# The Youth Investment Fund: Learning and Insight Paper Seven

**Findings from a shared evaluation of open access youth provision**

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# About the authors

## The Youth Investment Fund learning team

New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) led the Youth Investment Fund (YIF) learning project in partnership with the Centre for Youth Impact and a wider consortium of research partners.

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy helping charities, philanthropists, impact investors, businesses, and policy makers to maximise social impact.

The Centre for Youth Impact supports a community of organisations in the UK committed to working together to progress thinking and practice in impact measurement in youth work and provision for young people. Its vision is for all young people to have access to high quality services that improve their life chances. The Centre believes that embedding more meaningful approaches to evaluation, quality improvement and impact measurement at the heart of resilient, learning organisations is key to achieving this vision.

Our research partners are:

- **Bryson Purdon Social Research LLP (BPSR)**: An independent research partnership specialising in impact evaluation and quantitative methodologies. Partners Susan Purdon and Caroline Bryson supported the design of the counterfactual group and led the impact analysis for this report.

- **David Pritchard**: An Associate Director at NPC, principal of SVT Group, and President of Social Value US. David has led on the value-for-money element of the Learning Project.

- **Keystone Accountability**: A global leader in user voice, Keystone advised the YIF learning team on how to embed young people's feedback into the heart of the programme.

- **Renaisi**: An award-winning social enterprise specialising in mixed method evaluations and research. Renaisi advised on the design and analysis of the qualitative process evaluation.

- **The Dartington Service Design Lab:** A charity that uses data and evidence to influence policy and practice in children's services. Dartington have advised on the design, implementation, and analysis of the counterfactual element of the project and the process evaluation.

- **QTurn:** A US-based consulting and technical services firm that supports continuous quality improvement and implementation of socio-emotional skill measures. QTurn provided pattern-centred impact analytics for this report.

## Acknowledgements

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# 1.   Executive summary

## 1.1   About the Youth Investment Fund evaluation

In this paper we present the final findings from the Youth Investment Fund (YIF) shared evaluation. The YIF was a joint £40m investment between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) to expand delivery of open access youth services in six regions of England. It was one of the biggest investments in open access youth provision in recent years and supported 90 organisations between 2017 and 2020. The YIF aimed to support young people's personal development by building their confidence and supporting them to become happy, healthy, and economically active adults.

We adopted an innovative mixed-methods evaluation approach, which included a qualitative process evaluation and a quantitative impact and process evaluation. This paper summarises the findings of the latter, the specific aims of which were to:

1.  Understand which young people engaged with YIF-funded open access youth provision.

2.  Understand the types of activities experienced by young people and the ways in which young people engaged with these different activities.

3.  Understand the quality of youth provision funded by the YIF.

4.  Assess the impact of YIF-funded youth provision on young people's outcomes.

5.  Understand which factors contribute to the impact of youth provision and in what ways.

## 1.2   Summary of key findings

The YIF evaluation makes a valuable contribution to understanding how open access youth provision supports the development of young people and provides emerging evidence related to the aims set out above. The findings relate to the sample of YIF organisations for which we have usable data and therefore may not fully represent the wider YIF cohort or open access youth provision more generally. When reading the findings, limitations of our data should be considered,

including relatively small sample sizes for the outcomes data and the dominance of data from one grant holder in the impact analysis.

Our key findings are presented below.

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**Box 1: Outcomes measured in the YIF evaluation**

The impact of YIF provision has been measured using 21 outcomes, broadly categorised into the following domains.

1. **Self-confidence and personal locus of control** (defined as the tendency to take responsibility for self-actions and successes)

2. **Leadership**

3. **Social skills**

4. Self-regulation

5. **Communication and self-expression**

6. **Social connectedness**

7. **Happiness and wellbeing**

Domains 1-5 relate to social and emotional learning. Outcomes related to domains 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, highlighted in bold, were found to have statistically significant impacts among young people attending youth provision at three months. Full details of the outcomes measure can be found in Section 4.3.5.

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### 1.2.1  The quality, impact and reach of youth provision

1. **Open access youth provision has the potential to significantly improve social and emotional learning skills, social connectedness, and wellbeing for young people, particularly those with most to gain.** Young people attending YIF provision made greater improvements in most outcome domains (see Box 1) compared to a group of young people who did not attend provision. Looking across the 12 projects providing baseline and follow-up data at approximately three-months, we found statistically significant impacts related to social skills, self-confidence, leadership, communication and self-expression, social connectedness and happiness and wellbeing.

Young people with medium to low social and emotional learning (SEL) skill profiles at baseline made greater gains than those with high SEL skill profiles on some outcomes related to personal locus of control, social skills, communication and self-expression, and wellbeing (see Section 8.5). SEL skills have been linked with longer term impacts such as improved mental and physical health, educational attainment, finding and sustaining employment, positive long-term relationships, and life satisfaction.[1]

2.	**Higher quality youth provision is related to better outcomes for young people.** Young people participating in higher quality provision – as measured by the Programme Quality Assessment (PQA) – experienced better outcomes across all outcome domains compared to those taking part in lower quality provision.

Young people may experience greater SEL skill growth in targeted (or combined targeted and universal) provision, but universal provision plays an important initial engagement role. Young people attending targeted provision[2] (either on its own or alongside universal provision), made greater gains across some outcomes related to social skills, leadership, self-regulation and communication and self-expression than those attending universal provision only.[3]

The YIF process evaluation highlighted the role of universal provision in reaching and engaging young people in positive activities and informal learning opportunities. Specifically, the universal offer was referred to as 'foundational' in reaching and engaging with young people locally, and as playing a 'funnelling' role in identifying and connecting with young people who may need a more focused targeted offer.

3.	**Youth provision is generally high quality and valued by young people.** Young people rated provision highly in terms of the quality and value of provision in their lives; experiencing a safe and supportive environment; and the offer of stimulating, positively challenging and fun activities. Whilst still positive, feedback was relatively poorer relating to empowerment and youth voice. Additionally, we found that the quality of the youth provision settings was generally medium to high, as rated by grant holders taking part in the PQA process and that higher-quality settings received more positive feedback from young people related to empowerment and youth voice.

4.	**Youth organisations are generally reaching the young people who need them, but more attention should be paid to supporting the specific needs of girls and young**

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[1] See Insight Paper 3: A shared outcomes framework for open access youth provision and Open Access Youth Work: A narrative review of impact (Hill, 2020).
[2] Provision that was designed for, focused on and delivered to particular groups of young people
[3] Provision that was designed for, and open, to all

**women.** YIF provision was successful in attracting and engaging with a broad range of young people living in some of the most deprived areas of the country. Based on our data, grant holders were successful at engaging young people from ethnic minority backgrounds – specifically young Black people and young people from mixed/multiple ethnic groups.

However, there appears to be a gender bias towards males. This is particularly pronounced when we look at intersections in the data, where we find that girls and young women from ethnic minority backgrounds were underrepresented to a greater degree than their White female peers. Notably, Asian girls and young women were least represented in the cohort of young people attending YIF provision based on our sample.

5. **Around a fifth of young people were reporting poor wellbeing.** 21% of young people taking part in YIF funded activities were experiencing high psychological distress or risk of depression at baseline and 40% reported feeling lonely at least occasionally (see Section 5.2 for further details).

### 1.2.2  Evaluating and learning about open access youth provision

6. **The YIF evaluation approach, drawing on five types of data, was methodologically robust. It has generated new insight into the impact of open access youth provision.** The YIF Learning evaluation framework established a credible and potentially powerful approach to understanding what works, for whom and in what circumstances in open access youth provision.

   The framework enabled triangulation of data across multiple settings and data types and provided for in-depth testing of hypotheses. It also offers an enduring approach to evaluation that is feasible for youth organisations of all sizes, both individually and collectively. However, collecting outcomes data over time for young people remains challenging (see Finding 8).

7. **Thinking beyond outcomes yields more insightful and useful learning.** Gathering five types of quantitative data (beneficiary, engagement, quality, feedback, and outcomes) and exploring the links between them revealed the relationships between quality of provision, the experiences of young people, and impact. This led to more 'actionable' insights for both funders and providers.

   The most challenging part of the evaluation design was collecting outcomes data over time and future evaluations are likely to face the same issues that we did. The YIF Learning

Project's evaluation approach offers more flexible and feasible ways for providers and funders to understand and improve the impact of open access youth provision. More work is needed to examine alternative approaches to outcome data collection that are acceptable and feasible in evaluating youth provision.

8. **Shared evaluation is feasible and highly valuable, but practically challenging.** Whilst it was challenging, YIF providers were able to collect and share sufficient data to address the research aims presented. To get to this point required huge effort on behalf of both the Learning Team and the YIF grant holders.

There was significant variation across grant holders in terms of evaluation capacity, resource and motivation to take part in the shared YIF evaluation, despite a general belief and consensus among grant holders in the importance and value of evaluation both for the purposes of proving and improving. Where resources were stretched, the demands of front-line delivery and the sustainability of the organisation took priority, a tension that was felt by many participating in outcomes data collection, particularly in the final year of grant funding.

## 1.3   Recommendations

### 1.3.1   Recommendations for youth organisations

1. **Continue to provide a broad offer to meet the varied needs of young people but identify those who may be excluded**. Use data about your beneficiaries, alongside your relationships and knowledge of the community in which you work, to understand any groups of young people who are not accessing your provision and potential barriers to their engagement. Pay particular attention to the experiences and needs of girls and young women, especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

2. **Continue to listen to young people and embed systematic collection of feedback into practice.** Close the feedback loop by telling young people what you have heard and how you are going to address it. Put those changes into practice and show young people when these changes have been made.

3. **Think beyond outcomes when evaluating your work.** Quality of provision and young people's experiences play a critical role in developing social and emotional skills.  Capturing data on these aspects of your provision gives a much fuller picture of how and why change might be happening for young people.

4. **Consider how measuring SEL skills can usefully be integrated into practice** to support better understanding of young people's needs and development areas. Understanding the 'profile' of groups that you work with is vitally important for quality and equity.

5. **Consider using shared approaches and frameworks for evaluation** alongside bespoke qualitative methods to build a sector-wide evidence base of the quality and impact of youth provision. The Centre for Youth Impact have further information about shared evaluation in the youth sector.

### 1.3.2  Recommendations for Funders

1. **Invest in open access youth provision through funding like the YIF.** Funding for this type of provision has been significantly reduced over the past ten years, yet our findings and those of others[4] suggest it is a powerful way to support young people to thrive both now and in the future, to manage the transition into adulthood, and to grow into healthy and happy adults, through developing SEL skills and positive relationships.

2. **Pay attention to beneficiary data for open access youth provisio**n and interrogate any potential inequities in terms of access. Identify gender bias, in particular barriers to access for girls and young women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

3. **Support organisations to focus on continuous learning about their practice as well as impact evaluation**. Encourage a structured and detailed focus on quality and youth voice in grant holder learning and evaluation practices.

4. **Make it easier for organisations to collect and share honest numbers**. This requires a culture of 'low stakes accountability' in which learning and improvement is prioritised over results.

5. **Support shared evaluation by championing common frameworks** and aligning your reporting expectations. Listen to youth organisations and other funders about what data is being collected and think about how this aligns with your expectations. This shift requires funding for infrastructure support for learning, development and evaluation, and a change in how funding is perceived to incentivise organisations taking an individual approach.

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[4] Open Access Youth Work: A narrative review of impact (Hill, 2020).

6.  **Improve future large-scale evaluations by:**

- **Working in partnership with your evaluator and making it a shared endeavour**. Be clear about what is being monitored and measured, and how it will contribute to the evaluation. Use the data you gather to help the sector improve by making it publicly available, sharing what you've learnt and what you're going to do differently as a result.

- **Starting the conversation early**. Engage with the target audience (either grant holders or potential applicants) before you and your evaluation partner design the evaluation approach to understand the delivery process and pressures that youth organisations are under. Work with the sector and your evaluation partner so that a theory of change, a measurement framework and related tools are in place before grants are awarded. Outline evaluation expectations from the beginning and be clear about the time and budget required.

- **Providing ongoing capacity building, infrastructure support and account for staff time to collect and process data**. This shouldn't be a hidden cost and needs to be separate to staff delivery time.

- **Building on what is already known**. We've learnt a huge amount from this evaluation, some of which is presented in this report and some in Insight Paper 6, which clearly outlines what worked and what didn't. Learn from our successes and mistakes and add to existing datasets rather than starting from scratch.

Further information related to these findings can be found in Insight Paper 6: Looking back, looking forward.

### 1.3.3  Recommendations for future research and evaluation

1.  **Align evaluation approaches with youth work practices.** Evaluating open access youth provision is challenging because of the varied ways in which young people engage with provision; misalignment between evaluation approaches and youth work practice; and the practical challenges of collecting data from and about young people. It therefore requires a greater emphasis on:

- Developmental evaluation approaches that align with the reflective nature of youth work practice.

- Understanding how different young people engage in different ways with different types of youth provision.

- Capturing young people's voices and experiences as part of the relational nature of youth provision.

- A broader range of data types including data on quality and feedback.

2. **Continue to measure short to medium term changes in SEL skills**. Our findings support the theory that SEL skills are medium-term outcomes developed through high quality youth provision. The [Centre for Youth Impact](#) has developed a set of shared measures, building on learning from the YIF, that are available for use in monitoring and evaluation of youth provision.

3. **Improve the quality of beneficiary data**. There were large gaps in our beneficiary data, particularly related to ethnicity. Whilst we acknowledge that collecting this data can be challenging, we need to ask these questions in meaningful ways if we are to understand and attend to inequities.

4. **Make the data collection process useful and aligned with practice** as part of an asses-plan-improve cycle. Enable participating organisations to get real-time feedback from the data being collected and support them to share what they're changing in response.

5. **Allow more time for capacity building work.** Changing or taking on new evaluation and learning practices requires organisational change. Done right, this additional support will require more funding and time to develop even more supportive relationships with grant holders.

6. **Impact evaluation matters but needs to be sector-wide with a longitudinal approach.** Impact evaluation using common data collection tools is valuable in understanding the difference open access youth provision makes to young people's lives, and understanding impact is likely to remain a key interest for policy makers. However, seeking to collect this data as part of an individual organisation's regular evaluation practice is neither proportionate nor appropriate, and can be a waste of precious resource. In addition, we suggest that longitudinal research exploring young people's development into adulthood should incorporate indicators of young people's engagement with, and experiences of, open access youth provision during adolescence. This would add vital insight into the longer-term impact of open access youth provision across the life course.

7. **For future impact evaluations, we recommend a particular focus on increasing the sample size of young people involved and range of organisations from which data is collected**, gathering data on longer-term impacts (e.g. 12 months and beyond), and improving data about new participants to establish a true baseline.

## 1.4  Methods and Approach

The quantitative evaluation strand of the YIF learning project focused on understanding the difference YIF funded provision has made to young people's lives (impact) and how it did this (process) through shared measurement across the YIF cohort. To understand impact, we employed a quasi-experimental design, comparing outcomes over time between YIF participants and a comparison group (a sample of young people not involved in YIF provision).

We addressed the process question by collecting quantitative data about who was attending provision (beneficiary data), what type of provision/activities they were attending and how often (engagement data), the nature of young people's experiences (feedback data), and the quality of the youth setting (quality data). For feedback, quality, and outcomes data, we intentionally worked with sub-sets of the YIF cohort as they were more resource intensive and not suitable for all types of provision. Full details of the methods used can be found in Section 4.

# 2.        Introduction

## 2.1    About this report

This is the seventh in a series of Learning and Insight papers published as part of the learning project for the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). In this paper we report on the final findings from the shared evaluation across the 89 organisations that were recipients of the Fund[5] between 2017 and 2020. We outline the implications of these findings for YIF grant holders, other open access youth providers, evaluators and researchers, and funders of the youth sector.

The YIF learning project is one of the most ambitious shared evaluations undertaken in the youth sector to date. It is a new approach to evaluation in this context (see section 3.2) which recognises the profound limitations of traditional impact evaluation in informal and non-formal youth provision (see section 2.2). It has given us a unique learning opportunity to gain insights into a field in which impact is under-researched and poorly understood.[6] The YIF shared evaluation makes a valuable contribution to understanding how open access youth provision supports young people's development and provides emerging evidence on the quality and impact of youth provision.

This paper is for anyone working in, supporting, or providing funding and resources for youth provision. YIF funded organisations are based in England, but we believe that what we've learnt is relevant across the UK. We invite you to engage in a conversation with the Centre for Youth Impact about how the YIF evaluation findings and our recommendations can be taken forward. Please get in touch with the Centre for Youth Impact at hello@youthimpact.uk or on Twitter at @YouthImpactUK. To find out more about the YIF programme please visit www.YIFLearning.org

### 2.1.1   Report structure

In **Section 2**, we introduce the Fund and provide the context for the learning project. **Section 3** provides an overview of the YIF shared evaluation approach including an outline of the other

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[5] One grant holder withdrew from the Fund in year one.
[6] *A 2013 review of Youth Work research* stated that "While there is a high level of research activity in areas such as prevention science and work with children, and some attention has been given to the effectiveness of specific support initiatives in place for young people, the same level of attention has not been placed on developmental activities in youth work."

strands of the learning project and the aims of the shared evaluation. **Section 4** describes the methodology.

**Sections 5-9** present findings on: young people attending YIF provision based on information collected by grant holders about young people's age, gender, ethnicity and postcode  (Section 5); the types of activities young people attended, how often and for how long (Section 6); information about the quality of funded youth provision and young people's experiences based on the organisational self-assessment and feedback from young people (Section 7); findings from the impact analysis (Section 8) and the factors affecting impact including the role of quality and activity type (Section 9). **Section 10** provides a discussion of the findings in the context of the wider YIF learning project, alongside conclusions and recommendations.

## 2.2   A snapshot of the context for youth provision

### 2.2.1   Open access youth provision in context

Within the Youth Investment Fund (YIF), 'open access youth services' are broadly defined and include both traditional youth club provision and more targeted and structured provision across a range of areas including sports, arts, social action and employability. The main unifying features are that young people do not need to be referred to provision, access is 'open', and engagement is voluntary on behalf of the young person.  Section 9 in the Technical Report provides a summary of the activities delivered by each of the 89 grant holders.

Over the past decade, funding for youth provision has seen significant cuts, with open access provision particularly badly hit. As a result, there have been widespread closures of youth centres, professional youth work roles and the associated training have been lost, and there has been an increasing reliance on volunteers and short term 'issue specific' funding.[7] In this climate, the YIF was particularly welcome, as both a source of funding and for its focus on open access provision. Significantly, YIF funding could be used to support ongoing provision (and consequently the young people who were already engaged). This contrasts with a more prevalent focus on funding new or 'innovative' delivery in the youth sector, which some practitioners view as deflecting funding and attention away from their core work.

The Covid-19 pandemic, and resulting lockdown, began towards the end of the data collection period of the shared evaluation. This ended data collection slightly early for some grant holders, as face-to-face work with young people was restricted. Whilst we do not believe that the pandemic

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[7] How youth provision supports assets for a healthy life (Centre for Youth Impact, 2019).

affected the results of this study, as most data was collected before it began, we believe it is important to recognise the current context for young people and youth organisations, and the increased pressures that they face. We therefore consider the implications of our findings against this new and changing context in which open access youth providers are operating.

It is also important to consider that the constant adaptation to changing circumstances can increase challenges with monitoring and evaluation, despite an even greater need for learning.

## 2.2.2 The impact of youth provision

Whilst a full review of the evidence related to the impact of youth provision is beyond the scope of this report, we feel it is useful to summarise some of the most recent evidence that underpins our theory of change. The theory of change is presented in full in Appendix A and summarised below:

- Through engaging young people in high quality activities and relationships, provided in such a way that young people have empowering and developmental experiences in a safe and supported environment, young people will see positive changes in their social and emotional skills, social connectedness and wellbeing, in the short to medium term.

- Over the longer term, these positive changes will transfer to other areas of young people's lives, supporting a positive transition into adulthood, alongside long-term improvements in mental and physical health, educational attainment, sustainable employment and finances, secure housing, positive relationships and personal safety.

The most recent and comprehensive review of evidence is presented in a narrative review of the impact of open access youth provision published in 2020.[8] This report identifies common factors that contribute to the 'success' of open access youth work, which provide support for the theory of change outlined above. These success factors include:

- **Positive relationships**, particularly those between youth workers and young people.

- **Providing a safe space** where young people feel included, can develop a peer network and get away from other challenges in their lives.

- **Long-term relationships** through which trust and respect are developed over time.

- **Stimulating and engaging activities**.

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[8] Open Access Youth Work: A narrative review of impact (Hill, 2020).

- **Place-based youth workers** who have knowledge about the local area and with whom young people can identify.

- **Openness,** meaning both free to access and welcoming regardless of how often a young person attends.

- **Flexibility and responsiveness** to young people's needs and interests.

- **Autonomy** of young people through involvement in decision-making and a commitment to share power.

The review also identified the impact of open access youth provision as improvements in the following areas:

- **Personal development** in social and emotional skills, such as getting better at dealing with setbacks.

- **Skills development** in life-based learning, such as cooking or participating in music, art or sports.

- **Positive and healthy relationships** with adults and other young people.

- **Access to physically and emotionally safe spaces**.

- **Engagement with employment and education** such as through workplace skills.

- **Health and wellbeing**, such as reducing risky behaviour or enabling good decision making.

- **Society and civil participation**, such as social cohesion, active citizenship and feeling safer in the neighbourhood.

The research on which this review draws is mostly qualitative and based on self-reported stories of change. There is a marked lack of larger-scale quantitative studies of open access youth provision, particularly those that include a counterfactual (i.e. a comparison group). The YIF evaluation aims to add to this evidence base.

In line with the findings from the Narrative Review, the Centre for Youth Impact's Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0[9] describes the important role of social and emotional learning (SEL) in improving the lives of young people. The theory on which the framework is based sets out how:

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[9] A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0 (Centre for Youth Impact, 2019)

*"high quality staff practices and content offered in a setting where staff and young people meet will encourage higher levels of engagement from young people during provision. Over time, the combination of high quality staff practices and engagement supports the growth of social and emotional skills. With longer-term participation in, and intensity of exposure to, high quality settings, these social and emotional skills will transfer to other areas of young people's lives."*

The framework suggests it is through this transfer of SEL skills into contexts outside of youth provision, such as with family and at school, that young people experience positive long-term impacts such as those outlined above.

Finally, the YIF qualitative process evaluation found that open access youth provision forms the foundations of engagement with young people. In addition to the benefits described above, the process evaluation highlighted the important role that open access provision plays in providing pathways to more targeted or specialist provision, for those who need it, through engaging them in non-stigmatising and asset-based opportunities.

### 2.2.3   Evaluating open access youth provision

The limited nature of research referenced in Section 2.2.2 stems from a number of challenges associated with evaluating open access youth provision. Open access youth provision can include a wide range of different 'interventions' (many of which are not identified as such) and activities. It is underpinned by the building of trusted relationships and voluntary engagement on behalf of the young person, rather than mandatory activities or journeys with a defined beginning, middle and end. Open access youth provision may not have pre-defined outcomes, and different young people are likely to engage in very different ways or have very different experiences of provision.

Furthermore, what makes 'good evidence' in the context of youth provision is highly contested. There are tensions over the valuing of evidence produced by experimental and quasi-experimental studies (particularly randomised control trials) over the voices of individual young people. This reflects both a logistical and ethical position, with the concern that certain methods are impractical for informal/non-formal youth provision and fail to accurately capture the complexity of 'impact' whilst respecting the lived experience of young people.

There are of course many positions in between perceived extremes, so characterising them as binary or in opposition is unhelpful. The practical reality is that policy makers, funders and other stakeholders want sector-level, comparable data (both within the sector and beyond) on the nature and impact of open access youth provision, whilst youth organisations value data that supports

continuous learning for their day-to-day delivery and helps them understand and demonstrate the impact of their work on young people.

The YIF evaluation approach draws on different perspectives in both impact measurement and continuous improvement processes. We use a range of data about beneficiaries, engagement with provision, feedback from young people, and quality of provision to help us better understand how open access youth provision impacts on the lives of young people and what factors contribute to this.

Our approach has been co-designed with grant holders to become a part of practice – informing ongoing learning and development of provision – rather than a time limited add-on. This means we can move beyond a simple 'what works' approach, to provide rich and meaningful data that can aid understanding of impact at a sector level, whilst providing actionable insights at an organisational level.

Through triangulation of methods, including a quasi-experimental design, we have designed a methodologically robust evaluation process that provides the sector with a platform on which to build upon in the future. In the long-term, a demonstrable link between quality and outcomes would enable a greater focus on measuring quality, which is more aligned with practice, informs continuous learning, and enables a reduced need for outcomes data collection – the most challenging data to collect – as part of regular monitoring and evaluation.

## 2.3   About the Youth Investment Fund

The YIF was a joint £40m investment between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund to expand the delivery of open access youth provision in six regions of England (Figure 2.1) and to enable funded organisations to invest in their own development to increase the sustainability of this youth provision.

Grants were awarded to 90 youth organisations. One grant holder withdrew in the first year of funding, meaning there were 89 grant holders when the learning project began.

The three-year programme (2017-2020) provided new opportunities for young people to get involved in their communities. It aimed to support the personal development of hundreds of thousands of young people across England, building their confidence and supporting their transition to becoming happy, healthy, and economically active adults.

Figure 2.1: Areas receiving YIF funding



Further information about the Fund can be found in Section 2 of the Technical Report.

# 3.	The YIF shared evaluation

## 3.1	The YIF learning project

The YIF shared evaluation is part of the broader YIF learning project.  As part of the investment in local voluntary and community youth organisations, the funders allocated £1m to a learning and impact project led by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), in partnership with the Centre for Youth Impact and a wider consortium of research partners. The learning project commenced in May 2017 and ended in April 2021. Figure 3.1 shows the learning project's intended aims.

Figure 3.1: The YIF project learning aims



Co-develop a shared approach to evaluation which is adaptable and appropriate across all provision

Build a base of knowledge and insight into young people's engagement in informal & non-formal provision, and how it makes a difference to their lives

Leave the sector with what they need to self-evaluate long after YIF funding has ended
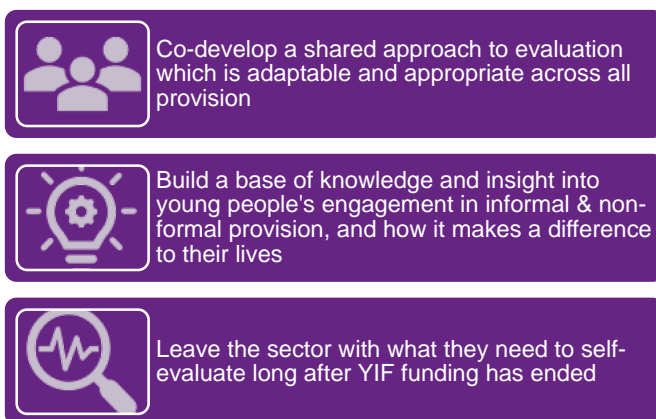
To meet these aims, the learning team undertook seven different strands of project delivery (Figure 3.2).

- The **Programme co-design** strand (Strand 1) involved grant holders and young people in designing the programme of work and advising on associated activity delivered as part of strands 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 on an ongoing basis for the lifetime of the project.

- The **Capacity building** activity (Strand 2) sought to facilitate grant holders' collection of **Impact and Process** evaluation data (Strands 3 and 4) and enable the **Learning and insight** strand (Strand 6).

- The **Impact** data collection and analysis (Strand 3) fed into the **Value for money** strand (Strand 5) and the **Impact** and **Process** data and analysis (Strand 3 & 4) have also informed the **Learning and insight strand** (Strand 6)**.**

- Finally, in Strand 7, the online **Digital platform** (IMPACT system) was designed to enable grant holders to store most of the shared quantitative data collection and analysis, and the YIF Learning [Website](#) has been used to share learning among YIF grant holders and the wider youth sector.[10]

Quantitative data gathered through strands 3 and 4, and enabled through strands 1,2 and 7, form the basis for the shared evaluation reported in this paper.

Figure 3.2: YIF learning project – seven strands of activity
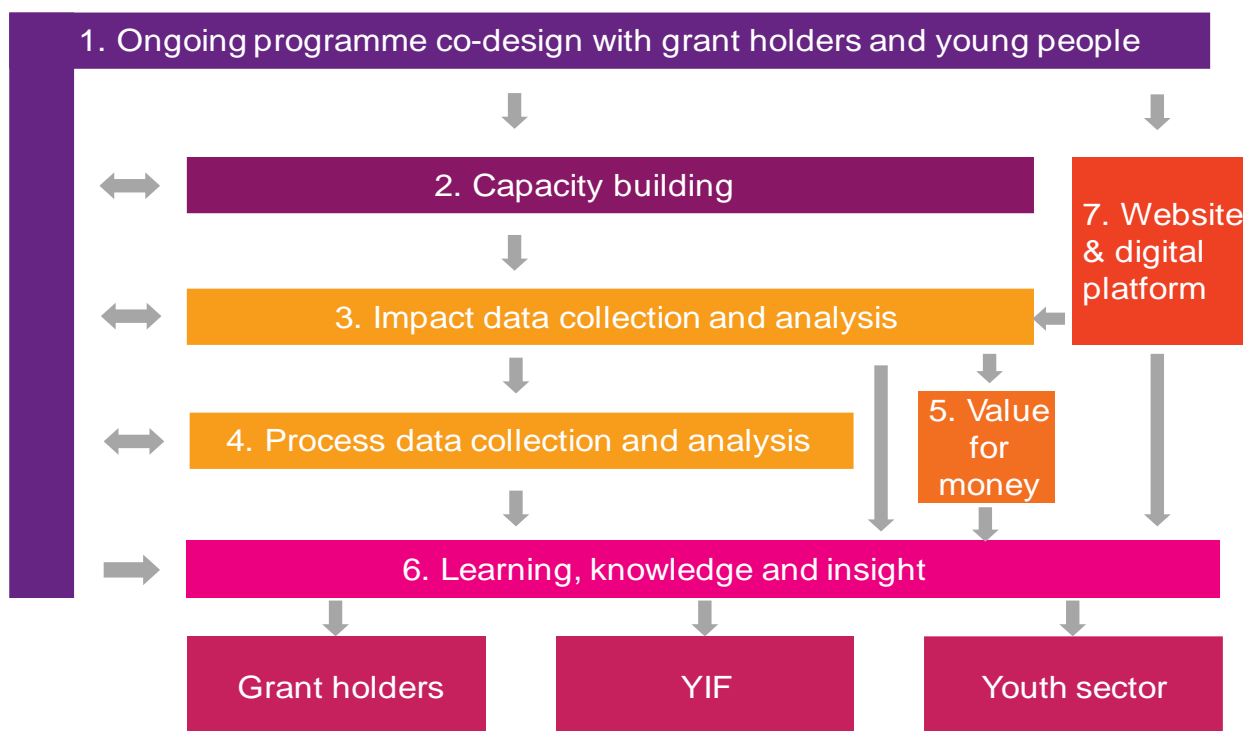


## 3.2   The YIF shared evaluation approach

### 3.2.1   Aims of the shared evaluation

The specific aims for this quantitative strand of the YIF learning project were to:

- Understand which young people engaged with YIF-funded open access youth provision.

- Understand the types of activities experienced by young people and the ways in which young people engaged with these different activities.

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[10] The YIF learning site will be hosted and managed by the Centre for Youth Impact when the learning project ends.

- Understand the quality of youth provision funded by the YIF.

- Assess the impact of YIF-funded youth provision on young people's outcomes.

- Understand which factors contribute to the impact of youth provision and in what ways.

A detailed set of related research questions are provided in Section 4 in the Technical Report.

### 3.2.2   Overview of the YIF shared evaluation approach

The YIF shared evaluation framework was designed to align with youth provision and was co-produced with practitioners. It recognises inherent challenges in measuring and understanding the impact of informal and non-formal, relational provision, particularly that which is open access.[11] We sought to equip grant holders to better understand their impact and to share their learning collectively to improve their provision for young people. The YIF evaluation therefore represents an exciting opportunity to learn lessons that can simultaneously raise standards and contribute to a collective evidence base. The approach was intended to enhance, rather than detract from, grant holders' relationships with young people, whilst enabling formative learning.

Our design process was informed by NPC's principles of shared measurement, which set out strong arguments for developing and embedding shared approaches to measurement as a consistent basis for learning, service improvement and evaluation. Through the co-design process, we produced a shared Theory of Change (Appendix A) that formed the foundation of the evaluation design.

The evaluation focuses on both understanding the difference YIF funded youth provision has made to young people's lives (impact) and how it does this (process). To address the impact question, we employed a quasi-experimental design through which changes in outcomes over time were compared between YIF participants and a comparison group. We commissioned YouGov to carry out a counterfactual study, in which a sample of young people from across England who were not involved in YIF provision were invited to complete the same outcomes survey as YIF participants (see Section 5 in the Technical Report for further information). This sample was matched as closely as possible to our YIF sample of young people in terms of age, gender, and geography. By measuring the same outcomes among a comparative sample of young people who didn't attend

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[11] For a review of these challenges see: *The everyday and the remarkable: valuing and evaluating youth work*. For further information about the challenges of measuring outcomes for young people taking part in open access youth provision, see *YIF Learning and Insight Paper Three: A shared outcomes framework for open access youth provision*.

YIF provision, we aimed to better understand causality and the contribution of YIF provision to changes in young people's outcomes.

We addressed the process question by collecting quantitative data about who was attending provision (beneficiary data), what they were attending and how often (engagement data), the quality of young people's experiences (feedback data), and the quality of the youth setting (quality data). By collecting these different types of data, we were able to look at what each tells us separately (e.g. what are the relative strengths and weaknesses in the quality of youth provision?) and in relation to each other (e.g. how does the quality of provision impact upon young people's experiences of youth provision?). Plus, we were able to look at how the elements of youth provision, measured through these four types of data, affect outcomes for young people (i.e. what works, for whom, and in what conditions - Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Investigating the relationships between the different elements of open access youth provision and changes for young people
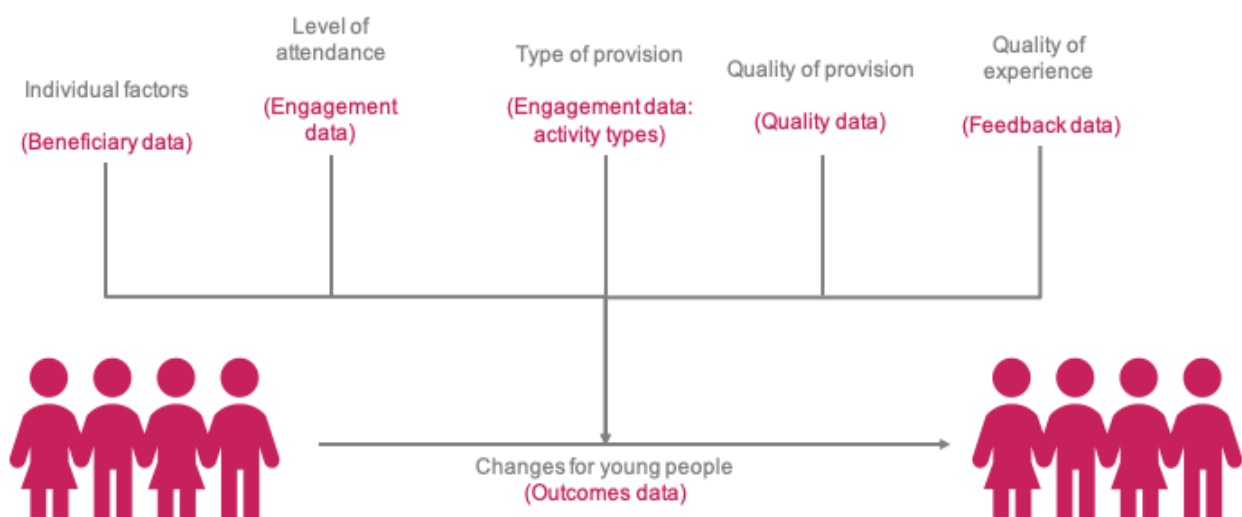


A more detailed description on the methodology used in this study is provided in Section 4 and further information about the YIF evaluation design can be found in: *YIF Learning and Insight Paper One: A shared evaluation framework for open access youth provision*, *YIF Learning and Insight Paper Three: A shared outcomes framework for open access youth provision, and YIF learning* and *Insight Paper Five: Understanding how open access youth provision works: findings from the YIF case study process evaluation.*

# 4.    Methods

## 4.1   Introduction

As described in Section 3.2.2, this paper presents findings from a shared quantitative process and impact evaluation conducted with YIF grant holders. It forms part of the wider, mixed-methods learning project, and we will draw on these other elements in interpreting the findings, most notably the qualitative process evaluation. Central to the shared evaluation was the collection of five types of data (Table 4.1) which is described further in Section 4.3.

Table 4.1: Five types of data

| | Type of data | What is it? | Element of Theory of Change it addresses |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Appropriate for all grant holders** | **Beneficiary (user)** | Administrative data on the young people taking part, including gender, age, ethnicity, and postcode. | **Activities** |
| | **Engagement** | Administrative data about the activities young people were engaging with and how often. | **Activities** |
| | **Feedback** | Systematic feedback from young people participating in provision. | **Mechanisms of Change** – evidence from young people |
| | **Quality** | Grant holder self-assessment data on the quality of provision. | **Mechanisms of Change** – evidence from practitioners |
| **Appropriate for some grant holders** | **Outcomes** | Pre-post questionnaires to understand whether short-term outcomes have changed for young people. | **Intermediate outcomes** |

## 4.2  Participants

A total of 90 organisations received YIF funding, although one organisation withdrew due to significant organisational change in the first year of the project. Four organisations opted out of the evaluation at the beginning of the learning project, leaving a total of 85 grant holders that we could work with to collect data.

We intentionally set out to collect the most 'basic' types of data (i.e. those that are more routinely collected such as beneficiary and engagement data) from all the YIF grant holders and to work with sub-sets of grant holders to collect data that required more resource and capacity (feedback, quality and outcomes).

Based on activity descriptions provided by grant holders and consultation during the co-creation phase, we estimated that around 5% of grant holders would not engage in the evaluation; around 75% of grant holders would volunteer to participate in feedback; approximately 40-50% would participate in quality data collection; and around 25% would collect outcomes data.

Table 4.2 shows the total number of participating grant holders and young people who responded to each type of data. Whilst the number of grant holders taking part is close to our estimates, the volume of usable and eligible data we received from each grant holder was lower than anticipated, particularly for outcomes. See Section 4.5 for a discussion of the issues faced in data collection including usability and eligibility of data. The data collected represents an opportunity sample of grant holders that were willing and able to take part in the data collection, alongside young people who attended the provision *and* were willing and able to participate in the data collection process. Further information about the sub-samples used to address each of the research aims is presented alongside findings in Sections 5 to 9.

It is not feasible to accurately estimate the total number of young people who attended provision due to the lack of a complete data set and challenges with recording attendance (e.g. during detached or drop-in provision). However, monitoring data collected by the Fund over the full three-year period of the YIF[12] gives an indication of reach per grant holder. According to this data, the number of young people attending grant holder provision varied widely from a minimum of 80 young people reached by an organisation that worked with a specific group of young people to a maximum of 27,819 young people at a grant holder running a wide variety of activities in a large purpose-built venue. Organisations reached an average of 3,631 and a median of 1,923 young people (see Section 6 of the Technical Report for further information).

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[12] Based on end of funding data submitted by 80 grant holders.

Table 4.2: Summary of YIF shared evaluation sample

| Type of data | No. of grant holders who submitted data* | No. of grant holders giving eligible/usable data* | Total no. of young people or responses (eligible/usable) | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Beneficiary | 83 (93%) | 71 (80%) | 56,783 young people | See Section 4.5 for information about excluded data. |
| Engagement | 83 (93%) | 72 (81%) | 1,018 activities<br><br>390,811 attendances | Eligible activities are those that took place fully or partially within the timeframe of the learning project.<br><br>Attendance figures are based on 'log' data for each time a young person attended an activity. |
| Feedback | 62 (70%) | 25 (28%) | 6,073 responses | Feedback questionnaires were completed anonymously by young people over the course of the data collection process.<br><br>Individual young people may have completed more than one questionnaire and therefore be counted more than once in the total number of responses. See Section 4.5 for information about excluded data. |
| Quality | 54 (61%) | 54 (61%) | NA | Quality data was collected at an organisational level.<br><br>24 grant holders took part in 1 round of the quality process.<br><br>16 grant holders took part in 2 rounds of the data collection process.<br><br>14 grant holders took part in 3 rounds of the data collection process. |

| Outcomes (total) | 26 (29%) | 26 (29%) | Baseline survey responses = 1,140 Baseline plus one follow up survey = 414 Baseline plus two or more follow up surveys = 84 | For young people already attending YIF provision, the baseline is the first questionnaire completed. It is not necessarily a baseline relative to registration. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outcomes (impact analysis) | 26 (29%) | 15 (17%) 12 in 3- month group 11 in 6-month group | Baseline and 3-month = 181 Baseline and 6-month = 79 | For the impact analysis, data was required to have been collected at intervals that matched data collection intervals for the comparison group (i.e. baseline and 3-month follow-up or baseline and 6-month follow-up). 8 Grant holders were in both the 3- and 6-month cohorts. |

*% is calculated based on 89 organisations that were part of the YIF at the beginning of the learning project.

## 4.3  Data collection and research materials

The data collection process and associated measures were co-designed and piloted with grant holders. Data collection was devolved to grant holders who received training to support the process (see Section 3 of the Technical Report for details). Details of the data collection process for each of the five types of data are outlined below. Figure 4.1 shows the timelines over which each data strand was collected.

### 4.3.1  Beneficiary data

Beneficiary data is administrative data about which young people engaged with YIF activities. It was collected on an ongoing basis as young people joined YIF provision, or at the outset of the learning project for young people who were already attending activities.[13] Beneficiary data included

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[13] The YIF supported both existing and expanded provision, meaning that many young people who participated in the YIF funded activities were already engaged with the grant holder.

date of birth, gender, ethnicity, and postcode for participating individuals. Seventy-one grant holders used the IMPACT system, a pre-existing digital platform that was customised for the YIF learning project, to collect this data. Others used their own tools such as an Excel spreadsheet or an alternative customer relationship management (CRM) system.

Figure 4.1: Overview of data collection timelines for the five types of data
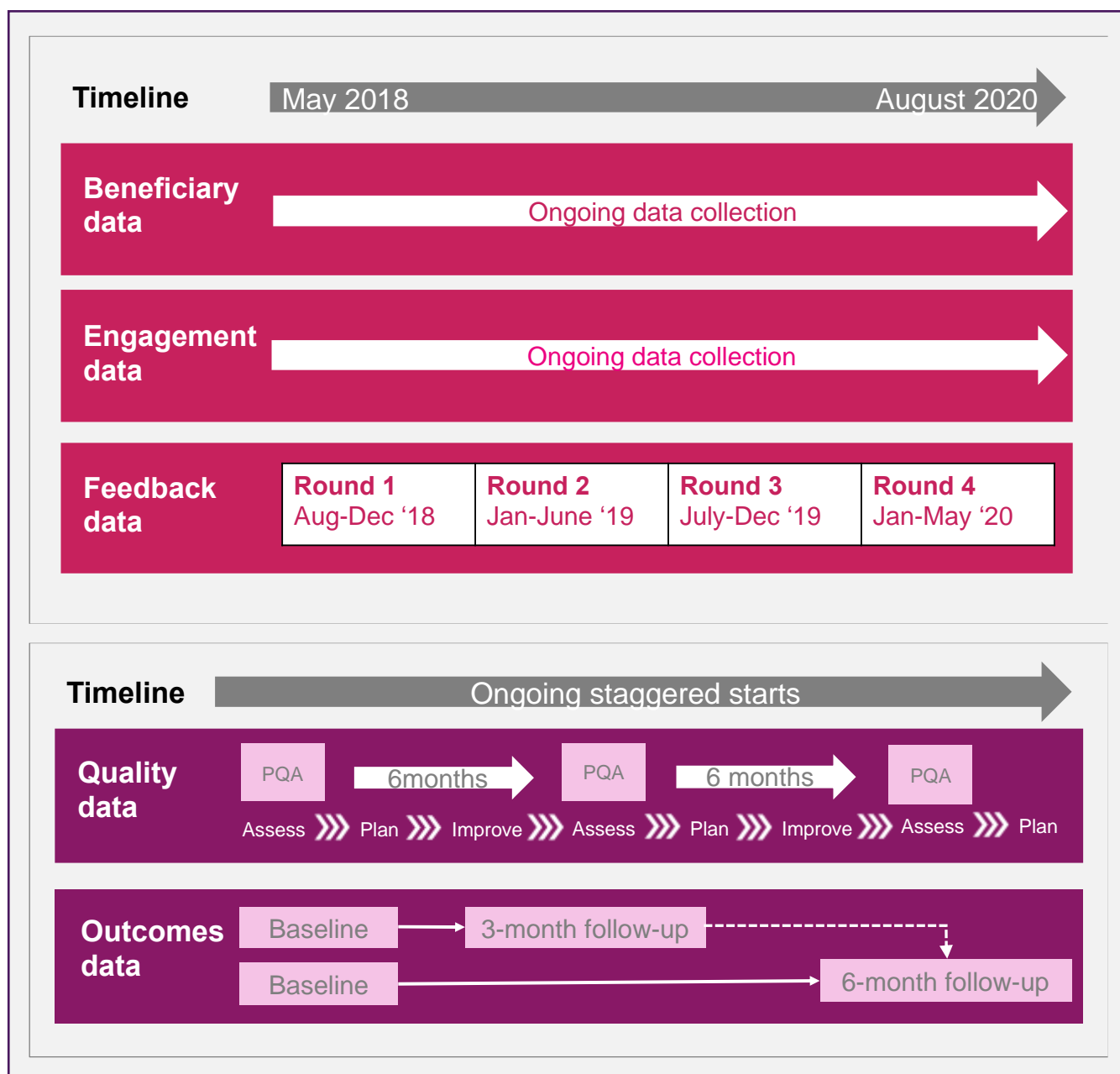


### 4.3.2  Engagement data

Engagement data is administrative data on the types of activities young people were engaging in and how often. We developed groupings of activities that would contribute to our understanding of

provision and potentially its impact. Activities could be categorised as either: detached or building-based; group or individual; targeted or universal; drop-in or fixed; time-limited or open-ended; and unstructured or structured (see Table 4.3 for full definitions of these categories). The intention was that each activity should fit only one of the categories in each pairing (e.g. group *or* individual) and that pairings should collectively cover the key defining factors of provision. Grant holders gathered this data on an ongoing basis as young people engaged with YIF provision. This was done on an activity by activity basis for grant holders who offered more than one type of provision.

Table 4.3: The six characteristic groupings of YIF provision

| Activity grouping | Description |
|---|---|
| **Detached or building-based** | This refers to whether the young person is coming to the space or the youth organisation is going to their space. |
| | Detached provision is going out to where young people are, whether that be out on the street, in a park or any other space young people occupy or gather. |
| | Building-based includes any provision where youth organisations organise and coordinate the space, such as provision within a youth centre, a community venue or any other 'controlled' space such as schools, sports centres or residential centres. Building-based also includes outdoor provision where the space is organised and coordinated by the grant holder e.g. sports facilities, arts, or field trips. |
| **Group or individual** | This refers to whether the young people typically take part in the activity with other young people or on an individual basis. Here, 'group' is not restricted to traditional 'group work' and includes any provision where a young person is not engaging in an activity on their own – be it in sports, arts, workshops or in general youth club provision. |
| | Individual engagement includes one-to-one as well as any other solo involvement in courses, mentoring or individual activities (where there is intentionally no or very little engagement with other young people). |
| **Targeted or universal** | Targeted provision is aimed at (or explicitly restricted to) a particular group – even if that group is large. It will often include explicit eligibility criteria. |
| | Provision could be targeted based on gender, ethnicity, special educational needs, or more issue-specific groups such as those with poor mental or physical health, or those with caring responsibilities. The only exception to this is provision aimed at a particular age group e.g. under-15s basketball – this is still classed as universal. |

| Drop-in or fixed | This refers to how set the young person's engagement is. Drop in provision allows young people to drop in and out freely, whereas fixed provision involves scheduled, timed sessions where young people are expected to engage for a set amount of time. |
|---|---|
| Time-limited or open-ended | Time-limited provision has a set length of expected engagement, which could include one-off engagement or a 12-week programme. Open-ended is rolling provision with no set or expected end date. |
| Unstructured or structured | This relates to a specific conception of structure. Unstructured provision is where the young person navigates their own way through an activity without their journey being pre-planned by a practitioner (e.g. a young person decides to try out a music suite in a youth club, or has an informal conversation with a youth worker).<br><br> Structured provision has a considered sequence that has been planned by the practitioner/provider – even if the exact sequence is flexible (e.g. a workshop, a youth forum with an agenda, a one-to-one advice session). |

### 4.3.3  User feedback data

User feedback is systematic feedback from young people about their experiences of YIF provision, based on the mechanisms of change identified through the co-produced YIF theory of change (see Appendix A). The YIF feedback process used a set of 17 'core questions' (see Technical Report Section 7.2.1), from which grant holders could select questions to include in a bespoke survey.[14]

This process offered flexibility on the choice of questions, including the option to add bespoke questions (e.g., a small number of service-specific questions), and data collection method (e.g., paper, online, interactive workshop/discussion). Feedback data was intended to be collected during four discrete rounds of data collection during the YIF, each lasting approximately two months. In reality, data collection was continuous and did not fall inside the two-month timeslots. As a result, the data is presented from four consecutive rounds of data collection.

### 4.3.4  Quality data

This is self-assessment data on the quality of provision using the Social and Emotional Learning Programme Quality Assessment (SEL-PQA). The SEL-PQA is an assessment tool that contains 70 'items', each of which focuses on a specific element of observable practice when working with

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[14] Plus, an additional open question which is not included in this report: 'Are there any other services that [organisations/the project] could offer that you would value?'. The feedback questions were co-designed with grant holders.

young people. It is based on the Quality Pyramid (Figure 4.2) that comprises 18 scales, which group into four overarching domains: safe space, supportive environment, interaction, and engagement (see Technical Report Section 7.3.1 for scale descriptions).

The YIF grant holders conducted a peer observation of their provision, spanning multiple sessions and staff members, taking detailed and objective notes of what they observed. Team members then met to determine a score for their provision against the items in the SEL-PQA tool, agreeing the supporting evidence and giving a score for each as high (5), medium (3), or low (1). These scores were entered into 'Scores Reporter', an online platform hosted by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, the developers of the SEL-PQA.

Like any self-report measure, the SEL-PQA data collection may be subject to bias. We reduced the risk of this in two main ways:

- **Low stakes accountability**: The quality process is designed to be 'low stakes', which means that no one will be penalised for low scores. No target is set, and the emphasis is on ongoing improvement rather than 'one time' compliance. This approach is intended to move away from 'high stakes' accountability environments where there is fear of 'failure', individuals can be penalised or publicly shamed, targets may be unattainable, compliance is seen as mandatory but unhelpful, and there is little or no support to improve. As the data was collected primarily for the purpose of learning, and data used in the evaluation is anonymous, there was no incentive to inflate scores. All scores were collected at the organisational level (rather than individual), and scores were not shared beyond the learning project team.

- **Structured approach to scoring**: As outlined above, the SEL-PQA scoring used a detailed observational schedule and peer discussion to reduce observer bias. Grant holders were trained to accurately score provision against the SEL-PQA, with a focus on observational note taking as opposed to interpretation or inference.

Interviews with grant holders suggest they were open and honest in their appraisal of provision. This is reflected in the range of quality scores submitted by grant holders (discussed further in Section 7). Furthermore, the profile of quality data was broadly in line with data gathered in the US, where the tool was developed, over the last 15 years of its use.

Figure 4.2: The Programme Quality Assessment Pyramid



The Youth Programme Quality Intervention (YPQI), developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, and led by the Centre for Youth Impact in the UK, gives a clear and evidenced picture of what makes a high quality environment for youth development.

The Programme Quality Assessment Pyramid, which underpins the YPQI, sets out four domains of quality environments, the foundation being 'creating safe spaces'. The Social and Emotional Learning Programme Quality Assessment (SEL-PQA), based on the pyramid, was used to measure quality in the YIF learning project.

You can read more about the process in *YIF Learning and Insight Paper One: A shared evaluation framework for open access youth provision*.

The quality process is based on an 'assess-plan-improve' sequence, as depicted in Figure 4.3. Once grant holders had completed an observation and uploaded their scores, they decided as a team the areas of improvement on which they planned to focus. The intention was that grant holders then put the improvement plan into action and repeated the cycle of self-assessment, planning and improving.

Each full cycle was intended to take six months. In reality, grant holders took part in the quality process when it was convenient for them and completed the number of cycles that they found most

useful or most feasible based on time and resources. Quality data is therefore reported based on the number of times a grant holder took part in the process, regardless of when they participated.

However, when looking at the average intervals between rounds, the average length of quality cycles is close to the intended six months with grant holders that took part in two rounds of the quality process (n=16) having an average interval of almost seven months between observations; and those taking part in three rounds of the process (n=14) having an average interval of almost six months between rounds one and two, and five and a half months between rounds two and three (see Technical Report Section 7.3.3.3).

Figure 4.3: Assess-plan-improve cycle
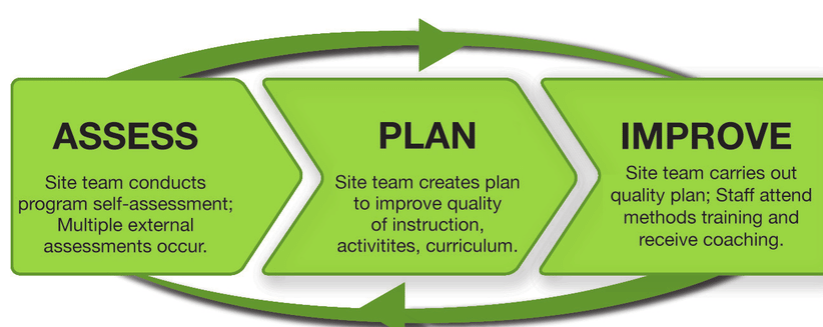


### 4.3.5  Outcomes data

This was collected through a repeated survey measuring the intermediate outcomes identified in the YIF theory of change (see Appendix A) over time. For young people who were already attending YIF provision, this was intended to be collected at baseline with a follow up survey after six months.[15] For young people new to provision, there was an additional survey after three months. In reality data was collected at varying intervals but only data collected at baseline with three and/or six-month follow up is included in the impact analysis (Section 8). This is because the intervals between questionnaires needed to be approximately the same as the data collection intervals for the comparison group.

The YIF outcomes framework was developed primarily with YIF grant holders in mind, but it also closely aligns with the Centre for Youth Impact's Outcomes Framework (A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0), which has been developed in collaboration with its regional networks and with the support of the Local Government Association (LGA). The YIF outcomes

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[15] For young people already attending the YIF provision, the baseline is the first questionnaire completed. It is not necessarily a baseline relative to registration.

framework aims to be relevant and applicable to other open access providers. Key attributes of the framework are outlined below.

**Use of standardised tools and selected questions**

We developed outcomes measures through consultation and pilot testing with grant holders (see Insight Paper 3). We used freely available, fully standardised outcomes tools alongside selected questions (one or more) from other standardised measurement tools (see Section 7.4.1 of the Technical Report for details). We based the outcomes measure on these existing tools, rather than creating a new set of questions, as they had previously been used with young people aged ten years and over, and/or had been shown to validly and reliably measure the target outcomes. For those outcomes where previous studies have shown that one question is the strongest predictor of change, we chose to use this one question instead of the full scale (for example, life satisfaction and self-belief).

This is a common approach to measurement; other major research studies have taken a similar path. Our pilot testing suggested that the benefits of adapting measures outweighed the challenges of using them in their original form. For example, it helped to reduce the burden on young people and improve the understanding and usability of the YIF outcomes survey. We recognise that there are some limitations to this approach, potentially including reduced confidence in accurate measurement of outcomes.

**Types of provision for which it is appropriate**

The YIF outcomes framework was only expected to be used with a subset of grant holders that were delivering activities for which outcomes data collection is appropriate. Our approach explicitly rejects the value of collecting outcomes data for some forms of provision where the intensity of engagement is light-touch, very fleeting or irregular (such as detached provision[16]). It's not that these forms of provision are ineffective, but merely that it is neither feasible nor meaningful to capture this change through standardised pre- and post- questionnaires. Our approach is suitable for all other types of provision that meet the YIF description of open access youth provision (see Section 2.2.1).

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[16] Detached provision refers to youth work that involves going out to where young people are, whether that be out on the street, in a park or any other space where young people are

**Low or no cost**

Tools and questions for measuring outcomes had to be free to use, so that other youth providers could easily access them in the future. This immediately ruled out a range of tools that either had a charge associated with using them, or a charge involved in entering/analysing the data.

**Choice of outcomes**

The YIF outcomes framework was mostly informed by the YIF Theory of Change (see Appendix A), which was built on existing evidence and the expertise of YIF grant holders. The theory of change acts as a set of hypotheses about the causal links between YIF activities and young people's intermediate outcomes and the longer-term impact on their lives. Some of the links have already been established through previous research, largely in relation to intermediate outcomes and longer-term impact (see page 8, Insight paper 3). However, there is limited evidence of the links between activities, mechanisms of change, and intermediate outcomes.

The YIF outcomes framework focuses on understanding the links between young people's engagement in open access youth provision and changes in their values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviours. All questions in the outcomes framework were included in baseline and follow-up surveys completed by young people (see Table 4.4 below).

Table 4.4: YIF outcomes

| Domains | Outcomes (questions/scales) | Response Options |
|---|---|---|
| Self-confidence and personal locus of control[17] | I am confident that I have the ability to succeed in anything I want to do.<br>I can handle things no matter what happens.<br>My life is mostly controlled by external things.[18]<br>My own efforts and actions are what determine my future. | 1 (False/not like me) to 8 (True / like me) |
| | I have a lot to be proud of. | 1=Very True<br>2=Partly True<br>3=Not True at all |
| Leadership | How confident do you feel:<br>Being the leader of a team? | 1= Very confident<br>2= Confident<br>3= Not sure<br>4= Somewhat confident<br>5= Not at all confident |
| Social skills | How confident do you feel:<br>Having a go at things that are new to me?<br>Working with other people in a team? | 1= Very confident<br>2= Confident<br>3= Not sure |

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[17] Locus of control is defined as 'the tendency to take responsibility for self-actions and successes'
[18] This is a reverse scored item and has been dropped from the impact analysis as the data suggested that young people misinterpreted the coding for this negatively worded question.

| | Meeting new people? | 4= Somewhat confident |
| | Dealing with conflict between friends? | 5= Not at all confident |
| | Being in large groups of people? | |
| Self-regulation | How confident do you feel: | 1= Very confident |
| | Getting things done on time? | 2= Confident |
| | | 3= Not sure |
| | | 4= Somewhat confident |
| | | 5= Not at all confident |
| | I can stay calm in stressful situations. | 1 (False/not like me) to 8 (True / like me) |
| Communication and self-expression | How confident do you feel: | 1= Very confident |
| | Putting forward my ideas? | 2= Confident |
| | Explaining my ideas clearly? | 3= Not sure |
| | Standing up for myself without putting others down? | 4= Somewhat confident |
| | | 5= Not at all confident |
| Social connectedness | I have family and friends who help me feel safe, secure and happy. | 1= Very True |
| | There is someone I trust who I would turn to for advice if I were having problems. | 2= Partly True |
| | There Is no one I feel close to. | 3= Not True at all |
| | How often do you feel lonely? | 1= Often/always |
| | | 2= Some of the time |
| | | 3= Occasionally |
| | | 4= Hardly ever |
| | | 5= Never |
| Happiness and well-being | How happy are you with your life as a whole? | 0-10 response scale |
| | | 0 = Very unhappy |
| | | 5 = Not happy or unhappy |
| | | 10 = Very happy |
| | I've been feeling optimistic (positive) about the future. | 1= None of the time |
| | I've been feeling useful. | 2= Rarely |
| | I've been feeling relaxed. | 3= Some of the time |
| | I've been dealing with problems well. | 4= Often |
| | I've been thinking clearly. | 5= All of the time |
| | I've been feeling close to other people. | |
| | I've been able to make my own mind up about things. | |

**'New' vs 'existing' users**

YIF grant holders that opted into the outcomes data collection were asked to prioritise young people who were 'new' to provision. We defined this as being within three weeks of first attending and/or registering with the provider. This was because we hypothesised that outcomes were most likely to change in response to provision during the first three to six-months of attendance, rather

than an arbitrary six-month period for young people who had been attending the same provision for some months or years previously.

However, what we learnt from the pilot suggested that we should also include young people who have been attending for some time ('existing users'), so that the results of the YIF outcomes research would reflect the profile of all young people attending provision. It was also of interest to YIF grant holders, the evaluation team and to funders to understand the potential change in outcomes for 'existing users' versus 'new users.'

Ultimately, we all agreed that we should place a greater emphasis on collecting outcome surveys from 'new users' to allow us to compare results more robustly with a counterfactual sample of a similar group of young people who do not attend YIF funded provision.

The high number of missing registration dates meant we were unable to specify the proportion of young people in our sample who were new users.

## 4.4   Data management process

### 4.4.1   Administering the feedback and outcomes surveys

**Administering surveys**: The **feedback** and **outcomes** surveys were administered by staff members (for example, youth workers or managers) in participating YIF organisations. Staff were given clear written guidance and one or more staff from participating grant holders attended brief training from the learning team on the YIF data collection processes. This covered obtaining consent and how and when to support young people completing the questionnaire. The training was intended to standardise the process of administering surveys and reduce bias in the data collection process. Although we do not have systematic information about the extent to which surveys were administered with fidelity to this process, interviews with grant holders do not suggest any major issues or adaptations to survey administration that would have a significant impact on the quality of data collected.

Each YIF grant holder had the choice of collecting data from the surveys in written form or using an online version available on the IMPACT system. More interactive methods of data collection were also available for **feedback** surveys (see Section 4.3.3). Staff members administering the **outcome** surveys were required to allocate each survey an 'External ID Number', which was then used to identify the individual young person's survey without using their name. **Feedback** surveys were anonymous.

**Selecting activities**: Whilst guidance was given about which activities would be more suitable for collecting **outcomes** data (see Section 4.3.5), selecting activities relied upon practitioner's judgement. Detached provision or short/one-off interactions were excluded from **outcomes** data collection.

**Selecting young people to take part**: We do not have comprehensive information about how grant holders selected young people to take part in the **outcomes** data collection process. However, interviews with grant holders suggest the approach to sampling young people was mixed. Some specified 'survey completion' dates in advance and collected data from all young people who attended the session, whilst others attempted to target a sample of young people they felt represented the make-up of their participants.

It was common for grant holders to target regular attendees to take part in **outcomes** surveys (because of the pre-existing relationship) and there was an associated reluctance to target new young people for fear of 'putting them off'. Some grant holders expressed the belief that it was better to build trust before asking young people to complete the questionnaire. **Feedback** surveys were typically given to all young people attending activities that grant holders had chosen to be part of the feedback process.

### 4.4.2  Data input

The majority of the participating YIF grant holders chose to collect outcome surveys using paper questionnaires, which required them to input the survey data manually onto the IMPACT system. This imposed an admin burden on some grant holders. It is unlikely that they had capacity for a quality checking process, so there is an increased likelihood of errors in data inputting.

Due to an oversight in the design of the IMPACT system, it was possible to enter some data in an incorrect format (e.g. entering age rather than date of birth). This was rectified partway through the learning project.

Some grant holders entered their survey data in batches, making it harder for the YIF learning team to track response rates in real-time. A small number of grant holders submitted paper copies to the learning team who entered the data on to IMPACT, but some of these surveys had missing administrative information (e.g. user IDs).

## 4.5   Implementation of the YIF approach to data collection

The scale of data collection for the YIF learning project was ambitious and has never been attempted before in the youth sector. We strove to collect consistent data across 85 grant holders of different sizes, with varied levels of resources, capacity and skills (excluding the four grant holders that opted out of the shared-evaluation at the beginning). This, in part, necessitated a 'learning as we go' approach to data collection, both for the grant holders and the learning team.

Many grant holders made significant progress in developing their ability to collect shared data, but the process highlighted areas where improvements in the consistency and quality of the data gathered are needed. These are not unique to the YIF grant holders or to youth sector organisations, but are important considerations for organisations to address. Specific data collection challenges included:

- **Lack of fidelity due to flexible delivery**: Whilst clear guidance for data collection was provided, some grant holders adapted the data collection process to suit their delivery and the young people with whom they were working. This included changing the timelines for collecting feedback, quality, and outcomes data, and adapting feedback questions.

  Data collection methods for feedback data were intended to be flexible. For example, some grant holders chose to use printed questionnaires whilst others asked young people to throw balls into buckets to represent their answers. As the data collection process was devolved to grant holders, we have limited information through which to judge the fidelity with which the data collection was conducted. However, stringent criteria were applied to the data during analysis to exclude data that was of poor quality, for instance, where the question wording had been adapted in the feedback surveys.

  Bias may have been introduced during the data collection process depending on the methods employed. For example, more interactive approaches (e.g. throwing balls in buckets) are less likely to be anonymous and therefore may have affected how open and honest young people were in their answers. Similarly, data collection being conducted by grant holder staff rather than an independent evaluator may have affected how the young people responded.

- **Understanding how representative the YIF data is of the overall YIF beneficiary cohort**: Grant holders were asked at the outset of the learning project to collect beneficiary and engagement data for all young people attending provision from May 2018 onwards, to provide a complete picture of the YIF's reach during this time period. However, some grant

holders did not submit data for the full period of the evaluation and some only submitted partial data.

Based on feedback from grant holders, we know that this was sometimes a conscious decision where grant holders chose a subsection of their activities on which to focus their available data collection resources, meaning that only a subsection of young people were included in gathering data. In other cases, capacity issues or changes in staff meant that they were unable to share all their beneficiary and attendance data with us.

Technical issues also affected some grant holders' ability to submit data, for example, challenges integrating their data collection platform with the digital IMPACT platform used in the YIF learning project. As a result, it is not possible to precisely calculate the proportion of YIF participants for whom we have data, which limits our ability to generalise findings to the broader YIF cohort.

- **Missing demographic data**: Large amounts of demographic data are missing about the young people who attended YIF provision during the learning project. Gender information is missing for 16% of young people, ethnicity data is missing for 34% of young people, and age is missing for 24% of young people. Reasons described by grant holders for this include:

  o Young people, understandably, being unwilling to provide personal information if they are unclear of the purpose for which it is being collected (particularly ethnicity data).

  o Data was collected but in an incompatible format (e.g. age instead of date of birth or using a different set of options to describe gender or ethnicity).

  o Technical difficulties with sharing data (e.g. uploading data to the IMPACT system).

  o This type of data collection not being standard practice for some grant holders (e.g. membership or registration forms may not include a question about ethnicity).

  o Challenges with data collection due to staff turnover.

  o The introduction of GDPR, which resulted in some grant holders significantly reducing the amount of demographic data they were collecting.

- **Exclusion of data**: We received beneficiary and engagement data that, based on the available information, appeared to be outside of the YIF funding period or the learning project's parameters. This included data about individuals who were outside of the YIF age

range[19] or who were registered as taking part in activities prior to the learning project data collection timeframe, but not during it. This data was excluded from the analyses on which this report is based.

In total we received beneficiary data for 84,027 young people. Of this, 23,825 young people's data was excluded as, according to the information provided, they stopped attending activities *prior* to the beginning of the YIF learning project. A further 1,848 were excluded as they were outside of the age range supported by the YIF and 1,571 young people's data was excluded as they were both outside of the age range *and* stopped attending provision prior to the start of the learning project. The remaining beneficiary sample size is 56,783 and this is the beneficiary data reported in Section 5. Where age or attendance data are missing within this sample, we have worked on the assumption that the participants meet the inclusion criteria (see Technical Report Section 7.1, Table 7.1.1 for a breakdown of the excluded and missing beneficiary data within the sample).

- **Challenges with collecting outcomes data**: Outcomes data was the most challenging type of data to collect, which has impacted both the quantity and quality of our data. Reasons for this include:

  o Provision is predominantly attended on a drop-in basis so there is no guarantee that young people will attend provision more than once within the timeframe, meaning that many young people did not complete questionnaires at more than one timepoint.

  o Tracking young people over time is administratively challenging. Inconsistent or missing 'user IDs' meant that, in some instances, it was not possible to link survey data to an individual and was therefore impossible to track their journey over time.

  o Young people experience questionnaire fatigue, with feedback from grant holders suggesting that young people do not like completing the same questionnaires in what they perceive to be close succession.

  o The more personal nature of the outcomes questionnaire (e.g. asking about self-confidence) means young people are less willing to complete it compared to, for example, the anonymous feedback questionnaire.

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[19] 10 to 18 years old or 10 to 25 years with a disability or special educational needs

## 4.6   Data analysis

Details of data analysis are presented alongside findings in Sections 5 to 9.  Supplementary information is provided in appendices and the Technical Report that accompanies this paper.

## 4.7   Interpreting the findings

The YIF evaluation design is innovative and methodologically robust. It was designed to be attentive to the nature of open access youth provision, and to take account of the diversity of practice and young people who participate. It was also designed to be different. We used varied types of data to generate new insights into the relationships between features of provision and young people's experiences.

However, we experienced significant challenges in implementing the approach, as outlined in Section 4.5. These challenges resulted in large amounts of missing data (e.g. demographic information) or data that was unusable for analysis purposes (e.g. where feedback questions had been adapted). For outcomes data, this resulted in modest sample sizes for the impact analysis (comparing YIF outcome survey data with a comparator survey data set). Of the 26 grant holders that submitted usable outcomes data, 16 provided data that was suitable for the impact analysis.[20] As a result, the impact analysis was based on data from a minority of YIF grant holders over a three to six month time period, with one grant holder being dominant in the dataset (due to the proportion of data that was collated by this one organisation compared to others).

Despite these challenges, we were able to collect sufficient outcomes data to test our hypotheses through the impact analysis. Effect sizes and confidence intervals are available in the Technical Report to support interpretation of the findings. Generally, the small sample sizes mean that the 95% confidence intervals around the estimates of impact tend to be wide. Furthermore, as smaller sample sizes were achieved for the cohort of young people completing a baseline and six-month follow-up questionnaire, it is harder to detect statistically significant impacts. As the sample of both grant holder organisations and young people is unlikely to approximate to a random sample, any inferences drawn should be to participants from a similar profile of organisations and to similar subsets of participants within those grant holders (See Appendix B for further information).

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[20] For outcomes data to be used in the impact analysis it needed to have a unique ID for matching questionnaires over time and needed to be collected at approximately the same intervals as the comparison group (i.e., 3 and/or 6 months following baseline data collection).

Larger samples sizes were achieved for the other four types of data (beneficiary, engagement, feedback, and quality) although it is not possible to say how representative these datasets are due to limited information about the overall YIF cohort.

In summary, the findings presented in Sections 5 to 9 relate to the sample of YIF grant holders for which we have usable data and therefore may not fully represent the wider YIF cohort or open access youth provision more generally. These limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

# 5. Findings: Young people attending YIF-funded youth provision

## 5.1 Who attended YIF provision?

### 5.1.1 YIF participants

Beneficiary data is administrative data about the young people attending YIF provision. This included date of birth, ethnicity, gender, and postcode. The YIF learning project set out to collect beneficiary data about all young people taking part in funded provision. However, in practice, the data collected represents a sub-set of participants as some grant holders either intentionally or unintentionally submitted partial beneficiary data due to limited time and capacity; six grant holders did not submit any beneficiary data (including four that opted out of the evaluation at the outset of the project); and one grant holder withdrew from the funding (see Section 4.5 for further information). To understand more about data collection challenges and reasons for missing data, we conducted interviews with grant holders, and the findings are presented in Insight Paper 6.

Between May 2018 and August 2020, eligible beneficiary data was submitted for 56,783 young people across 71 grant holders (see Section 4.5 for information about exclusion of data). The highest number of young people recorded at a single grant holder was 7,221, the median number of young people recorded as attending per grant holder was 309, and the average was 807. The lowest number of young people recorded by a grant holder was 1, illustrating that some data submitted by grant holders was clearly incomplete. For context, according to end of funding data gathered by the Fund (as reported in Section 4.2), grant holders reached a median number of 1,923 young people, an average of 3,631 and a maximum of 27,819 young people over the full duration of the YIF (see Technical Report Section 6 for further details). The differences between beneficiary and monitoring data is a result of the partial submission of beneficiary data outlined above. The National Lottery Community Fund's monitoring data is intended to represent the full reach of the YIF but due to a lack of information about how grant holders generated these figures, this data should be treated with some caution.

The following sections provide further information about the young people attending YIF provision, according to the available beneficiary data.

## 5.1.2  Gender

The beneficiary data suggests girls and young women may be underrepresented amongst those attending YIF funded provision. Based on available data, there was a bias towards boys and young men, with 58% of participants recorded as male compared to 41% recorded as female and 0.2% recorded as 'other' (Chart 5.1). For comparison, population estimates report that 51% of young people aged 8-26 are male and 49% are female (Chart 5.2).[21] We received gender data for 83% of young people (n=46,970; 1% of data was recorded as 'don't know' and 16% was missing). This was also reflected in the YIF process evaluation, which found that there is sometimes a tendency for activities to become dominated by boys and young men, particularly outdoor sports.

When looking at gender data by region (Chart 5.3), the bias towards male participants is even more pronounced in London East and the West Midlands. The percentages of male and female young people taking part in activities provided by grant holders in the Eastern Counties were most reflective of the population of young people in England as a whole.

Chart 5.1: Gender of young people taking part in YIF provision
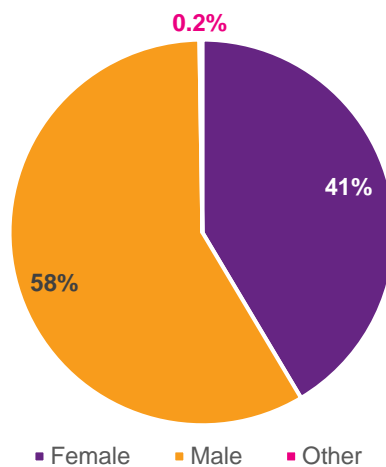


Base: 46,970

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[21] Based on population estimates for 8-26 year olds in England (mid-2019). Source: ONS (2020) Analysis of population estimates tool. Downloaded at:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforuk englandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland
We use this age range to match the overall profile of the YIF beneficiary data. We find the same pattern if we use regional data for the core YIF age range of 10-18.

Chart 5.2: Gender of young people attending YIF provision compared to population estimates for 8-26 year olds in England (mid-2019)
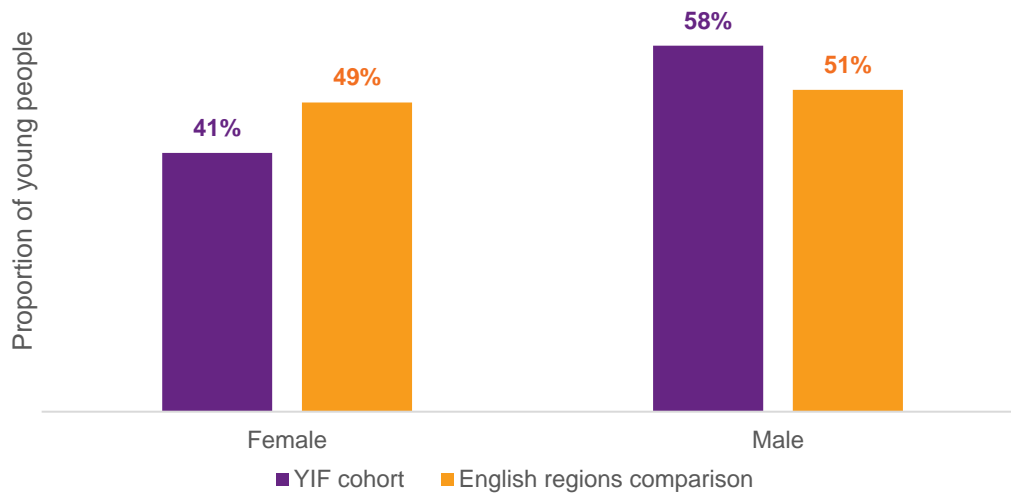


Bases:  46,854 YIF cohort; 12,828,136 English regions comparison

Chart 5.3: Regional breakdown of gender of young people attending YIF provision compared to population estimates for 8-26 year olds in England (mid-2019)[9]
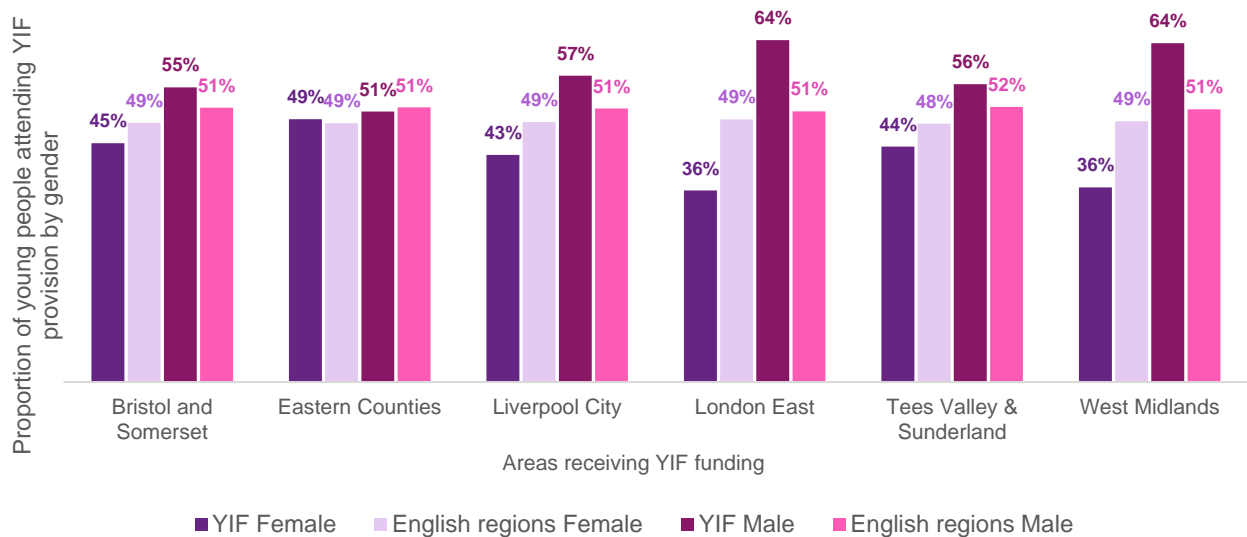


Bases:  **YIF cohort**: 10,464 Bristol and Somerset;  2,977 Eastern Counties; 12,804 Liverpool City; 9,076 London East; 5,167 Tees Valley and Sunderland; 6,366 West Midlands. **English regions**: 1,213,214 Bristol and Somerset (South West); 1,350,527 Eastern Counties (East); 1,685,932 Liverpool City (North West); 2,095,254 London East (London); 606,933 Tees Valley and Sunderland (North East); 1,406,810 West Midlands (West Midlands)[22]

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[22]The English regions used for comparison are shown in brackets.

### 5.1.3  Ethnicity

Ethnicity was recorded for 60% of our sample (n=33,806; 7% was recorded as 'don't know' and 34% was missing data). Excluding missing data and 'don't know' responses, 73% of young people were White (n=24,714) and 27% (n=9,902) were from minority ethnic groups (Chart 5.4).

When compared to ethnicity data for England,[23] White and Asian/Asian British young people were slightly underrepresented whilst Black young people and young people from mixed/multiple ethnic groups were slightly overrepresented among YIF participants (Chart 5.5). When we look at the data by region (Chart 5.6), we find a similar pattern, with White young people representing the majority of participants across most areas, whilst being slightly underrepresented compared to the general population of young people. Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are overrepresented compared to the general population of young people in four out of six areas. One exception is Liverpool City region where 97% of participants were white and only 3% were from ethnic minority backgrounds (for further details, see Technical Report Section 7.1, Table 7.1.4). However, it should be noted that ethnicity data was missing for 51% of participants in this region.

Overall, this data suggest that across most regions, grant holders were successful in engaging young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Chart 5.4: Ethnicity of young people taking part in YIF provision



- Asian / Asian British

- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups

- Other Ethnic Group

- White
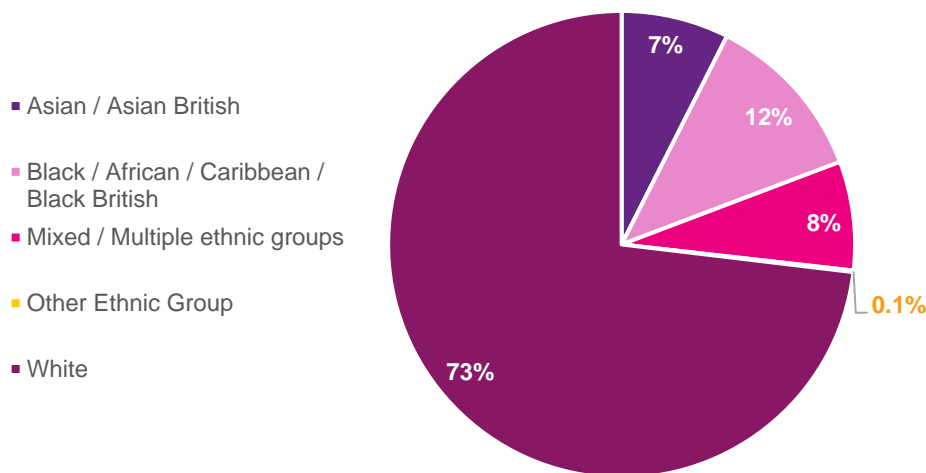
Base: 33,806

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[23] The data used here has been sourced from the 2011 census (ONS) and refers to young people aged 8-24 years. Age in the census data extract is grouped as follows: 8 to 9, 10 to 14, 15, 16 to 17, 18 to 19, 20 to 24.

Chart 5.5: Breakdown of ethnicity of young people taking part in YIF provision against a comparison dataset for England[24]
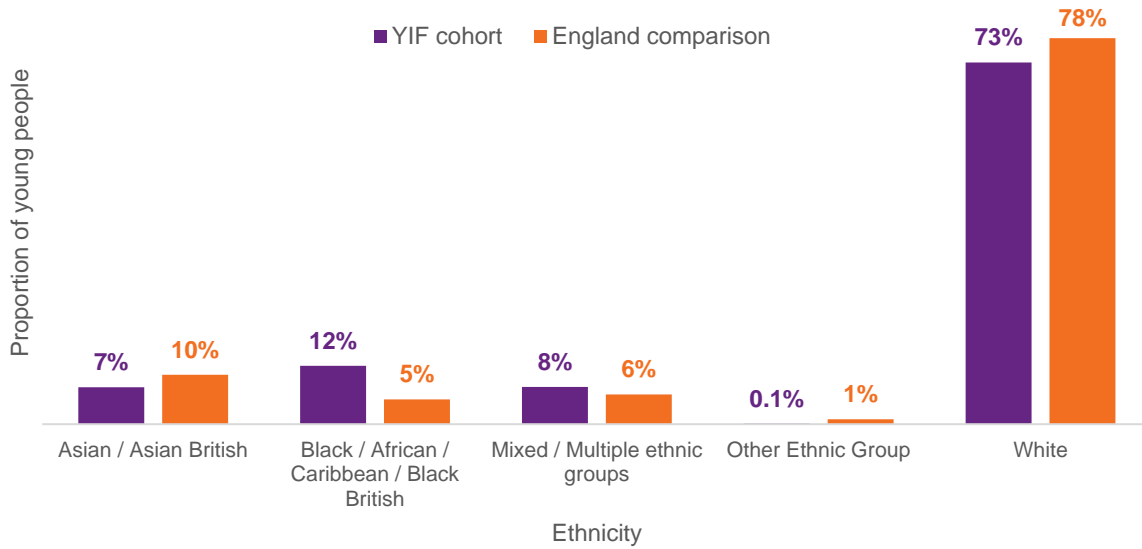


Base: 33,806 YIF cohort; 11,161,537 England comparison

Chart 5.6: Distribution by geographical cluster by ethnicity of young people attending YIF provision compared to population estimates for 8-24 years old in England[25]
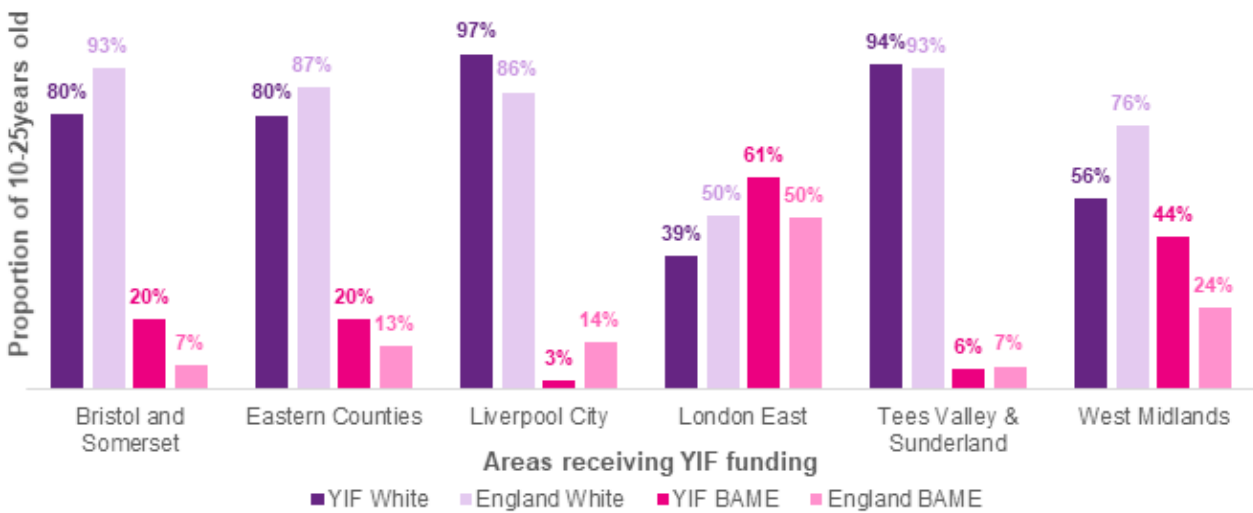


Bases: **YIF cohort:** 6,285 Bristol and Somerset; 2,309 Eastern Counties; 9,242 Liverpool City; 7,840 London East; 3,403 Tees Valley and Sunderland; 4,727 West Midlands. **England comparison**: 1,064,686 Bristol and Somerset (South West); 1,184,543 Eastern Counties (East); 1,509,942 Liverpool City (North West); 1,740,210 London East (London); 551,113 Tees Valley and Sunderland (North East); 1,217,231 West Midlands (West Midlands)[26]

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[24] Ibid

[25] Ibid

[26] The English regions used for comparison are shown in brackets.

## 5.1.4 Gender and ethnicity

When looking at the intersection between gender and ethnicity (Chart 5.7), we find that girls and young women from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds are underrepresented to a greater extent than their White peers. This is particularly true for Asian girls and young women. Combined gender and ethnicity data was available for 59% of our sample (n= 33,380).

Chart 5.7: Breakdown of the young people taking part in YIF provision by ethnicity and gender
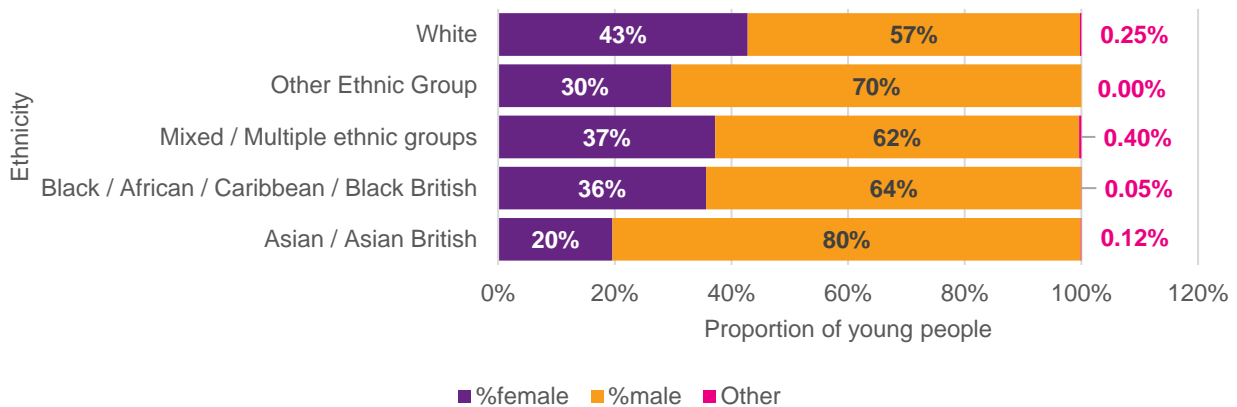


Bases: 24,413 White; 37 other ethnic group; 2,505 Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups; 3,944 Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; 2,481 Asian/Asian British

## 5.1.5  Age

The YIF defines 'young people' as those who are 10 to 18 years old or 10 to 25 years with a disability or special educational needs.[27] Whilst some YIF grant holders work with a broader group of young people, we have excluded any data for young people who fall outside of the 8 to 26 age range.[28] According to our sample, YIF provision peaks at age 13, with high numbers recorded between the ages of 11 and 15 years old (Chart 5.8). Age was recorded for 76% of young people attending YIF provision (n=42,971).

There are small variations in the age profile across regions (Chart 5.9) with larger numbers of 8 to 10 year olds attending provision in London East and Liverpool City regions and the West Midlands working with more young people in the 14 to 19 age range.

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[27] Data was not collected about disabilities or special educational needs of the young people attending YIF provision.
[28] Age of eligible young people, those born between 1993-2010, has been calculated using their date of birth and a 'cut off' point of 30th April 2019, which is the reason why age ranges from 8 to 26.

Chart 5.8: The age profile of young people taking part in YIF provision
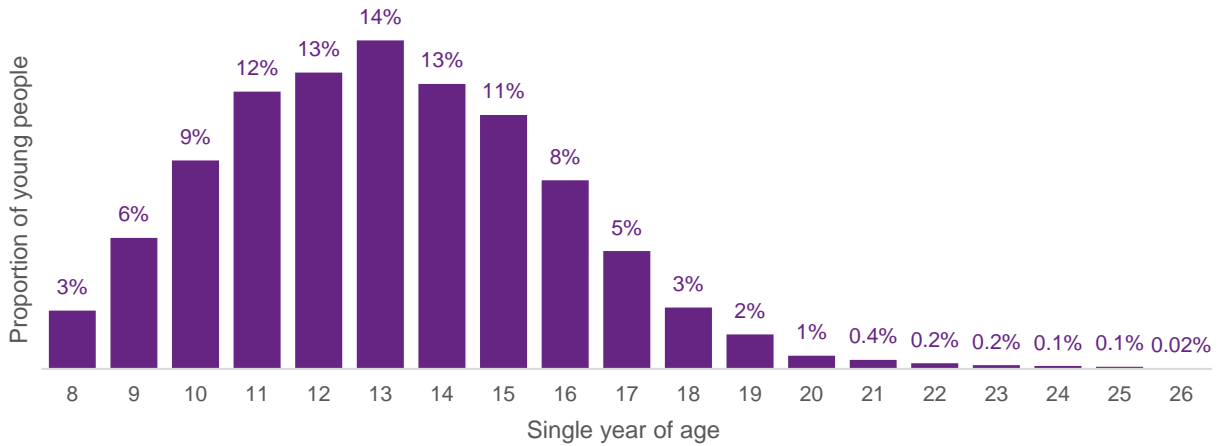


Base: 42,971

Chart 5.9: The age profile of young people taking part in YIF provision by geographical clusters
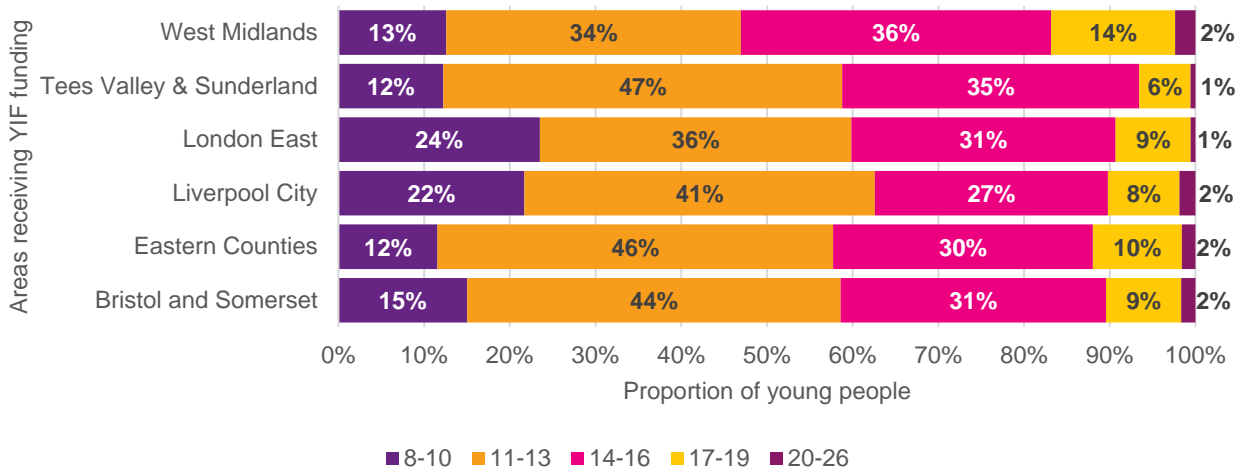


Bases: 8,716 Bristol and Somerset; 2,739 Eastern Counties; 13,234 Liverpool City; 9,123 London East; 3,733 Tees Valley and Sunderland; 5,426 West Midlands

## 5.1.6 Geographical distribution and relative deprivation

Youth organisations in receipt of YIF funding were located in six geographical areas across England. When looking at geographical distribution, it is important to consider that grant holders included a variety of youth organisations, with different reach and service provision. Of the sample of participants presented in this report, the highest proportion was based in Liverpool (n=19,045), followed by Bristol and Somerset (n=11,794), and East boroughs of London (n=9,596) (Chart

5.10). It is important to note that, as outlined in Section 4.5, this is based on partial beneficiary data and the pattern shown in Chart 6 may be a result of capacity and motivation to collect and share data rather than actual reach.

Chart 5.10: Geographical distribution of young people based on beneficiary data[29]
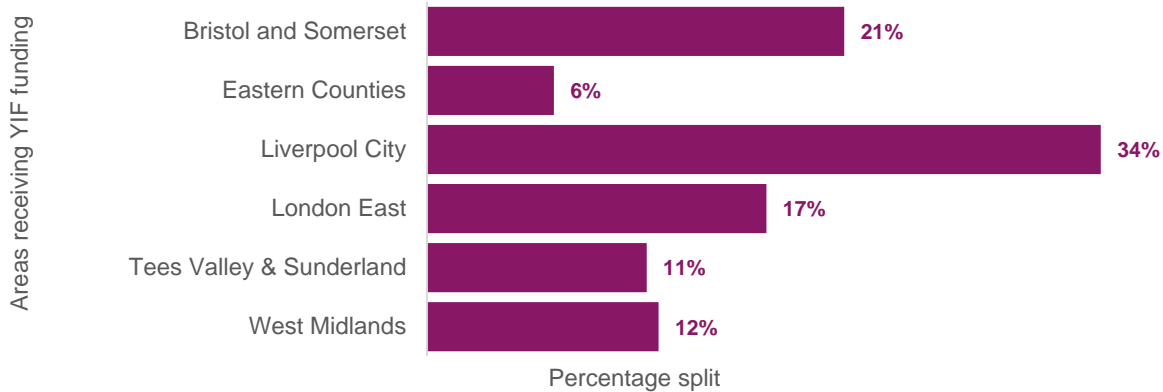


Base: 56,783

YIF provision aimed to reach young people experiencing multiple disadvantage and deprivation. Based on the data available, we managed to link 64% of young people in the sample (n=36,584) to the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation.[30] Overall, 80% of young people reached by YIF funded provision (n=29,215) were based in the five most deprived neighbourhoods of the country, with the highest proportions based in the two most deprived deciles (Chart 5.11). Matching young people's postcodes with IMD was not possible for 36% of the sample (n=20,199) because the postcode was either missing or recorded incorrectly.

The top three geographical clusters where service providers reached the highest proportion of young people living in the five most deprived areas were London East (94% of young people, n=7,622), West Midlands (93%, n=4,114), and Tees Valley & Sunderland (87%, n=1,878). For further details see Technical Report Section 7.1, Table 7.1.3.

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[29] Distribution was calculated based on service providers' location.
[30] Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019. Data accessed at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

Chart 5.11: Distribution of young people by deprivation decile
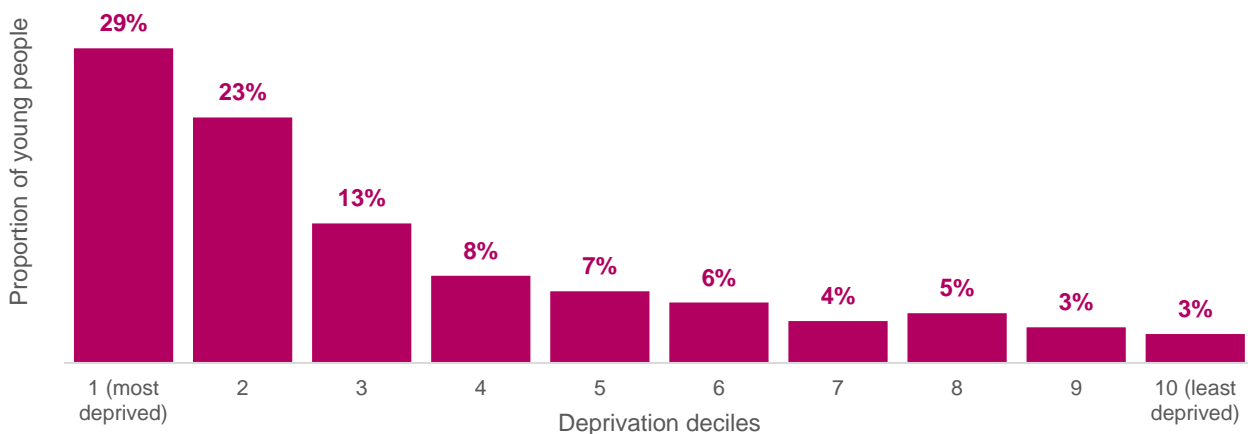


Base: 36,584

## 5.2  YIF participants' SEL skills, social connectedness and wellbeing when joining provision

In this section, we compare YIF participants' levels of social and emotional learning (SEL), social connectedness, and wellbeing on entering provision (based on baseline outcomes data) with a comparison group of young people not accessing YIF provision. The comparison group was drawn from areas with similar socio-economic need (outlined in Section 3.2.2), so their baseline outcomes will broadly represent those of the 'eligible pool' of young people for YIF.

At this point we are simply looking at **baseline data** and not change in outcomes over time, which is covered in Section 8. The purpose of this exercise is to assess the reach of the YIF provision: to what extent is it involving young people across the full range of need in terms of their social and emotional learning, social connectedness and wellbeing? However, one caveat to these comparisons is that the baseline measures for the YIF participants are not necessarily collected at the start of them attending YIF funded provision. For this reason, differences between the participants and the comparison group could reflect real differences in the profile of those choosing YIF provision or they may be a result of early impacts of provision, occurring before the baseline measure.

Figures 5.12 and 5.13 report on the baseline outcomes for each of the social and emotional learning, social connectedness, and wellbeing outcomes (see Section 4.3.5). As with the impact analysis (see Section 8), we have created binary measures splitting outcomes into 'positive' or 'less positive' (see Technical Report Section 7.4.2). The figures show the percentage of YIF

participants and the percentage of the comparison group with a positive score on each binary outcome. The only exception to this is related to the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMBWS), where we report on the percentage of young people scoring as having a high level of psychological distress or risk of depression. Because the comparison group included only young people aged 10 to 18, we restrict our comparisons to YIF participants aged 10 to 18.[31]

In general, the baseline profiles of the participants and comparison group are relatively similar, suggesting that YIF is reaching a wide range of young people in terms of their baseline needs. However, there is some evidence that a greater number of YIF participants compared to the comparison group score highly in terms of their social skills. Conversely, there is evidence that they are less likely to score well in terms of their self-confidence, communication and self-expression and social connectedness.

In more detail:

- **Self-confidence and personal locus of control**: while YIF participants, at baseline, are statistically significantly less likely to say they are confident that they have the ability to succeed (51% compared to 57%, p=0.004), on other outcomes the two groups are very similar.

- **Leadership and social skills**: as a broad pattern, more YIF participants have good social skills and leadership capabilities than young people in the comparison group. Whether this suggests that YIF attracts young people who are inherently more comfortable in social situations or whether this is an early impact of YIF is unknown. The differences between the two groups are statistically significant for three outcomes: confident having a go (59% versus 50%, p=0.017), confident meeting new people (54% versus 46%, p=0.022) and confident handling conflict (57% versus 47%, p=0.022).

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[31] Unlike for the impact analysis (see Section 8), here we include all YIF participants aged 10 to 18 who completed a baseline questionnaire.

Figure 5.12: Comparison of the baseline outcomes of YIF participants and the comparison group (personal locus of control, leadership and social skills)
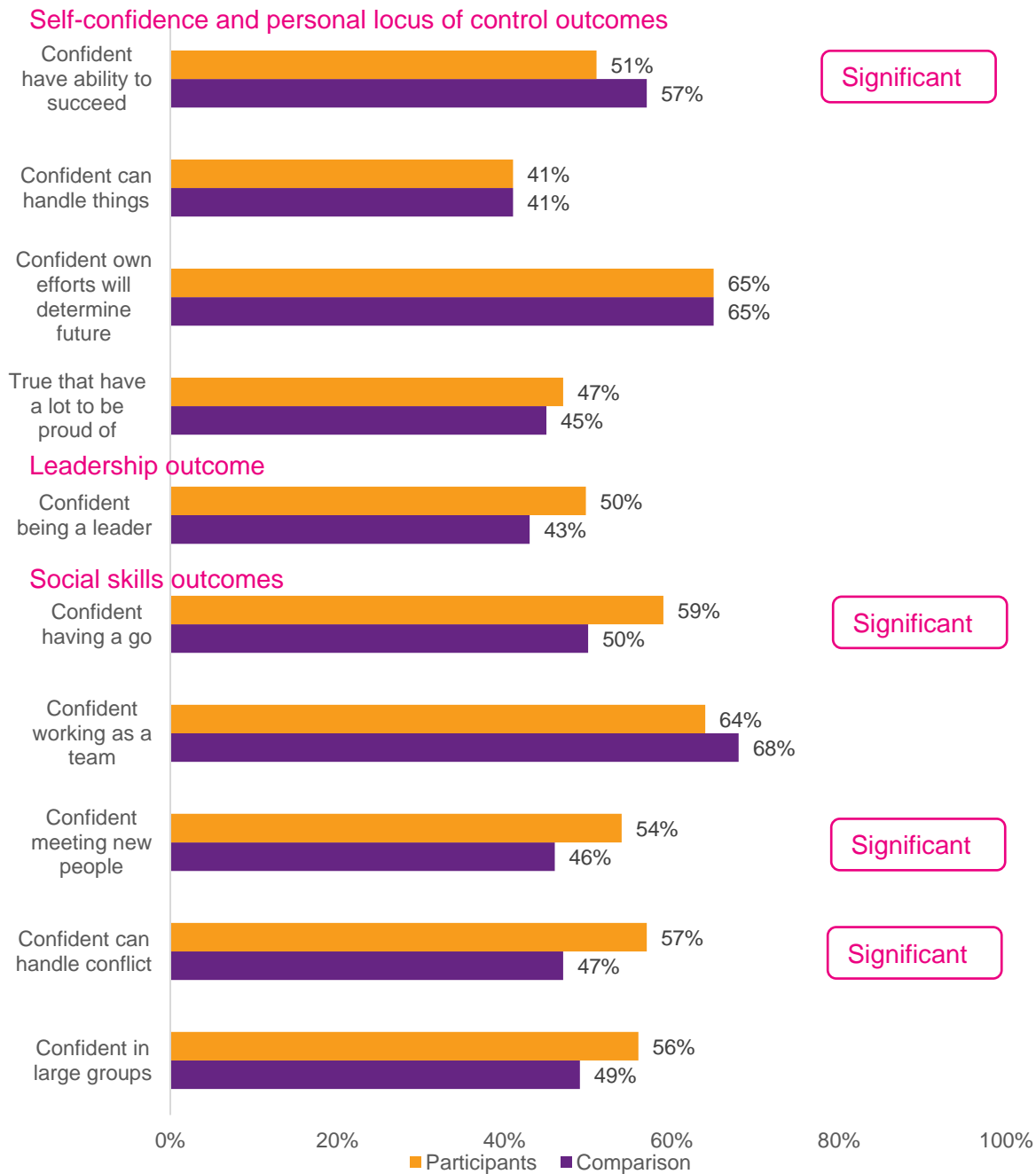


Bases: 990 YIF participants; 1000 young people in the comparison group

- **Self-regulation:** YIF participants and the comparison group are very similar in terms of their scores on baseline self-regulation.

- **Communication and self-expression**: as with the self-confidence measure, there is evidence that YIF is reaching young people with lower levels of confidence in terms of

communication and self-expression. They are statistically significantly less likely to say they are confident explaining their ideas than the comparison group (50% versus 59%, p=0.013).

- **Social connectedness**: YIF is also reaching young people whose social connections are less strong. They score lower on three outcomes, with the proportions of YIF participants saying that they have people they are close to being statistically significantly lower than in the comparison group (73% compared to 81%, p=0.002). However, they are also statistically significantly less likely to report feeling lonely (60% said they were not compared to 39% in the comparison group, p=0.012). This may be an early impact of YIF, with their attendance at YIF provision affecting their feelings of loneliness.

- **Wellbeing**: there are no statistically significant differences in levels of happiness and well-being among the YIF participants and the comparison group at baseline, suggesting that YIF is reaching young people from across the spectrum in terms of these measures.

Figure 5.13: Comparison of the baseline outcomes of YIF participants and the comparison group (self-regulation, self-expression and communication, social connectedness and well-being

**Self-regulation outcomes**

Confident getting things done on time — Participants: 56%, Comparison: 58%

Confident can stay calm — Participants: 40%, Comparison: 41%

**Communication and self-expression outcomes**

Confident putting forward ideas — Participants: 54%, Comparison: 56%

Confident can explain ideas clearly — Participants: 50%, Comparison: 59% — Significant

Confident in standing up for oneself — Participants: 57%, Comparison: 55%

**Social connectedness outcomes**

True have friends and family to feel safe — Participants: 75%, Comparison: 80%

True have someone to trust — Participants: 74%, Comparison: 76%

True that close to others — Participants: 73%, Comparison: 81% — Significant

Not lonely — Participants: 60%, Comparison: 39% — Significant

**Well-being outcomes**

Happy — Participants: 57%, Comparison: 53%

High psychological distress (SWEMBWS) — Participants: 21%, Comparison: 18%

■ Participants ■ Comparison

Bases: 990 YIF participants; 1000 young people in the comparison group

# 6. Findings: The types of activities attended by YIF participants

## 6.1 What types of activities are young people attending?

Grant holders recorded their YIF funded activity sessions delivered between May 2018 and August 2020 alongside details of the young people who participated in these activities. Through linking the attendance data with a unique beneficiary user ID, grant holders could understand which groups of young people were taking part in the different activities offered, and how often they were attending.

The nature and type of activities delivered across the YIF grant holders varied enormously, so to help understand key common features we developed a set of six characteristic groupings of open access youth provision (see Section 4.3.2), against which each grant holder was asked to classify their activities.

As outlined in Section 4.5, some grant holders submitted partial activity data and 6 grant holders did not submit any activity data at all. We received data for 1,018 eligible activities which were attended 390,811 times. Of these activities, we have classification data on one or more of the six characteristic groupings recorded for 673 activities across 72 grant holders.[32] (see Technical Report Section 7.1, Table 7.1.1b for further information).

Data on classified activities (Technical Report Section 7.1, Table 7.1.6) shows a clear pattern, with most attendances at activities that are building-based, drop-in, group, universal and open-ended. This reflects what we would perhaps expect to see from traditional open access youth provision. However, according to this data, there is a notable difference between the types of activities for which the highest numbers of attendances were recorded and the types of activities that were most commonly provided. This is likely to be because some types of activities, for example universal, open-ended and drop-in activities, are attended by greater numbers of young people than their counterpart activity types. Chart 6.1 shows the percentage split of attendances at each activity pairing.

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[32] 673 activities were categorised on at least one of the pairs of characteristic groupings (e.g. building-based or detached). The number of activities coded for each pairing can be found in the Technical Report Section 7.1. Table 7.1.6.

Chart 6.1: Percentage split of attendances at each activity pairing

| Detached | 4% | 96% | Building-based |
| Drop-in | 70% | 30% | Fixed |
| Group | 90% | 10% | Individual |
| Targeted | 15% | 85% | Universal |
| Time-limited | 26% | 74% | Open-ended |
| Unstructured | 51% | 49% | Structured |
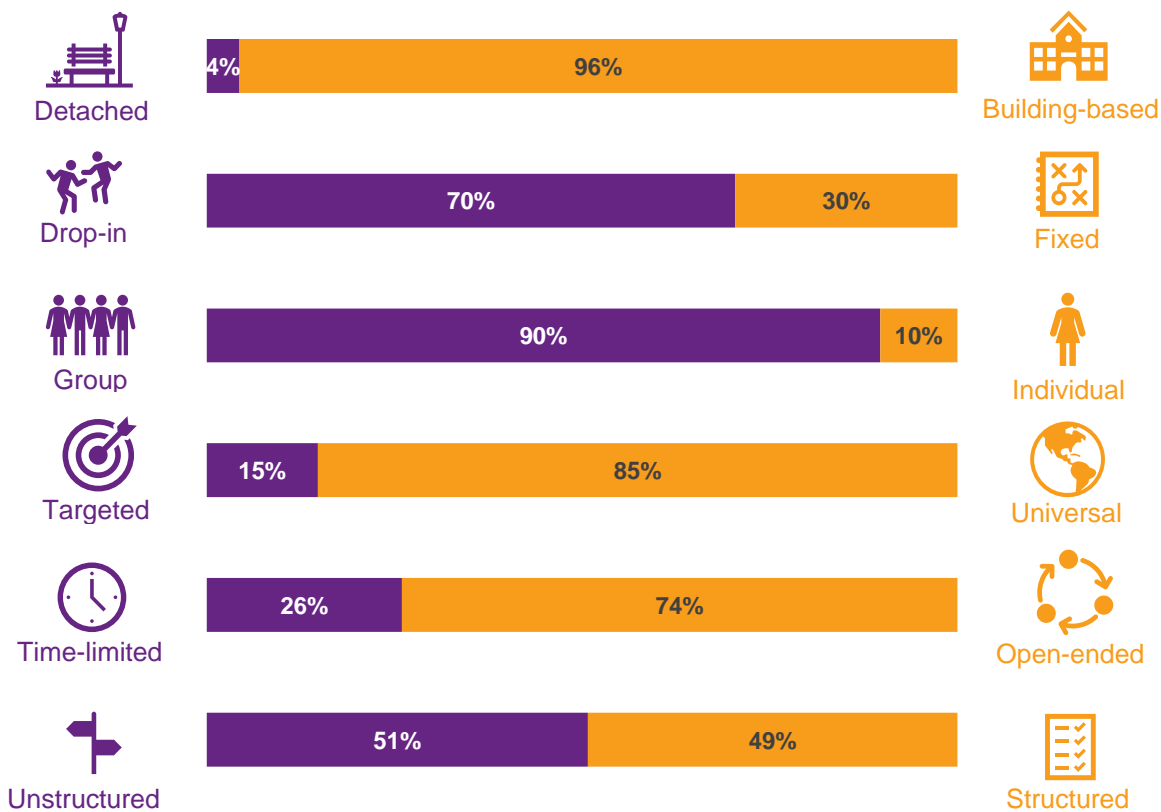
## 6.1.1 Types of provision

The activity data was used to inform the development of a set of activity 'types'. These are based on common combinations of the characteristics outlined in Section 4.3.2. Pattern-centred analysis was used to identify common ways that the characteristics grouped together, and these clusters were then refined based on the learning team's knowledge of youth provision. This enabled us to categorise the activities of all 89 grant holders[33] based on data submitted to The National Lottery Community Fund in annual reports, which included detailed activity descriptions (see Section 9 of the Technical Report for activity summaries). The types of provision identified are shown in Table 6.1 along with the number of grant holders delivering each activity type.

The most common type of activity provided through YIF funding was 'open/group/drop-in', which is reflective of the findings presented in Section 6.1. Interestingly, about a third of grant holders were providing some detached activities ('street/outreach'). It's likely that this is not reflected in the

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[33] One grant holder out of the original 90 funded grant holders withdrew in year one.

activity data presented in Section 6.1 as collecting data for detached work is challenging and because it was attended fewer times by young people.

Unsurprisingly, grant holders often delivered a range of different types of activities funded by YIF, with most grant holders offering two to four different types of activities (Table 6.2).

Table 6.1: Activity types and prevalence across the 89 YIF Grant Holders

| Activity type | Cross-reference to categories | No. of grant holders | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Street/ outreach | Detached (dominant, over-rules other types) | 29 | Mobile unit taking sports sessions out into communities; Pop-up cooking and art sessions in community spaces |
| 2. One to one/ mentoring | One to one; time-limited; buildings based | 14 | Sexual health counselling; Career coaching/mentoring |
| 3. Open/ group/ drop in | Universal; group; buildings based; drop in; open-ended | 70 | Sports provision for all young people living in the locality; Adventure playground on a housing estate; Weekly youth club offering a range of activities including arts, sports and games |
| 4. Open/ group/ programme | Universal; group; buildings based; fixed; time-limited | 57 | Programme focused on the dangers of violence and extremism, supporting young people to develop leadership skills and speak out; Writing workshops facilitated by peer mentors; Democratic participation workshops |
| 5. Targeted/ group/ programme | Targeted; group; buildings-based; fixed; time limited | 35 | Summer holiday programme of weekly drama sessions for young carers; Employability programme for young people who are NEET and interested in the creative industries |
| 6. Targeted/ group/ drop in | Targeted; group; buildings-based; drop in; open ended | 25 | Weekly youth club for young people with disabilities; Support hub for young LGBTQ+ people |
| 7. One to one/ service provision | One to one; drop in; buildings based | 14 | Drop in advice on housing and finances |

Table 6.2: The variety of activity types delivered by YIF grant holders

| Number of different types of activities delivered | Number of grant holders delivering activities |
|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | 7 |
| 2 | 35 |
| 3 | 27 |
| 4 | 18 |
| 5 | 1 |
| 6 | 1 |
| **Total** | **89** |

## 6.2   About young people's attendance

Data collected by grant holders included the number of times individuals attended activities (recorded as 'logs'). Based on the information shared by YIF grant holders, those activities delivered either fully or partly within the YIF data collection timeframe (i.e. May 2018 to August 2020) had an overall average number of 6.0 logs per person per activity. It should be noted that young people may have attended more than one type of activity, so this is not equivalent to the average number of times a young person attended provision in total, the mean for which is 8.04.

Activities classified as building-based, fixed, group, universal, open-ended and unstructured had a higher average number of attendances per activity (Chart 6.2). Further information about activities, number of attendances and duration of attendance can be found in the Technical Report Section 7.1, Table 7.1.6.

Chart 6.2: Average number of times young people attended by activity classification
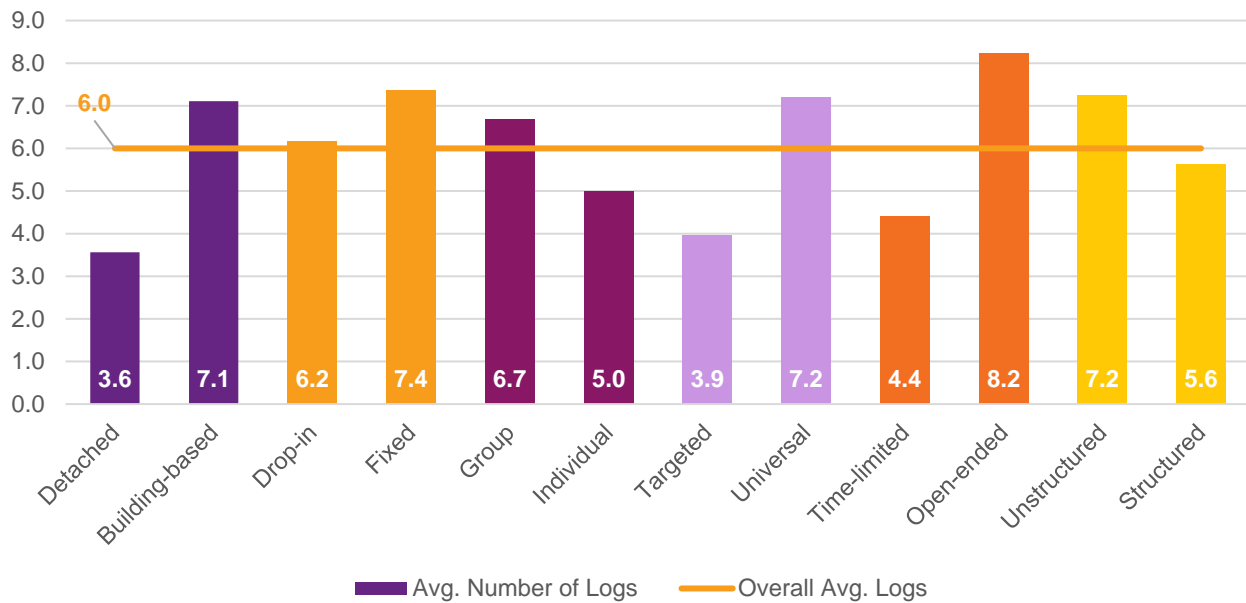


Bases: 2,641 detached; 29,102 building-based; 24,292 drop-in; 8,550 fixed; 30,190 group; 4,627 individual; 7,294 targeted; 23,051 universal; 12,792 time-limited; 19,504 open-ended; 15,046 unstructured; 18,798 structured

We found that male young people had the highest average number of attendances per activity (6.4). Female young people attended activities on average 5.9 times and young people who identified their gender as 'other' attended activities on average 4.5 times. Additional information on attendance data by gender can be found in the Technical Report Section 7.1, Table 7.1.7.

Data on young people's activity logs shows that certain activities were attended by young people over a longer duration (average number of months) than others. This included activities that were classified as open-ended, unstructured, universal, group, drop-in, or building-based (Chart 6.3). Again, young people may have attended more than one activity type and may have been attending prior to the start of the learning project. Therefore, this data represents duration of attendance at recorded activities and not duration of attendance at the grant holders' provision more generally.

When combining this information with the data presented in Chart 6.2, we can see that 'fixed' (attended on average 7.4 times over 1.9 months) provision appears to be more intensive. Open-ended provision is attended most often (8.2 attendances) over the longest period of time (4.1 months on average).

Chart 6.3 - Average attendance (number of months) by activity classification



Bases: 2,641 detached; 29,102 building-based; 24,292 drop-in; 8,550 fixed; 30,190 group; 4,627 individual; 7,294 targeted; 23,051 universal; 12,792 time-limited; 19,504 open-ended; 15,046 unstructured; 18,798 structured.
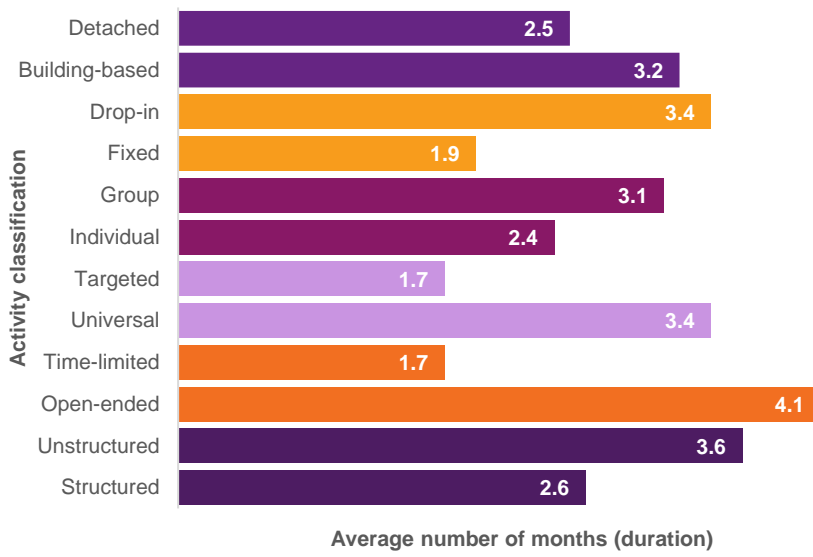
# 7.    Findings: The quality of Youth provision funded by the YIF

As outlined in Section 4, we looked at the quality of provision from two perspectives:

- The perspective of young people taking part. This was measured through feedback data from young people using a self-report questionnaire.

- The perspective of staff in the grant holder youth organisations who rated the quality of the setting using the SEL-PQA (see Section 4.3.4).

In this section, we look first at quality from each of these perspectives separately and then the relationship between the quality of the setting and the quality of young people's self-reported experiences of youth provision.

## 7.1    What is the quality of young people's experiences of YIF provision?

### 7.1.1    Interpreting the feedback data

To address this question, we systematically collected feedback from young people about their experience of YIF provision, based on the mechanisms of change identified through the co-produced YIF Theory of Change (see Appendix A). To aid readability, all questions are abridged to exclude the phrase "at [organisation]" or "whilst at [organisation]". The full unabridged questions can be found in Section 7.2.1 of the [Technical Report](#).

Feedback questions are grouped into four themes:

- Empowerment and voice.

- Stimulating, positively challenging and fun activities.

- Safe and supportive environment.

- Quality and value of provision.

Questions were scored on a three-point scale, with three being the most positive response. When reporting on themes, this was converted to a scale of zero to one in which a score of one would indicate a total set of positive answers. For example, if all young people had responded "A great deal" to the question "how included do you feel?", then the score would be one. Conversely a score of zero would indicate a total set of negative responses. The theme totals were calculated by creating composite mean scores for the thematic areas. The questions included within each theme and accompanying data are presented in Section 7.2.4.2 in the Technical Report.

Demographic data on the young people who completed feedback surveys suggests they were broadly similar to those in the overall beneficiary sample, as reported in Section 5 (see Technical Report Section 7.2.3 for full details). However, the proportion of girls and young women completing feedback questions was slightly higher (46% of feedback respondents compared to 41% of overall participants) and feedback respondents were slightly older in general. Information gathered through grant holder interviews suggested that girls and young women were more likely/willing to complete surveys.

### 7.1.2   Young people's feedback

Feedback is overall very positive (Chart 7.1 and Chart 7.2), as was reported in Insight Paper 4: Emerging findings from the Youth Investment Fund Learning Project. When feedback questions are thematically grouped, the relative poorer feedback on 'empowerment and voice' becomes apparent (Chart 7.1). It should be noted that each thematic group is made up of a different number of responses depending on how many responses were received. The number of responses within each theme is indicated in Chart 7.1.

At the individual question level, the same pattern re-emerged as was seen in Insight Paper 4. That is, enjoying time spent at the organisation, feeling safe, and valuing the organisation were rated highest. Influence on activities and a belief that changes will be made as a result of feedback scored relatively lower (Chart 7.2). As was noted in Insight Paper 4, young people's belief that staff trust them is lower (65% responded 'a great deal')) than their trust in staff (81% responded 'a great deal').

Chart 7.1: Feedback data presented by theme
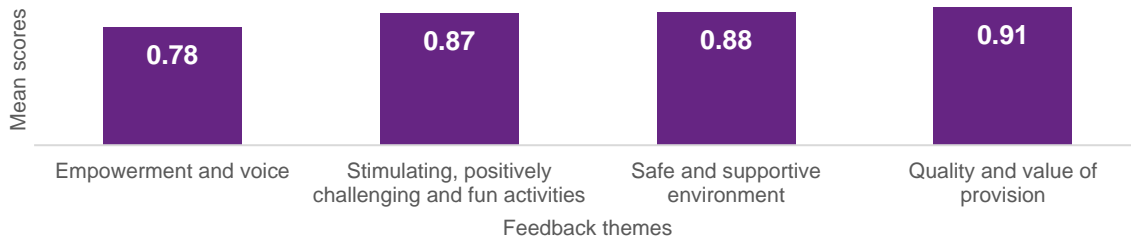


Bases: 5,187 Empowerment and voice; 8,082 Stimulating activities; 17,964 Safe and supportive environment; 4,460 Quality and value of provision

Chart 7.2: Item level feedback responses across all four rounds of data collection
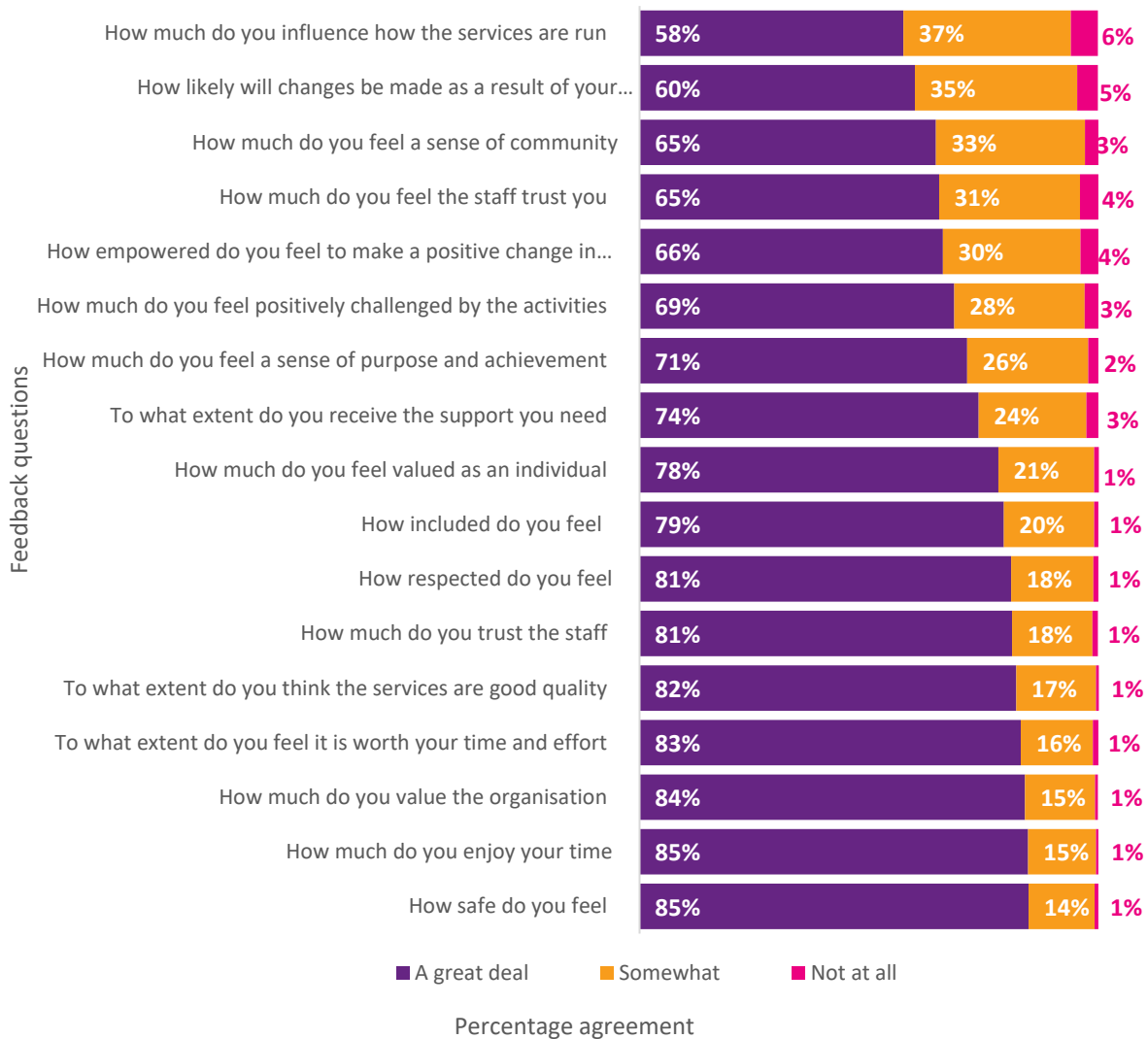


Bases: the number of responses for each question varies and ranges from 683 to 3525. See Technical Report Table 7.2.2 for full details. *Response options for this question were 'Very likely', 'Somewhat likely' and 'Not at all likely'.

## 7.2    How does feedback change over time?

Feedback data was gathered over four consecutive rounds of data collection between August 2018 and May 2020 (see Section 4.3.3). These included four time-periods:

- Round 1 - August 2018 to the end of December 2018.

- Round 2 - January 2019 to the end of June 2019.

- Round 3 - Start of July 2019 to the end of December 2019.

- Round 4 - January 2020 to the end of May 2020).

This produced a relatively even spread of surveys collected, which is helpful when comparing feedback questions across the different periods. Overall, feedback data shows little variation between the four consecutive rounds (Chart 7.3).

A statistically significant difference between round one and round four does emerge for one thematic group in feedback, namely "safe and supportive environment" ($P = 0.02$) where scores between the rounds increased by 0.3. We could interpret this to mean that, on average, feedback had improved in this theme in a way that is unlikely to be explained by chance.

The feedback theme "empowerment and voice" also increased by 0.3, however its sample size was roughly three times smaller meaning that statistical significance would be harder to detect. The primary reason explaining these differences is that grant holders could choose which feedback question to use, meaning that more grant holders chose to ask young people about safe and supportive environments than empowerment and voice.

Chart 7.3: Feedback split by theme divided into four rounds
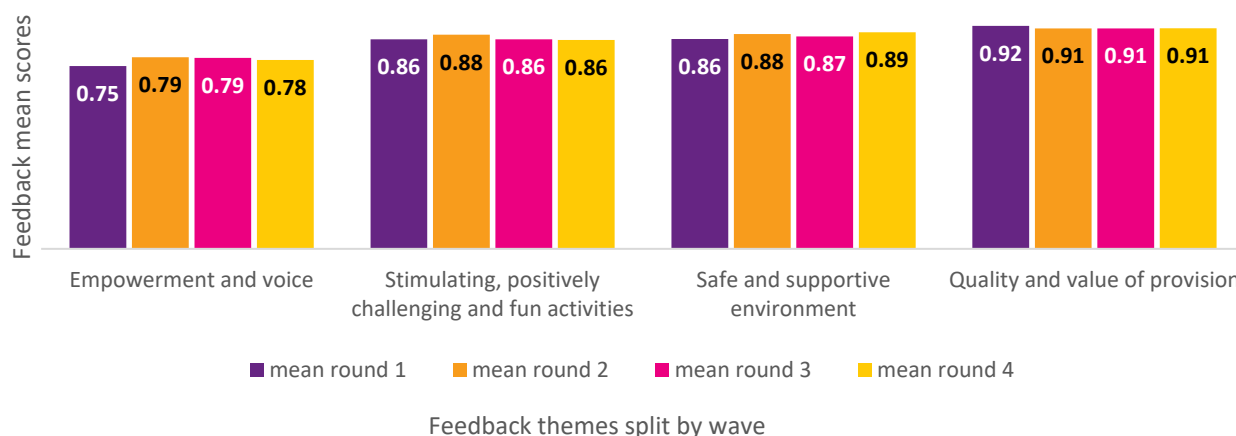


Bases: See Technical Report Table 7.2.5

## 7.3   What is the quality of settings delivering YIF provision?

The quality of youth provision settings was generally medium to high, as self-rated by grant holders using the SEL-PQA (see Section 4.3.4).

The domain "Safe Space" was rated highest, with a mean rating of 4.3 (Chart 7.4). Section 7.3.1 in the Technical Report shows how scales are aggregated into domains, but for immediate context the highest rating that could be assigned was five and the lowest was one, with a three representing some features of the quality behaviours being evidenced. This gives an indication of just how high the domain Safe Space was self-rated.

More detail emerges when we observe quality at scale level. As can be seen in Chart 7.5, there are some scales for which quality ratings were consistently lower such as "mindfulness" and "leadership". Furthermore, at baseline level there was little variation between grant holders' ratings, meaning scores between different grant holders were similar.

Chart 7.4: Overall quality of 54 participating grant holders at domain level
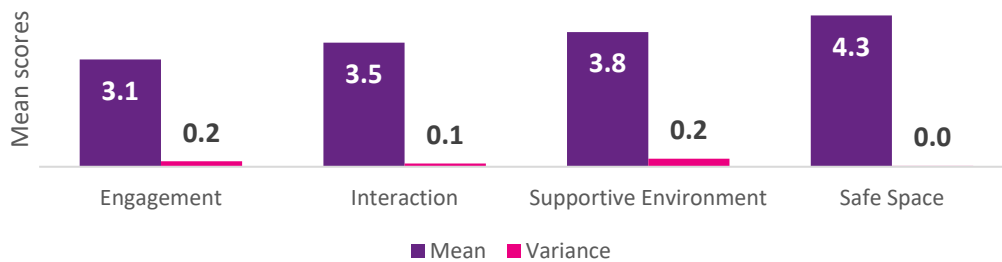


Base: 54 organisations

Chart 7.5: Overall quality of 54 participating grant holders at scale level
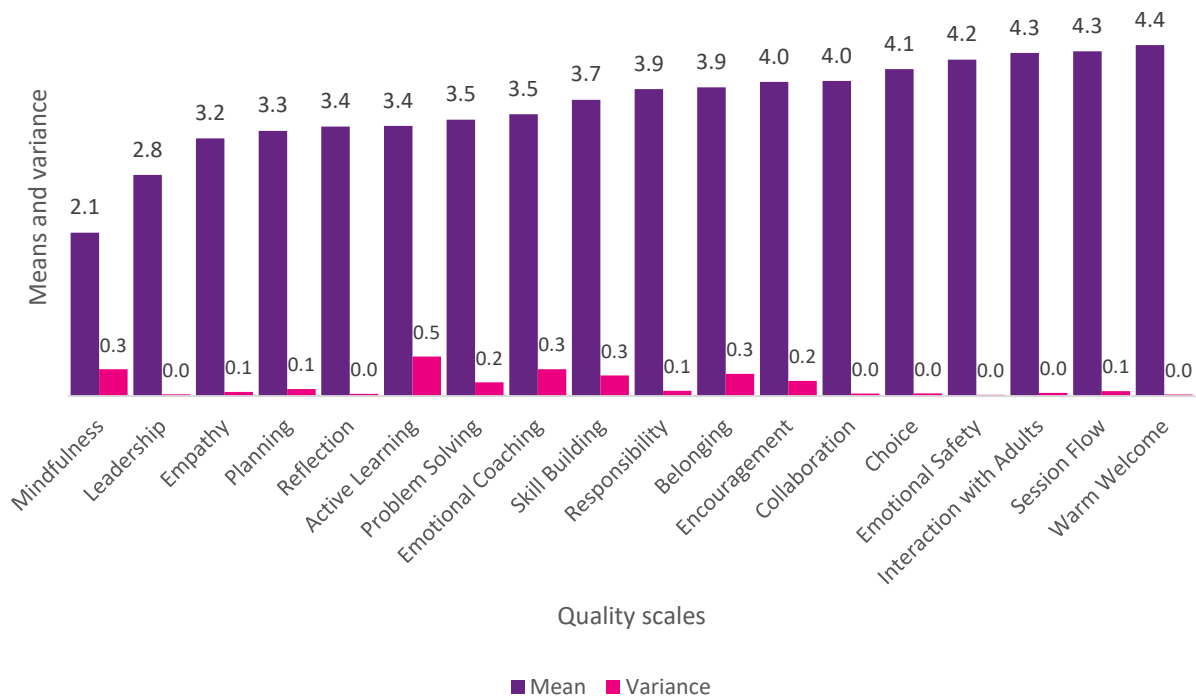


Base:54 organisations

## 7.4  How does quality of setting change over time?

For grant holders taking part in two rounds of the quality process (n = 16), the scores on the second round were, for most scales, slightly higher than the first (Chart 7.6). The variance also increased on most scales for the second round. This can be interpreted to mean that grant holders had become less similar in terms of their quality self-ratings. The constituent data can be found in Section 7.3.3.2 of the Technical Report.

Chart 7.6: Quality scores for grant holders taking part in 2 rounds only
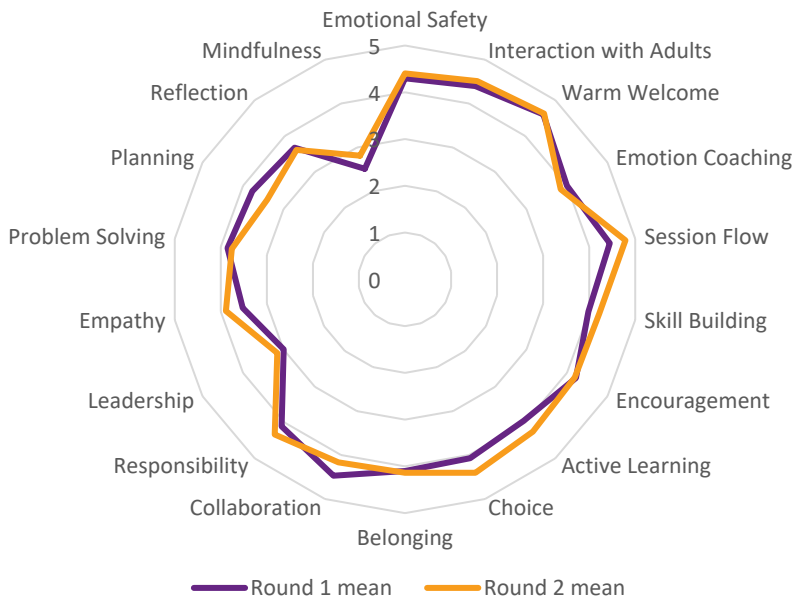


Base: 16 grant holder organisations

The pattern of quality increasing with each subsequent round is not observed when grant holders taking part in three rounds of the quality process are examined (Chart 7.7). For these 14 grant holders, the scores on their second round were, for most scales, slightly higher (although not significantly higher) than in their third round.

Chart 7.7: Quality scores for grant holders taking part in 3 rounds only (n = 14)
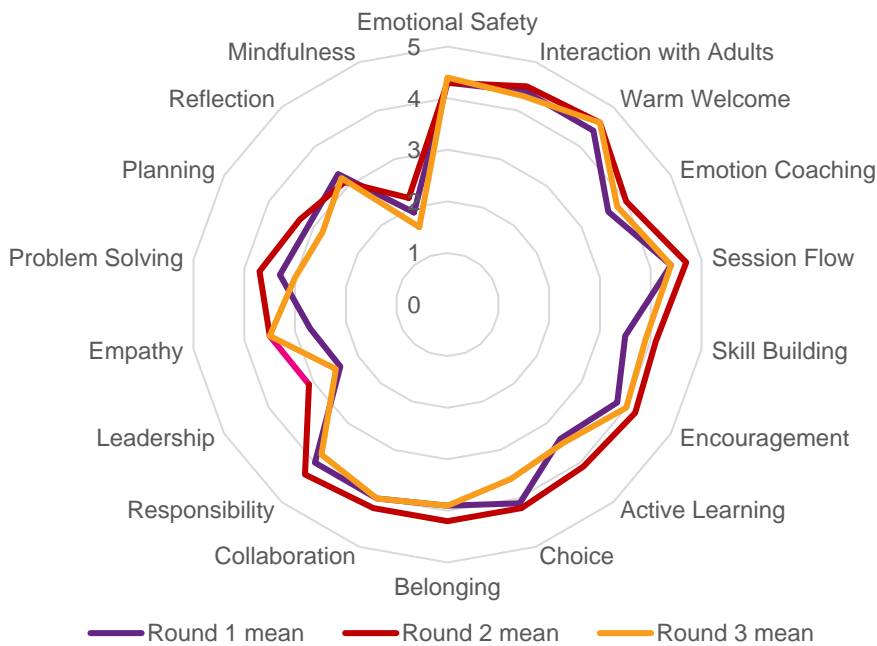


Base: 14 grant holder organisations

There are several potential explanations for why we see this pattern in the data:

- Staff become more trusting of the process as they get used to the 'low stakes accountability approach'.

- Staff become more critical as they learn more about what 'good' looks like in each of the scales.

- Quality marginally decreases. This may, for example, be a result of staff changes or because quality improvement does not progress in a linear fashion.

It should also be noted that the SEL-PQA is usually implemented as part of a broader support programme called the Youth Programme Quality Intervention (YPQI), through which participating grant holders receive ongoing support for improvement. This was not part of the YIF evaluation, which was not seeking to test the efficacy of support mechanisms.

## 7.5   What is the relationship between quality of setting and quality of experience?

There appears to be a relationship between quality of experience (as measured through feedback from young people), and quality of setting (as self-reported by grant holders using the SEL-PQA). Feedback from young people attending provision offered by grant holders taking part in the quality process was generally more positive than feedback from young people attending provision offered by grant holders not taking part in quality processes. This may be a result of those participating in the quality process paying increased attention to quality (regardless of scores) or it could be caused by underlying differences between the grant holders that selected into the quality process and those that did not.

As can be seen in Chart 7.8, the feedback themes of "empowerment and voice" and "quality and value of provision" emerge as significantly more positive (p=0.0014 and p=0.0028 respectively) for grant holders taking part in the quality process. The remaining two groupings were not significantly different from each other (p=0.7649 and p=0.4861 respectively).

Chart 7.8: Feedback themes split by grant holder's participation in quality processes
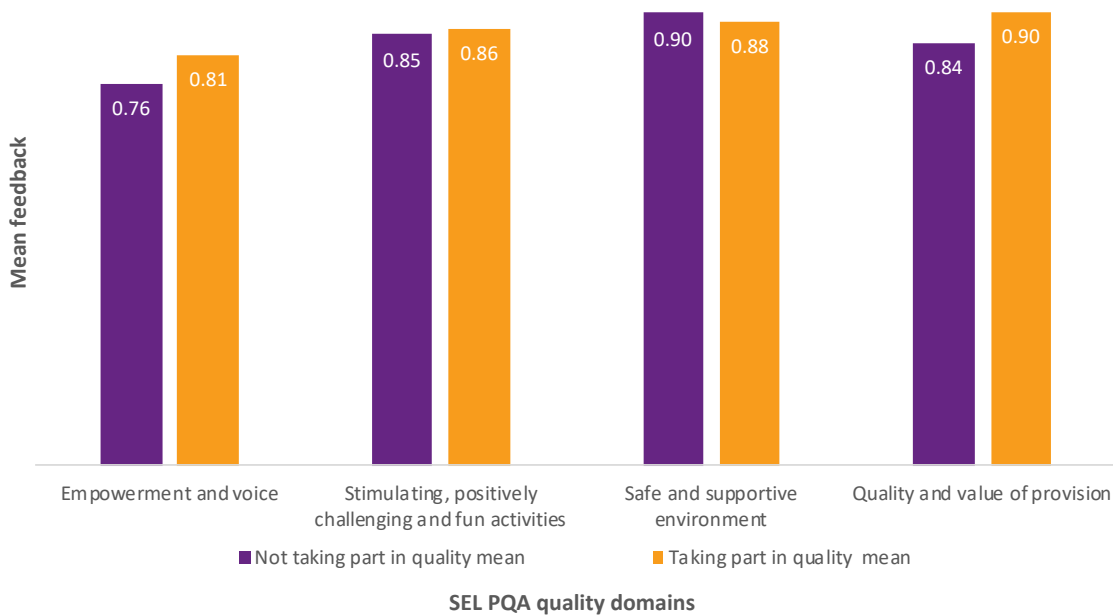


Base: **Not taking part in the quality process**: 747 empowerment and voice; 185 stimulating activities; 574 safe and supportive environment; 660 quality and value of provision. **Taking part in the quality proc**ess:  2,333 empowerment and voice; 1,793 stimulating activities; 1,214 safe and supportive environment; 1,552 quality and value of provision.

The relationship between the quality of the setting, as reported by grant holder staff, and feedback from young people as measured by their feedback surveys can be further seen when the quality of setting scores are used to create two groups: grant holders with "higher quality scores" and grant holders with "lower quality scores". Grant holders in the high-quality group received significantly better feedback from young people than those in the low-quality scores group (p=0.0059).

These groups were created through pattern-centred analysis, using the four quality domains as defined by the SEL-PQA, through which four groups of grant holders emerged according to their quality profiles. For more information on how grant holders taking part the quality process were grouped, see Section 8 of the Technical Report.

In Chart 7.9, the low-quality group's feedback scores from young people can be seen as consistently less positive than the high-quality group.

Chart 7.9: Feedback means split by higher quality and lower quality groups[34]

| Feedback questions | high quality group mean | low quality group mean |
|---|---|---|
| How much do you feel valued as an individual | 0.96 | 0.87 |
| To what extent do you receive the support you need | 0.94 | 0.86 |
| How much do you enjoy your time | 0.94 | 0.94 |
| To what extent do you feel it is worth your time and effort | 0.93 | 0.93 |
| To what extent do you think the services are good quality | 0.93 | 0.91 |
| How much do you trust the staff | 0.93 | 0.90 |
| How safe do you feel | 0.92 | 0.92 |
| How included do you feel | 0.91 | 0.84 |
| How much do you feel a sense of purpose and achievement | 0.91 | 0.83 |
| How respected do you feel | 0.90 | 0.88 |
| How likely will changes be made as a result of your feedback | 0.90 | 0.78 |
| How much do you feel a sense of community | 0.90 | 0.76 |
| How empowered do you feel to make a positive change in your life | 0.90 | 0.79 |
| How much do you influence how the services are run | 0.88 | 0.79 |
| How much do you feel positively challenged by the activities | 0.87 | 0.86 |
| How much do you feel the staff trust you | 0.82 | 0.73 |

■ high quality group mean    ■ low quality group mean

Feedback means

Bases: see Technical Report Table 7.2.8

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[34] We removed the question "How much do you value the organisation" from this chart as there was only one response in the high-quality group.

Chart 7.10 shows how the grant holders in the higher quality group (n= 11 grant holders) gain better feedback across all feedback themes than those in the lower quality group (n= 8 grant holders). The responses in Chart 7.10 are based on feedback from young people within these organisations, with the sample size for each theme shown below the chart.

The theme "empowerment and voice" reached statistical significance (p=0.029). The underlying data tables for the below figures including the significance values can be found in Table 7.2.9 of the Technical Report.

Chart 7.10 Feedback split by higher quality and lower quality groups
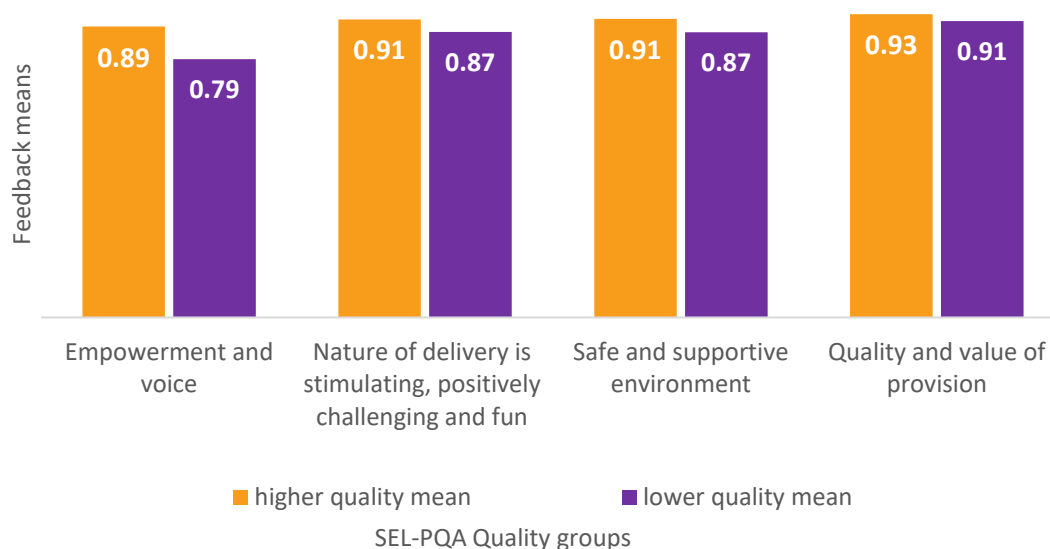


Bases: **Higher quality**: 482 empowerment and voice; 1,764 stimulating activities; 3,617 safe and supportive environment; 464 quality and value of provision. **Lower quality**: 764 empowerment and voice; 1,772 stimulating activities; 3,991 safe and supportive environment; 746 quality and value of provision.

Based on the data above, there appears to be a relationship between the quality of setting as observed and self-reported by staff, and the feedback that young people give in relation to the quality of the setting. Additionally, the degree of quality (high/low) makes a difference to young people's experiences as reported by their feedback ratings on provision. Lastly "empowerment and voice" appears to be an important domain that differentiates between higher and lower quality grant holders.

The importance of focusing on quality in open access youth provision is a notable finding emerging from the YIF learning project.

# 8.    Findings: The impact of YIF funded provision on young people's outcomes

## 8.1    Introduction

A key aim of the YIF evaluation has been to measure the *impact* of YIF provision for young people in terms of their social and emotional learning (SEL), wellbeing and social connectedness.

YIF participants were asked to complete an outcomes questionnaire at regular intervals to track their progress over time (Section 4.3.5). The comparison group of similar young people comes from a bespoke survey commissioned for the evaluation among 10 to 18-year olds on YouGov's online panel who were also asked to complete the survey at regular intervals (see Section 5 of the Technical Report for further details).

The original plan was to collect outcomes at three to four time-points from baseline to 12 months, but the challenge of recruiting YIF grant holders and collecting data meant we had to focus on a shorter period of baseline to six months and that sample sizes are relatively small. Therefore, only short-term impacts of YIF are measured. However, as some outcome measures are intermediaries for longer-term outcomes, it is possible to draw some inferences about the potential long-term effects on young people's lives.

## 8.2    Impact evaluation methods

### 8.2.1    A 'difference in differences' design

The impact of YIF provision is measured by comparing the progress YIF participants made to the progress of a group of very similar young people not involved in YIF provision. With the participants and the comparison group, we look at:

- The change in each outcome between baseline and approximately three months later.

- The change in each outcome between baseline and approximately six months later.

It is reasonable to assume that any change between time points among the comparison group is what we might expect to happen naturally over time. So, if the change among YIF participants is greater than the change among the comparison group, then we can reasonably attribute any difference in the amount of change between the two groups as being an impact of YIF, at least for those young people within our sample (see Section 4.7 for a discussion about generalisation of these findings to the broader YIF cohort).[35]

Take, for example, young people's confidence after three months about working as part of a team (Section 8.3.3):

- Among the comparison group, 63% were confident at baseline and 64% were confident three months later: a percentage point difference of 1pp.

- Among the YIF participants, 56% were confident at baseline and 72% were confident three months later: a percentage point difference of 16pp.

The impact of YIF is measured as the difference in the percentage point (pp) changes for the two groups, so: 16pp minus 1pp = +15pp impact. This is a 'difference in differences' design.

For each outcome, we test whether the size of the impacts is statistically significant by calculating its 'p-value'. The p-value is the probability of an observed difference being due to chance, rather than being a real underlying difference between the two groups. A p-value of less than five percent is conventionally taken to indicate a statistically significant difference ($p<0.05$).

Modest sample sizes and the fact that the participants providing outcomes data are concentrated in a relatively small number of projects mean that sometimes large percentage point differences are not statistically significant, with the threshold for significance differing from outcome to outcome depending on how the data is distributed across the projects[36]. In the example above about confidence working as part of a team, the percentage point difference is statistically significant ($p=0.006$). More detail on the statistical testing is given in Appendix B and Section 7.4.4.3 of the Technical Report.

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[35] Likewise, if the comparison group had progressed more than the YIF participants, this could be taken as evidence of YIF having a negative impact on participants.

[36] The p-values are calculated taking account of the fact that the YIF sample is clustered within a relatively small number of clusters. If the change over time for an outcome is very variable across this small sample of projects it is difficult to draw inference about the level of change for YIF as a whole. Under this scenario the calculated p-value will be large. P-values for the impact estimates are calculated after controlling for the baseline outcome per group.

## 8.2.2   The comparison group sample

The comparison group provides data on the 'natural' progress that young people make over the same time period as we have data for the YIF participants, bearing in mind that at least some of these young people will take part in similar activities[37]. They were drawn from YouGov's online panel,[38] sampled to match as closely as possible the age, gender, and ethnicity profile of the YIF participants[39] as well as geographic levels of deprivation of the YIF geographical areas.

One thousand young people aged 10 to 18 completed an initial 'baseline' survey and were invited to participate in follow-up rounds of data collection after three and six months. 632 took part at three months and 583 did so at six months. At each round, the survey included the same outcome measures completed by the YIF participants. The comparison group completed an online survey, whilst the YIF participants completed a paper survey, despite having the option to complete the survey online.

## 8.2.3   YIF participant sample

Grant holders were asked to collect data on their participants' outcomes over the course of the evaluation at regular time points. Participants already attending a project were asked to complete a 'baseline' questionnaire at the start of the evaluation and follow-up surveys after six and twelve months. Any participants who were 'new' to the project were then asked to complete a baseline questionnaire at that point. The intention was to ask young people who were new to provision to complete follow-up surveys at three, six and twelve months, but in reality the intervals between surveys were more varied.

For the impact evaluation, we needed outcomes data collected at broadly similar time intervals from the participants and the comparison group. Our analysis is therefore restricted to:

- The 181 participants who completed a follow-up two to four months after their baseline compared to the 632 young people in the comparison group who completed a three-month follow-up.

- The 79 participants who completed a follow-up five to seven months after their baseline compared to the 583 young people in the comparison group who completed a six-month follow-up.

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[37] For example, 6% of the comparison group said that they attended a youth club at least once a week.
[38] Adult members of the panel with children were asked to forward the survey link to their children, and adult panel members aged 16 to 18 were approached directly.
[39] Based on early beneficiary data on the profile of YIF participants.

Only 22 participants completed surveys within both of these time points. As a result, our analysis of the three- and six-month impacts largely involve separate pools of YIF participants.

**Sample limitations**

One limitation of our impact analysis is that it is based on data from only a minority of the 89 YIF grant holders. We intentionally set out to collect outcomes data from a sub-set of grant holders and worked with 39 grant holders to do so. However, only 26 grant holders were able to provide data and not all data collected could be included in the impact analysis, either because we were not able to match the data or because it was not collected at the same time intervals as the comparison group (i.e. at approximately three or six month intervals). Twelve grant holders provided data contributing to the three-month impacts and eleven are included in the six-month impacts. Moreover, among the 181 participants included in the three-month analysis, 54% were attending just one grant holder organisation (see Table 7.4.3 in the Technical Report).

Taken together, this means we must be cautious in suggesting that the positive impacts reported in this section would be replicated across the full range of YIF provision. Indeed, even among those contributing data to the impact analysis, the results are dominated by the single grant holder providing the most data. However, when looking at the types of activities delivered by this dominant grant holder, based on those set out in Table 6.1, we find they are delivering the most common types of activities delivered across the 89 grant holders, namely 'open/ group/ drop in' and 'open/ group/ programme'. Further discussion about the inferences that can be made is included in Appendix B. A sensitivity analysis, excluding the grant holder providing the most data, is included in Section 7.4.4.4 of the Technical Report.

A further limitation is that only a very small minority of participants providing data contributing to the impact analysis are positively identified as new or recent starters to their YIF project. Many started several months before their baseline survey[40], but for the majority their registration dates were missing from the data, so we simply do not know when they started. Not having 'pre-provision' baseline data for participants means we are unable to estimate the impact of the project on new starters. Where we are finding positive impacts, we assume that these may be due to the injection of YIF funding changing the opportunities and experiences of participants (potentially through the quality of provision), even if they have been attending the project for some time.

Finally, there may be selection bias in our sample, meaning it is possible that the young people in our sample for the impact analysis may be systematically different from the those for whom we

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[40] Based on available data, for the 3-month cohort this ranged from 0-21 months before baseline with a median of 8 months; for the 6-month cohort this ranged from 0-125 months with a median of 13.5 months. See Technical Report Section 7.4.4.5.

have beneficiary data (as reported in Section 5). It is also difficult to assess how representative the sample is of the wider YIF beneficiary cohort of young people (i.e. all those attending funded provision) due to limited information about the wider YIF beneficiary cohort.

However, when comparing demographic information for those young people included in the impact analysis with the sample of young people for whom we have beneficiary data (Section 5), we find those responding to outcomes questionnaires were more likely to be male and slightly older. They are less likely to be White young people and more likely to be Black, Asian or Asian/British young people, compared to the wider beneficiary group. Full information on the demographic profiles of young people included in each dataset is provided in the Section 7.4.3 of the Technical Report)

### 8.2.4 Matching the two samples

Although the sample for the comparison group was drawn to reflect the broad profile of YIF participants in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and level of local deprivation, at the analysis stage the comparison group was weighted to bring it much closer to the YIF participant sample. This was done using propensity score matching.

Propensity score matching allows us to mirror the profile of the YIF participants, not only in terms of demographics, but also their 'baseline' outcomes. For the impact analysis, we have matched the YIF participants and comparison on their baseline SEL levels as well as their demographics. Each young person has been assigned to one of three groups (high, medium, or low level SEL) using pattern-centred analysis employing a range of baseline SEL outcomes (see Section 8 of Technical Report). In addition, for each outcome in turn, the YIF participant and comparison groups have been matched on the baseline scores of that particular outcome[41].

So, when we compare the progress of YIF participants with the comparison group, we do so having made sure that they are similar, if not exactly the same[42], at baseline on all of the variables available to us. Clearly, there may still be differences between the two groups in terms of variables on which we do not have data, such as qualifications levels and home circumstances, but this should not lead to major biases after matching on the baseline outcomes[43]. More detail on the propensity score matching is included in Appendix B.

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[41] A separate propensity score model has been run per outcome, with the matching variables being age, gender, ethnic group (White young people compared with BAME young people), SEL group and the baseline outcome score.

[42] Propensity score matching does not achieve a perfect match across two groups on all the matching variables, but it does remove any major differences.

[43] If there are differences between the groups in unobserved variables that are correlated with outcomes, these unobserved variables will influence the baseline outcomes. Matching on the baseline outcomes should, automatically, control for most of the influence of the unobserved variables.

## 8.2.5  Interpreting the findings

The impact of YIF provision has been measured using 21 outcomes, broadly categorised into the following domains:

- Self-confidence and personal locus of control.

- Leadership.

- Social skills.

- Self-regulation.

- Communication and self-expression.

- Social connectedness.

- Happiness and wellbeing.

From each outcome measure, we have created a binary variable splitting young people into those with a more or less 'positive' outcome. For instance, for those outcomes with a five-item response scale from 'very confident' to 'not at all confident', we have created a binary variable of 'confident' (made up of those saying 'very confident' or 'confident') versus less confident (made up of those saying 'not sure', 'somewhat confident' and 'not at all confident'). The figures in the sections below report on the percentages with a positive score on each binary measure. We found a very similar pattern of results when we measured the impact of YIF across the full outcome scales, the three-month tables for which are in Section 7.4.4.2 of the Technical Report.[44]

For each positive outcome, the figures show the percentage of YIF participants and comparison group at baseline (in orange) and at follow-up (in purple). Although we refer to 'three' and 'six-month' follow-ups, for the YIF participants this equates to 'two to four-month follow-up' and 'five to seven-month follow-up'.

To the right of the figure, we show the percentage point impact estimate, as explained in Section 8.2.1. Those highlighted in yellow are statistically significant and those highlighted in pink are not. The p-values for each outcome, alongside the 95% confidence intervals around each estimate of impact and estimated effect sizes, can be found in Table 7.4.5 in the Technical Report. In

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[44] We have not included the full outcome measures for six-months due to the small YIF participant sample size.

calculating these p-values and confidence intervals, we are drawing inference about the likely impact for a hypothetical group of similar participants from a similar profile of organisations.

In the text, the term 'statistically significant' is often abbreviated to 'significant'.

## 8.3    Impact of YIF three months after baseline

### 8.3.1    Self-confidence and personal locus of control

The evaluation adopted four items from the Review of Personal Effectiveness and Locus of Control (ROPELOC) scale (Richards and Neill, 2000) to measure young people's locus of control. We also included a single item from the NPC Wellbeing Measure, measuring young people's self-belief.[45]

Chart 8.1 shows the percentage of YIF participants and young people in the comparison group with 'positive outcomes' for three of the four ROPELOC items – at baseline and again after three months.[46] For each statement in the figure, young people were asked to describe their experience in the last two weeks using an eight-point scale from 1 ('false/not like me') to 8 ('true/like me'). The binary 'positive' outcome includes those with scores of 6 to 8.[47]  The orange bars show the proportion of participants and the comparison group with a positive outcome at baseline, while the purple bars show the proportions after three months.

For each of the three measures, the percentage of YIF participants with a positive outcome is similar to the percentage in the comparison group at baseline (this being guaranteed by the propensity score matching – see Section 8.2.4). By the three-month follow-up, on all three measures, the percentage with a positive outcome related to their personal locus of control is greater among YIF participants than among the comparison group. For instance, at baseline, 47% of YIF participants and 48% of the comparison group had a positive score against the statement 'I can handle things no matter what'. After three months, the percentages were 63% compared to 48% (a 15 percentage point difference in the amount of change between the two groups).

However, none of these differences in relation to personal locus of control reach statistical significance (as indicated by the pink box). This lack of significance can be attributed to the fact that the change scores are not the same across all of the YIF projects in the sample. This lack of

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[45] Tool available on request from info@thinknpc.org
[46] The fourth item 'My life is mostly controlled by external things' has been dropped from the analysis as the data suggest that young people have misinterpreted the coding for this negatively worded question.
[47] The split was based on providing a roughly equal split among the comparison group at baseline, on the basis that it roughly divided the population into half.

consistency across projects leads to an increased level of uncertainty about the exact size of the 'YIF effect', and significance tests reflects this.

Chart 8.1: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants reporting that each 'personal locus of control' statement is 'like them' after three months

% saying statement 'true/like me'
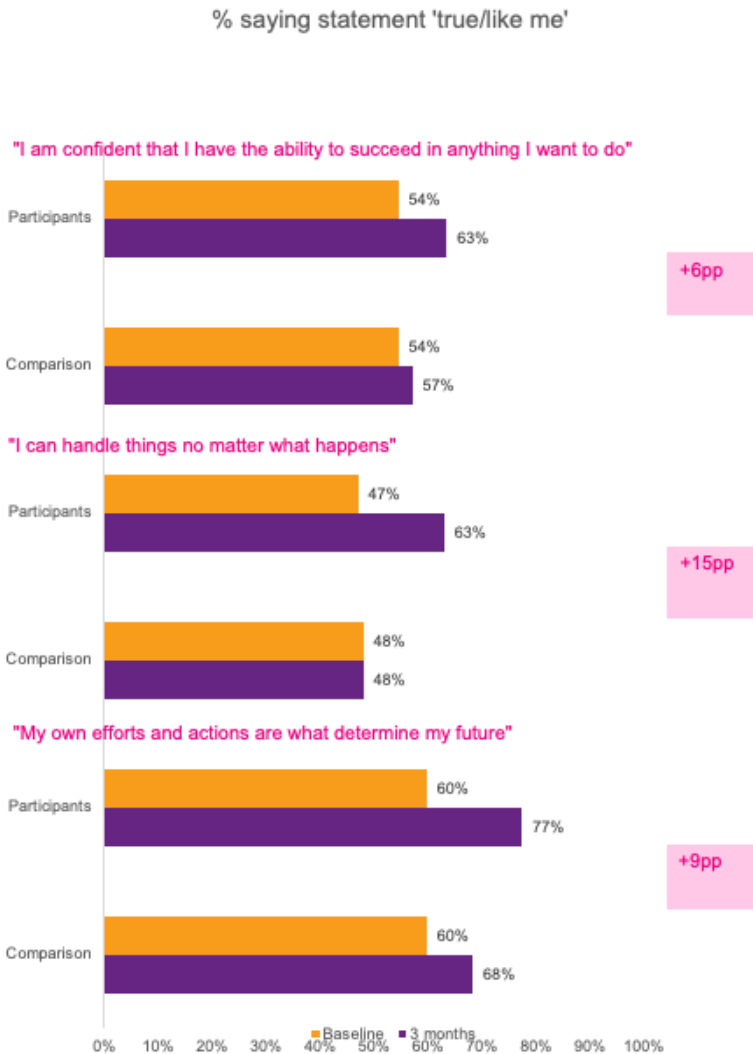


Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

In contrast, we do find a statistically significant impact of YIF provision on participants' level of self-belief as measured by their responses to the statement 'I have a lot to be proud of' (Chart 8.2).

When asked to rate their response to this statement as 'very true', 'partly true' or 'not at all true', the proportion of participants who replied 'very true' rose from 62% at baseline to 71% after three months. Among the comparison group, the perception fell from 57% to 48%, resulting in a percentage point change difference of 16 (p=0.012).

Chart 8.2: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants reporting that they 'have a lot to be proud of' after three months

## % reporting it being 'very true' that they "have a lot to be proud of"
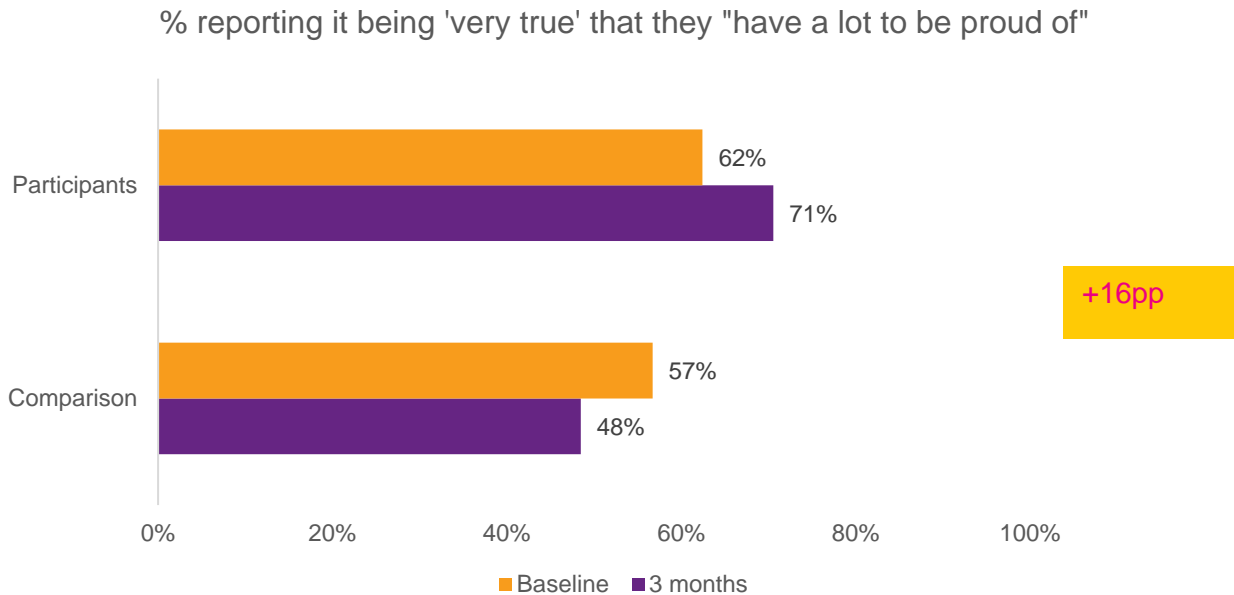


Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

### 8.3.2  Leadership

Similarly, YIF provision appears to have positively impacted on young people's confidence in taking on leadership roles (Chart 8.3).

When asked how confident they felt about 'being the leader of a team', using a five-point scale from 'very confident' to 'not at all confident', the percentage of YIF participants who reported being very confident or confident rose from 43% at baseline to 66% after three months.

In contrast, there was very little change among the comparison group (48% at baseline and 49% at follow up). This amounts to a statistically significant percentage point difference in change scores of 23 (p=004).

Chart 8.3: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants confident about being a leader of a team after three months

% reporting being 'very confident' or 'confident' about "Being the leader of a team"

Participants
43%
66%

+23pp

Comparison
48%
49%

0%    20%    40%    60%    80%    100%

■ Baseline ■ 3 months
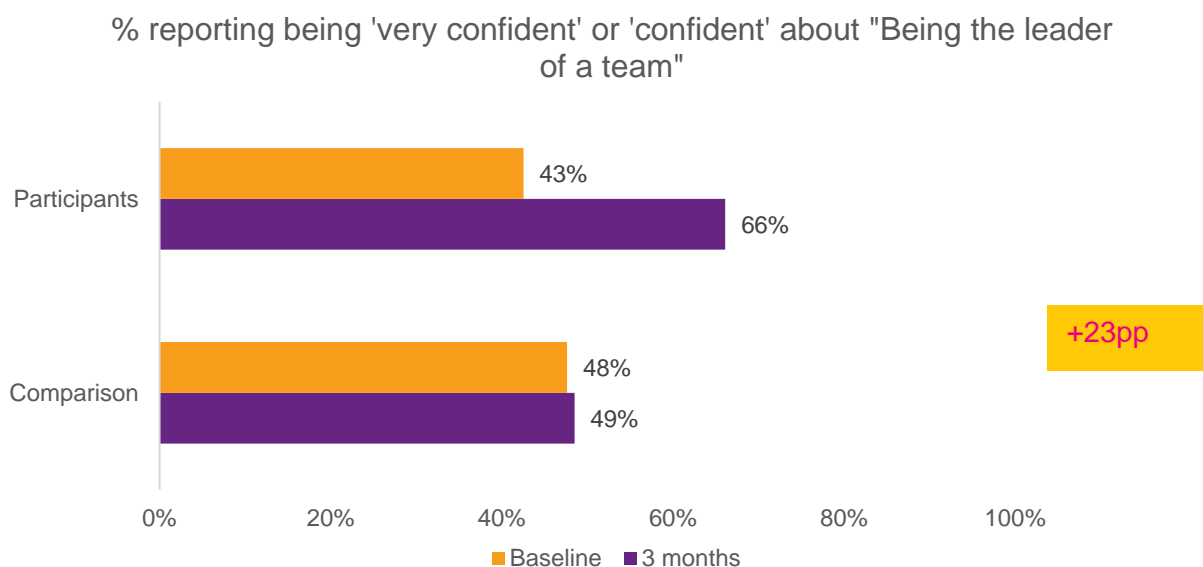
Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

### 8.3.3  Social skills

The question on leadership reported above is part of a wider suite of ten questions fielded as part of the National Citizen Service (NCS) evaluation.[48] They were selected for inclusion in the YIF evaluation given the similar aims of YIF provision in relation to social skills, communication and self-expression.

Responses to five of these items are shown in Chart 8.4 to demonstrate the impact of YIF on participants' social skills. For each of the five statements, the bars show the proportion of YIF participants and young people in the comparison group who report being 'very confident' or 'confident' at baseline and then again after three months.

We find a statistically significant positive impact of YIF provision across all five dimensions, with percentage point differences in the change scores of YIF participants and the comparison group of between 15 and 27 percentage points (p-values ranging from <0.001 to 0.022, see Table 7.4.5 in the Technical Report). In each case, the percentage of young people in the comparison group rating themselves as confident barely changes between the baseline and the three-month follow-up, in contrast to significant progression among the YIF participants. They demonstrate improvements in their confidence in group settings (e.g., meeting new people, being in large

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[48] Personal Development Scale (NCS)

groups of people and in working as part of a team), in taking part (e.g., having a go at new things) and in navigating more complex social situations (e.g., dealing with conflict). Three months after baseline, around two thirds to three quarters (from 61% to 75%) of YIF participants express confidence in their social skills across these dimensions.

Chart 8.4: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants confident in their social skills after three months

% saying they are 'very confident' or 'confident'
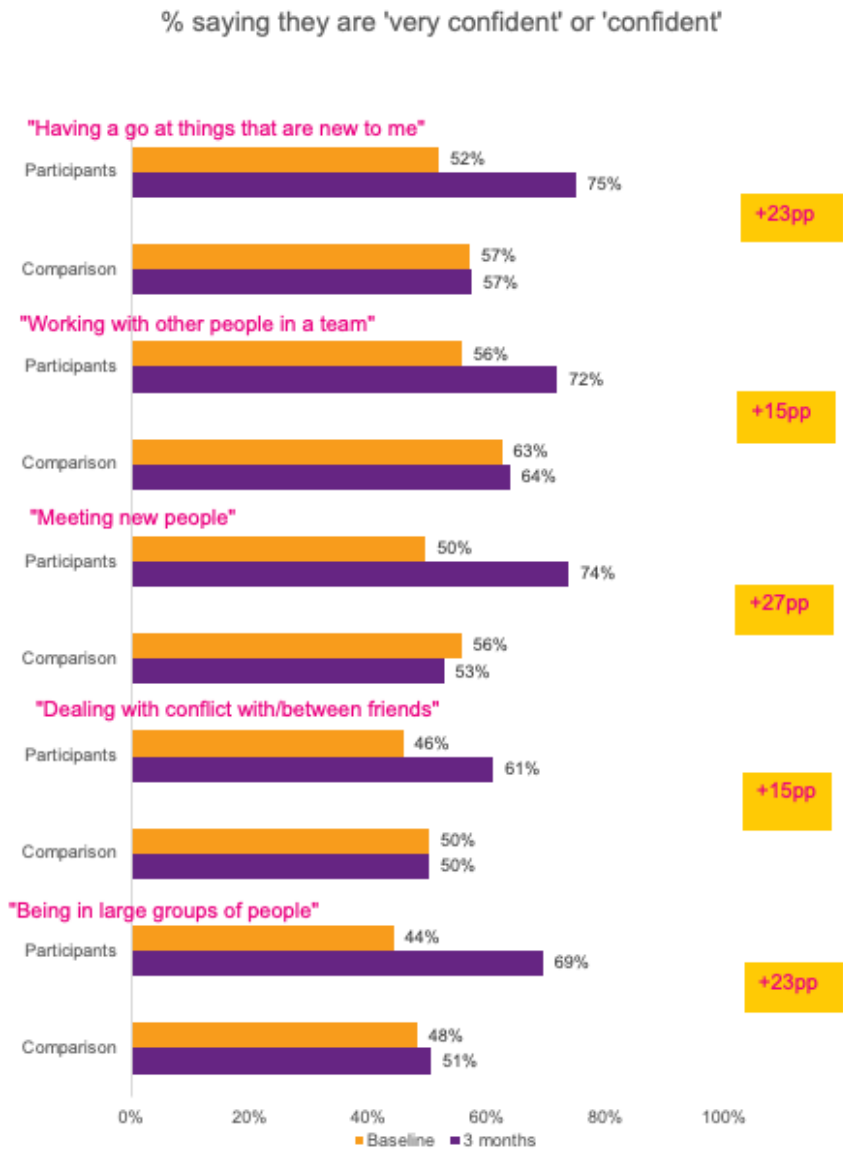


Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

### 8.3.4 Self-regulation

One element of young people's SEL that YIF aspires to improve is their self-regulation, measured in the evaluation using two outcomes. The first measure is one of the NCS suite, relating to

confidence about 'getting things done on time' (Chart 8.5). The second relates to a young person's ability to deal with situations measured by an item from the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire asking respondents to rate from 1 (false/not like me) to 8 (true/like me) the statement 'I can stay calm in stressful situations' (Chart 8.6).

Although YIF participants' scores on both these measures improved more than those of the comparison group from baseline to three months, the differences in the level of change between the two groups was not statistically significant. While the percentage of participants who reported being confident about getting things done on time increased from 44% to 64%, the comparison group saw an increase from 48% to 59%. The percentage point difference in the level of change between the YIF participants and comparison group was larger (15 percentage points) in relation to staying calm in stressful situations, but still not statistically significant.

Chart 8.5: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants confident about getting things done on time after three months
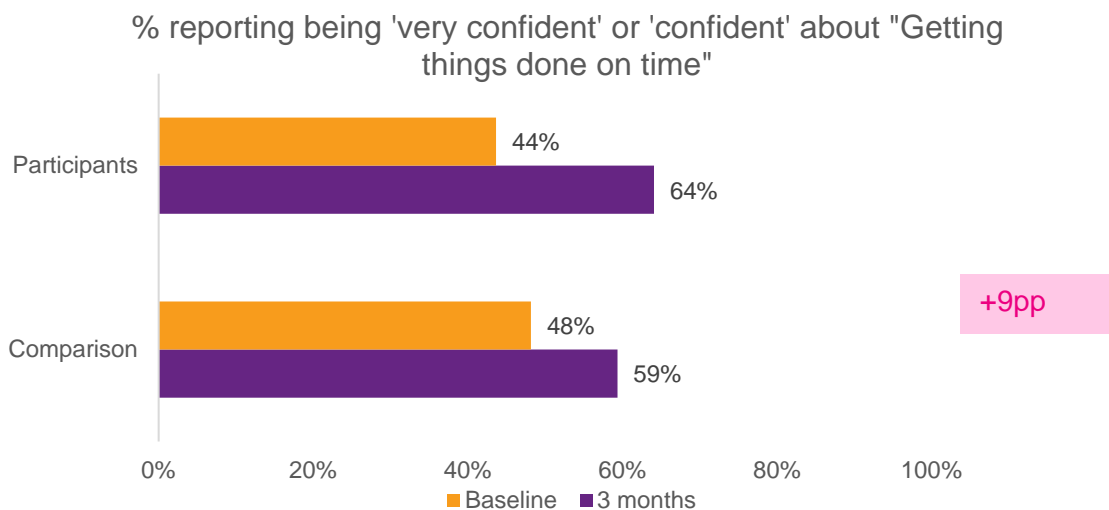


Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

Chart 8.6: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants reporting that the statement "I can stay calm in stressful situations" is 'like them' after three months

% saying statement "I can stay calm in stressful situations" is 'true/like me'



Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

### 8.3.5  Communication and self-expression

Using the suite of questions from the NCS evaluation, three measures are included aimed at capturing the extent to which YIF has an impact on participants' ability to communicate effectively and on their self-expression (Chart 8.7).

On two of the three outcomes – confidence putting forward ideas and confidence standing up for oneself – YIF has a statistically significant positive impact within this sample. The percentage of YIF participants feeling confident putting forward their ideas rose from 49% at baseline to 67% after three months. The comparison group remained at 52% in both rounds (a 19 percentage point difference, p-value=<0.001).

The same pattern is evident for confidence explaining ideas clearly - but is not statistically significant.

Chart 8.7: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants confident in their communication and self-expression after three months
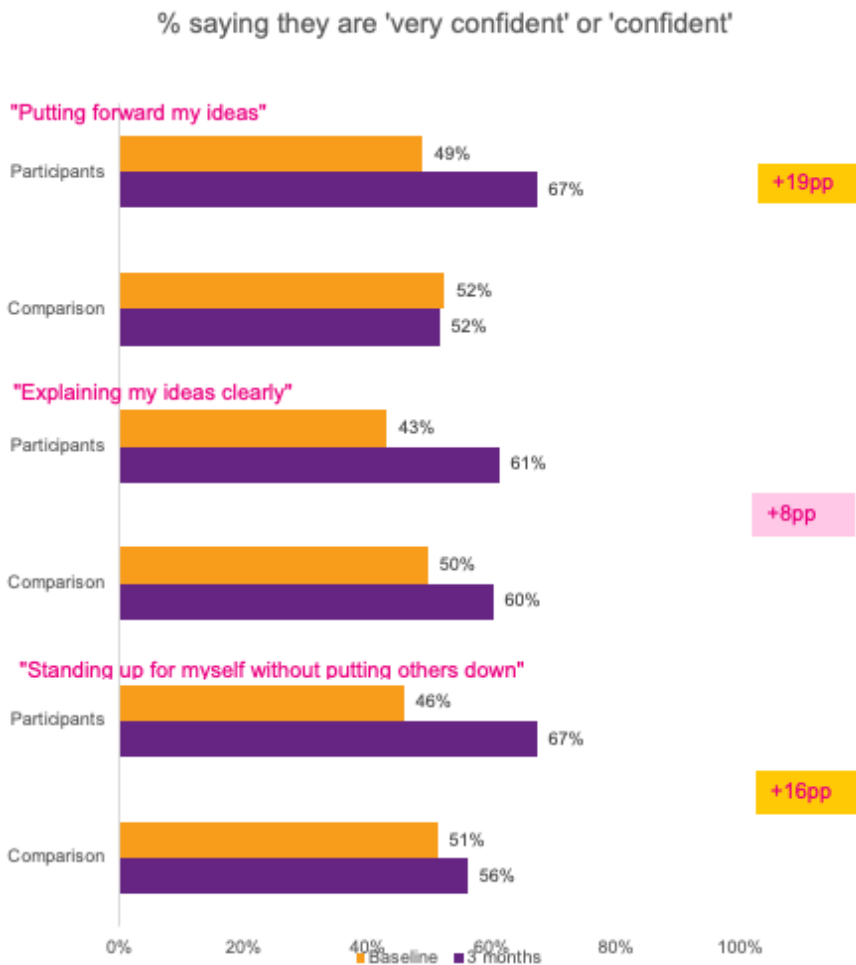


### 8.3.6  Social connectedness

A number of 'intermediate' outcomes related to social connectedness that are known to be predictive of young people's longer-term outcomes were included in the evaluation.

The evidence of the impact of YIF provision on these issues (see Chart 8.8) is mixed but arguably in line with what we might expect in terms of short-term outcomes. There is a statistically significant positive impact on having people to turn to for advice. At baseline, 65% of both participants and the comparison group reported it to be 'very true' that there is someone they can turn to whom they trust. Three months later, while the percentage remained the same in the comparison group, among YIF participants this had risen to 78% (p=0.019). We found little evidence of YIF impacting on participants having people they feel close to or can make them feel secure. However, we might

well expect these kinds of measures to be harder to shift in the short-term compared to gaining a 'trusted advisor', which is a typical role of a youth worker.

Chart 8.9 also suggests YIF is having a positive impact on young people's levels of loneliness, with a statistically significant 15 percentage point difference between the participants and the comparison group in their levels of change over three months (p=0.001). This result is driven by an increase in levels of loneliness among the comparison group (73% were hardly ever or never lonely at baseline in comparison to 62% after three months), rather than reduced loneliness amongst the participants.

This result is on the face of it puzzling, but as we noted in Section 5.2 ('Comparing YIF participants with the wider population'), the participants started with significantly lower levels of loneliness than the wider population of young people. Because of this, the *matched* comparison group has, for this outcome, been drawn from those in the YouGov comparison group who were the least likely to describe themselves as lonely at the time of their baseline questionnaire.

As is often seen when tracking people who start from a relatively high position, over time the outcomes for this matched comparison group tend on average to worsen (simply because the only change possible is to stay the same or worsen[49]). It appears that the impact of YIF has been to help the participants maintain their early low levels of loneliness, whereas without the provision a proportion would have become lonelier.

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[49] This is referred to as regression to the mean.

Chart 8.8: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants reporting feeling socially connected after three months

## % reporting whether this statement is true for them

**"I have family and friends who help me feel safe, secure and happy" (% 'very true')**

Participants
- 67%
- 79%

+5pp

Comparison
- 66%
- 74%

**"There is someone I trust who I would turn to for advice if I were having problems" (% 'very true')**

Participants
- 65%
- 78%

+14pp

Comparison
- 65%
- 65%

**"There is no one I feel close to" (% 'not at all true')**

Participants
- 80%
- 83%

+4pp

Comparison
- 79%
- 78%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Baseline   ■ 3 months
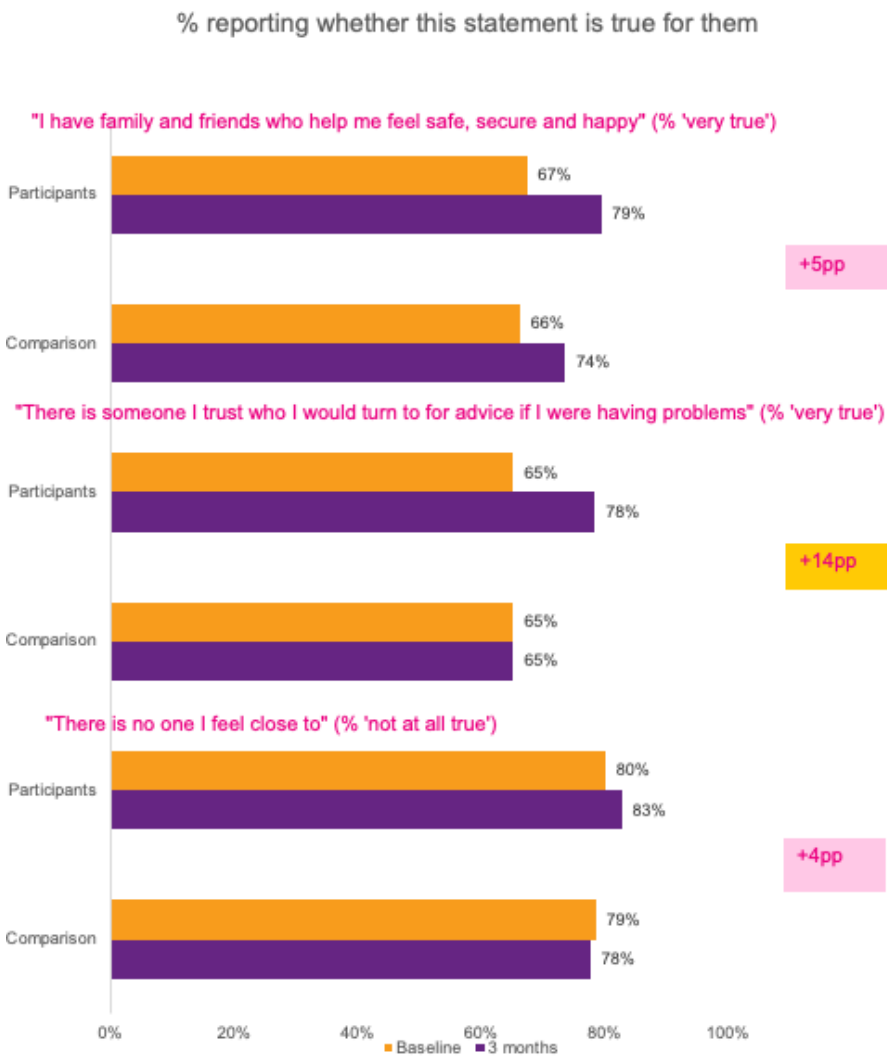
Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

Chart 8.9: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants reporting feeling lonely after three months

## % reporting being lonely 'hardly ever' or 'never'

Participants
- 80%
- 85%

+15pp

Comparison
- 73%
- 62%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Baseline   ■ 3 months
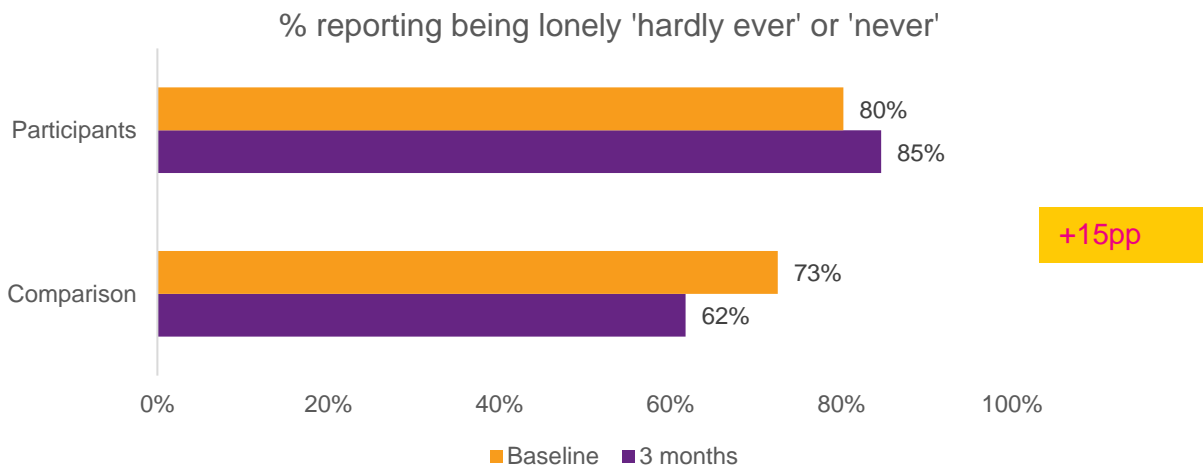
Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

### 8.3.7  Happiness and wellbeing

The last set of outcomes relate to how young people were feeling about life and their levels of mental health and emotional wellbeing. Life satisfaction was identified as both an intermediate outcome and a measure of impact.

We fielded a question on how happy young people were with their life as a whole (with a scale of 0 'very unhappy' to 10 'very happy') from the Good Childhood Index (Children's Society, 2016). Young people were also asked to complete the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMBWS), a seven-item scale used to rate levels of wellbeing and risk of mental health issues (NHS Scotland et al, 2008). For each of the seven measures describing different elements of wellbeing, respondents are asked to rate how often they feel like this on a five-point scale from 'all of the time' to 'none of the time' (with a resultant score of 7 to 35, with a higher score denoting higher wellbeing). Emotional wellbeing was identified as a long-term outcome, and our hypothesis was that young people's mental health and wellbeing in both the participant and control group would stay the same or even show a decline in the short-term[50]. However, we found statistically significant positive impacts on measures of both happiness and wellbeing.

Chart 8.10 shows the percentage of YIF participants and young people in the comparison group scoring their level of happiness as 8 or higher. At baseline 68% of participants and 62% of the comparison group rated themselves as happy. Three months later, the percentage had risen to 76% among the participants and fallen to 56% among the comparison group. The 14 percentage point difference in the level of change between the two groups is statistically significant (p=0.004).

Chart 8.10: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants reporting feeling happy with life after three months

**% reporting being happy with life (score of 8+ out of 10)**

| | Baseline | 3 months |
|---|---|---|
| Participants | 68% | 76% |
| Comparison | 62% | 56% |

+14pp
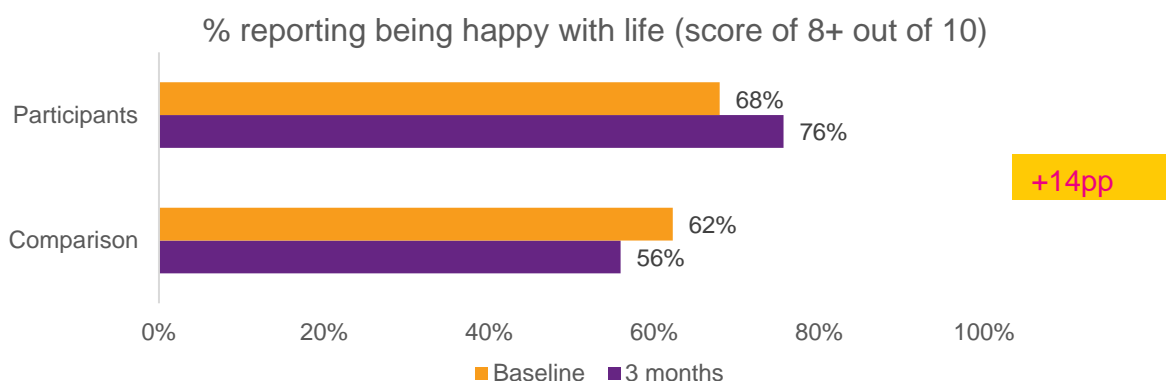
Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

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[50] YIF Learning & Insight paper 3: A shared outcomes framework for open access youth provision (2020)

A score of less than 20 out of 35 on the SWEMBWS scale is commonly used to identify high levels of psychological distress or being at risk of depression. At baseline, a quarter of YIF participants (27%) and young people in the comparison group (26%) fell into this category (Chart 8.11). Three months later, the YIF participants' scores had improved more than those in the comparison group, resulting in a statistically significant nine percentage point difference in the level of change between the two groups (p=0.006). This is the only outcome presented where a negative percentage point difference indicates a positive impact of YIF.

Chart 8.11: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants scoring as having high psychological distress or risk of depression on the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale after three months



% scoring with high psychological distress or risk of depression (score of 7 to 19 on scale from 7 to 35)

Participants: Baseline 27%, 3 months 11%
Comparison: Baseline 26%, 3 months 19%

-9pp
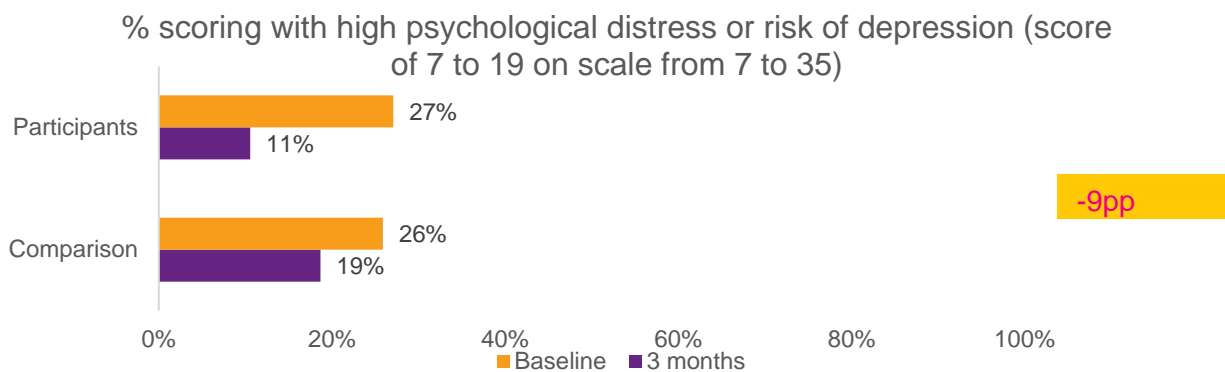
Baseline ■ 3 months

Bases: 181 YIF participants; 632 young people in the comparison group

## 8.4   Impact of YIF six months after baseline

The general pattern of positive results that we observed after three months is carried through to six months after baseline. As smaller sample sizes at the six-month point make it harder to detect statistically significant impacts, we focus not only on significant results but also on the general pattern. As a result of the smaller sample size, findings are less robust than those in Section 8.3 and subject to the same issues of generalisability. In general, the percentage point change tended to be somewhat lower than at three months, suggesting that some but not all of impacts of YIF provision are maintained over time. However, it may be to do with differences in the projects providing six-month data.

As noted in Section 8.1, the majority of the YIF participants providing six-month data are different to those providing three-month data[51], with a different distribution of participants across the

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[51] The baseline percentages reported in the figures reflect the baseline outcomes for those providing six-month data. They are therefore different to the baseline percentages reported in Section 3, which are based on those providing three-month data.

projects. In particular, the single project which provided around half of the participants at the three-month point provides only 28% after six months. At the six-month point, the participants are more evenly spread across the 11 projects providing six-month data (see Table 7.4.3 in the Technical Report for the number of participants per grant holder within the six-month analysis). This may account for some of the reductions in percentage point differences between three and six months.

In addition, it is likely (although cannot be tested) that the three-month sample was composed of more new starters than the six-month sample, simply because projects were asked to complete data after three months for new starters. Assuming impacts are largest at the start of provision, the three-month impacts might be expected to be larger because of this difference in sample profile.

Charts 7.4.1 to 7.4.11 in the Technical Report (Section 7.4.4.1) replicate Charts 8.1 to 8.11, reporting on the impact of YIF provision six months after baseline. Below we summarise the key findings:

- **Self-confidence and personal locus of control** (Technical Report Charts 7.4.1 and 7.4.2): As at three months, the pattern of the results for the three measures of young people's personal locus of control is positive but not statistically significant. On each measure, the change between the baseline and six-month follow ups is greater among YIF participants than the comparison group. Whilst after three months we found a statistically significant difference of 16 percentage points in the percentages of YIF participants and the comparison group saying it was 'very true' that they 'had a lot to be proud of', the difference after six months was only four percentage points.

- **Leadership** (Technical Report Chart 7.4.3): Although there was a 15 percentage point improvement between baseline and the six-month follow up in the percentage of YIF participants saying that they were confident about being the leader of a team (and no percentage point change among the comparison group), this was smaller than the 23 percentage point difference found after three months, and no longer statistically significant.

- **Social skills** (Technical Report Chart 7.4.4): While none of the results six months after baseline are statistically significant, there remains quite substantial percentage point differences between the progress of the YIF participants and the comparison group (between 14 and 19 percentage points).

- **Self-regulation** (Technical Report Charts 7.4.5 and 7.4.6): YIF provision did not have a statistically significant positive impact after three months on either of the two outcome measures relating to self-regulation, and this was replicated at six months. While the percentage point difference was very similar to three months in terms of young people feeling

that they can 'stay calm in stressful situations' (13 percentage points compared to 15 percentage points after three months), the comparison group progressed further than the YIF participants in terms of being confident about 'getting things done on time'.

- **Communication and self-expression** ([Technical Report](#) Chart 7.4.7): We found statistically significant and large impacts of YIF provision after six months in relation to young people's confidence putting forward ideas (23 percentage point difference, p=0.015) and explaining ideas clearly (17 percentage point difference, p-value=0.036). These were greater than observed at three months. The 15 percentage point positive difference in young people's confidence in standing up for themselves was not significant.

- **Social connectedness** ([Technical Report](#) Charts 7.4.8 and 7.4.9): The pattern of results at six months was very similar to the three-month pattern, with a statistically significant and positive impact on young people reporting having someone to turn to for advice (16 percentage point difference, p-value=<0.001) and on levels of loneliness (21 percentage point difference, p-value=0.015). As with the three-month impacts on loneliness, the impact is driven by improvements amongst the matched comparison group rather than improvements amongst participants. A discussion as to how this slightly counterintuitive finding is likely to have occurred is given in Section 8.3.6.

- **Happiness and well-being** ([Technical Report](#) Charts 7.4.10 and 7.4.11): The statistically significant impacts of YIF provision three months after baseline on young people's levels of happiness and on their well-being appear to have largely disappeared after six months, with percentage point differences between YIF participants and the comparison group of only two on both measures.

## 8.5   Impact of YIF provision on participants with higher or lower levels of social and emotional learning (SEL) after three months

As well as wanting to understand the overall impact of YIF provision among its participants, the evaluation has sought to explore whether provision works better or worse for different sub-groups.

Early exploratory analysis focused on gender, age, and ethnicity. However, we have been unable to produce robust findings on these demographics, as more than two thirds of the boys, Black and ethnicity minority groups and 16 to 18 year old participants in the sample had attended a single project. Given that this project achieved a higher level of impact than other projects (Section 8.3), it

has not been possible to disentangle the impact of YIF provision more generally on boys, ethnic minority groups and older teenagers. What we can conclude from the exploratory analysis is that it positively impacts across the different demographic groups (that is, there is no evidence of negative impacts).

However, we have been able to better assess how well YIF provision works for young people who, at baseline, had higher or lower levels of SEL, as there was more variation across the projects providing the three-month data.[52] This is important as it helps us to understand which young people can benefit most from youth provision in terms of the development of social and emotional skills.

Pattern-centred analysis (see Section 8 of the [Technical Report](#)) grouped the YIF participants and the comparison group into three typologies based on their baseline SEL outcome responses. In order to have large enough sample sizes for our analyses, we combined the typologies to produce three sub-groups: high, medium and low SEL at baseline[53]. Overall, we find that YIF provision has the greatest impact for those with medium or lower levels of SEL at baseline, rather than those with higher levels. That said, it is of course more difficult to improve the outcomes of those who already start from a positive position.

For these analyses, we focus on a sub-set of 11 of the 21 outcomes reported in Section 8.3 and 8.4:

1. **Personal locus of control**:

   a) It is 'true/like me' that 'I am confident that I have the ability to succeed in anything I want to do'.

   b) It is 'true/like me' that 'I can handle things no matter what happens'.

   c) It is 'true/like me' that 'my own efforts and actions are what will determine my future'.

2. **Leadership:** Level of confidence 'being a leader of a team'.

3. **Social skills:** Level of confidence 'working with other people in a team'.

4. **Communication and self-expression:** Level of confidence 'putting forward my ideas'.

5. **Self-regulation:**

   a) Level of confidence 'getting things done on time'.

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[52] We restrict this analysis to the three-month follow-up, as the sample size at six months is limiting.
[53] Clusters 1 and 2 were combined, 3 was combined with 4, and 5 with 6.

b) It is 'true/like me' that 'I can stay calm in stressful situations'.

6. **Social connectedness**:

   a) It is 'true/like me' that 'there is someone I trust who I would turn to for advice if I were having problems'.

   b) How often do you feel lonely?

7. **Wellbeing:** Not scoring as 'high psychological distress or at risk of depression' on the SWEMBWS.

The sub-set has been selected to represent each of the outcome domains identified in the Theory of Change (Appendix A). Table 7.4.9 in the Technical Report provides the full set of results. Here we present the four outcomes where we find a statistically significant difference in the impact that YIF is having across the different baseline SEL groups. They relate to:

- **Personal locus of control**: It is 'true/like me' that 'I can handle things no matter what happens' (Chart 8.12, p-value=0.003).

- **Social skills**: Level of confidence 'working with other people in a team' (Chart 8.13, p-value=0.002).

- **Communication and self-expression**: Level of confidence 'putting forward my ideas' (Chart 8.14, p-value=0.010).

- **Well-being**: Not scoring as 'high psychological distress or at risk of depression' on the SWEMBWS (Chart 8.15, p-value=<0.001).

Among those with high baseline levels of SEL, three quarters (77%) of YIF participants and those in the comparison group reported that it was 'true/like them' that they could handle things no matter what, with only a three percentage point negative change for the YIF participants at the three month follow up (Chart 8.12).

However, the YIF participants with mid- or low-level SEL at baseline progressed substantially further after three months than their counterparts in the comparison group. For instance, there was a 37-percentage point difference in the level of change from baseline to three months among those with mid-level SEL.

Chart 8.12: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants with different baseline SEL reporting that they 'can handle things no matter what' (personal locus of control) after three months



% saying 'true/like me' that 'I can handle things no matter what'

High SEL at baseline
High SEL participants: 80%, 77%, -3pp
High SEL comparison: 77%, 77%

Medium SEL at baseline
Medium SEL participants: 13%, 55%, +37pp
Medium SEL comparison: 20%, 25%

Low SEL at baseline
Low SEL participants: 26%, 45%, +26pp
Low SEL comparison: 23%, 17%

Baseline / 3 months
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Bases: 84 high SEL participant; 280 high SEL comparison; 53 medium SEL participants; 177 medium SEL comparison; 44 low SEL participants; 175 low SEL comparison

The picture was very similar looking across young people's levels of confidence working as a team (Chart 8.13). Only minorities of those in the low and medium baseline SEL groups scored as confident at baseline, compared to nine in ten of those with high baseline SEL.

After three months, the percentage of YIF participants with low or mid-level baseline SEL scores who scored as confident about working as a team had more than doubled, in contrast to very little change in their counterparts in the comparison group. For instance, among those with mid-level baseline SEL, there was a 34 percentage point difference in the progression of the YIF participants compared to their counterparts. Again, the pattern is very similar when we look at the confidence young people have putting forward their ideas (Chart 8.14).

Chart 8.13: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants with different baseline SEL reporting who are confident working as a team (social skills) after three months



% confident working as a team

**High SEL at baseline**

High SEL participants: 89% (Baseline), 82% (3 months) — -4pp

High SEL comparison: 91% (Baseline), 88% (3 months)

**Medium SEL at baseline**

Medium SEL participants: 28% (Baseline), 66% (3 months) — +34pp

Medium SEL comparison: 45% (Baseline), 49% (3 months)

**Low SEL at baseline**

Low SEL participants: 25% (Baseline), 60% (3 months) — +26pp

Low SEL comparison: 27% (Baseline), 36% (3 months)

Bases: 84 high SEL participant; 280 high SEL comparison; 53 medium SEL participants; 177 medium SEL comparison; 44 low SEL participants; 175 low SEL comparison

Chart 8.14: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants with different baseline SEL reporting who are confident putting forward their ideas (communication and self-expression) after three months
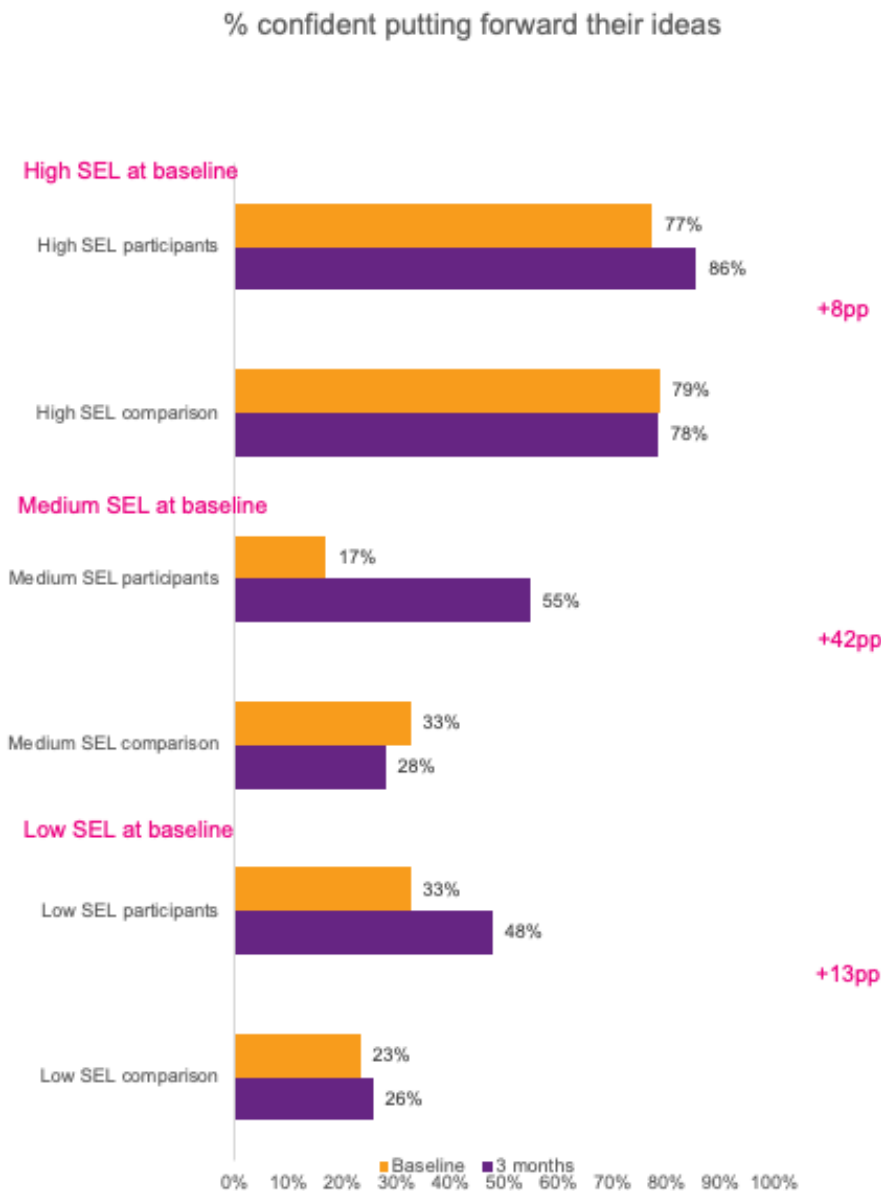


% confident putting forward their ideas

Bases: 84 high SEL participant; 280 high SEL comparison; 53 medium SEL participants; 177 medium SEL comparison; 44 low SEL participants; 175 low SEL comparison

Finally, Chart 8.15 shows the progression over three months of those with high, medium, or low SEL scores in relation to their levels of wellbeing. Those with low or mid-level baseline SEL were much more likely than those with high level SEL to score as having high psychological distress or risk of depression (e.g., 43% of YIF participants with low baseline SEL compared to 13% of YIF participants with high baseline SEL).

Three months later, YIF participants in the lower two SEL groups experienced substantial improvements in comparison with their counterparts. For example, the proportion of YIF participants with low baseline SEL scoring as at risk of depression fell from 43% at baseline to 14% three months later, in contrast to the comparison group which fell from 47 to 33% (a 16 percentage point difference).

Chart 8.15: Impact of YIF provision on the proportion of participants with different baseline SEL reporting who score as having high psychological distress or risk of depression (well-being) after three months
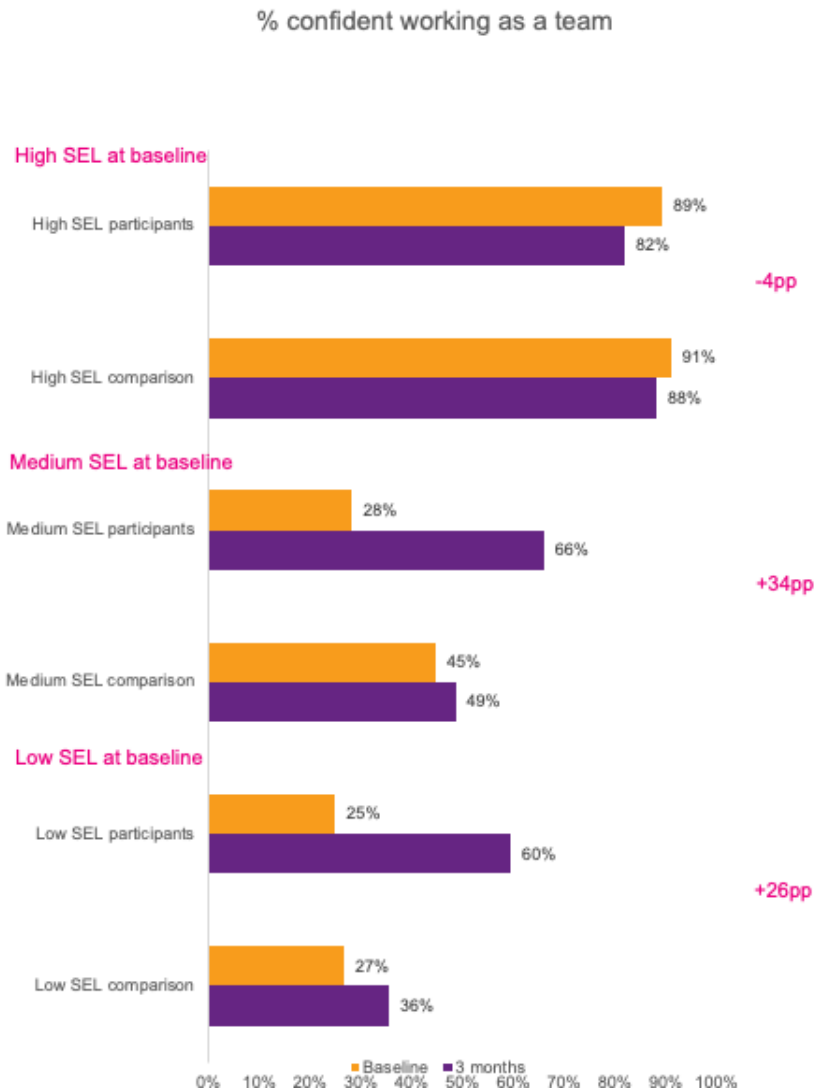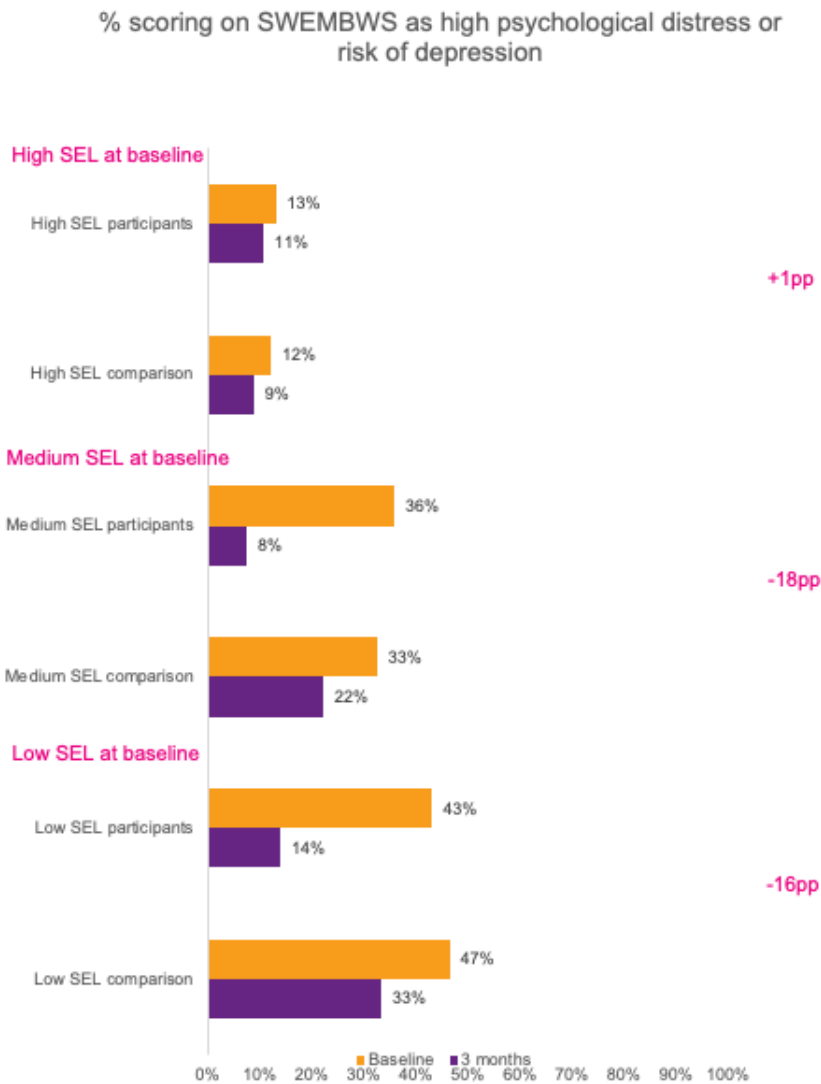


Bases: 84 high SEL participant; 280 high SEL comparison; 53 medium SEL participants; 177 medium SEL comparison; 44 low SEL participants; 175 low SEL comparison

# 9. Findings: The role of quality and type of provision in improving outcomes for young people

This section focuses on the extent to which the quality and type of YIF provision experienced by young people are associated with their outcomes. In section 8, our analysis compared YIF participants with a matched comparison group of young people. In this final section, we focus only on YIF participants, and instead compare participants in different projects or doing different types of activity. Our questions are:

- Does the quality of the provision matter to participants' outcomes? Is the impact of higher quality provision greater than the impact of less high-quality provision?

- Is there a differential impact depending on whether participants are engaged in universal or targeted provision? (See Section 4.3.2 for definitions).

To maximise the number of participants included in these analyses, we include all YIF participants who completed a baseline and at least one follow-up, regardless of the time interval between the two.[54]

## 9.1  Quality of YIF provision

During the evaluation, information was collected about the quality of provision of a subset of 54 grant holder organisations (see Section 4.3.4 for details of the quality process). Pattern-centred analysis using these data grouped the grant holders into four typologies: high, moderately high, moderate, and low quality (see Section 8 of the [Technical Report](#) for full methodology).

As only 15 grant holders provided both information about the quality of the provision and outcomes data for its participants, here we collapse the four typologies into two: higher and lower quality provision.[55] Five grant holders fall within the higher quality provision, with data from 215

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[54] We tested whether the results presented here change after controlling for the interval between baseline and follow-up and there is no suggestion that they do.

[55] Higher = first two typologies; Lower = third and fourth. For two projects no data on quality were collected but feedback scores were collected. There is a very high level of correspondence between the quality typologies and the feedback typologies, so quality scores were imputed for four projects based on their feedback scores.

participants. The other ten, including data from 156 participants, fall into the lower quality category. However, as was a theme throughout Section 8, the high-quality group includes one very large project which makes up 76% of the total sample for that group. The outcomes achieved by young people in that organisation dominate the findings for the whole of the high quality group so we must be cautious when generalising these findings to the wider YIF cohort (see Section 7.4.4.4 of the Technical Report for a sensitivity analysis of these findings).

Here we focus on ten of the sub-set of eleven outcomes listed in Section 8.5.[56] For each outcome, we compare the change between baseline and follow-up for YIF participants in the higher and lower quality provision.[57]

Across all of these outcomes, participants in higher quality provision did statistically significantly better at the follow-up than those in lower quality provision (Charts 9.1 and 9.2, with p-values and the 95% confidence intervals around the estimates being shown in Table 7.4.7 in the Technical Report).

For each outcome, those in higher quality provision were less likely than those in lower quality provision to have a positive outcome at baseline, but more likely to have a positive outcome at the follow-up. It seems the higher quality provision attracted or recruited young people with lower levels of SEL and wellbeing but managed to improve their outcomes to the point that they overtook those in the lower quality provision who had started 'ahead'.

A review of activity summaries for these projects (Section 9 in the Technical Report) suggests no obvious differences in the types of activities being delivered, therefore supporting the hypothesis that quality is the key differentiator.

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[56] For these analyses, we exclude the loneliness measure. As baseline levels of loneliness were under 10% among YIF participants in higher quality provision, it would not have been reasonable to expect a significant shift in levels of loneliness among this group.
[57] Unlike the impact estimates where the YIF group is compared to the comparison group (where the comparison group was weighted to match the profile of the YIF group using propensity score matching), the two quality groups have not been matched to the same profile and the charts illustrate the observed change in outcomes for the two quality groups. A separate, matched, analysis (in this instance done via regression) suggests the pattern and broad magnitude of the differences are not markedly changed after matching, although they do tend to reduce by a few percentage points.

Chart 9.1: Impact of higher and lower quality YIF provision on participants' personal locus of control, leadership and social skills outcomes



**"I am confident I have the ability to succeed in anything I want to do" (% true/like me)**

Higher quality: 47% / 69% — +20pp

Lower quality: 53% / 56%

**"I can handle things no matter what happens" (% true/like me)**

Higher quality: 45% / 76% — +31pp

Lower quality: 46% / 46%

**"My own efforts and actions are what will determine my future" (% true/like me)**

Higher quality: 55% / 83% — +35pp

Lower quality: 68% / 60%

**Confident being the leader of a team**

Higher quality: 33% / 75% — +37pp

Lower quality: 54% / 59%

**Confident working as a team**

Higher quality: 41% / 76% — +24pp

Lower quality: 56% / 66%

■ Baseline  ■ Follow up

Bases: 215 participants in higher quality provision; 156 participants in lower quality provision

Chart 9.2: Impact of higher and lower quality YIF provision on participants' self-regulation, communication and self-expression, social connectedness and wellbeing outcomes
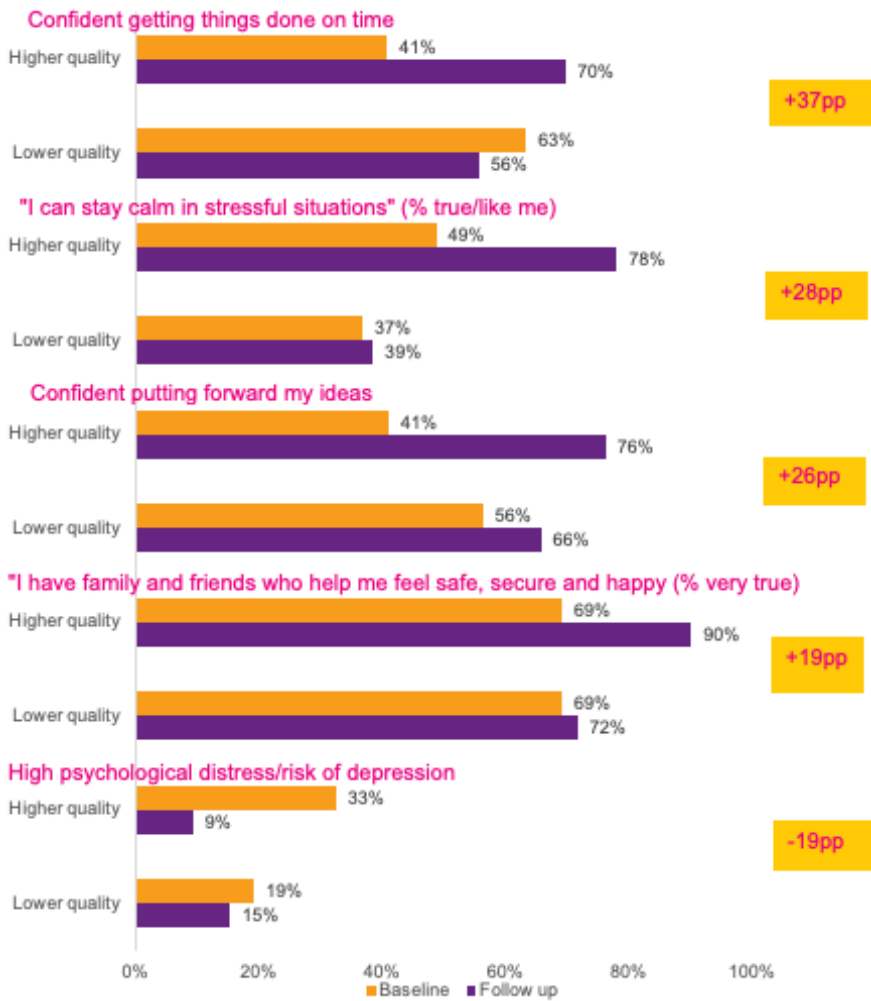


Bases: 215 participants in higher quality provision; 156 participants in lower quality provision

If we divide the YIF participants in the higher and lower quality projects into those with high, medium, and low SEL baseline scores, a clear pattern emerges (although modest sample sizes[58] mean we have not tested for statistical significance). The YIF participants who progress the most, across a range of outcomes, are those in high quality settings who started with low or medium-level SEL (tables not shown). In other words, findings tentatively suggest that provision is most effective when it is high quality and reaching young people with lower levels of SEL.

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[58] Among the high quality projects were 88 participants with high SEL, 83 with mid SEL and 44 with low SEL. Among the lower quality projects were 79 participants with high SEL, 42 with mid SEL and 35 with low SEL.

## 9.2    Universal versus targeted activities

For individual young people, the YIF grant holders provided information on the number and types of activities undertaken. The categories recorded per activity are: building based versus detached; drop-in versus fixed; group versus individual; targeted versus universal; time limited versus open ended; and structured versus unstructured. A variable was created per individual to summarise each of these.[59]

Excluding those with missing data each time, we have tested whether these summary variables are predictive of the level of change in outcomes. Overall, there is no evidence that they are, with the exception of the targeted versus universal categorisation. For targeted versus universal we created a new binary variable (because of low sample numbers per group otherwise): 'all universal activities' or 'at least some targeted' activities. Using the same sub-set of outcomes as in the previous section, it appears that those young people attending targeted activities progressed further than those only in universal activities in outcomes related to social skills and team working.

The four outcomes where those in targeted activities progressed statistically significantly further than those in universal activities were (Chart 9.3):

- **Social skills**: Level of confidence 'working with other people in a team' (p-value=0.022).

- **Leadership**: Level of confidence 'being the leader of a team' (p-value=0.017).

- **Self-regulation**: Level of confidence 'getting things done on time' (p-value=0.041).

- **Communication and self-expression**: Level of confidence 'Putting forward my ideas' (p-value=0.010).

As with the quality scores, young people in the targeted activities were more likely than those doing universal activities to have poorer starting positions (that is, their baseline scores are lower than those doing universal activities). Again, in line with the findings on quality, by the time of their follow up, those in targeted activities had progressed further than those doing universal activities across these four outcomes.

The same pattern was not evident in relation to outcomes related to personal locus of control, social connectedness, or wellbeing.

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[59] For example, for building versus detached, a variable was created with possible categories: 'all activities building', 'all activities detached', 'a mix', or 'missing'. In practice there is a lot of missing data on these categories with around 58% missing for the summary variables 'building', 'drop-in'; 'group'; 'targeted' and around one quarter missing for 'time-limited' and 'structured'.

Chart 9.3: Impact of targeted and universal activities on participants' social skills, leadership, self-regulation and communication and self-expression outcomes

**Confident being the leader of a team**

| | |
|---|---|
| Targeted | Baseline 30%, Follow up 59% |
| Universal | Baseline 61%, Follow up 58% |

+31pp

**Confident working as part of team**

| | |
|---|---|
| Targeted | Baseline 56%, Follow up 77% |
| Universal | Baseline 76%, Follow up 70% |

+27pp

**Confident getting things done on time**

| | |
|---|---|
| Targeted | Baseline 49%, Follow up 62% |
| Universal | Baseline 62%, Follow up 53% |

+22pp

**Confident putting forward my ideas**

| | |
|---|---|
| Targeted | Baseline 37%, Follow up 68% |
| Universal | Baseline 60%, Follow up 61% |

+30pp

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Baseline   ■ Follow up

Bases: 82 participants in targeted activities; 90 participants only in universal activities

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# 10.  Conclusions and Recommendations

These findings are from a shared evaluation of open access youth provision that was funded through the Youth Investment Fund (YIF). The findings support a number of other studies that suggest open access youth provision can improve the lives of young people through the development of social and emotional skills.[60] the findings also provide new insights into the factors that contribute to this impact, including the importance of high-quality provision.

Here we summarise key findings and discuss them in the wider context of the youth sector. We draw conclusions and recommendations for youth organisations, funders of youth provision, and future research and evaluation. The findings relate to the sample of YIF organisations for which we have usable data and therefore may not fully represent the wider YIF cohort or open access youth provision more generally (see Section 4.7 for further information).

## 10.1 Conclusions and discussion

### 10.1.1 The quality, impact and reach of youth provision

1. **Open access youth provision has the potential to significantly improve social and emotional learning skills, social connectedness, and wellbeing for young people, particularly those with most to gain.** Young people attending YIF provision made greater improvements in most outcome domains (see Section 4.3.5)when compared to a group of young people who did not attend provision. Looking across the 12 grant holders providing baseline and follow-up data at approximately three months, we found statistically significant impacts related to social skills, self-confidence, leadership, communication and self-expression, social connectedness and happiness and wellbeing.

   Young people attending provision with medium to low social and emotional learning (SEL) skill profiles at baseline made greater gains than those with high SEL skill profiles on some outcomes related to the domains of personal locus of control, social skills, communication and self-expression and wellbeing (see Section 8.5). SEL skills have been linked with longer term impacts such as improved mental and physical health, educational attainment, finding

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[60] For a recent review see Open Access Youth Work: A narrative review of impact (Hill, 2020).

and sustaining employment, positive long-term relationships, and life satisfaction.[61] These outcomes appear to be improved through a series of core 'mechanisms of change' that young people experience within youth provision. Based on the YIF Theory of Change (co-produced with grant holders), the YIF qualitative process evaluation, and recent research,[62] these include young people experiencing:

- A safe and supportive environment.

- Positive and healthy relationships.

- High quality provision that they value.

- Engagement through free choice.

- Support to take part in stimulating and fun activities.

- The opportunity to take an active role in, and contribute to, the design and delivery of youth provision.

- Support to explore values and attitudes.

- The opportunity to contribute to, and participate in, the wider community.

- Insights into new and different worlds beyond their own.

Further information about these mechanisms of change can be found in the shared theory of change of open access youth provision.

Whilst the pattern of results is similar for the eleven projects providing data at baseline with a six-month follow up[63], the differences between YIF participants and young people in the comparison group reach statistical significance less often. This may be because the six-month sample size is much smaller than at three months, meaning it is harder to detect statistically significant impacts.[64]  However, it may also be an indication that some of the impacts are not maintained over longer periods of time. A further potential explanation is that a higher percentage of young people in the three-month sample attended higher quality provision[65] and we would therefore expect to see greater improvements for these young people (see Point 2 for further information).

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[61] See Insight Paper 3: A shared outcomes framework for open access youth provision and footnote 60.
[62] A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0 (Centre for Youth Impact, 2019) and footnote 60.
[63] Add a note that the two samples are mainly different young people
[64] As sample size decreases, impacts need to be larger to reach significance
[65] 74% of the 3 month sample are in the highest quality group compared to just 42% at 6 months

We hypothesised that young people who were 'new' to provision would make greater gains, as existing young people may already have benefitted from participating in YIF provision, but we were unable to test this due to missing start dates for a high percentage of participants. However, available data suggests our sample was mainly made up of young people who had been attending provision for some time. Interviews with grant holders suggest that they felt it was more appropriate to ask young people who they had an existing trusted relationship with to complete an outcome survey. It is possible that even greater gains are made by young people in the early stages of their engagement with provision or, perhaps more likely, that it is some months into engaging with provision that young people start to develop their SEL skills, building on the foundations of a safe, trusted relationship with their youth workers.

2. **Higher quality youth provision is related to better outcomes for young people.** Young people participating in higher quality provision – as measured by the Social and Emotional Learning Programme Quality Assessment (SEL-PQA) – experienced better outcomes across all outcome domains compared to those taking part in lower quality provision.

   Young people may experience greater SEL skill growth in targeted (or combined targeted and universal) provision, but universal provision plays an important initial engagement role. Young people attending targeted provision[66] (either on its own or alongside universal provision), made greater gains across some outcomes related to social skills, leadership, self-regulation and communication and self-expression than those attending universal provision only.[67]

   The YIF qualitative process evaluation highlighted the important role of universal provision in reaching and engaging young people in positive activities and informal learning opportunities. Specifically, the universal offer was referred to as 'foundational' in reaching and engaging with young people locally, and as playing a 'funnelling' role in identifying and connecting with young people who may need a more focused targeted offer.

3. **Youth provision is generally high quality and valued by young people.** Young people, who provided anonymous feedback, rated provision highly in terms of the quality and value of provision in their lives; experiencing a safe and supportive environment; and the offer of stimulating, positively challenging and fun activities. Whilst still positive, feedback was relatively poorer relating to empowerment and youth voice.

   We found that the quality of the youth provision settings was generally medium to high, as rated by grant holders taking part in the SEL-PQA process, and that higher quality settings

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[66] Provision that was designed for, focused on and delivered to particular groups of young people
[67] Provision that was designed for, and open, to all

received more positive feedback from young people related to 'empowerment and youth voice'. Grant holders generally scored highly on what can be considered the foundational aspects of youth provision and, whilst still positive, scores decline as we move up the Programme Quality Pyramid into the aspects of youth provision that are more challenging to do consistently well, such as opportunities for young people to take leadership roles (see Section 4.3.4).

In line with feedback from young people, 'safe space' was the highest rated domain of the Quality Pyramid. This reflects findings from our qualitative process evaluation, which found that emotional safety is the foundation on which open access youth provision is built.

4. **Young people place high levels of trust in staff but feel relatively less trusted.** Mutual trust is an important basis for healthy relationships and is a foundation of youth provision. Whilst young people show high levels of trust in staff, relatively, they do not feel that as much trust is placed in them: 81% of young people felt that staff trusted them 'a great deal' compared to 65% who stated that they trusted the staff 'a great deal'. It is possible that this is linked to the findings in Point 3, as empowering young people to influence how provision is run demonstrates trust and, conversely, the absence of this may be perceived by young people as a lack of trust.

5. **Youth organisations are generally reaching the young people who need them, but more attention should be paid to supporting the specific needs of girls and young women.** YIF provision was successful in attracting and engaging with a broad range of young people living in some of the most deprived areas of the country. Based on our data, grant holders were successful at engaging young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds – specifically young Black people and young people from mixed/multiple ethnic groups.

However, there appears to be a gender bias towards males. This is particularly pronounced when we look at intersections in the data, where we find that girls and young women from ethnic minority backgrounds were underrepresented to a greater degree than their white female peers. Notably, Asian girls and young women were least represented in the cohort of young people attending YIF provision based on our sample. Others have identified a need for a greater understanding of the experiences and requirements of girls and young women[68] so they engage in this type of support. Our data suggests that the issue is with 'recruitment' of girls and young women in the first place rather than engagement over time, as girls and boys

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[68] NYA (2019) Youth Work Inquiry

showed broadly similar attendance patterns in terms of number of attendances and duration per activity.

The YIF [qualitative process evaluation](#) found a similar pattern, with three out of seven grant holders reporting that there is sometimes a tendency for activities to become dominated by boys/young men, particularly in outdoor sports. As a result, these grant holders consciously made an effort to increase inclusive spaces for girls and young women, for instance, through creating an all-girls football or cricket club, something that was facilitated by YIF funding.

One case study grant holder was also supporting girls who were expected to have less independence and agency due to their cultural backgrounds. Staff perceived an important part of their role to be building confidence in these young women to overcome cultural barriers that might stop them from taking part.

6. **Around a fifth of young people reported poor wellbeing.** 21% of young people taking part in YIF funded activities were experiencing high psychological distress or risk of depression at baseline and 40% reported feeling lonely at least occasionally (see Section 5.2 for further details).

7. **Open access youth provision is potentially reaching young people who are more socially skilled but less socially connected.** When comparing young people who attended YIF provision with a group of young people who did not access this support, we found that both groups were relatively similar in terms of their baseline SEL skills, suggesting that grant holders reached a broad range of young people.

However, grant holders were reaching young people who were less confident about their ability to succeed and had lower levels of confidence related to communication and self-expression. Grant holders also reached young people whose social connections were less strong, although they were less likely to say they feel lonely. As baseline data was collected up to three months after a young person started attending provision (and potentially longer for those who were existing participants), this may be an early impact of YIF, with their attendance at YIF provision having an effect on their feelings of loneliness.

As a broad pattern, more YIF participants have good social skills at baseline than young people in the comparison group. Specifically, YIF participants reported being more confident in having a go, meeting new people, and handling conflict. Whether this suggests that YIF attracts young people who are inherently more comfortable in social situations or that this is an early impact of YIF is unknown.

**Evaluating and learning about open access youth provision**

A full description of lessons from the YIF learning project can be found in Insight Paper 6: Looking back, looking forward. Below we present some key findings related to this report.

8. **The YIF evaluation approach, drawing on five types of data, was methodologically robust, and generated new insight into the impact of open access youth provision.** The YIF evaluation framework established a credible and potentially powerful approach to understanding what works, for whom and in what circumstances in open access youth provision.

   The framework enabled triangulation of data across multiple settings and data types and provided for in-depth testing of hypotheses. It also offers an enduring approach to evaluation that is feasible for youth organisations of all sizes, both individually and collectively. However, collecting outcomes data over time for young people remains challenging (see Finding 9).

9. **Thinking beyond outcomes yields more insightful and useful learning.** Gathering five types of quantitative data (beneficiary, engagement, quality, feedback, and outcomes) and exploring the relationships between them enabled us to highlight relationships between quality of provision, the experiences of young people, and impact. This resulted in more 'actionable' insights for both funders and grant holders.

   The most challenging part of the evaluation design was collecting outcomes data over time and future evaluations are likely to face the same issues that we did. The YIF learning project's evaluation approach offers more flexible and feasible ways for providers and funders to understand and improve the impact of open access youth provision. More work is needed to examine alternative approaches to outcome data collection that are acceptable and feasible in evaluating open access youth provision.

10. **Shared evaluation is feasible and highly valuable, but practically challenging.** Whilst it was demanding, grant holders were able to collect and share sufficient data to address the research aims presented. To get to this point required huge effort on behalf of both the learning team and the YIF grant holders.

    There was significant variation across grant holders in terms of evaluation capacity, resource and motivation to take part in the shared YIF evaluation, despite a general belief in and consensus among grant holders about the importance and value of evaluation, both for the purposes of proving and improving. Where resources were stretched, the demands of front-line delivery and future proofing the sustainability of the organisation took priority; a tension

that was felt by many participating in outcomes data collection, particularly in the final year of grant funding.

11. **Classifying activities is valuable but complex.** The original categories that were identified for use in the YIF evaluation (e.g. building-based or detached, universal or targeted) proved useful in understanding provision but challenging to put into practice. A simpler approach may be to test and refine the newly identified 'types' based on common clusters of the activity categories (see Section 6.1.1).

## 10.2 Recommendations

### 10.2.1 Recommendations for youth organisations

1. **Continue to provide a broad offer to meet the varied needs of young people, but identify those who may be excluded**. Use data about your beneficiaries, alongside your relationships and knowledge of the community in which you work to understand any groups of young people who are not accessing your provision and the potential barriers to their engagement. Pay particular attention to the experiences and needs of girls and young women (particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds) if your attendance data suggests that your provision is attracting more males than females. Consider how to engage young people who are less socially confident and who may be intimidated by group settings and/or busy environments.

   Continue to offer a combination of activity types (e.g. universal, targeted and detached) to engage and support young people. It can be helpful to offer young people systematic and consistent opportunities to provide feedback, as it provides real-time insight into what the young people who *do* participate find valuable, and therefore where you might be able to extend or develop your offer to reach new communities.

2. **Continue to listen to young people and embed systematic collection of feedback into practice.** Close the feedback loop by telling young people what you have heard and how you are going to address it. Put those changes into practice and show young people when these changes have been made. Continue to gather and monitor feedback to build insight into the effect of these changes.

3. **Think beyond outcomes when evaluating your work.** The quality of provision and young people's experiences play a critical role in developing social and emotional skills. Capturing

data on these aspects of your provision gives a much fuller picture of how and why change might be happening for young people.

Embedding structured reflection on quality, and regular feedback from young people lets you to address areas of lower quality that, if not tackled, are likely to reduce the impact of your work on young people. This continuous cycle of planning, doing, assessing, and reviewing where improvement is needed is often more important than impact evaluation in helping organisations improve and develop their work to meet the ever-changing needs of young people.

Think carefully about the right times to use pre- and post- (before and after) outcomes approaches. Be clear about the purpose and how the information will be used.

4. **Consider how measurement of SEL skills can usefully be integrated into practice** to support better understanding of young people's needs and development areas. Understanding the 'profile' of groups that you work with is vitally important in designing with quality and equity in mind.

5. **Consider using shared approaches and frameworks for evaluation** alongside bespoke qualitative methods to build a sector-wide evidence base of the quality and impact of youth provision. The Centre for Youth Impact offer further information about shared evaluation in the youth sector. A key strength of the YIF learning project was the use of shared measures to build a broad narrative that sits across multiple organisations and types of provision. We simply could not have done this if we had been attempting to draw together the findings from 89 individual evaluations. Despite the challenges, there remains strong grant holder support and interest in shared approaches to data collection.

## 10.2.2 Recommendations for Funders

1. **Invest in open access youth provision through funding like the YIF**. Funding for this type of provision has been significantly reduced over the past 10 years, yet our findings and those of others[69] suggest it is a powerful way to support young people to thrive both now and in the future. Open access youth provision can help young people manage the transition into adulthood and grow into healthy and happy adults, through developing SEL skills and

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[69] Open Access Youth Work: A narrative review of impact (Hill, 2020).

positive relationships. The YIF was especially valuable because it funded ongoing provision, rather than focusing primarily on new activity or innovation.

2. **Attend to beneficiary data for open access youth provision** and interrogate any potential access inequities. Identify gender bias and barriers to access for girls and young women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

3. **Support organisations to focus on continuous learning as well as impact evaluation.** Encourage a structured and detailed focus on quality and youth voice in grant holder learning and evaluation practices. Recognise that evaluation 'readiness' is complex and fluid, and affected by changes in resources, funding, and staff. This therefore requires ongoing attention. Provide healthy challenge to grant holders. Work with them to ensure expectations related to data collection are reasonable and useful, but then hold them to account for collecting the data.

4. **Make it easier for organisations to collect and share honest numbers**. This requires a culture of 'low stakes accountability' in which learning and improvement are prioritised over results. For example, organisations not being held to projected numbers from their grant application, and the terms on which numbers are gathered being transparent.

5. **Support shared evaluation by championing common frameworks and align your reporting expectations.** Listen to youth organisations and other funders about what data is being collected and think about how this aligns with your expectations. Is it always better for youth organisations to tell their own story as a one-off, or could they create a more powerful story over time by joining their voices with others?

   Support the sharing of this information across the sector to inform understanding of what constitutes high quality practice and experiences for young people, because this is a powerful predictor of impact. This shift requires funding for infrastructure support for learning, development and evaluation, and a change in how funding is perceived to incentivise organisations taking an individual approach.

6. **Improve future large-scale evaluations by:**

   - **Working in partnership with your evaluator and making it a shared endeavour**. Be clear about what is being monitored and measured, and how it will contribute to the evaluation. Use the data you gather to help the sector improve by making it publicly available, sharing what you've learnt and what you're going to do differently as a result.

- **Starting the conversation early**. Engage with the target audience (either grant holders or potential applicants) before you and your evaluation partner design the evaluation approach to understand the delivery process and pressures that youth organisations are under. Where feasible, work with the sector and your evaluation partner so that a theory of change, a measurement framework and related tools are in place before grants are awarded. Outline evaluation expectations from the beginning and be clear about the time and budget required.

- **Providing ongoing capacity building, infrastructure support and account for staff time to collect and process data**. This shouldn't be a hidden cost and needs to be separate to staff delivery time.

- **Building on what is already known**. We've learnt a huge amount through this evaluation, some of which is presented in this report and some in YIF Insight Paper 6: Looking back, looking forward, which clearly outlines what worked and what didn't. Learn from our successes and mistakes and add to existing datasets rather than starting from scratch.

### 10.2.3 Recommendations for future research and evaluation

1. **Align evaluation approaches with youth work practice.** Evaluating open access youth provision is challenging because of the varied ways in which young people engage with provision; misalignment between evaluation approaches and youth work practice; and the practical challenges of collecting data from and about young people. It therefore requires a greater emphasis on:

   - Developmental evaluation approaches that align with the reflective nature of youth work.

   - Understanding how different young people engage in different ways with different types of youth provision.

   - Capturing young people's voices and experiences as part of the relational nature of youth provision.

   - A broader range of data types including data on quality and feedback.

2. **Continue to measure short to medium term changes in SEL skills.** Our findings support the theory that SEL skills are medium-term outcomes developed through high quality youth

provision. The [Centre for Youth Impact](#) has developed a set of shared measures, building on learning from the YIF, that are available for monitoring and evaluation of youth provision.

3. **Improve the quality of beneficiary data.** There were large gaps in our beneficiary data, particularly related to ethnicity. Whilst we acknowledge that collecting this data can be challenging, if we are to understand and attend to inequities, we need to ask these questions. An important way of improving this is through co-designing questions with practitioners and communities. The questions we used to collect data on ethnicity and gender were over-simplified. More nuanced options that reflect the range of ways young people self-identify are needed. Our study did not look at the experiences of young people based on SEND, gender identification or sexual orientation. This needs to be addressed in future research.

4. **Make the data collection process useful and aligned with practice as part of an asses-plan-improve cycle**. Enable participating organisations to get real-time feedback from the data being collected and support them to share what they're changing in response. Ensure systems are fit-for-purpose.

5. **Allow more time for capacity building work.** Changing or taking on new evaluation and learning practices requires organisational change. Our approach was a 'cascade model' where we worked with and trained one key contact within grant holder organisations. This wasn't enough support to embed the new data collection processes or get organisation-wide buy-in to the evaluation. Done right, this additional support will require more funding and time to develop even more supportive relationships with grant holders. This approach may necessitate working more closely with a smaller number of organisations.

6. **Impact evaluation matters but needs to be a sector-wide with a longitudinal approach.** Impact evaluation using common data collection tools is valuable in understanding the difference open access youth provision makes to young people's lives, and understanding impact is likely to remain a key interest for policy makers. However, seeking to collect this data as a part of an individual organisation's regular evaluation practice is neither proportionate or appropriate, and can be a waste of precious resources.

   We suggest that longitudinal research exploring young people's development into adulthood should incorporate indicators of young people's engagement with, and experiences of, open access youth provision during adolescence. This would add vital insight into the longer-term impact of open access youth provision, but is of course out of reach for almost all individual youth organisations.

7. **For future impact evaluations, increase the sample size of outcome surveys and the range of organisations from which data is collected**, gather data on longer-term impacts (e.g. 12 months and beyond), and collect improved data about new participants to establish a true baseline. A more aligned and proportionate approach to evaluation would enable some aspects of data collection to become the norm in youth provision, increasing the potential for large, shared datasets to be used across the sector.

The YIF learning team has been privileged to work with so many committed youth organisations, and their funders, through the YIF learning project. We believe this project has broken new ground in many ways, from the co-design of the evaluation framework to the analytical approach. We are grateful for the opportunity to undertake this work in partnership with grant holders, The National Lottery Community Fund and DCMS, and remain excited and optimistic about the potential to build on both the approach and the findings.

The YIF shared evaluation sets a new standard for future impact evaluations of youth provision and demonstrates the value and importance of having common metrics that support comparison between organisations and improve understanding of how they achieve impact with and for young people.

# Appendix A: YIF Theory of change

During the first year of the YIF, we developed a shared theory of change through a co-design process with all grant holders through a series of face to face meetings and with a core group of grantees.

| Activities | Mechanisms of change | Intermediate outcomes | Impacts |
|---|---|---|---|

Young people identify their individual goals to achieve their potential

**High quality, open access youth services**

Including: youth clubs, sports, arts, social action, informal learning, counselling / therapy, employability and health and wellbeing.

Most often regular and sustained engagement from YP but can be one-off provision.

Building-based services, outdoor provision and outreach sessions

Mostly universal rather than targeting a specific group

Group and 1-2-1 work

Some issue-based provision

YP engage positively and through free choice

**Environment & relationships**

Young people trust and feel trusted (both initially & more deeply over time)

Young people feel respected

Young people don't feel judged or punished

Young people feel safe & secure

**Nature and delivery of activity**

Young people feel positively challenged

Young people feel a sense of enjoyment (including fun & a deeper satisfaction)

Young people feel a sense of purpose, achievement & contribution

**Empowerment and community**

Young people are empowered to create change in their lives and in the world around them

Young people feel included & a greater sense of connection with their community

**Increased self-awareness, reflection and self-determination**

**Values**
Increased respect for others
Increased empathy for others
Increased commitment to equality and diversity

**Attitudes & non-cognitive skills**
Increased aspirations
Increased self-confidence
Increased motivation
Increased resilience
Increased independence
Increased willingness to address issues

**Knowledge & skills**
Improved social and emotional skills
Improved communication skills and self-expression
Increased awareness of rights & responsibilities
Improved life skills
Improved leadership
Acquisition of specific knowledge & skills relating to individual provision

**Behaviours**
Increased positive engagement outside of youth provision
Improved decision-making
Developed more positive relationships

**Accountability line**

**Improved life chances and wellbeing of young people …**

Improved mental and physical health

More stable and secure personal finances and housing

Educational attainment

Sustainable employment

Positive long-term relationships

Personal safety

**Increased positive contribution of young people to their community and wider society**

https://yiflearning.org/

In essence, the theory of change proposes that:

- Through engaging young people in high quality activities and relationships, provided in such a way that young people have empowering and developmental experiences in a safe and supported environment, young people will see positive changes in their social and emotional skills, social connectedness and wellbeing, in the short to medium term. This change is expected to be greater for young people who are new to provision.

- Over the longer term, these positive changes will transfer to other areas of young people's lives supporting a positive transition into adulthood, alongside long-term improvements in mental and physical health, educational attainment, sustainable employment, finances, secure housing, positive relationships, and personal safety.

Each element has been carefully considered and developed with the input of experienced practitioners. Through the YIF evaluation we are seeking to identify trends and make linkages between different elements of the shared theory of change by looking for relationships between the different types of data being collected. Based on learning from the YIF evaluation, an updated theory of change for open access provision has been produced.

# Appendix B: Significance testing, drawing inferences from the data, and propensity score matching

**Significance tests for the estimates of impact**

The p-values and confidence intervals around the estimates of impact have been calculated using the complex samples module of SPSS. The statistics generated via that module account for the clustering of the participants data within grant holders (and, by corollary, the variation in impacts across the grant holders in the sample), and the weights attached to the comparison group from the propensity score matching.

**Drawing inferences from the data**

In testing whether or not impacts are statistically significant to zero, and generating confidence intervals around the estimates, ideally, we would make an assumption that the participant sample approximates to a random sample of all YIF grant holders, and that the participants completing the outcome surveys per grant holder are a random sample of all participants for that organization.

In practice neither of these assumptions is likely to be valid. The implication is that, when drawing inference from the findings, the inference should be to 'participants from a similar profile of organisations and to similar subsets of participants within those grant holders'.

It is plausible that if the participant sample had been drawn from a different set of organisations, or a different profile of participants had completed the outcome surveys, our reported findings would have been somewhat different. To an extent this has been tested in Section 7.4.4.4 in the Technical Report by taking out the largest organization, but this does not equate to a comprehensive test (which would be extremely difficult to do given the small sample sizes). However, overall, it seems a reasonable assumption that the direction and broad magnitude of the impacts would be similar even with a different set of organisations and participants.

**Propensity score matching**

The impact estimates in Section 8 compare change in outcomes for participants with those of a matched comparison group. The matched comparison group is essentially a weighted version of the YouGov comparison group, with the purpose being to generate a weighted sample that, at baseline, has a similar profile to the participants. Any difference in the degree of change for these two groups (participant, and matched comparison), is then assumed to give an estimate of impact.

Given the small sample size of participants and the large number of outcomes, it did not prove feasible to generate a single matched comparison group that was similar to the participant group across all baseline outcomes simultaneously. Instead, a separate matched comparison group was generated for each outcome in turn. For each outcome the matched comparison group was generated using propensity score matching, the main steps of which are:

- The probability (or propensity) of an individual being in the participant group (rather than the comparison group) is estimated from a logistic regression model of the data. The binary outcome variable in the model is the group (1=participant; 0=comparison). The predictors are:

  o The baseline version of the outcome (entered as a categorical variable).

  o Gender (male/other/not recorded v female).

  o Age-group (entered as a categorical variable).

  o Ethnic group (BAME v white).

  o SEL group (entered as a categorical variable).

- The comparison group is then weighted so that the distribution of propensity scores in the comparison group is the same as in the participant group.

The implication of generating a separate matched comparison group per outcome is that the two groups, YIF and comparison will be matched on the baseline version of the outcome of interest, but may not be so well matched on other baseline outcomes. However, controlling for SEL group, which is a 'summary' of most of the baseline outcomes, does largely guard against any large mismatches. Nevertheless, taking 'I am confident I have the ability to succeed in anything I want to do' as an example, the matching ensures the two groups are well matched on the baseline version of this outcome, but the two groups are less well matched on some baseline outcomes that have low correlation with 'ability to succeed', such as 'I have a lot to be proud of'.

For this to be biasing (in a way that would affect interpretation), the 'pride' baseline score would need to be highly predictive of change in the ability to succeed outcomes <u>after</u> having controlled for baseline 'ability to succeed' plus SEL group, A regression analysis of change in the ability to succeed shows other baseline outcomes to have low predictive power, so the conclusion is that there is very little risk of bias. Likewise, for other outcomes.

The technical details of the matching undertaken are as follows:

- The logistic regression model was fitted within SPSS with all predictors entered irrespective of whether they were significant. This ensures that, after applying the propensity score weights the two groups are very similar across all of the predictors.

- The weights for the comparison group were calculated as inverse propensity weights (i.e., p/1-p). Comparison group members that are very similar to participants, and hence have a high propensity score are given a large weight; comparison group members that are dissimilar to participants, and hence have a low propensity score are given a small weight.