my mind set straight on being a plumber when I'm older and I 100 percent knew that's what I wanted to do."***

Participant in Young Person Focus Group, Construction Youth Trust

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

## 6.2 Awareness of different academic and vocational pathways

Young people said their understanding about the relative merits of apprenticeships and university courses had improved while on the programmes.

Although we gathered anecdotal evidence of this change, there was limited survey data to support it in the information we received from partners. Monitoring young people's awareness of different academic and vocational pathways may be an area the partner organisations wish to develop going forward.

## 6.3 Career planning

Three quarters of young people responding to a survey about attending the virtual Career Ready Skills Festival said it had helped them with their career planning and how best to use their skills.

Young people said that CYT's activities had helped them clarify the career path they want to pursue, and gain understanding in how to work towards this, including their knowledge of different training and qualifications options.

## 6.4 Aspirations

Young people involved in the Mercers'-funded activities aspire to work in a wide range of sectors, including more traditional routes such as law and corporate business, charitable work and social care, and vocational routes including the military and catering.

We did not observe a trend in how young people's aspirations shifted throughout their involvement on the programmes, although feedback indicates that aspirations – whether they stayed the same or evolved – became more informed.

## 6.5 Destinations

Career Ready provided information on the destination of their students from 2006 through to 2018. In the most recent year 68% had gone on to Higher Education, 4% to Further Education, 10% into work and 17% onto an apprenticeship. For reference, according to government data, disadvantaged students are less likely than other students to progress to higher education or training (56% vs 63%)<sup>9</sup>.

As our data collection points occurred before the end of the first year of the programmes, we have understandably received limited information about destinations. CfEY will work with the four partners to gather more information around this outcome measure in Years 2 and 3.

---

<sup>9</sup> See:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/860136/Progression\\_to\\_higher\\_education\\_training\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/860136/Progression_to_higher_education_training_2019.pdf)

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

### **Implications**

- Organisations should separate out the impact of particular strands of activity to identify what is having the most impact.
- CfEY, the partners and Mercers' should review the extent to which the existing evaluation outcomes framework meets the partners' needs, and if required adjust it.
- Going forward our evaluation should examine efficient, light-touch ways to standardise data collection, with partners gathering a 'common core' of data, within the co-created framework.

## 7 Implications

This concluding section summarises our implications for future delivery and evaluation of the Mercers'-funded programmes. Further recommendations for schools and employers can be found in our literature review (Appendix 2).

### ***When identifying 'seldom heard' young people:***

- Organisations and policymakers should resist any temptation to define young people's circumstances in broad brush strokes. 'Seldom heard' young people are not a homogenous group, have a wide range of different experiences and face many different combinations of challenges and barriers.
- Organisations working with these young people must actively seek to understand the contexts from which children come, and how this may affect their needs.
- Organisations must provide these young people with opportunities to explain their needs and ambitions.
- Organisations should avoid imposing their own views and preconceptions on young people, in order to enable students to develop their own personal aspirations.

### ***When recruiting 'seldom heard' young people:***

- Organisations should adopt a multi-pronged approach to recruitment involving online and hardcopy material and in-person sessions. This approach is greater than the sum of its parts, making organisations more likely to reach 'seldom heard' young people than they are with any single approach.
- Organisations should use social media, as it provides a direct line to 'seldom heard' young people, but should not rely upon this medium on its own, given some young people do not have easy access to the internet.
- Organisations should encourage recommendations by trusted contacts, which provide a powerful means of recruiting 'seldom heard' young people. Sharing success stories involving popular peers and engaging trusted adults such as teachers, youth workers and carers also appears to be particularly effective.
- Organisations should work closely with other agencies including local authorities, schools and charities to identify and recruit 'seldom heard' young people. Speaking with multiple agencies makes 'catching' the young people most in need more likely (especially if their school attendance is low).
- While face-to-face contact remains limited, organisations should still invest time in one-to-one contact with young people and trusted contacts. This is labour intensive, but appears to yield a high conversion rate.
- Organisations should use self-selection with caution, and perhaps alongside recommendations from other professionals to ensure the young people who will benefit most join the programmes.

### ***When designing and implementing programmes:***

- Organisations targeting 'seldom heard' young people should incorporate the success factors we highlight into their programme design, in order to: connect with existing local provision; make schools' and businesses' lives as easy as possible; codesign interventions and adapt flexibly as required; meet young people's learning needs and access requirements, and; develop trusting relationships.
- Organisations should connect with existing local provision, liaising and partnering as relevant with local boroughs, schools, employers and other youth service

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



providers. This will help ensure provision augments rather than duplicates other local support.

- Organisations should make stakeholders' lives as easy as possible through taking on generic procedural and administrative tasks. This will free up schools and employers so that they can provide the support partners cannot.
- Organisations should codesign and refine interventions, working with young people and adults who know them well to identify the most relevant support and adapting this as required in light of young people's experiences on the programme.
- Organisations must meet young people's learning needs by personalising learning, supporting specific access requirements, and regularly checking in with participants in person and remotely (for example, online).
- Organisations must ensure their young people develop trusting relationships, and can support this through mentoring, internships and placements, buddy systems and partnerships with trusted adults.

***In responding to Covid:***

- Ongoing evaluation should explore partners' ongoing responses to Covid in greater depth.
- Future research should explore the effects of lockdown and ongoing disruption to young people and partners' stakeholders, through an Intensive Study.

***When gathering data:***

- Going forward our evaluation should examine efficient, light-touch ways to standardise data collection, with partners gathering a 'common core' of data, within the co-created framework.
- Organisations should delineate how different activities have impacted upon young people.
- CfEY, the partners and Mercers' should review the extent to which the existing evaluation outcomes framework meets the partners' needs, and if required adjust it.

# Appendix 1: Information about each partner in Cohort 1

## 1 Career Ready

Career Ready launched in 2002, providing support to disadvantaged pupils to support their transition into work. It works across years 7 to 13 targeting areas of high deprivation. It has a network of volunteers who provide mentoring support, and its associated businesses provide work experience.

Career Ready works to develop eight skills for young people's career success, which are:

- Communication and networking
- Organisation
- Teamwork
- Self-awareness
- Resourcefulness
- Managing myself
- Problem solving and analysis
- Managing my career

These are the skills are embedded throughout the content, including the mentoring and internships.

Career Ready also provides employability workshops to pupils in whole year groups, a selection of whom receive intensive support, including mentorship and paid internships. Each school/college takes part in a minimum of four activities a year, per year group. Career Ready is using Mercers' funding to expand its work in schools across London. Structured activities across whole schools include:

- Assemblies, introducing the world of work, choices at 16, labour market information and apprenticeships;
- Tutorials, delivered by school tutors with resources and support from Career Ready;
- Masterclasses, led by business volunteers and focussing on work readiness;
- Careers in the curriculum, bite-sized information for teachers to drop into lessons; and
- Workplace visits to local employers.

In addition to the above activities, the programme offers group mentoring for year 10s, one hour of one-to-one mentoring (per month for 12 months) for year 12 and 13 students, and work experience (typically a four-week paid internship).

## 2 Construction Youth Trust

Construction Youth Trust was set up in 1961, to help disadvantaged young people progress into careers in construction. CYT works in areas of deprivation with anticipated skills shortages over the next decade. It provides engagement activities in schools to raise awareness of career opportunities and delivers more targeted support for those who need it (including NEET young people).

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

Using Mercers' funding, CYT is delivering the 'Building Bridges' programme to young people aged 15 and 16 facing disadvantage, including care-experienced young people. The programme is in two phases:

- A series of engagement sessions and team challenges, providing a taster of construction careers and skills development.
- A selection of young people will receive fortnightly, term-time, one-to-one coaching, alongside employer encounters including workplace visits and work experience.

### **3 Drive Forward Foundation**

The Drive Forward Foundation was established in 1992 in Russia by its CEO, Martha Wansbrough. In 2010, the organisation moved to the UK and focused on developing a holistic support package to enable care leavers aged 16-26 to successfully transition from care into sustainable employment and independence.

The DFF offices are based in Waterloo and the organisation's Early Intervention team works with children as young as 13. DFF operates from five service delivery hubs across London (Enfield, Hackney, Camden, Haringey and Lambeth), also offering other relevant services including Leaving Care Teams, Job Centre Plus.

Using Mercers' funding, DFF wants to increase its reach, supporting young people through:

- Needs assessments of young people joining the programme
- One-to-one support from a Youth Worker, alongside engagement activities including music, debating, coding, etc.
- Sector insights days
- One-to-one support from careers coaches
- Work experience opportunities and workplace visits
- Job seeking skills development, including interviewing practise
- Ongoing mentoring while in a job

Activities take place outside mainstream education, and the programme lasts for 18 months to two years, ending when the young person is in education, employment or training.

### **4 EY Foundation**

EY Foundation was set up in 2014 and seeks to help all young people transition successfully into the workplace. They work with young people facing barriers to entering the workplace, higher education or self-employment. Its main activities involve the delivery of the following: Smart Futures and Our Future work experience programmes for secondary pupils, providing employability workshops, alumni networks and events, conducting research, and supporting employers to be 'young people ready'.

While the Foundation operates in locations across the UK, it will use Mercers' funding to develop its work in the London Borough of Lewisham. EY Foundation is working with

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

stakeholders including schools and colleges, and SMEs to provide support to free school meal-eligible young people in years 7 to 13 through:

- Employability workshops for classes and year groups of pupils in years 7 to 11.
- Smart Futures, a 10-month programme targeting year 12 pupils studying A-levels or level 3 BTECs. Young people receive two weeks of paid skills training, a paid work placement, a mentor, and Chartered Management Institute accreditation.
- Our Future, a 6-month programme which targets 16- to 19-year-olds studying level 1 or 2 BTEC courses, with 5 or fewer GCSEs, and two or more risk factors (behavioural, attendance, SEND, young carer, LAC, young parent). Young people receive one week of paid skills training, two paid work placements, CMI accreditation, and a mentor.
- Employability workshops for classes and year groups of pupils in years 7 to 11. Key outcomes of the workshops are to improve interview preparation, presentation, teamwork, attitude to work, confidence and raise awareness of the career options.

## Appendix 2: Literature review

### 1 Defining 'seldom heard' and 'disengaged'

#### 1.1 Defining the term 'seldom heard'

'Seldom heard' groups are those who are generally under-represented and less likely to be heard by professionals or decision-makers. Sometimes the term 'hard to reach' is used to describe groups with low engagement in support or services, although this can implicitly suggest people in these groups are in some way at fault. Instead, and as the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) suggests, the term 'seldom heard' emphasises the role services have in proactively supporting people (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services [IRISS], 2011).

#### 1.2 Defining the term 'disengaged'

Caution should be exercised when using the term 'disengaged', because it may mistakenly imply that a young person's attitudes or behaviours are fixed when in fact they are not. This is something Duffy and Elwood emphasise in their 2013 qualitative study in Northern Ireland, which examined the perspectives of 'disengaged' students aged 14 to 19. The study identifies different factors causing young people's levels of engagement to fluctuate, including their relationships with teachers and peers, worries about future employment prospects, and the balance between practical work and quiet independent study. However, despite voicing frustrations and 'disengagement' with certain aspects of classroom learning, the study finds that these young people nonetheless demonstrated 'positive aspirations for future success and achievement' (Duffy & Elwood, 2013, pp. 112–113).

Furthermore, the group of young people described as 'disengaged' is not fixed. In their 2012 study of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), Bielby et al. divide NEET young people broadly described as 'disengaged' into three sub-groups:

1. 'Open to learning' and likely to re-engage in education or training, with higher levels of attainment and better attitudes towards school than other NEET young people;
2. 'Sustained' NEETs, who have had a negative experience of school, reflected in higher levels of truancy and exclusion and lower academic attainment than other NEET young people, and;
3. 'Undecided' NEETs, who are similar in some respects to those who are 'open to learning' in terms of their attainment levels, but who are dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them.

(Bielby, Judkins, Donnell, & Mccrone, 2012, p. 2).

Therefore, young people can be more or less engaged or disengaged, and this is likely due to a wide range of individual, circumstantial and environmental factors.

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

## 2 Factors leading young people to become 'seldom heard' and/or disengaged

A range of factors can lead to young people becoming 'seldom heard' (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services [IRISS], 2011; Peter Beresford, 2013, p. 13), including:

### 2.1 Individual characteristics

Young people's characteristics can increase their vulnerability to being marginalised. Beresford (2013) found that factors such as 'gender, ethnicity, culture, belief, sexuality ... disability and class' (Peter Beresford, 2013, p. 12) can influence whether a person's rights and needs are properly addressed, whether they are ignored or made to feel uncomfortable, and whether they experience active discrimination.

Stonewall's School report 2017 revealed that nearly half of lesbian, gay, bi and trans pupils (45 per cent) are bullied for being LGBT at school, and the same proportion never tell anyone about the bullying. Meanwhile, one in three trans pupils (33 per cent) are not able to be known by their preferred name at school, while three in five (58 per cent) are not allowed to use the toilets they feel comfortable in (Bradlow, Bartram, Guasp, & Jadva, 2017). It is unlikely these young people feel heard in an environment where their identity is either attacked or ignored.

Looking at ethnicity, employment statistics paint a disheartening picture for BAME young people hoping to enter the job market. Government data from 2019 showed that white people had a lower unemployment rate than people from all other ethnic groups combined at all ages. Among 16- to 24-year olds, 11% of white people were unemployed, compared with 18% of people from all other ethnic groups – the largest gap of any age group, at seven percentage points. In every year between 2004 and 2018, white 16- to 24-year olds have had a lower unemployment rate than those from all other ethnic groups combined (Office for National Statistics, 2019).

Many young people with physical disabilities may find themselves 'seldom heard' because they lack the assistive technologies they need to access education, training and employment opportunities (Bown, Harflett, & Gitsham, 2014). Physical disabilities such as being deaf, blind or mute require different kinds of communication, and individuals may become excluded if their communication style is not supported or shared. People with especially complex impairments are at an even greater risk of being 'seldom heard', especially where securing their involvement is seen as expensive or difficult or where it is assumed that they are not interested in becoming involved. They may also face having their viewpoints dismissed as anecdotal or unreliable, because of their disability (Bradlow et al., 2017).

### 2.2 Geographic isolation

Certain parts of the country are poorer and worse connected (physically and economically) than others, so young people in some areas have less access to services and opportunities than others. Young people in these areas are less likely to have access to forums for engagement or supportive third sector provision, which may result in them becoming 'seldom heard' or disengaged.

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

Research has shown that outer urban neighbourhoods that can be found on the edge of most cities in England are areas where young people's outcomes appear to be weakest. In some cases, this is also true on the peripheries of smaller cities and towns. The recently developed Community Needs Index (OCSI, 2019), which draws together multiple measures of local social infrastructure, connectedness, community activity and engagement, helps to identify these hard-pressed communities, where young people can feel cut off. Isolation in these areas can contribute to cycles of entrenched, intergenerational poverty and disadvantage.

## 2.3 Household poverty

The UK has very high levels of income inequality compared to other developed countries, and research has shown that young people from poorer households are likely to face challenges that leave them at risk of becoming 'seldom heard' or disengaged, such as poor health, debt and a lack of control over choices and opportunities (ATD, 2019). In 2018, households in the bottom 20% of the population had on average an equivalised disposable income of £12,798, whilst the top 20% had £69,126 (The Equality Trust, 2020). A lack of access to transport, or to internet and data, as a result of financial struggles can impede young people's educational progress in deprived areas (Bown et al., 2014); (Tunstall, Lupton, Green, Watmough, & Bates, 2012). Children from poorer backgrounds are also more likely on average to develop weaker linguistic skills than their more affluent peers (Hart & Risley, 2003); (Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2010) and this language gap tends to widen rather than shrink throughout schooling (Plaister, 2019); (Middlemas, 2014); (Department for Education, 2019). This in turn can contribute to poorer children and young people being 'unheard'.

## 2.4 Homelessness

Young people dealing with unstable accommodation, including those who are homeless, in care or in prison, are particularly likely to become 'seldom heard'. Certain situations can make some young people more at risk of facing unstable accommodation than others. For example, research into GRT communities indicates these communities are more likely to face poverty, insecure housing and inadequate living conditions (Mulcahy, Baars, Bowen-Viner, & Menzies, 2017). Refugees and asylum seekers are also more likely to face such challenges; making these groups at risk of being 'seldom heard' or disengaged (Robertson, Baars, & Bowen-Viner, 2019).

## 2.5 Social and cultural capital

Refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants face a variety of barriers that may make them feel unheard. For example, if English is not their first language, it can be difficult for them to contribute to discussions that relate to their rights and experiences. In some migrant families, parents rely entirely on the children to act as interpreters when accessing health or education services, making it harder to accurately convey their thoughts or needs. Furthermore, migrant communities are sometimes not fully recognised as members of the wider population. For example, people of Latin American origin living in England have no way to state their ethnicity in the country's census, as it is not included as one of the categories, therefore little consistent data or information is gathered about their specific experiences (Robertson et al., 2019).

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

## 2.6 Unwanted voices

Finally, people who challenge the status quo, for example by questioning the availability or quality of local services, are also at risk of having their voices ignored or being dismissed as troublemakers.

*'While involvement should be diverse and inclusive, this should also extend to including these 'usual suspects' – more confident and assertive people whose views agencies may not want to hear, but which are a key part of the overall picture.'*

(Peter Beresford, 2013, p. 13)

## 3 Engaging and inspiring 'seldom heard' and/or disengaged young people

### 3.1 What can schools do?

There are a number of strategies that schools can put in place when attempting to inspire and engage young people who are 'seldom heard' and/or disengaged.

#### 3.1.1 Building positive, nurturing relationships

Relationships exert a significant influence over young people's experiences of education and other support, and positive, constructive relationships play a vital role in supporting pupils at risk of becoming disengaged. This is because connections between pupils and teachers can provide a significant motivating factor for learning, with young people in one study explaining that positive relationships with teaching staff 'could make lessons much more engaging' (Duffy and Elwood, 2013), especially where teachers are caring, flexible, empathetic and respectful, and who can 'take a joke' (Duffy & Elwood, 2013, p. 119). Contrastingly, students can feel frustrated by teachers who show preferential treatment towards the most academically able, or condescendingly treat students 'like kids' (ibid.).

While positive relationships between pupils and teachers are widely valued, others believed a system with firmer boundaries and little tolerance for misbehaviour is the most effective approach to working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those who appear disengaged. A 'zero tolerance' approach to behaviour is, for example, at the heart of the approach of the Ofsted 'outstanding' Michaela Community School in Wembley, which boasted results among the best in the country in 2019 (Weale, 2019), despite catering to a population from deprived backgrounds, with around 41% of pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during the past 6 years, compared to 28% nationally. Michaela's "no excuses" behaviour policy involves detentions for indiscretion such as being one minute late to school or not having a pen (Kirby, 2016).

Regardless of school culture, research has shown that relationships outside of school are just as important for young people who are struggling to be heard or stay engaged. For example, in their 2012 literature review, Bielby et al. suggest that young people at risk

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



of disengagement from learning benefit from the opportunity to develop relationships with a trusted adult who can keep them 'on track':

***'For young people who are at risk of becoming disengaged, relationships with trusted adults in the community can be crucial to maintaining their participation.'***

(Bielby et al., 2012, p. 10)

This was reflected in Bown, Harflett and Gitsham's (2014) review of approaches to embedding inclusive practices in youth social action activities, which emphasises the importance of "knowing the young people you are working with". The authors recommend considering intensive one-to-one support such as mentoring for young people who are excluded or at risk of being excluded, and recognise that these interventions may be delivered in school by teachers, or outside school with support from third parties. The support available to young people should accommodate their individual needs:

***'Prepare for an individually paced, gradual approach to engage and involve each young person on their terms and in their own time.'***

(Bown et al., 2014, p. 32)

In their review of school cultures and practices that support the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, (Baars, Shaw, Mulcahy, & Menzies, 2018) highlight that in addition to constructive and purposeful relationships with students, positive and energetic relationships between staff are also important. They note that working towards clear, shared goals, having a prominent, supportive senior leadership team, and shared events (such as staff socials) can contribute towards building staff relationships (Baars et al., 2018).

### **3.1.2 Supporting aspirations**

Alongside building trusting and supportive relationships, it is also important that schools support students' aspirations. This is something explored in depth by (Baars et al., 2018) in their study focusing on how schools support disadvantaged pupils, highlighting the importance of:

- Setting high, specific expectations with regards to academic achievement
- Establishing high expectations early
- Providing experiences and role models

They also stress the importance for staff to demonstrate consistency of belief, and to push students to consider ideas and opportunity beyond their immediate frames of reference.

'Seldom heard' or disengaged young people may require additional support in order to identify their strengths and understand how to apply them to a new context, especially if they lack support at home, have additional responsibilities which place high demands on their time, and/or have struggled to pass exams. For example, Aylward *et al.* (2018) highlight how young adult carers can find it difficult to think about their aspirations for the future, because their responsibilities in the present are so demanding. This may lead them to undersell themselves as they are occupied with 'getting by', rather than thinking about longer-term goals (Aylward et al., 2018). Some forms of aspiration may

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

be discounted as being 'low' or, at the other end, 'unrealistic', whereas good practitioners know that these aspirations can be used as hooks, to build thoughts about other options. Consequently, young people with disruptive home lives can benefit from exploring their futures and making explicit connections between learning in school and college and possible future pathways.

Importantly, while some forms of aspiration are discounted as being 'low' or 'unrealistic', the evidence cited above indicates that these aspirations can be used as hooks to build young people's thoughts and understanding of different options available to them.

### 3.1.3 Developing a flexible approach to learning

'Seldom heard' or disengaged young people may benefit from a more flexible approach to learning, both in terms of the content itself, and timetabling. For example, young people in Duffy and Elwood's 2013 study said that they preferred activities that were enthusiastically delivered and 'hands on':

*'A common response, with regard to what motivated students to learn, was having opportunities to participate in lessons or 'to get involved'. Students talked about enjoying opportunities to engage in whole class and group discussions, large and small group work, working in pairs or being able to move around the classroom.'*

(Duffy & Elwood, 2013, p. 120)

The study says that offering disengaged young people 'a much more innovative and flexible curriculum' may encourage them to stay in school or college (Duffy & Elwood, 2013, p. 123). Similarly, Bielby et al. (2012) recommend providing a richer curriculum offer, for example by offering a wider range of GCSEs or vocational qualifications and offering taster or short courses to help young people to better understand the options available to them:

*'[T]eaching (academic and vocational) is delivered in an appealing way that not only interests the young person but where the relevance to life (for example future careers) is drawn out.'*

(Bielby et al., 2012, p. 3).

Research examining outcomes for disadvantaged students in London highlighted that increasing the relevancy of the curriculum can provide an initial 'hook' for learning, but that this must not come at the expense of lower expectations and aspirations (Millard, Bowen-Viner, Baars, Trethewey, & Menzies, 2018). It is important, however, that a personalised approach is taken for each child, and their needs and interests are listened to carefully. Young people who are 'seldom heard' or disengaged should not be immediately channelled into vocational or 'alternative' pathways if these are not what they want to pursue, on the assumption that they aren't capable of pursuing other routes.

Other evidence indicates that flexibility can be helpful in terms of logistics and timetabling, as young people at heightened risk of being disengaged may have things happening in their lives that make attending regular lessons more difficult. For example, young adult carers miss an average of five per cent of school days due to caring

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

responsibilities and achieve lower GCSE attainment on average than their peers (Aylward et al., 2018). Greater flexibility about the timing of lessons for young people such as this could increase their ability to participate in school-based learning. In practice, this might mean moving some learning online, or deploying peer or adult learning mentors who can provide support beyond the regular school timetable.

### 3.1.4 Providing access to workplace opportunities

'Seldom heard' young people are less likely than their peers to be able to access meaningful experiences of the workplace while in school, and apprenticeships or employment after leaving education. In their 2008 qualitative study on access to work experience opportunities, Hatcher and Gallais find that young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are:

- Less able to use family contacts to access work placements in professional workplaces
- More likely to undertake menial tasks
- Less likely to be treated as a colleague or receive mentoring in a professional context

In light of this, Millard et al. suggest schools, further and higher education settings, and careers education providers should aim to identify the patterns in their students' access to particular types of work experience (by sector and/or quality) and, where necessary, target opportunities to reduce social inequalities in access.

This may be especially beneficial for young people at risk of becoming disengaged. For example, 38% of homeless young people gain fewer than five GCSEs, reducing their ability to access education, training and employment. Centrepont found that these young people wanted access to work experience and training in order to help them find work:

***'Gaining work experience and further qualifications rank most highly in what young people think would help them into work. For the 38 per cent of young people who have not achieved five A\* to C GCSEs, there is a need to ensure that channels remain open for them to re-engage with education in a way that takes their additional needs into account.'***

(Centrepont, 2015, p. 7)

Academic achievement is not the only barrier that restricts access to work experience for 'seldom heard' or disengaged young people. Lacking basic resources such as internet and data access is can also present a significant challenge. A 2012 study by Tunstall et al. for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that having no access to the internet can significantly discourage young people who are already facing disadvantage, as it is an easy way for finding and pursuing opportunities:

***'Seeking a job is a job in itself. Those without access to the internet at home or who can only search sporadically for jobs will be at a disadvantage.'***

(Tunstall et al., 2012, p. 7).

Physical access requirements, financial assistance, and access to transport can also impede young people's access to opportunities, and increase the likelihood that certain

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

young people become disengaged or 'seldom heard' (Bown, Harflett and Gitsham, 2014).

Consequently, while schools have an important role to play in offering support, they many also need to consider employing people with specific expertise and skills or working in partnership with organisations who can share or exchange resources (Bown et al., 2014).

## 3.2 What can employers do?

### 3.2.1 Be open-minded

For 'seldom heard' or disengaged young people one of the most helpful actions an employer can take is to be open-minded and make fair adjustments that accommodate young people's backgrounds and circumstances. This is important because, as Tunstall et al. (2012) observe, employers can dismiss or overlook young people facing disadvantage (for example those who have criminal records, health problems or caring responsibilities). This can mean these young people become trapped in cycles of unsuccessful applications.

Young people facing disadvantage through limited qualifications, circumstance (such as a lack of geographic mobility), or personal factors such as disability are not able to apply for jobs with as wide a range of employers. Furthermore, and as Aylward et al. (2018) highlight, these young people cannot exercise as much control over their careers as they are not able to move easily between jobs, which in turn inhibits their ability to earn more money:

***'While staying in the same job is not necessarily negative, narrowing down the pool of employers to those that offer support and flexibility could potentially limit career progression based on interest. In addition, moving between employers is the surest way of securing pay progression, and so young adult carers may experience depressed pay and limited opportunities to increase their salaries.'***

(Aylward et al., 2018, pp. 70–71)

As well as being open-minded and accommodating during recruitment, Buzzeo et al. (2016) recommend that employers provide additional support to young people once they are employed, such as support with travel costs, lunch expenses or uniforms where necessary, and support in developing workplace behaviours and skills (Buzzeo et al., 2016). Greater open-mindedness and flexibility among employers would mean more young people could apply for jobs, which would expand the talent pool from which organisations can recruit.

### 3.2.2 Value vocational qualifications

Another helpful approach to engaging with 'seldom heard' or disengaged young people is for employers to demonstrate that they appreciate vocational, work-based qualifications, as well as GCSEs and A-levels. This is crucial, because disadvantaged children including those from poorer backgrounds, those with special needs and disabilities, or those who are care-experienced, are less likely than their comparatively-advantaged peers to obtain GCSEs and A-levels. In its 2015 survey of 260

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

disadvantaged young people, Centrepont and its partners found that nearly half of the NEET young people surveyed said they felt they were not in education, employment or training because they did not have the right qualifications 'suggesting that alternative qualifications are still not as valued by employers as traditional academic ones' (Centrepont, 2015, p. 5).

Even for jobs requiring limited skills and experience for which formal qualifications are not relevant, these qualifications are still necessary for the job applications (Tunstall et al., 2012). Avoiding this practice and instead highlighting how other types of skills are valued could be a way to attract and recruit disengaged young people.

Young people who pursue vocational pathways post-16 may miss out on receiving career guidance. For example, sixth form students will typically receive information about university applications alongside other routes, such as apprenticeships. However, young people who enter employment straight away likely miss out on this. Employers can compensate for this by supporting new recruits through mentoring (Millard & Bowen-Viner, 2019).

### 3.2.3 Provide feedback

Generally, employers do not provide unsuccessful job applicants with feedback. This closes down an important opportunity for young people to learn and develop, particularly those who are 'seldom heard' or at risk of becoming disengaged. This can be demotivating. Tunstall et al. (2012) spoke to 57 jobseekers aged between 17 and 27, all with low qualification levels and living in deprived areas. 'Almost all' had sent off numerous job applications, been unsuccessful, and received no feedback:

***'Lack of response to applications and feedback from employers sapped the confidence of many jobseekers, allowing ill-targeted applications to be repeated. In an ideal world, employers should be encouraged to provide generic but informative feedback. Ideally, job searching and advice on job searching need to be tailored to individual areas and job types.'***

(Tunstall et al., 2012, p. 57)

An 'easy win' is providing feedback to young people after work experience placements, and research by Millard et al. (2019) suggests this can cover:

- The young person's experience of the placement: what they enjoy, how they have developed in terms of their personal, social and emotional skills, what they have learnt about the role or sector, and how they would have improved the experience.
- The organisation's experience: perceptions of the young person's skills and attributes, and how these might have developed during the placement.
- Feedback on specific tasks undertaken by the young person (such as project work, or support they provided).

### 3.2.4 Offer helpful tasters alongside longer-term opportunities

Certain groups of young people would particularly benefit from taking part in short visits or 'taster' sessions, allowing them low-stakes insight into the kinds of work an

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

organisation offers. This can help them decide whether a role and working environment would suit them (Centrepont, 2015).

Providing young people with these opportunities while they are still at school has the potential to broaden their horizons and give them an idea of future opportunities relevant to them. In their mixed methods examination of young people who become NEET, Gracey and Kelly (2010) propose that 'tasters' of the world of work should be offered to young people who are at risk of becoming disengaged, and should involve a combination of vocational and practical activities, key skills and personal enrichment (Gracey & Kelly, 2010, p. 34).

Once employers have connected with 'seldom heard' young people, it is important that they also provide meaningful encounters that will lead to sustained engagement. One way to do this is to ensure that the opportunities they are offering are worthwhile (for example, by giving insight into particular roles and pathways, or by providing feedback), even if they are low-skilled roles.

Jobs that pay less than a living wage, or require unpredictable working hours, are likely to aggravate rather than improve the circumstances of young people who are already facing challenges. The work of Tunstall et al. (2012) involved an online search for vacancies in three labour markets over ten months, for selected jobs that require limited education and skills, including sales assistants, security guards, cleaners, office administrators, kitchen hands, chefs and accounts clerks. They found that 76% of the vacancies found were part time or had non-standard hours, or both, while 78% of the jobs with wage data available paid under £7 per hour, and 54% paid minimum wage.

### **3.2.5 Create efficient opportunities**

Employers may be discouraged from providing work experience opportunities, especially to vulnerable young people, because of concerns about the administrative burden or time constraints. Millard et al. (2019) suggest that in order to overcome this, employers should consider linking up to provide a coherent programme of work experience where the responsibility is shared.

The report suggests that this approach could:

- Allow multiple young people to participate whilst only marginally increasing the administrative and organisational requirements for schools and hosting organisations.
- Increase access to placements, enabling more young people to participate. One roundtable participant explained that his organisation requires all male pupils offered work experience to bring a female peer along with them, increasing female pupils' access to STEM work experience opportunities.
- Enable young people to work together on meaningful projects (see above), building their understanding of the role and workplace, while also developing their personal, social and emotional skills including teamwork and communication.
- Reduce the level of supervision required by the hosting organisation, as young people could work together on projects rather than needing the full attention of an employee.

(Millard et al., 2019, p. 39)

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

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

### 3.3 What can other organisations do?

#### 3.3.1 Broker relationships

External organisations have a vital role to play in helping to connect 'seldom heard' and disengaged young people with employers and experience in the world of work. These connections can be forged in person, or through digital platforms, which link young people with placements of differing lengths, and provide employers hosting work experience with access to guidance and resources enabling them to support efficient and meaningful placements (Millard et al., 2019).

Hayward and Wilde (2008) also recognise the important role external organisations can play in mediating between employers and young people. They suggest that having a neutral facilitator can help young people know and understand the rules and consequences for breaking them, while any problems which arise can be quickly resolved. Such a model is explored in Millard et al.'s case study of Real World Learning Projects at School 21 in Newham, East London.

#### 3.3.2 Provide role models

It is important for 'seldom heard' and disengaged young people to see people like them in the workplace and succeeding. Positive engagement with role models can serve as an important motivation for participation in key activities, according to a 2009 governmental literature and communications review of 'Attitudinal Barriers to Engaging Young People in Positive Activities'. Significantly, these role models can act as a helpful 'counterbalance' where young people are not being supported and encouraged by parents:

***'They help young people to choose how to become involved and to support them through enduring activities. Some evidence highlights that role models with a similar socio-economic, ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds can wield more influence. Other evidence disagrees, claiming that strong and effective support by adults is valuable regardless of background.'***

(EdComms, 2009, p. 2)

Young people can also be role models by embodying positive outcomes. Bown, Harflett and Gitsham (2014) recommend matching young people who are already involved in activities with other young people with whom they have something in common, to share the experience and skills they have learned. Centrepont (2015) also proposes the value of providing local information services that promote disadvantaged young people who have progressed into sustainable employment and independent living as role models.

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



## 4 References

- ATD. (2019). The Six Dimensions of Poverty: Ripple Effects Cut Lives Short. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20200501005428/https://atd-uk.org/2019/11/16/the-six-dimensions-of-poverty-ripple-effects-cut-lives-short/>
- Aylward, N., Klenk, H., Robey-Turner, C., & Wolkind, R. (2018). *Barriers to employment for young adult carers*. (October). Retrieved from <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Barriers-to-employment-for-young-adult-carers-Full-report.pdf>
- Baars, S., Shaw, B., Mulcahy, E., & Menzies, L. (2018). *School cultures and practices: supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20190724050758/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-culture-and-practice-supporting-disadvantaged-pupils>
- Bielby, G., Judkins, M., Donnell, L. O., & Mccrone, T. (2012). *Review of the curriculum and qualification needs of young people who are at risk of disengagement*. 1–41.
- Bown, H., Harflett, N., & Gitsham, N. (2014). *Embedding inclusive practices in opportunities for youth social action*. Retrieved from <https://www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Embedding-Inclusive-Practices-for-YSA.pdf>
- Bradlow, J., Bartram, F., Guasp, A., & Jadva, D. V. (2017). *School report*. Retrieved from [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/the\\_school\\_report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/the_school_report_2017.pdf)
- Buzzeo, J., Marvell, R., Everett, C., & Newton, B. (2016). *Tackling unemployment among disadvantaged young people*. (March). Retrieved from <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/70302/1/cpt0316.pdf>
- Centrepont. (2015). *Supporting disadvantaged young people to earn or learn*.
- Department for Education. (2019). Key stage 4 and multi-academy trust performance 2018 (revised): Characteristics national tables. Retrieved from [https://web.archive.org/web/20190725151242/https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/806277/2018\\_Revised\\_National\\_characteristics\\_tables.xlsx](https://web.archive.org/web/20190725151242/https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806277/2018_Revised_National_characteristics_tables.xlsx)
- Duffy, G., & Elwood, J. (2013). The perspectives of “disengaged” students in the 14-19 phase on motivations and barriers to learning within the contexts of institutions and classrooms. *London Review of Education*, 11(2), 112–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2013.799808>
- EdComms. (2009). *Attitudinal Barriers to Engaging Young People in Positive Activities Literature and Communications Review*. Retrieved from <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10817/1/DCSF-RR140.pdf>
- Gracey, S., & Kelly, S. (2010). *Changing the NEET mindset*. Retrieved from [www.lsnlearning.org.uk](http://www.lsnlearning.org.uk)
- Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (2003). The Early Catastrophe. The 30 Million Word Gap. *American Educator*, 27(1), 4–9.
- Hatcher, R., & Gallais, T. Le. (2008). *The work experience placements of secondary school students: widening horizons or reproducing social inequality?*
- Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services [IRISS]. (2011). *Insights: Effectively Engaging and Involving Seldom-Heard Groups*. Retrieved from <https://www.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/iriss-insight-2.pdf>
- Kirby, J. (2016). No Excuses: High Standards, High Support. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20200811141202/https://pragmaticreform.wordpress.com/2016/12/10/no-excuses-high-standards-high-support/>
- Middlemas, J. (2014). *National curriculum assessments at key stage 2 in England, 2014 (Provisional)*. 2018(December), 1–39. Retrieved from [http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20765/1/SFR30\\_2014\\_Text.pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20765/1/SFR30_2014_Text.pdf)
- Millard, W., Bowen-viner, K., Baars, S., Trethewey, A., & Menzies, L. (2018). *Boys on*

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

*Track: Improving support for Black Caribbean and Free School Meal-Eligible White Boys in London.* 44(0). Retrieved from <https://www.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/LKMco-and-GLA-Boys-on-Track-FINAL-version-for-web.pdf>

- Millard, W., & Bowen-Viner, K. (2019). *MORE THAN A JOB 'S WORTH*: (April).
- Millard, W., Shaw, B., Baars, S., & Menzies, L. (2019). *More than a job's worth: Making work experience fit for purpose.* (May). Retrieved from <https://www.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Making-Careers-Education-work-experience-digi1.pdf>
- Mulcahy, E., Baars, S., Bowen-Viner, K., & Menzies, L. (2017). *The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in higher education.*
- OCSI. (2019). *Developing a measure of 'Left-behind ' areas Phase 2.* Brighton: OCSI.
- Office for National Statistics. (2019). Unemployment. Retrieved August 11, 2020, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20200725043800/https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest>
- Peter Beresford. (2013). *Beyond the Usual Suspects: Practical Guide.*
- Plaister, N. (2019). What do the latest Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results show? Retrieved from FFT Education Datalab website: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200811134529/https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2019/11/what-do-the-latest-early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-show/>
- Robertson, A., Baars, S., & Bowen-Viner, K. (2019). *Representation, engagement and participation: Latinx students in higher education.* Retrieved from <https://cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Latinx-students-in-higher-education-Nov-2019.pdf>
- The Equality Trust. (2020). The Scale of Economic Inequality in the UK. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20200811133517/https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/scale-economic-inequality-uk>
- Tunstall, R., Lupton, R., Green, A., Watmough, S., & Bates, K. (2012). *Disadvantaged Young People Looking for Work: A Job In Itself?* (October), 1–78.
- Waldfoegel, J., & Washbrook, E. (2010). Low income and early cognitive development in the UK. *Sutton Trust*, 60.
- Weale, S. (2019). Controversial Michaela free school delights in GCSE success. Retrieved from The Guardian website: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200811135124/https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/aug/22/controversial-michaela-free-school-delights-in-gcse-success>



This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' The Centre for Education and Youth. The Centre for Education and Youth is a social enterprise - we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

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