

West Somerset Opportunity Area (WSOA) Synthesis Report for Years 1-4

Delivery, progress and wider benefits

1 Executive summary

This report synthesises a range of data relating to the delivery of West Somerset Opportunity Area (WSOA) between 2017 and 2021. It also assesses progress against various social mobility outcomes, which are divided into key priority areas. The report combines insights from outcome level aggregate statistics and intervention level evaluation data with primary qualitative data collected by The Centre for Education and Youth in 2022. Aggregate statistics were compiled by WSOA from various sources. Intervention level data derived from 31 planning, feedback and evaluation documents relating to different priority areas. Some intervention level data contained several components, including qualitative perceptions of delivery and progress, and quantitative data relating to delivery and outcomes. The qualitative component of the work comprised three intervention case studies, based on interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, seven supplementary process interviews with a range of local authority leads, intervention leads and others, and a qualitative survey of 30, covering a similar range of stakeholders. This report presents a synthesis of the data described above. It does not aim to make causal inferences, instead presents a picture of what was delivered as part of WSOA, alongside conclusions about the progress that was made during the first four years of WSOA delivery. The report examines stakeholders' perceptions of factors that helped or hindered delivery and progress, and suggests implications for future delivery of social mobility interventions in West Somerset.

Delivery

Stakeholder surveys and interviews revealed that the landscape of provision for young people from Early Years through to their transitions to adulthood changed substantially over the first four years of WSOA funding. Documents and stakeholder interviews highlighted that WSOA funding both created provision where none existed previously, and helped existing provision find new ways of working in partnership. Delivery extended to development for staff and leaders in a range of sectors, including education, health, care and the voluntary sector.

Delivery of WSOA funded activities were often multi-faceted. Stakeholders reported that WSOA leaders and partners ensured that communication and ways of working improved over the four years of funding, to a point where a genuine cross-sector local community of practice emerged by 2021.

Stakeholders also reported, supported by documentary evidence, that the flexibility decision makers provided in terms of when and how funding was spent also ensured that WSOA could respond to newly identified needs in the community, and changing needs, not least in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Documentary and stakeholder responses highlighted that the biggest challenge to delivery, especially for priority areas 3 and 4, both of which aimed to provide opportunities at post-16 was transport. The difficulties for both young people and the professionals that work with them to physically access provision and training due to the limitations of local transport were highlighted by the pandemic but will also hamper future efforts to provide opportunities for young people in West Somerset.

Another theme running across all priority areas was the challenge of delivering multiple interventions amongst a small number of settings. Although case study respondents reported individual interventions were generally well-designed and delivered, they sometimes struggled to find the capacity to run a number of interventions at the same time. This was reported in Early Years settings and schools.

Outcomes

Priority Area One (every child has a great start in life)

- Aggregate data held by the local authority showed that the percentage of children achieving GLD in West Somerset increased by 15 percentage points from 58% to 73% between 2016/17 and 2018/19, against a target of 70%.
- Local authority data showed that take-up of early years places for disadvantaged two-year olds fell from 69% in spring 2018 to 64% in summer 2021, despite an initial increase in the proportion of disadvantaged two-year olds accessing places between 2018 and 2020.
- Amongst stakeholders, there were perceptions of strong progress on partnerships, likely to have lasting benefits in West Somerset. Particular strengths lay in cross-phase collaboration (mainly between Early Years settings and First schools, although Middle and even 14-19 schools were engaged) as well as early identification and support for SEND.

Priority Area Two (educational excellence in the classroom)

- In Priority 2, aggregate data held by the local authority revealed some shifts in pupil attainment during the first four years of WSOA funding. Local authority aggregate data showed that progress in phonics scores for Year 1 pupils in West Somerset improved between 2016/17 and 2018/19. The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics increased 10 percentage points between 2016/2017 (73%) and 2018/2019 (83%), almost reaching the target for 2021 (for which data is not available).
- At Key Stage 2, local authority aggregate data showed that the proportion of pupils achieving expected level or above in RWM increased from 50.6% in 2017/18 to 56.9% in 2018/19, albeit lower than the proportion achieving expected level or above nationally in 2018/19 (65%)¹.
- Beyond attainment, documentary evidence and stakeholder interviews highlighted examples of improved collaboration between schools as well as improvements in processes for delivery of local SEND services.

Priority Area Three (transition to adulthood)

- For Priority 3 interventions, West Somerset College staff and intervention leads reported progress in a range of outcomes for young people, especially through

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the wide range of support the academic mentoring programme offered, but also through out-of-school provision.

- Planned delivery was flexible and responded to emerging needs. This supported greater progress than would otherwise have been the case.
- There was weaker evidence of progress against target outcomes, especially reducing the rates of young people becoming NEET. Figures were not available, but indirect evidence suggested although West Somerset College leaders reported an increase in student retention, overall it had been difficult to find appropriate pathways for young people who were NEET. This was linked to the combination of limited transport infrastructure (and cost for Post-16 students), connectivity, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Priority Area Four (skills for employment and business)

- Priority 4 funding delivered new provision of support for young people to develop career-related skills.
- Young people and local stakeholders felt positive about these new opportunities, although this positivity did not yet translate into measurable changes in target outcomes across the locality. Covid-19 may have contributed here, with staff and students telling us about the difficulties related to accessing provision during the pandemic.
- There were some success stories in terms of apprenticeship starts but numbers were low, which stakeholders partly attributed to challenges facing the labour market in West Somerset, particularly in light of the pandemic.

Implications

There were a number of key considerations for delivery of Social Mobility policy in West Somerset, and for other geographically isolated localities.

- Strategic leadership and funding is needed to ensure progress made through the Opportunity Area is maintained. In this context, the West Somerset EIA offers an opportunity to consolidate and build on the gains of the Opportunity Area.
- Maintaining these partnerships will be the key role of future local leadership.
- Flexibility to offer a range of interventions and to tackle some underlying barriers proved essential during Covid-19 and will remain important in future policy and delivery.

Summary of recommendations

For government:

1. Many leaders we spoke to in education settings across phases told us about difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, and WSOA leads reported high levels of churn amongst school leaders. DfE should invest in place-based initiatives that improve the supply of teachers in rural and coastal communities, such as West Somerset.
2. The digital divide is an important barrier in West Somerset. All young people have access to a stable internet connection and an appropriate digital device. As a result DfE should ensure that programmes such as Connect to the Classroom are monitored and adapted to meet changing needs for those young people who are most disconnected.
3. As part of Priority Education Investment Areas, consider a 'transition fund' that focuses on improving young people's transitions between different phases (e.g.

school-university, college-work), helping them to move effectively from one form of support to another.

For Somerset LA:

1. Provide strategic support to West Somerset schools and other settings that help them access additional pools of funding and/or support.
2. Within Local Community Networks, map the services (e.g. schools, youth clubs) that young people in West Somerset are accessing both within and outside of West Somerset and use this to inform investment decisions.
3. Invest in local infrastructure, with transport as a key priority, focussing in particular on post-16.
4. Build on the progress of WSOA in offering non-formal education and enrichment opportunities for young people beyond schools, making the most of existing networks of youth provision, and filling gaps where needed.
5. Ensure that consultation with young people themselves is at the heart of investment decisions.

For leaders and partners in West Somerset:

1. Use the PEIA programme to build on West Somerset's existing infrastructure, WSOA schemes and interventions that were disrupted by the pandemic, giving settings time to embed existing support.
2. Encourage employers to improve work experience access by supporting travel for young people and/or providing online opportunities, while ensuring young people have a strong internet connection and suitable digital device.
3. Consider how Theories of Change and rigorous evaluations can be built into future interventions to measure the impact of individual interventions and use long-term data on labour market outcomes (e.g. NEET figures, type of work), comparing with similar areas, to observe the effect of WSOA's work.

For schools:

1. Continue to improve collaboration between settings and draw on federations, MATs, the LA and other school networks to align practice where appropriate (e.g. curriculum sequencing).
2. Improve ties between West Somerset schools and those in other parts of Somerset, particularly given many young people in West Somerset may access these institutions.

2 Introduction

This report overviews the progress made in West Somerset between 2017 and 2021 as a result of the West Somerset Opportunity Area (WSOA).

The Opportunity Area programme was a 2016 Department for Education initiative aiming to bring local and national resources to bear on improving social mobility in 12 areas with the lowest rates of social mobility in England. West Somerset was chosen as a result of its position in the Social Mobility Index, ranked 324th out of 324 Council areas in the country. This ranking was partly influenced by relatively low levels of educational attainment compared to national averages, but largely driven by economic outcomes.

West Somerset has a lower than average wages and a lower than average proportion of the working population with Level 2 qualifications, in part reflecting the number of low-skilled jobs in the area. House prices are relatively high for the region due to second-home ownership and tourism². Concerns about work readiness and labour market outcomes take on renewed significance in light of the pandemic.

West Somerset is unique relative to other Opportunity Areas. This is partly due to its rurality and coastal nature, and partly due to its size. West Somerset has the lowest population density of all local authority districts in England. Fewer than 35,000 people live in West Somerset, with an average age of 54 and a very small school age population³.

There are 18 schools in WSOA (15 first/junior/primary schools, 2 middle schools and 1 senior school). During Years 1-4 of WSOA there were 18 early years settings and a number of community groups and youth settings. Of the 18 schools, only the senior school provides post-16 opportunities (through a small 6th form) and young people seeking a wider range of courses or qualifications than the school can provide must look outside West Somerset. West Somerset also differs from other Opportunity Areas in the lack of local Further and Higher Education provision. There is no university, and post-16 provision is limited to a small school 6th form and an FE college in a neighbouring area.

WSOA was launched in 2016/17, with delivery beginning in 2017/18. Funding was due to run until 2019/2020, extended twice to include the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years. This report synthesises data from the first four years of delivery.

The total budget in years 1-4 for the WSOA was £6.38m and was shared across four priority areas:

- Priority 1: Every Child has a great start in life.

²
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/675052/Social_Mobility_Delivery_Plan-West_Somerset.PDF

³
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/675052/Social_Mobility_Delivery_Plan-West_Somerset.PDF

- Priority 2: Educational excellence in the classroom.
- Priority 3: Transition to Adulthood.
- Priority 4: Skills for employment and business.

This report answers three research questions:

- What has WSOA done towards meeting its original delivery aims?
- What can be said about the (perceived and/or measured) progress that has been made in WSOA?
- What benefits have been realised that go beyond the intent set out in the delivery plan?

Each chapter of the report summarises progress on delivery and outcomes for each of the four areas in turn. Sustainability and long-term progress were a key feature of WSOA from the outset, as demonstrated in the evaluation template that was used for individual interventions or programmes funded by WSOA and various theory of change documents. This report therefore contains a sub-section considering sustainability.

3 Methods

This report synthesises and triangulates a range of quantitative and qualitative data relevant to Years 1-4 of WSOA delivery. There were six key components; outlined below.

1. **Documentary review:** A synthesis of 31 sets of documents. These sets contained embedded documents spanning delivery plans, project documents, board papers and other material that outlines what WSOA intended to achieve through their work but also provides insights as to how delivery was adapted through the programme. Analysis was split into different priority areas, with both strategic and intervention-level insights concerning design, process, and sustainability among other themes.
2. **Aggregate data analysis:** This focused principally on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relevant to WSOA's objectives for each priority area. While this would not necessarily indicate the efficacy of individual interventions, it would give an indication of whether the work delivered through WSOA had been associated with intended outcomes at the aggregate priority level. CfEY and WSOA agreed on a set of available data to inform this synthesis. Where possible, data was analysed with a comparison group outside WSOA. Aggregate data was not available for every outcome in every priority area.
3. **Evaluation synthesis:** In addition to the aggregate data analysis, CfEY assessed over 25 evaluation documents at the intervention level to better understand whether different activities had been delivered and whether there were instances where participant's outcomes had changed as a result of the programme. Insights included number of activities delivered, number of participants reached, findings from pre/post surveys, qualitative insights from participants about their experiences. Data quality varied, and a key recommendation for future intervention is to consider how Theories of Change and rigorous evaluations can be built into future interventions to measure the impact of individual interventions and use long-term data on labour market outcomes (e.g. NEET figures, type of work), comparing with similar areas, to observe the effect of interventions.
4. **Case studies:** Three case studies across three different priority areas were conducted to supplement the insights gleaned from the documentary review and data analyses. Here, various qualitative methods were used, including interviews, focus groups and observation of one of the interventions in practices with young people. We conducted semi-structured interviews with school leaders, practitioners, leaders of delivery organisations and local authority leads as well as focus groups with young people aged 16-19 for Priorities 3 and 4. Questions focussed principally on intervention objectives, perceived impact, partnership and collaboration, and sustainability. Material was transcribed, thematically coded to draw out commonly occurring themes.
5. **Survey:** A survey was distributed to a range of professionals (n=30) that had been involved in WSOA in some capacity, such as representatives from various council services involved in WSOA delivery, members of the WSOA team,

intervention leads, and school senior leaders. The survey was intended to add breadth to the case study responses; collecting further qualitative data relating to progress, unexpected benefits, partnerships and sustainability. The survey data was thematically coded alongside case study and process interview data.

6. Process interviews: Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with WSOA and DfE stakeholders and leads for each of the priority areas. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically coded alongside the case study and survey data to produce a set of qualitative insights. The coding framework was divided into themes on progress (what was or was not delivered), enabling factors, barriers, partnership/collaboration, and sustainability/legacy, each of which contained further sub-themes.

4. Findings

Priority 1: Every child has a great start in life

4.1.1 Delivery insights

Priority 1 encompassed at least 19 OA-funded interventions for which learning insights were gathered, covering a wide range of project activities. Many activities involved working directly with children (4), but also supporting settings in embedding quality practice (10), training practitioners working with children (13) and supporting parents to develop their skills and confidence (11). There were partner-led interventions like I CAN and Homestart, which consisted of several, independent interventions focusing on communication and EY.

There was also an emphasis on SEND across a number of interventions. WSOA made considerable strides towards its aims of auditing practice, developing action plans and building capacity to improve SEND support in Early Years settings, among others. 14 audits were completed, with 13 developing action plans (one setting had closed), which marked good progress. In addition, two training opportunities, surrounding positive behaviour and inclusive practice in the Early Years reached 14 settings and 48 practitioners, alongside further training, including a two-day EY SENCo training course, attended by 12 practitioners

Priority 1 encompassed all aspects of EY, for example, interventions focused on pregnancy, through to interventions focused on transitions from EY settings into school. These interventions covered all aspects of EY, and provided guidance and support for parents and families.

Some (for example SEYS Coaching and EY SEND Mentoring) took a longer-term approach, mentoring staff that had excelled in the programme to become programme champions who can share practice across West Somerset and the wider county. Many activities had partnership working built into their design, for example, as part of Public Health Nursing and Health Visiting, additional funding was given to Health Visitors to improve links across community groups and organisations.

Some delivery extended beyond the West Somerset administrative boundary through 'twinning' projects. In Priority 1, a speech, language, communication and maths programme was extended to Weymouth and Portland, whilst ICAN's Early Talkers intervention, which consisted of *Early Talk* Training and Accreditation and *Early Talk Boost*, was also delivered in Mendip.

Overall, Opportunity Area data shows that all surveyed EY settings in West Somerset participated in at least three interventions, and practitioners were positive about the interventions WSOA funded. 87.5% of responding EY practitioners gave positive feedback on WSOA-supported EY interventions, while all reported using WSOA-oriented resources, with 93% of settings finding these resources useful.

4.1.2 Progress

WSOA aimed to make progress against two indicators; children's levels of development by the end of the Early Years, and parental take-up of early education.

Achieving Good Levels of Development (GLD):

Increase the proportion of children achieving GLD at the end of the early years foundation stage to at least 70%, so it is above the current national average. This will mean around 40 more children in West Somerset will achieve a good level of development.

Take-up:

Increase take up, so that at least 80% of disadvantaged two year olds access early education, which is well above the current national rate of take up.

What progress did WSOA make against those outcomes?

Achieving GLD

There is clear evidence that WSOA investment coincided with progress in the proportion of children achieving GLD by the end of the Early Years Foundation stage.

Aggregate data held by the local authority showed that the percentage of children achieving GLD in West Somerset increased from 58% to 73% between 2016/17 and 2018/19, exceeding the original target (70%).

Disadvantage and GLD

The gap between children eligible for FSM and those not-eligible for FSM decreased 18 percentage points from 22% in 2016/17 to 4% in 2018/19. There was a marked increase in the proportion of children eligible for FSM achieving GLD; from 40% in 2016/17 to 69% in 2018/19.

Increasing take up

The proportion of disadvantaged two-year olds accessing early years settings in West Somerset initially increased, but declined again post-pandemic. Local authority data showed that the percentage of two-year olds identified by DWP data as eligible for free-places accessing places in Autumn 2018 was 69%. By Spring 2020 the proportion had risen to 88%, but then fell again by the end of Year 4 funding in summer 2021 to 64%.

Case study data suggested that whilst the parents we spoke to had taken up Early Years places and participated in Priority 1 interventions, they recognised difficulties for other parents in taking up Early Years provision. Transport difficulties was the most commonly cited factor, as this parent exemplified:

"If you didn't drive... it would be quite hard to get there if you came from [anywhere other than] Minehead because there wasn't much [provision elsewhere]... It's only Minehead or Taunton. It probably could be a bit hard to access"

Parent: Early Years case study

Other parents suggested that WSOA had not communicated elements of its Early Years offer (in this case the Tiny Tots intervention) widely enough:

Progress beyond planned outcomes

4.1.3 Outcomes for children with an identified SEND

Case study and process interview respondents reported that, whilst it was not a stated aim, a key internal aim for Priority 1 was to improve outcomes for children with an identified SEND. Of the children identified as having SEND (n = 17), 58.8% achieved GLD in West Somerset (n = 10). Survey responses show that Early Years staff and leads

believed that WSOA interventions improved practitioners' skills in identifying potential SEND needs, as well as increasing the range of strategies they could employ to support children's' differing needs (especially relating to language and communication)

4.1.4 Benefits to local partnerships

WSOA Priority 1 activities established or strengthened local partnerships. For example the Parenting Skills and Confidence programme connected multiple organisations:

- West Somerset Volunteer Sector including CLOWNS and Home-Start
- Somerset County Council Public Health team (Health Visitors)
- NHS (Midwifery)
- West Somerset Early Years providers (including Childminders, schools, nurseries)
- Somerset Libraries (for Story Start sessions)
- Parish Councils, West Somerset District Council

Case study and survey respondents reported that the extent and nature of partnership working had improved in West Somerset in the Early Years, as this response exemplified:

"[There is] genuine partnership working due to knowing who the key links are across the WSOA in larger agencies and also smaller providers. Working together as part of community interventions and looking to contribute to new innovations."

Survey response

These partnerships were reported as being beneficial in a number of ways:

- **Staff development:** collaboration between different organisations within Early Years education and other agencies working in the Early Years enabled models of peer support to emerge, as this Early Years lead explained

"Where those results had improved collaboration between our colleagues in West Somerset, not just within education, but outside of their organisational boundaries.... They were supporting one another to do it even better, and they knew more importantly where to ask for help and identifying their weaknesses, which I don't think have been very prevalent before."

Interview response

Resources and training delivered by non-local organisations were also seen as positive. For example, 85% of attendees (n=34) reported that an Early Years SEND conference gave them ideas for their settings, and I CAN evaluations showed positive perceptions of the training delivered to EY staff, albeit with very small sample sizes.

- **Supporting transitions into school:** partnerships between staff in primary schools and Early Years settings improved, both within and across phases. This in turn enabled improved support for children transitioning from the Early Years into Key Stage 1. Somerset's Early Years lead explained that this had occurred partly because by breaking down "siloes working" and partly because it enabled staff to offer constructive challenge across organisations:

"Transition points have been stronger because of it, for example, because people know each other now. They understand each other, and what their roles are, and ultimately they've seen each other support one another... just people understanding each other's organisations, being supportive, and putting that appropriate challenge into place"

- **Targeting of resources.** Partnerships between a number of organisations enabled pooling of knowledge about local communities. This in turn led to better targeting of resources to families with greater need. Resources could also be shared, for example running multiple interventions from the Children’s Centre building.

4.1.4 Factors leading to successful implementation

Combining support for families with support for professionals

As highlighted in Section WSOA Priority 1 interventions were designed to meet outcomes through more than one delivery mechanism. Many combined training for practitioners with direct delivery with families. Healthy Movers reflects this approach, with sessions provided to families directly to encourage greater activity at home, while also training and supporting EY staff to embed physical activity programmes in their settings.

Sharing/reflecting on practice with others

Some interventions, like the EY Moderation Training, provided opportunities for partners to share their expertise and insight. Beyond interventions, the WSOA leadership created a culture of transparency, sharing data where possible and discussing set-backs and issues openly. This transparency extended to collective planning of multiple interventions, spotting opportunities to maximise impact, as the West Somerset lead for one delivery partner explained:

We were all going into the same settings, so we pulled together a group [...] to get everybody together to talk about which settings were hard to target, which work we were doing, so that we could space it out, make it more manageable and just share intelligence of what was working and how we could approach different settings

Interview response

Designing interventions rooted in assessment of local need

One of the strengths of Priority 1 interventions was the way in which delivery partners (such as I CAN) were able to draw on the local knowledge of the availability of services and the barriers to accessing those services. For example, the Home Start and Bump Start interventions were based on an identified need for antenatal services in West Somerset. In several interventions, WSOA built on existing local infrastructure and expertise and brought in external support, where needed.

Designing interventions rooted in evidence

Several interventions drew on external evidence to support their work. For instance, Year 4’s ICAN’s work with Mendip settings engaged as part of the twinning phase from 2020/21 cites Education Endowment Foundation evidence on ‘communication and language approaches’, as well as I CAN evidence of ‘what works’.

4.1.5 Factors hindering implementation

Overload

Especially in Years 1-3, WSOA leadership and delivery partners identified problems with the number of Priority 1 interventions leading to overload. Some settings lacked the capacity to take part in interventions, whilst delivery dates overlapped. WSOA Board Papers from 2019 identify several issues with delivery:

- *"Childminders and settings with low staff numbers cannot always attend training.*
- *"Not all the training was appropriate for the type of provider."*
- *"Too many courses were delivered in the first couple of terms. The training programme started in 2018 a year after the OA project had started.*
- *"Clashing of dates between priorities".*

WSOA implemented lessons learned in the first three years to streamline the offer from the fourth year of delivery. For instance, in the Year 4 approach to Priority 1, interventions were scaled back to allow them time to embed, while the strategy turned to address structural issues, like school staffing, which would help sustain the benefits derived from interventions. In addition, there was a movement away from training courses towards individualised support, allowing staff to embed training and strategies.

Staffing issues

Across a range of interventions, staff turnover was cited as a challenge to progress against delivery aims.

"There is turnover in the workforce. It can be as much as in one setting, practically all the staff have changed. You get to that point where you've trained everybody, and then it all changes."

Interview response

These sorts of challenges were particularly acute in West Somerset, where interviewees across Priority 1 (and priority areas 2, 3 and 4) reported finding it hard to recruit teachers and other youth-facing practitioners. Covid also exacerbated these challenges. WSOA and partner organisations made efforts to adapt their delivery to meet the challenges of staffing interventions during the pandemic. For instance, Early Talk Boost staff found creative ways to inform parents about resource sharing outside of the parent workshops, which could not take place due to Covid. Elsewhere, Twinning⁴ advisors moved much of their liaison work online.

⁴ Twinning refers to WSOA funded work delivered outside of the West Somerset geographic area

Case Study: Tots Talking

Background

Tots Talking was an intervention that was delivered under WSOA's Priority 1, which had a focus on the early years. A key aim of Priority 1 was for an increased proportion of young people in West Somerset to finish Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at a Good Level of Development (EYFS). The intervention was part of a suite of interventions surrounding early speech, such as Early Talk Boost. Through a range of in-person sessions and provision of other resources, Tots Talking supported parents to more effectively help their children with their language acquisition. As a member of WSOA noted, early language acquisition had been a concern for a long time in West Somerset, and supporting parents to help their children with language was a strategic priority:

"Parents [are] a child's first and most enduring educator. So, making sure that they have the skills, and the knowledge, and the expertise to support their children at home is really important"

WSOA lead

Practitioners in Early Years settings received training on how to deliver Tots Talking. These trained practitioners then held in-person or online sessions, working through a range of activities with parents, for instance: presentations, a session on how to narrate a playdough activity with children, and online videos used to constructively critique parents' technique. Each Tots Talking programme consisted of eight hour-long sessions spread across eight weeks. Participant parents were given an app on their phone to use during the group and afterwards to continue to support their learning

Benefits

Tots Talking reportedly produced the following benefits:

- **Increased parental engagement with children:** In one Early Years setting, a practitioner noted that parents' self-reported communication abilities with their children had increased through the programme. They also reported that parents that had completed Tots Talking were doing more language development activities at home with their children.

"it's so important in terms of outcomes for children and working consistently together and collaboratively with the parents"

Early Years staff

- **Improved parental understanding of effective strategies:** A member of staff at an Early Years setting noted that those who had participated in the programme were better able to distinguish between effective and less effective support for their children. In particular, a parent noted that the videos had helped them learn models of good practice and pitfalls to avoid:

"they definitely have benefited because you understand more from a child's perspective of the things that they can understand"

Parent

- **Improvements to Early Years settings:** According to a member of staff at an Early Years setting we spoke with, the Tots Talking training led to general improvements in practice across the setting, with the intervention's strategies becoming part of their provision. Moreover, the member of staff explained that they were extending their provision and had appointed new members of staff, including an apprentice, which would help them continue their work with Tots Talking in the future. They also pointed to the availability of online resources and their new delivery room, meaning their only future costs would be for the one-hour week from the person delivering the session.

Factors that supported delivery

WSOA helped improve the delivery of Tots Talking through reducing intervention overload when it became apparent, and effective coordination between settings and between interventions.

Reducing overload: In the first two years of delivery, settings were often overwhelmed by the number of interventions available to them, with a danger that resources were not being allocated efficiently. A member of staff in an Early Setting that ran Tots Talking recalled their initial concerns about duplication and a feeling that communication between providers could have been stronger, which may have compromised what they were able to achieve. In response, a WSOA lead set up an operational group of practitioners to discuss which settings had been difficult to target, the work being undertaken, and share best practice. In addition, the Year 4 strategy focused on embedding existing interventions, to ensure work was well-implemented and sustainable, while easing pressure on settings. These approaches helped ensure that Tots Talking was part of a coherent suite of interventions, reaching the settings and parents that needed them the most.

Effective coordination: Tots Talking also reportedly complemented other programmes funded as part of the WSOA. For instance, a parent noted that Tots Talking had helped them support their child, who had an identified SEND, building on the work they had done as part of the Shine intervention. Similarly, a member of staff at an Early Years setting felt that Tots Talking, which focused on two year-olds, provided a useful groundwork for another intervention, Early Talk boost, which did similar work for parents of children between two and three years of age. This model was celebrated by a member of staff at one of the settings, praising the collaborative approach taken to improving children's outcomes:

"We had Tots Talking for the two-year-olds and Talk Boost, Early Talk Boost for the three-four-year-olds. (...) they did compliment each other really well"

Early Years staff

Factors that hindered delivery

A key concern across evaluation documents and interviews was the number of participant parents. For example, a parent we spoke with explained that they were aware that the intervention had not reached the number of parents that they had originally set out to.

"There was only one other parent. It was only me and one other person that ended up going. It was meant to be about six of us, but none of them showed up"

Lower numbers of participants made it difficult to complete activities designed with a larger group in mind. However, the group activities were flexible enough to be adjusted and be effective with lower numbers.

Those we spoke with offered several reasons for lower numbers:

- **Covid disruption:** Attendance was lower due to Covid, as parents were not able to attend settings due to restrictions. In addition, several members of staff in the early years setting were furloughed between March-June 2020, which hindered delivery, although some groups were successfully delivered on Zoom.
- **Early Years capacity:** Most Early Years settings in West Somerset employed very few staff. The setting manager we spoke to reported they often found it hard to find time to offer staff capacity to complete the Tots Talking group delivery. A member of Tots Talking delivery staff noted that they were the only agency actively delivering the programme that term, meaning they were building a waiting list of parents for their next programme.
- **Staff performance and retention:** There were also issues associated with relying on a single member of staff for training. For instance, in one setting, the person delivering the intervention had left before completing their initial group. Sessions had been cancelled, which meant that attendance dropped off. The setting did receive support from a WSOA lead to rectify this issue, but this disruption did have an impact on programme reach in the setting.
- **Connecting with parents:** Staff at the Early Years setting we spoke with had made a concerted effort to target those who could most benefit from the programme. A member of staff explained that they had initially opened the programme to all parents but then had a key contact speak to certain parents directly to encourage them to attend and explained to them that the Tots Talking was a worthwhile and evidence-informed programme. However, the staff member noted that parents were sometimes reluctant to participate as they felt that they were being perceived negatively in terms of the quality of their parenting. They added that others were reluctant to commit to a programme with multiple sessions, and suggested Talk Boost had more success in engaging parents by sending resources home to use in parents' own time. Another parent noted that they would not have known about the programme unless they had been notified by a professional from Home-Start and felt that more could be done to inform others about the work.

Transport: Travel difficulties hindered access for some parents. A parent we spoke with noted that while they were able to access sessions as they were local to them, others outside of the town would have struggled unless they could drive. One member of Tots Talking delivery staff suggested that supporting parents with travel costs may be a good idea in the future.

Priority 2: Educational excellence in the classroom

4.2.1 Delivery insights

WSOA approached Priority 2 through a combination of interventions in school and youth settings. Several interventions (for example Boolean Maths) directly targeted children's academic outcomes. Others provided resources (Libraries) whilst others worked on children's social and emotional development (Youth Support Programme) in order to support them to be better able to learn. Many worked with teachers (School SEND support, Meta-curriculum, Trauma Informed Schools) to improve and enhance West Somerset curriculum planning and sharing, developing a trauma informed approach for staff, improving SEND identification, assessment and practice.

Documentary data allows comment on delivery for some, but not all interventions:

Phonics and literacy

Documents and interviews suggested that WSOA enabled greater consistency between schools. All schools were using the Talk for Writing model and champions delivered training to teachers as well as moderating teaching of Talk for Writing. Talkboost Champion and Read Write Inc. were also rolled out to the majority of schools, although there were some suggestions from case study respondents that a small number of schools lacked the capacity to engage with phonics and literacy hubs.

Boolean maths

WSOA's Boolean maths interventions, which sought to improve the quality of maths education in West Somerset, reached 32 teaching assistants and 27 teachers from across West Somerset schools. The 45 returned evaluation forms show overwhelmingly positive feedback, with staff respondents reporting greater confidence with maths subject knowledge, practical ideas from the sessions and a better grasp of the maths curriculum

SEND

Documentary and qualitative data suggest that WSOA's Priority 2 interventions changed the landscape of delivery for SEND in West Somerset, both through funding for CPD in schools, and also beyond schools. WSOA's SEND support work extended to parents, providing maps to provision within schools and other agencies, and additional work done to improve transition between settings. WSOA also targeted SEND support in VCS organisations, with early communication training delivered to six members of staff and resource packs distributed to two agencies.

Youth provision

Under the youth support programme, 121 young people engaged in various targeted resilience programmes for Year 10s-13s. In some cases, delivery plans had been altered by pandemic restrictions. For instance, Minehead EYE originally planned to deliver in 10 areas but were only able to deliver in seven. Some additional outdoor youth provision helped provide support during lockdowns. When youth clubs reopened, sufficient young people were engaged to make the provision viable, suggesting that good infrastructure was put in place during the pandemic to ensure progress could be made once restrictions were lifted. The outreach and detached youth work evaluation noted the

geographical spread of their provision, with provision in Dunster, Williton, Stogumber and Porlock.

Library provision.

450 book packs were distributed, each containing books, whiteboards, literacy advice packs for parents and other resources. New young library members (under 17s) of West Somerset increased from 141 in December 2018 – November 2019 to 971. However, Covid reduced engagement with libraries. Between December 2020 and November 2021, the number of total issues more than halved during this period, while visits declined 73.6%.

Another component of the library-oriented interventions was the digital dens offering access to digital technology (such as 3D pens and VR headsets) to children in more remote communities. Children from at least 25 different family units (from deprived or vulnerable backgrounds) interacted with the equipment.

Trauma Informed Schools

The Trauma Informed Schools intervention involved training to improve schools' understanding and practice of trauma informed strategies for supporting young people with their mental health needs, including:

- a one-day introductory course for all staff
- a two-day senior leader course delivered online to 24 delegates
- a diploma requiring 10 days of training and assessment completed by 27 delegates (the vast majority of those enrolled)
- development of evidence-informed strategies to support children and young people.

Case study responses highlighted the reach of this training in schools, with senior leaders, local authority specialists, and community sector staff involved as well as teachers. The training also extended to Early Years staff. Twinning projects extended West Somerset's Trauma Informed schools intervention to a further 8 schools in Somerset.

4.2.2 Progress

In Priority 2, WSOA aimed to make progress against three outcomes by 2021:

Phonics

At least 85% of children will meet the expected standards in phonics in all schools in West Somerset.

Key Stage 1 (KS1)

The proportion of children reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths outcomes at key stage 1 will put West Somerset in the top half of the country, and the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and all pupils will be half what it was in September 2017.

Key Stage 2 (KS2)

Outcomes at key stage 2 will be in the top half of the country the gap in West Somerset between disadvantaged pupils and all pupils will be half what it was in September 2017

What progress did WSOA make against those outcomes?

Phonics

Local authority aggregate data showed that progress in phonics scores for Year 1 pupils in West Somerset improved between 2016/17 and 2018/19. The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics increased 10 percentage points between 2016/2017 (73%) and 2018/2019 (83%), almost reaching the target for 2021 (for which data is not available).

Improvements in phonics scores were particularly notable for pupils known to be eligible for FSM. In West Somerset the proportion of FSM-eligible pupils meeting the expected standard rose from 60% to 74% between 2016/17 and 2018/19, although this change may have been due to factors beyond the influence of WSOA.

Key Stage 1

Local Authority aggregate data shows that the proportion of Key Stage 1 pupils achieving the expected level or above in reading, writing and maths (RWM) decreased marginally in West Somerset, from 48.8% in 2017/18, to 48.4% in 2018/19, while the rate in Somerset as a whole increased from 48.7% to 51.4% over the same period.

Key Stage 2

At Key Stage 2, local authority aggregate data showed that the proportion of pupils achieving expected level or above in RWM increased from 50.6% in 2017/18 to 56.9% in 2018/19, albeit lower than the proportion achieving expected level or above nationally in 2018/19 (65%)⁵. The improvements in Key Stage 2 RWM results were particularly notable among pupils eligible for FSM, increasing from 25.0% in 2017/18 to 42.9% in 2018/19. This represents a far greater change than Somerset as a whole, where the RWM rate improved from 39.0% in 2017/18 to 41.9% in 2018/19.

Progress beyond planned outcomes

There were two ways in which Priority 2 funding led to positive outcomes that were not set out in original delivery plans. These were:

- Improved support for pupils with SEND
- Staff development

SEND

Interview respondents reported that WSOA funding enabled schools to build better systems for SEND including identification and targeting intervention, more SENCoS in leadership teams, and greater awareness of research on effective practice for children with SEND from the Education Endowment Fund. Across the process interviews and case studies, respondents highlighted their perceptions of progress on SEND. Whilst these perceptions did not extend to direct impact on planned outcomes, they revealed how WSOA led to more inclusive mainstream schools. One process interview described changes across a number of West Somerset schools:

"We definitely saw leadership practice changes within the SENCo level, in particular, and heads monitoring, we saw more focus on trying to make interventions more tighter, more targeted, more measurable."

Interview response

5

Individual pupils also experienced better outcomes. This senior leader in a case study school described their perception of how WSOA SEND support led to better outcomes for one pupil:

"We thought actually this child needed specialist provision and to attend a PRU outside of the area at such a young age. We had to look at all sorts of different trauma informed ways of working. We worked with the PRU as an outreach. We upskilled our staff. We put supervision in for those staff... and, wonderfully the pupil is successful with us and now ready to transition with their class to the next phase many years on. The progress of this pupil is significant and life changing for them."

Interview response

Staff development

There were two ways in which WSOA supported staff development in schools. The first was through improving and embedding practice, for example through a shared language around and understanding of curriculum and maths mastery as these quotes demonstrate:

"Shared language is commonplace across the school; staff have a shared understanding of the importance of the curriculum"

Quote taken from Metacurriculum evaluation document

"Maths Leads have a better understanding of how to lead change in order to improve outcomes for all children. More consistent approach to maths across the region and greater collaboration beginning to happen between schools."

Survey response

Second, WSOA created career pathways within schools. WSOA funding enabled teachers to access leadership qualifications, whilst also funding a small number of local people into foundation degrees in teaching.

The extent of the training offer for Trauma Informed Schools was seen by school leaders as valuable in embedding change. In particular the timing of training for leaders coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic meant that school leaders could clearly see the need for this intervention:

"The pandemic gave everybody the kick and the excuse to engage. And it meant the timing of that buy-in was right. Because it is such a clear structure of training and leadership had to own it, it became quickly adopted in lots of the schools"

Interview response

4.2.3 Benefits to local partnerships

Priority 2 built on existing infrastructure in West Somerset to strengthen relationships with local and national partners. WSOA's funding for outreach and detached youth work, enabled legacy provision for youth settings and created links to recently reopened youth clubs. Evaluation documents cite effective links with PCSO teams, schools and community leaders as key in assuring community members that the support young people were receiving showed the programme was effective.

The SEND work, particularly around resource packs and transition support, also seemed to strengthen ties between EY settings, schools, the Local Authority, agencies and others, which may help more strategic SEND-oriented work in the future.

The Metacurriculum intervention supported alignment between school phases, with improved coordination reported between first and middle schools.

Finally, WSOA helped broker links between schools and local community groups, as described in this survey response:

"Developed closer links between the West Somerset Schools and other organisations, especially the charity groups. Better understanding of wider community offers available to support families"

Survey response

4.2.4 Factors leading to successful implementation

Four key factors supported successful delivery and progress towards outcomes for Priority 2. These were:

- The range of WSOA-funded interventions
- Flexibility in funding
- Buy in from schools

Range of interventions

The unique context of WSOA, with a small number of schools relative to other Opportunity Areas, meant that WSOA was able to fund a range of small interventions, rather than having to choose between large scale interventions aimed at a larger number of pupils, teachers or schools. This meant that, together, WSOA's priority 2 interventions led to changes across every part of local schools, from pastoral to classroom activities, as well as beyond the school gates in local youth settings. Case study respondents believed that this enabled a more holistic approach to meeting pupils' needs than might otherwise have been the case.

Flexibility in funding

Having flexibility in the Priority 2 budget also meant that funding could be targeted at needs as they emerged. For example, when it became clear that some schools were struggling to release staff for training, WSOA's budgets were able to meet the costs of cover. Likewise, there was funding available to meet underlying barriers to access, for example tackling transport costs or digital connectivity.

Buy-in from school leaders

Churn in school and MAT senior leadership led to changes in how schools engaged with WSOA. These changes led to some improvements in delivery. For example, growing support and buy-in from the MAT over the four years supported Priority 2 delivery. One example of this increased buy-in can be seen in the MAT's support for SEND provision, funding an executive SENCo to work across its schools. According to stakeholder interviews, the executive SENCo provided consistency in SEND support and thus helped schools meet individual pupil's needs.

4.2.5 Factors hindering successful implementation

There were a number of barriers to success in Priority 2:

- Overload
- Teacher recruitment and retention

- Transport and digital infrastructure

Overload

As was the case for other priority areas, the range of WSOA interventions required careful management of school capacity. As noted above, funding for cover eased some of these issues, but reports of overload persisted:

"We've obviously had the danger of overload and I think we all recognize that because even in the school strand there's literacy, there's maths. There's a big curriculum project going on. There's trauma informed schools, there's wider mental health and wellbeing. There's so much going on. There is the danger of overload. I think that schools have engaged well. I think they've had to be a bit more selective of what they can do."

Interview response

Recruitment and retention

Case study responses indicated that many schools struggled to recruit and retain teachers and leaders. Partly this was because it was hard to attract teachers and leaders from outside the area due to its isolation. This process interview respondent highlighted the extent to which turnover of leaders and SENCOs reduced the consistency of changes in West Somerset schools:

"Leadership churn stops development because each leader has a focus and goes through a process of evaluation and change management process. So that hindered the work to some extent, because it meant that SENCOs were working with different leaders, whether at a CEO level or a head teacher level. SENCOs were changing because a number of the schools' head teachers were also their SENCOs because they were small schools... so that hindered some of the classroom practice, because it affected consistency, but we did see some improvement in classroom purpose."

Interview response

The original WSOA delivery plan reported that 'Teach First has pledged to prioritise West Somerset in its future rounds of recruitment to increase the number of placements in West Somerset schools' but there was no indication that this had taken place.

Infrastructure

Digital poverty, broadband and transport infrastructure prevented all pupils accessing the WSOA funded support. During the pandemic, some communities were without broadband access. For children needing access to alternative or specialist provision, journey times and a lack of public transport impacted their ability to access provision. Although WSOA was able to mitigate some of these infrastructure barriers, physical and digital connectivity remains a challenge for pupils in West Somerset.

Case Study: Trauma-Informed Schools

Background

Trauma-Informed Schools aimed to improve the wellbeing of children in participant schools. According to the intervention documents, a trauma informed school is 'one that is able to support children and teenagers who suffer with trauma or mental health problems and whose troubled behaviour acts as a barrier to learning'. The programme involved a range of training delivered during 2020/21, delivered by Trauma-Informed Schools UK, consisting of:

- An initial one day introductory course for all school staff
- A two day course for senior leaders
- A ten day Level 5 Practitioner course.

In a first school we visited to complete this case study, the Trauma-Informed Schools work involved a wider strategic approach towards supporting young people's mental health, with a school policies and practices leaning towards an emphasis on teachers' relationships with young people and other tenet's of a 'Trauma-Informed' approach. The school's strategy included having an external professional come in to run sessions with young people who have been identified as needing additional support by their class teachers. The specialist worked with pupils one-on-one or in small groups, helping them manage emotional challenges and navigate the school day.

As well as having an impact on pupils' wellbeing, there was also an emphasis on other outcomes, such as reducing exclusions and improving attendance. A member of the WSOA team explained that whole school training was delivered to eight schools, with further senior leadership training and support from education psychologists. Some community organisation managers also attended training sessions, attempting to extend impact beyond schools.

Benefits

Trauma-Informed Schools reportedly produced the following benefits:

- **Increased practitioner knowledge:** Evaluation surveys and case study interviews suggested that practitioners increased their knowledge through the training. Of the 27 participants in the Trauma-Informed Schools practitioner training, 10 completed a feedback form, which reportedly showed a statistically significant increase (according to a paired T test) in self-reported knowledge.
- **Changing school practice:** Qualitative insights from WSOA evaluation documents and case study interviews suggest that the training resulted in tangible changes to school practice. The head of a school federation we spoke with felt that many trauma-informed approaches were in place across their schools but the programme had helped them embed it more fully in policy and practice.
- **Reducing risk of exclusion:** There was not clear data on exclusions to support this outcome, although there was some anecdotal evidence that suggested instances where trauma-informed interventions had helped lower risk of exclusion for certain pupils. For instance, the head of the school federation shared a case study about a pupil who was seen as being at risk of exclusion. Staff were upskilled on how to support them and after applying various trauma-informed interventions, they made significant progress in terms of their attitude towards school and learning, which reportedly helped them to stay in school.

Factors that supported delivery

Case-study participants identified three ways in which WSOA support with planning and collaboration had led to successful delivery:

Facilitating networks of schools: In addition to Trauma-Informed schools training reaching many individual settings in West Somerset, there were also reportedly benefits derived from the sharing of newfound knowledge and practice through school networks. For example, the School Federation Lead felt that being part of a family of schools helped to embed systems and routines associated with Trauma-Informed schools intervention into their schools. They also noted that schools in the local area were part of a behaviour partnership, which had allowed school leaders to discuss trauma-informed research and approaches that would work best in their schools.

Collaborating outside West Somerset: There was also evidence of collaboration with schools outside West Somerset. A member of the opportunity area team noted a planned trip to take approximately 18 school colleagues to visit a school in Cornwall to see how they had embedded their trauma-informed schools work and achieved award status. They said that this will help schools better understand their direction of travel and improve implementation. WSOA's twinning project also enabled training in 8 other schools in Somerset.

Quality of training: Feedback from the practitioner training was overwhelmingly positive. Survey data suggested a good balance of theory and opportunities for discussion/reflection/activities, with well-structured course content. In addition, the head of a school federation felt that the two day leadership training was useful, with informative case studies that would help shape school practice. They noted that several of those delivering the training were current or former school leaders, and that there was a clear evidence base underpinning the programme.

Factors that hindered delivery

Case study participants also highlighted a number of factors that limited delivery, or led to reduced progress:

Length of training: While feedback on the quality of training was generally positive across the Trauma-Informed Schools intervention, a school leader felt that the 10 days allocated to staff training was hard on teachers, particularly given the delicate subject matter being discussed. One member of staff pulled out halfway through the training as they found it too demanding, meaning they would not have received the Level 5 accreditation.

Future funding: There were also some concerns about settings' capacity to support the work in the future. The School Federation Lead felt that this sort of inclusion-oriented work may be compromised where schools suffer from a lack of resources. They were conscious of finding funding to continue the Trauma-Informed Schools work, and particularly the visiting specialist. They said that some help navigating future funding, whether it be within or outside the Priority Education Investment Areas programme would help them ensure the work could continue.

Intervention overload: There were concerns about settings trying to find the time to properly embed the Trauma-Informed schools work, particularly given the small size of schools and their lack of capacity, as the Schools Federation Lead outlined:

"West Somerset being so tiny, it hits the same staff all the time. And there is that real pressure about wanting to engage with everything, but you just don't have enough time or enough people to go round"

School Federation Lead

Transition: While evaluation data suggests that participants benefited greatly from the Trauma-Informed schools training and that their pupils would be better supported as a result, there were worries about what might happen when pupils moved to a different school phase. A specialist practitioner we spoke with was concerned about what would happen to the pupils involved in the intervention when they moved to the middle school, given that the same support was not available there.

Structural issues: There was a sense from some respondents that there were wider structural issues that would affect West Somerset's capacity to be inclusive and support young people's mental health. Some noted that there were no special schools in West Somerset, meaning that some pupils would need to go to nearby areas like Taunton, Bridgewater and Devon to get the support they need. They felt that the addition of a special school would help improve their provision for pupils that need significant additional support.

Priority 3: Transition to adulthood

4.3.1 Delivery

At the start of the Opportunity Area programme, during the 'problem analysis' phase partners identified the lack of diverse post-16 options within easy travelling distance as a significant challenge. There was evidence of drop-out by students travelling long journeys to colleges in Taunton and Bridgwater.

At the start of the funding period, the area's only 14-19 provider, West Somerset College, had a vocational skills centre which had been recently developed and delivered with mixed success. WSOA committed to supporting a relaunch of a small number of post-16 vocational options including building maintenance, hospitality, catering, and hairdressing. Despite funding support and collaboration with the FE college over a two-year period West Somerset College could not establish a way to sustain financially viable vocational provision, which was dependent on a minimum number of students per course.

WSOA also supported strengthening of the academic offer at West Somerset College. This included investing in facilities to help students study and enjoy their time at the school such as a bespoke library, study area, food offer and social space enabling them to make the most of their time between bus journeys, as well as targeted academic mentoring. Senior leaders at West Somerset College reported that the school was able to increase enrolment in its sixth form and believed that WSOA had supported this increase.

Priority 3 interventions overlapped those of Priority 4. For example, while the Academic mentor resulted in a more general supportive mentorship role, the digital provision of careers fairs, and workplace experience further supports the employability objectives of interventions led by Youth Friendly Place. Similarly, the objectives of Priority 4's Duke of Edinburgh activities overlap with those from Priority 3 to develop life skills and raise aspirations.

As was the case with other priority areas, WSOA funded-interventions were flexible and adapted to meet changing needs. In the case of the Academic mentor intervention, for example, the initial aim was to provide tuition and academic support in school for Y11 and Y13 students. However, this role ended up expanding towards providing care, guidance and other forms of support as outlined in the case study below.

Throughout the funding period, delivery changed to meet new challenges, especially those presented by Covid-19. For example, academic mentoring support targeted young people who were most likely to have suffered lost learning during the pandemic, while the digital jobs fair aimed to mitigate the loss of summer season job losses and disrupted work experience.

4.3.2 Progress

Priority 3 had two overarching aims:

Level three qualifications

- Increase the percentage of young people achieving level three qualifications, such as A levels, at age nineteen and close the gap between West Somerset and Somerset in both academic and

vocational qualifications. By 2020/21 we want achievement in West Somerset to equal the strong results already being achieved in the best performing parts of Somerset.

Reducing NEET

- All young people leaving West Somerset College will go onto further education, employment or training.

NEET

Evidence for progress on reducing NEET rates in West Somerset was mixed. On the one hand, case study respondents at West Somerset College told us that retention rates for year 12 and 13 students had improved as a result of the mentoring they had received, leaving fewer young people at risk of becoming NEET. Job Hub venues had also been created where school and staff from Somerset Works, an independent service offering support and advice to young people who are NEET, could on employability skills and access courses.

On the other hand, WSOA leads in process interviews were clear that there was still work to do to reduce NEET numbers. One major challenge was the limited post-16 and employment options within West Somerset, coupled with the cost of limited transport options. KPIs for The Jobs Hubs intervention had an initial target of 80% of participants moving on to a positive outcome (education, employment or training). In the monitoring and evaluation document for the intervention, a comment was then left suggesting that a target of 70% (as opposed to the 80% target) might be more realistic. This may be a useful reflection on some of the challenges associated with reducing NEET rates through such interventions. However, this also raises a wider point about the fact that NEET figures may reflect the wider economy. For instance, during the pandemic, an intervention aimed at reducing NEET outcomes may have reduced the number of young people who would have been NEET otherwise.

Progress beyond planned outcomes

There were two ways in which Priority 3 funding led to positive outcomes that were not set out in original delivery plans. These were supporting young peoples' social and emotional development and support staff professional development.

Social and emotional development

Both young people and staff at West Somerset College pointed to the way in which one to one support delivered through the academic mentoring intervention supported social and emotional needs. As this respondent explained, this led to more students remaining on courses when previously they might have dropped out:

"I think we've done a good job in terms of retaining students. What we didn't realise ... is the amount of social, emotional, mental health work she would be doing... we thought it would be mostly academic support, but actually the students have needed quite a lot of emotional well-being support over the last two years, and she's provided that alongside the academic mentor work"

Interview response

Other interventions also pointed towards positive progress. Youth workers involved in Duke of Edinburgh observed improvements in young people's confidence and openness over the programme. This was also borne out in participant's self-assessment results and monthly progress reports, with half reporting increases in confidence and agency. A

Somerset Skills and Learning survey also reported improvements in participant young people's confidence, friendships and wellbeing.

Benefits to staff development

As discussed in Priority 2, the context of one 14-19 school and resultant flexibility of funding enabled Priority 3 to support CPD for staff, such as NPQs for senior leaders and support meeting Gatsby Benchmarks.

4.3.3 Benefits to local partnerships

Priority 3 funding enabled a stronger partnership between West Somerset College, local employers and local/national voluntary sector organisations, as this senior leader described:

"We've worked with the NCS, National Citizenship Service. We've worked with the Southwest Business Hub. We've worked with the local authorities (...) I think bringing different people of various levels of expertise all focused around improving outcomes for students have been great"

Interview response

Evaluation documents pointed to strong links with Somerset Works, SS&L, JobCentre Plus, work coaches and Young Mind, assisting in the creation of the Youth Employment Hub.

These partnerships were perceived as strengthening the sustainability of careers education in West Somerset, through:

- Deepening school leaders' and employers' shared understanding of the local context
- Strengthening knowledge of funding opportunities and capacity to pursue them, for example through pooling expertise in bids.
- Increasing access to national programmes such as NCS and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

4.3.4 Factors leading to successful implementation

Several reasons were given for the successful implementation of Priority 3 interventions. These were:

- partnership between schools, charities, businesses and other actors enabling new forms of practice
- practitioners' knowledge of the young people they worked with enabling effective targeting of young people
- Flexibility of funding to allow emerging needs to be met.

Partnerships

WSOA facilitated partnerships and collaboration that allowed new forms of practice to emerge. One example is the connections that WSOA helped broker between the sixth form and local employers, as this case study respondent explained:

"The Opportunity Area has been really instrumental in driving our careers forward. It's helped us really form good relationships with local providers and put us in contact with lots of other people we wouldn't have previously had contact with. So that's been really positive."

Interview response

Targeting

Across the priority area interventions paid close attention to targeting the young people most at risk of becoming NEET or disengaged with post-16 pathways. For example Somerset Works' post-16 provision was aimed at vulnerable 15-18 year-olds identified at West Somerset College as being at risk of becoming NEET, as well as those who were already NEET in Year 12-13.

Likewise, the academic mentoring programme used teacher-assessed grades and a needs assessment to identify those who might need more individual support.

Flexibility

WSOA partners adapted interventions according to the needs of the community. For example, when it became apparent that local transport options meant some students from West Somerset communities were dropping out of 6th form provision located outside of the Opportunity Area, OA funding enabled transport for those students:

"We did some focus groups with kids to find out what their challenges were. And then we found out just how bad... we saw the data. The data for sixth form college ... showed that there was something like 29% dropout of A level students. So I went to the principal and talked to her about it. And I also did a focus group in the community and asked them about it as well, to try and understand what was happening. And then we [proposed transport funding] to the board, which they then funded."

Interview response

Other ways in which WSOA adapted to better meet needs included:

- providing laptops for students to attend virtual taster sessions or courses,
- providing transport to careers fairs elsewhere in the county
- adjusting plans to meet student needs, even if this meant missing KPIs. For example, the online tutor intervention began with an aim to have all young people who need qualifications entered for literacy/numeracy functional skills qualifications and GCSEs. However, at the end of the programme only 95% of those who needed these qualifications were entered. The programme's monitoring and evaluation data acknowledged that this was partially because only those who were ready to sit exams did so, and partially because some pupils had re-entered mainstream school (a positive intended outcome not captured in the KPI on entry rates).

4.3.5 Factors hindering successful implementation

As with other Priority areas, transport, recruitment and retention, and overload hindered progress.

Transport

Across the priority area, local transport links created challenges. Students' choices for post-16 courses and pathways were constrained by a lack of public transport to post-16 provision outside the opportunity area. Whilst the OA funding enabled the sixth form within WSOA to offer a small number of vocational courses, students remain affected by difficulties travelling further afield, as this respondent from the WSOA team explained:

Although the school has set up an A-level, we've expanded the A-level provision at the college, and the opportunity area has supported that and has done a small vocational offer... Young people still have to travel to Bridgwater to go to do post-16 at a college if

they want to. I think a lot of them think that's going to be easy to do, but in reality, that travel every day, two and a half, three hours of travel every day is just... they can't cope with it

Interview response

During the Covid-19 pandemic, transport meant that at times whilst the sixth form was open, students were unable to attend due to staff shortages in local bus services.

Recruitment and retention

Teacher recruitment and retention challenges are particularly significant in West Somerset and formed part of the delivery plan. Case study response suggested that schools felt WSOA had not delivered in this area:

'There's been nothing that's happened on that and we still really struggle with teacher recruitment and retention (...) I know one of the aims was to improve teacher retention and recruitment to the area, because we're right on the coast and we're in the middle of nowhere'

Interview response

Teacher recruitment challenges meant that the sixth form was unable to run all the courses it intended.

Overload

Senior leaders at the case study school felt that there had been too many organisations bidding for money and an overwhelming number of opportunities. Not all could be taken up as a result.

Case Study: Academic mentoring

Background

This case study focuses on the academic mentoring programme at West Somerset College, working with sixth form students. The programme was part of a suite of interventions aiming to:

- ensure smooth transitions between middle schools and college
- improve academic performance Year 11, 12 and 13 students, address 'lost learning'
- provide complementary support to pastoral staff at West Somerset College
- provide structured support for those at risk of being NEET.

The academic mentor worked with students studying on academic and vocational pathways. One senior leader explained that they felt the academic mentor could help improve students' independent skills, help them manage the transition from Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5, and to think about their post-18 options. They had seen the academic mentor approach work in a previous setting, where academic data and student voice feedback spoke to the effectiveness of the model. They then made the case to the Opportunity Area to fund the position.

Delivery consisted of a mixture of one-to-one and small group sessions, which included opportunities to revisit classwork, address issues, practice past paper questions, with homework and support independent study. The academic mentor was located in a designated room in the college.

Benefits

Case study participants identified four main ways in which academic mentoring benefited students. There were:

Wide-ranging support: Staff and students we spoke to outlined the benefits of having a designated professional whose role was to support students with independent study, supplement in-class support and provide additional academic assistance:

"Just having that supervision, someone there to make sure you are doing your work and offer any help if you need it, I think that was quite a benefit to me"

Student

The support that students gained was wide-ranging. For instance, one student had used the academic mentor for support with their Extended Project Qualification, including proofreading some work, providing research assistance, and having conversations about the project.

Improved retention: With two years of teacher-assessed grades it is not possible to independently determine the extent to which access to the academic mentor had made a difference to participant pupils' academic outcomes. However, a college leader noted that year 12 and 13 retention was significantly better than previously, which was at least partly attributed to the mentoring programme. This has good implications for the aim of reducing NEET figures.

Independent learning: In addition, according to one senior leader, participant students improved their independent learning and revision skills, which they felt would

be particularly useful for those going on to further or higher education, with clear strategies for learning and revision.

Pastoral support: In addition to academic support, the mentor also played a key pastoral role for students, as one student explains:

"If someone's really upset because they've failed, she's always there. Although we only have sessions twice a week, if you need anything else any other time, then you know that she's always there. And she knows everyone"

Student

Factors that supported delivery

Case study participants highlighted four factors that helped support effective delivery of academic mentoring at West Somerset College:

Adaptability: The academic mentor's role evolved in response to pupil needs. A senior leader explained that the academic mentor's delivery model was tweaked in response to student feedback. For instance, there was a shift from the mentor communicating via parents/carers to having direct contact with students, which has reportedly been more effective. Mentoring also changed in response to student feedback from a more academic focus to one which included pastoral support for student wellbeing.

The college also adapted the times when students accessed support. According to one senior leader, attendance to academic mentor sessions was initially a challenge as pupils were unsure of who the academic mentor was and the support they were going to provide. In response to this, West Somerset College integrated mentor sessions into their timetables, which reportedly increased engagement. As one student explained:

"I think with having it scheduled into a timetable, it's just nice to have a set time where you know you have to revise something specifically. So that's quite helpful"

Student

Whereas some pupils were targeted for timetabled sessions, others found it useful to access additional support ad-hoc at break-times, lunchtimes and after-hours.

Targeting: While all students were able to work with the academic mentor, particular efforts were made to target particular students for additional support through the intervention. A college leader explained that they used Teacher-Assessed Grades to determine who was most in need of additional help at Key Stage 5, and then assigned them academic mentor assistance. This helped ensure that support went to those that needed it most.

Working closely with subject leaders: There was a strong emphasis on collaborating with subject leaders, to ensure that the academic mentor was complementing work on post-16 courses when tutoring students. A senior leader explained that the academic mentor had been able to access quality resources from different subject teachers, and that where relationships between subject teachers and the tutor were strong, this had led to improvements in students' academic performance.

Having a designated space: Staff and students reported that it was useful to have a designated room for the academic mentor. Students could visit a study room, which included a library, study tables, and also hosted the mentor. The mentor also ensured

the room contained resources on universities and other pathways, providing support on post-18 options and transitions.

Factors that hindered delivery

Case study participants reported that transport infrastructure was a key barrier to delivery. Although many students appreciated the ad-hoc availability of the academic mentor, there were concerns that students travelling great distances would be less willing and/or able to access support. For instance, one student explained that he had to drive over half an hour to get to and from West Somerset College.

Priority 4: Skills for employment and business

4.4.1 Delivery

Priority 4 focused on building skills for employment and business. Four interventions supported settings in enhancing their careers offer, and helped in refining the IAG provided to young people. More importantly, these helped improve the identification of young people at risk of NEET, and sought to address this risk. Priority 4 also sought to encourage working relationships between schools and employers, making West Somerset a Youth Friendly Place.

There was considerable overlap between the objectives of Priorities 3 and 4. Interventions like Skill Up, Duke of Edinburgh award and the Online tutor, complement the life skills and aspirations objectives of Priority 3. Similarly, the digital fairs, and workplace experience interventions from Priority 3 align with Priority 4 objectives of developing skills for employment and business.

Young people in the case study reported a range of CIAEG options they had accessed that were either easier to access or had not existed prior to WSOA. These were:

- Careers fairs
- Work experience
- Careers advisors
- Volunteering through DofE

"Loads and loads of stuff that we've done that would never have happened. We've run careers fairs that the opportunity area has paid for. We ran them in Taunton, we bussed all the kids over so they were able to go and see in year nine, 10, 11 and in year eight, actually, meet all the employers, universities, and colleges"

Interview response

WSOA priority 4 funding enabled three twinning projects in Mendip: Somerset Works Hubs, Duke of Edinburgh award and Catch Up College. Many priority 4 interventions met or exceeded delivery targets.

- The 'Youth Friendly Place' interventions met the target of having five Somerset employers sign up to be Youth Friendly employers, while all four district councils contributed to the website.
- The digital careers fair met its target of having 95% of students at West Somerset College attend the fair within the 30-day period of it being accessible and while middle school attendance was limited, staff reportedly attended and downloaded the resources for future classroom use.
- Skill Up's Apprenticeship and Skills Advisors and Employment Coaches, who provided information, advice and guidance surrounding apprenticeships, traineeships, T Levels, education and skills for business. 171 businesses were engaged (target: 150) and 121 supported (target: 100). 199 individuals (target: 200) were supported with employment and skills IAG, with more than 75 (target: 75) fitting in the 15-25 age bracket.
- ASK and Skill Up delivered 13 awareness raising and support activities across the school year, reaching 2,239 students, 2,440 parents and 74 teachers.

- The online tutor intervention met its target of 20-30 young people per month accessing the programme. In some cases, young people were accessing support up to four times a week.

Others made progress towards their targets, and achieved a wide reach in doing so:

- Seven Curriculum Teacher CEIAG Insight Briefings were delivered within the academic year, (target 14), with a second set of briefings in production.
- The first edition of the Careers in the Curriculum briefings, aimed at subject teachers, was viewed 347 times. Following feedback that at least two schools had also shared the video resource with pupils, they were adapting the second edition of the resource to address teachers and learners.

4.4.2 Progress

Priority 4 had two overarching aims:

Progress to HE

The proportion of young people progressing to higher education will put West Somerset in the top half of the country.

Apprenticeship starts

Increase apprenticeship starts so start rates are as high, or better than, the rest of Somerset and so completion rates are as high, or better than, the rest of Somerset.

There is no available aggregate data to report on progress towards these specific aims. On apprenticeship starts, WSOA leads in process interviews recognised that these aims were unachievable in the context of the local economy, made up of small employers who were unable to offer apprenticeship places in large numbers. This process interview response explains some of the challenges, particularly relating to apprenticeship starts:

"Nobody in West Somerset has got a [medium or large] business other than the three who have [engaged]... most of them are bands of one and two or three people. And so for a school to engage employers, when the employers are so different from the envisaged employers is really tough. Then how do you help them have apprentices? Because you can't have apprentices if you don't grow apprentice places in the first place."

Interview response

Progress beyond planned outcomes

Despite these challenges, interview respondents reported that WSOA made progress towards developing stronger partnerships between employers, schools and the local authority. This approach to partnership was at the centre of the Priority 4 strategy with the start, with strategy documents referring to CEC/CBI's network of 'national and local cornerstone employers', improving ties between schools and employers in West Somerset, including Butlins, EDF Energy, NHS and NatWest. It was clear from process interviews and case studies that WSOA stakeholders perceived clear progress in creating new partnerships between employers, schools and other organisations, as this process interview respondent described:

We've worked closely with the Careers and Enterprise Company, also the National Citizen Service... we've set up and funded Skill Up, which was Skill Up by Somerset and now is Skill Up Somerset, and that is the link with employers. We brought in the Somerset Education and Business Partnership, and the opportunity area has funded some of their work. People at Somerset Skills and Learning we've been working with, bringing them over to run courses for us. The Duke of Edinburgh program, some SSE Outdoors, so we've been doing a lot of work with them, we have Minehead EYE. We're doing everything in partnership as much of that as possible, and Somerset Works as well with the NEET project

Interview response

4.4.3 Factors leading to successful implementation

Understanding the labour market, drawing on evidence

It was apparent that WSOA's work in Priority 4 was adapted to reflect changing labour market challenges. For example, WSOA's Partnership Board Papers 2020-21 contain an economic overview, which 'covers some pandemic-related impacts on labour market and how these are affecting different groups of young people', with a view to this information shaping funding decisions and support for interventions. WSOA's Priority 4 work also drew on external evidence to inform delivery. The Curriculum Teacher CEIAG intervention, for example, drew on Bridgwater College's 'Teachers in Industry' pilot, where teachers visited different local careers opportunities, leaving them better placed to talk to students about those opportunities.

Addressing local challenges.

Another strength of Priority 4 interventions was a focus on challenges facing West Somerset, with consequences for both design and implementation. For example, as background to the establishment of Go-To Hubs in Williton, Watchet, Minehead and Dulverton, project documents acknowledge that they did not have 'a physical space that we can bring young people together with a range of advisors' and that 'travel is a huge barrier for West Somerset residents'. This led to an intervention that took support directly to young people, helping overcome the aforementioned challenges.

Targeting

As with other priority areas, Priority 4 interventions were often closely targeted towards those in most need of support and would benefit most from it. For instance, the Go-To Hubs were aimed at Year 11s who need post-16 transition support, NEET young people and 16-18 year-old early leavers.

Adaptability

Priority 4 interventions were adapted to meet the changing needs of their target populations and settings. For instance, Skill Up responded to the pandemic with new online tools to engage with businesses and the community. According to the intervention's evaluation document, the success of the digital engagement work may have led to more apprenticeship and trainee starts relative to what they may have otherwise been.

4.4.3 Factors hindering successful implementation

As with other priority areas, local transport infrastructure and lack of capacity in schools to support interventions hindered delivery. For Priority 4 in particular, the pandemic reduced opportunities for traineeships and apprenticeships. For example, the Skill Up evaluation attributes low apprenticeship starts to 'business recruitment and growth behaviour during the pandemic'.

There was also a perceived disconnect between young peoples' aspirations and the apprenticeship and employment opportunities available locally. A seasonal local economy, dominated by the hospitality and tourism sector, did not offer the range of opportunities young people required, as this process interview respondent described:

"We know they're desperate for hospitality staff in West Somerset, they can't get them, so you put on a load of stuff to attract them, but nobody goes to it, so obviously the people don't want to work in that sector. There's that mismatch of seeing where the gaps are, seeing what the area needs, but the people that live there may not want it, so how do you overcome that?"

Interview response

5 Sustainability

This section of the report examines factors across all priority areas that might support, or hinder the sustainability of progress made by WSOA in Years 1-4. Analysis draws on qualitative data from case studies and process interviews, alongside evaluation documents relating to individual interventions.

5.1 Factors supporting sustainability

There were two key ways in which WSOA funding increased the chances of outcomes continuing to improve for young people beyond the funding period.

High-quality training and resources

Training, resources and other support funded by WSOA was likely to support practitioners in the future. For example, the Creative Arts work under Priority 2 sought to 'provide a legacy of physical resources' according to programme documents. Design of the education space was complete and construction due to be underway in 2022. This means the space will be available beyond the WSOA-funded period but should help achieve the outcomes set out in the original proposal.

Digital resources in particular created a legacy. During the pandemic, WSOA funded free-to-use digital resources to improve access to interventions. These training videos, information packs and other materials can now be accessed by practitioners and target populations after WSOA funding ends. Attention will need to be paid to addressing the 'digital divide', to ensure that practitioners, target populations and other stakeholders have the internet connectivity and devices to make use of the resources.

WSOA also ensured that training was embedded using 'train the trainer' approaches. For instance, the Bump Start intervention for Priority 1 shifted from direct delivery from one individual, to training trainers to deliver this work in the future, taking an approach that emphasises sustainability.

Improved understanding across phases

WSOA supported collaboration across Priority areas and across phases of education. Stakeholders believed that the new shared understanding and ways of working this had enabled would support longer-lasting progress. For example, one Senior Leader believed that having a coherent curricular language between different school phases would help young people adapt to new academic demands, minimise disruption and help them feel comfortable in their new environment.

5.2 Factors hindering sustainability

A key question for stakeholders was whether partners would continue to engage without the incentive of funding and strategic direction.

Funding

There were some concerns surrounding the viability of certain interventions once WSOA funding came to an end. For instance, there was a perception that the mobile/detached youth work provision would not be able to take place without additional funding. In

some cases, schools and other settings were able to use their own funding to ensure that WSOA-funded interventions could continue after the Opportunity Area funding came to an end but this was not the case across all Priority Areas. This process interview respondent expressed a common concern:

"I think that is one of the conundrums of the work that we've been doing, that it is very easy to engage partners if you've got money, if you can pay people to do stuff, to extend the reach of their organisation, to try a new project, to provide capacity. We have funded a lot of capacity in one way and another, and so that has helped relationships develop. I don't know how relationships would've developed if we hadn't had any money at all or only had a little bit of money."

Interview response

Strategic direction

Stakeholders felt a strategic approach was needed to be taken to preserve any progress derived from the Opportunity Area and to sustain progress in the future. Stakeholders pointed to the benefits of the ways in which WSOA drove progress through articulating a shared vision and monitoring delivery, and raised concerns about what, if anything, might replace that direction:

"in terms of sustainable provision, if we're expecting any of those training agencies to do anything in the future, they won't because... and historically it's been the same. You can't get enough footfall for any one thing to make any of it viable, and that really worries me for the future"

Interview response

5.3 Future place-based investment

With WSOA funding coming to an end, the future of some interventions and activities may be reliant to some extent on the future of place-based support in West Somerset. Somerset LA has been selected as one of the government's new Education Investment Areas (EIAs), with West Somerset selected as one of 24 Priority EIAs, set to receive ['more intensive investment'](#). It remains to be seen what the focus of this £40m spread across 24 areas will support and the extent to which it will build on WSOA-funded work to support sustainability.

2 Conclusions

Delivery

Progress over the four years transformed the landscape of provision for young people from the Early Years through to their transitions to adulthood. WSOA helped organisations across phases and sectors find new ways of working in partnership. Delivery extended to professional development for staff and leaders in a range of sectors, including education, health, care and the voluntary sector. It is clear that WSOA enabled a step-change in the training opportunities for professionals and volunteers working with young people in West Somerset. This was particularly the case for school and setting leaders. WSOA's development of leaders has the potential to create a legacy beyond the funding period, as exemplified by the mindset shift amongst leaders created by the Trauma Informed Schools work.

Delivery of WSOA funded activity was often multi-faceted. WSOA leaders and partners ensured that communication and ways of working improved over the four years of funding, to a point where a genuine cross-sector local community of practice emerged by 2021. It will be important to ensure that local recruitment and retention difficulties do not hinder further progress.

The flexibility decision makers provided in terms of when and how funding was spent also ensured that WSOA could respond to newly identified needs in the community, and changing needs, not least in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. One important way in which funding flexibility began to make a difference to underlying barriers to provision was the initial step WSOA took to funding transport for post-16 students to access courses during Covid-19. For young people in West Somerset, transport remained the most significant barrier to accessing the wide range of pathways that might meet their needs and ambitions. A free or low-cost transport strategy should be included for all future efforts to address social mobility in this and other geographically isolated localities.

Outcomes

Early Years

Progress on outcomes was most apparent in the Early Years, with the proportion of children in West Somerset achieving Good Levels of Development increased relative to proportions in the county as a whole. There was not enough evidence to make a clear conclusion on whether Priority 1 investment had to progress on take-up of early years places. Amongst stakeholders, there were perceptions of strengthened partnerships, likely to have lasting benefits in West Somerset. Particular strengths lay in cross-phase collaboration (mainly between Early Years settings and First schools, although Middle and even 14-19 schools were engaged) as well as early identification and support for SEND. It will be important to continue to invest in professional development in the Early Years and maintain structures supporting collaboration.

Schools

In Priority 2, where investment aimed to lead to excellence in the classroom, there were difficulties engaging schools early on. WSOA worked around these problems and in the latter years delivered a range of interventions to support pupils, both in schools and in youth settings. By 2021 there was evidence of shifts in pupil attainment in West

Somerset. These changes were most noticeable at KS2 and emerging at KS4. Changes were less clear at KS1 although progress in the Early Years may help outcomes for this age group in coming years.

Beyond attainment, there was strong evidence of improved collaboration between schools. By 2021 a clear sense of community across schools and youth groups in West Somerset had emerged. SEND services and processes improved, though the extent to which these gains will translate into better outcomes for young people is yet to be seen. There were clear lessons for future work with schools in West Somerset in terms of flexibility of funding of ring-fenced interventions, enabling whole school approaches. It will also be important to maintain the collegiate culture of leadership and practice WSOA enabled across education, youth and early years settings. This was especially notable around inclusion, high expectations of progress, openness and collaboration with VCS and businesses.

Post 16

Progress towards intended outcomes was more limited at post-16, where support for young people targeting educational outcomes, careers advice and social and emotional development were arguably limited by the shape of the local economy. For Priority 3 interventions, there were strong perceptions of impact on a range of outcomes for young people, especially through the wide range of support the academic mentoring programme offered, but also through out-of-school provision. Again, it was clear that planned delivery was flexible and responded to emerging needs, and that this supported greater progress than would otherwise have been the case. There was weaker evidence of progress against planned outcomes, especially reducing NEET.

Priority 4 funding transformed the careers environment and led to new provision of support for young people to develop career-related skills. Academic mentoring and improved academic outcomes may filter through into HE destinations in time, although there was no data yet to show progress. There were some success stories in terms of apprenticeship starts but progress against outcomes was difficult, largely due to West Somerset's employment profile. For future work to build on WSOA's progress in developing skills for employment and business, a wider set of stakeholders may need to be incentivised to engage with West Somerset schools and youth settings. This is partly so the full range of local employers are involved in future support for young people, and also to creatively find more opportunities for employers outside the area to collaborate.

Implications for the future

There were a number of key considerations for delivery of Social Mobility policy in West Somerset, and for other geographically isolated localities. First, there was a clearly identified danger that without strategic leadership and funding progress will be lost. In this context, the West Somerset EIA offers hope.

Second, strong professional partnerships across all priority areas were both a positive outcome and an enabler of progress. Maintaining these partnerships will be the key role of future local leadership. Flexibility to offer a range of interventions and to tackle some underlying barriers (freeing up school staff, transport), proved essential during covid (digital, outdoor sessions) and will remain important in future policy and delivery.

The geographical context created barriers to progress, some of which require further sustained effort to shift. These barriers are not unique to West Somerset and may apply to other remote or isolated localities. In West Somerset these were:

- The difficulties for both young people and the professionals that work with them to physically access provision and training due to the limitations of local transport and digital infrastructure
- Recruiting and retaining professionals to work with young people in schools and other settings and recruiting external partners to deliver interventions or training in West Somerset.
- The disconnect between administrative geographies and lived geographies. Many young people in West Somerset accessed opportunities outside of the area. This was particularly the case for those with SEND and those accessing post-16 provision. Equally, those living elsewhere in Somerset accessed support in West Somerset.

Summary of recommendations

For government:

1. Many leaders we spoke to in education settings across phases told us about difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, and WSOA leads reported high levels of churn amongst school leaders. DfE should invest in place-based initiatives that improve the supply of teachers in rural and coastal communities, such as West Somerset.
2. The digital divide is an important barrier in West Somerset. All young people have access to a stable internet connection and an appropriate digital device. As a result DfE should ensure that programmes such as Connect to the Classroom are monitored and adapted to meet changing needs for those young people who are most disconnected.
3. As part of Priority Education Investment Areas, consider a 'transition fund' that focuses on improving young people's transitions between different phases (e.g. school-university, college-work), helping them to move effectively from one form of support to another.

For Somerset LA:

1. Provide strategic support to West Somerset schools and other settings that help them access additional pools of funding and/or support.
2. Within Local Community Networks, map the services (e.g. schools, youth clubs) that young people in West Somerset are accessing both within and outside of West Somerset and use this to inform investment decisions.
3. Invest in local infrastructure, with transport as a key priority, focussing in particular on post-16.
4. Build on the progress of WSOA in offering non-formal education and enrichment opportunities for young people beyond schools, making the most of existing networks of youth provision, and filling gaps where needed.
5. Ensure that consultation with young people themselves is at the heart of investment decisions.

For leaders and partners in West Somerset:

1. Use the PEIA programme to build on West Somerset’s existing infrastructure, WSOA schemes and interventions that were disrupted by the pandemic, giving settings time to embed existing support.
2. Encourage employers to improve work experience access by supporting travel for young people and/or providing online opportunities, while ensuring young people have a strong internet connection and suitable digital device.
3. Consider how Theories of Change and rigorous evaluations can be built into future interventions to measure the impact of individual interventions and use long-term data on labour market outcomes (e.g. NEET figures, type of work), comparing with similar areas, to observe the effect of WSOA’s work.

For schools:

1. Continue to improve collaboration between settings and draw on federations, MATs, the LA and other school networks to align practice where appropriate (e.g. curriculum sequencing).
2. Improve ties between West Somerset schools and those in other parts of Somerset, particularly given many young people in West Somerset may access these institutions.

Appendix one

Delivery in each priority area

Priority 1 Interventions								
Intervention Provider	Name of intervention	Working directly with CYP	Training practitioners working with CYP	Training people (e.g.volunteers) to work with CYP	Supporting settings (resources, guidance, admin, accreditation)	Training parents/ carers	Supporting parents/ carers	Evaluation report available
ICAN	Tots Talking		✓			✓		✓
	Early Talk Boost		✓				✓	
	Speech and Language (includes Tots Talking, ETB)		✓		✓		✓	
	Mendip Twinning		✓		✓		✓	
	Weymouth and Portland twinning		✓		✓		✓	

Homestart	Bump Start and Baby Start	✓				✓	✓	✓
	Parental training - Solihull and Tuning into Kids		✓					
	Parenting Skills and Confidence		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Public Health Nursing and Health Visiting (PHN and HV)	Health visitor enhanced service					✓	✓	✓
	Health Visit Horizons project (maternal support)						✓	
	Plan to improve uptake of HV		✓		✓		✓	
QUEST	SCC Early Years Team		✓					✓
SEYS	Somerset Early Years Specialists SEYS		✓		✓			✓
EY SEND	EY SEND Mentor		✓		✓			✓
	SEND Early Years training		✓		✓			
Youth Sports Trust EY	EY Physical literacy	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
	Active families	✓				✓	✓	
	Healthy movers	✓			✓			
EY conference	EY conference				✓			✓

Sue Rayner	Boolean Maths		✓		✓			
Anne Harvey and WS Research School	Phonics Leading Literacy		✓		✓			
West Somerset Academies Trust (WSAT)	Continuous Provision		✓		✓			
Community Council for Somerset	Village Agents	✓		✓	✓		✓	

Priority 2 interventions								
Intervention Provider(s)	Name of intervention	Working directly with CYP	Training practitioners working with CYP	Training people e.g.volunteers to work with CYP	Supporting settings (resources, guidance, admin, accreditation)	Training parents/carers	Supporting parents/carers	Evaluation report available?
Youth Support Programme (Minehead EYE and other)	YP's resilience - targeted group work	✓						✓
	YP's resilience - youth clubs	✓			✓			
	YP's resilience - outreach and detached youth work	✓						
Somerset Libraries	Book Gifting				✓		✓	✓
	Digital Dens	✓			✓		✓	
Creative Art/Contains Art	Creative arts - Inspiring teachers: Inspiring attainment	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
	resilience - Contains art	✓			✓			

Meta-curriculum (LA)	Meta-curriculum		✓		✓			✓
School SEND support (various providers)	Jon Gibson (Inclusion Expert) Timely assessment and identification SEND		✓		✓			✓
	SEND training		✓		✓			
Boolean Maths	Maths Mastery	✓			✓		✓	✓
Trauma informed schools	Trauma informed schools		✓		✓			✓
RWI	Phonics		✓		✓			
Talk for Writing			✓		✓			
Public Health	Lifebeat	✓	✓	✓				
WSAT	Attendance Officer	✓	✓		✓		✓	
LA	Providing Digital Devices during Covid pandemic				✓		✓	

Priority 3 Interventions								
Intervention Provider(s)	Name of intervention	Working directly with CYP	Training practitioners working with CYP	Training people (e.g.volunteers) to work with CYP	Supporting settings (resources, guidance, admin, accreditation)	Training parents/ carers	Supporting parents/ carers	Evaluation report available?
P3 West Somerset College mentoring and 1:1 support	Academic mentoring Y11-13	✓						✓

P3 Careers Education Information and Guidance (CEAIG)	Digital provision of jobs fairs, careers fairs and workplace experience	✓						✓
P4 DofE SSE Outdoors	Duke of Edinburgh Young Somerset/SSE Outdoors for at risk of NEET	✓		✓				✓
	Duke of Edinburgh Mendip/SSE Outdoors for at risk of NEET	✓		✓				✓
Number 1 West Somerset	Training for Young Leaders	✓		✓				✓

Priority 4 Interventions								
Intervention Provider(s)	Name of intervention	Working directly with CYP	Training practitioners working with CYP	Training people (e.g.volunteers) to work with CYP	Supporting settings (resources, guidance, admin, accreditation)	Training parents / carers	Supporting parents/ carers	Evaluation report available?
P4 DofE SSE Outdoors	Duke of Edinburgh Young Somerset/SSE Outdoors for at risk of NEET	✓		✓				✓
	Duke of Edinburgh Mendip/SSE Outdoors for at risk of NEET	✓		✓				✓
P4 Somerset Education BG Youth Friendly place	Education Business Partnership			✓	✓			✓
	Youth Employment UK	✓			✓			✓

	Curriculum Teacher (CEIAG)				✓			✓
P4 Careers Education Information and Guidance (CEAIG)	Online tutor + twinning	✓						✓
	SomersetWorks	✓						✓
P4 Skill Up	Skill Up	✓			✓			✓

Appendix two

WSOA-funded Training of School Staff

Please note, this is a record of training that was funded but not all courses/training were completed by staff.

Course Categories	Number of course places funded
Maths	146
Boolean Maths Hub - training for primary teachers/TAs (1 to 4 units)	121
Boolean Maths Hub - Mastery training for headteacher/specialist	19
Boolean Maths Hub - Develop Mathematical Thinking & Reasoning (Secondary)	4
Success @ Arithmetic	2
SEND	117
SEND development training for staff	70
SEND Review training (Inclusion Expert)	30
SENDCo Qualification	14
Understanding Autism Course (KS1 / Level 3)	2
Confidence in Your Diagnostic Assessment	1

Social, Emotional and Mental Health **78**

Trauma Informed Schools - 10 day Practitioner Diploma	21
Trauma Informed Schools - 2 days SLT course	18
Tuning into Kids training	13
Attachment Awareness short course	11
ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) training	7
Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)	5
Positive Behaviour Management Intermediate training	2
L4 Award Supporting Young People (SEMH)	1

English/Literacy **75**

Talk for Writing	71
Sounds-Write Training	2
Infinity Literacy Training	1
Guided Reading Training	1

Senior Leadership Training **37**

NPQ Senior Leaders / Middle Leaders	16
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NPQH Future Leaders / Ambition Leadership	14
Metacurriculum Training	3
Curriculum for Senior Leaders	2
NPQH Future Leaders / Ambition Leadership	1
National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)	1

Speech, Language and Communication **22**

Short Elklan Training Course	17
Elklan Training	4
STC Training (Speech and Language)	1

Professional Qualifications for Teacher/TA **20**

Funding towards Foundation Degree / Degree	7
Funding towards HLTA course	3
Funding towards Teach First	3
Funding towards L2 / L3 LSA Course	3
Funding towards Masters degree	2
Funding towards PGCE Apprenticeship / NQT Training	2

Outdoor Learning	18
Forest School Level 3	16
Woodwork Training	2
Other Short Courses	33
First Aid (various courses - paediatric or general)	23
Safeguarding courses	7
Executive Educators Course	1
Philosophy 4 Children short course	1
Team Teach	1
Total number of places funded	546