

Effective Transitions Fund evaluation

Findings report

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Executive summary

The Careers & Enterprise Company administered £2 million funding from JPMorganChase to deliver targeted support and build the evidence base on effective careers education for disadvantaged young people at points of transition. The Effective Transition Fund delivered over two years of targeted support across ten projects, that were delivered by Careers Hubs in England.¹ This provided support for over 1,000 young people in Year 10 and 11.

The objectives of the Effective Transitions Fund were:

- to deliver targeted transition support to enable disadvantaged young people in Key Stage 4 to achieve sustained engagement in high-quality post-16 destinations; and
- to build the evidence base of effective interventions for the target group by understanding the impact of long-term targeted support on achieving high quality sustainable destinations.

Target groups

Each project elected to combine the mandatory criterion of Free School Meals (FSM) with at least one other characteristic, reflecting local priorities and identified needs.

Young people faced intersectional barriers: young people in receipt of FSM face an attainment gap, are less likely to sustain an education destination, and are likely to earn less over their lifetime.^{2 3 4}

The groups targeted by the Fund were (in order of prevalence):

- In receipt of Free Schools Meals (FSM) (mandatory criterion)
- At risk of under achieving / mildly disengaged

¹ Nine of the ten were part of Careers Hubs at the start.

² Department for Education (DfE). (2024). Key stage 4 performance, 2022-2023, [custom table 1](#) and [custom table 2](#) created April 2024.

³ Official Statistics. (2024). Academic year 2021/22: Key stage 4 destination measures. GOV.UK. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-destination-measures> February 2024.

⁴ Hodge, L., Little, A., & Weldon, M. (2021). *GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings: Research report*. Department for Education. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60c36f0cd3bf7f4bd11a2326/GCSE_Attainment_and_Lifetime_Earnings_PDF3A.pdf

- Special educational needs or disability (SEND) or Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)
- Low attendance
- Low self esteem
- Gender
- Excluded from school or at risk of exclusion
- Ethnicity.

Activities

The Fund-level theory of change set out how young people would be supported predominantly through the provision of intensive and tailored one-to-one support and careers education, information, advice, and guidance. Young people had diverse support needs and the programme designed by each Careers Hub was bespoke to these, while containing a core of common activities. Each project created a programme that would support pupils to develop awareness and knowledge of different education and employment routes; increase their motivation, confidence, and aspirations; and support them to take actions for their next steps. Typically, the projects offered a combination of:

- **one-to-one coaching** to inform goal setting and action planning;
- **group sessions** to cover more generic topics and offer peer support;
- **further and higher education visits** to raise aspirations and knowledge of post-16 routes, and to maintain engagement in school and on the project;
- **work placements and work experience** to give insights into potential future careers and help with decision-making;
- **employer encounters** offered insights into the world of work and role models;
- **transition support** to address individual-level barriers and prepare for successful post-16 destinations;
- **parental engagement** to support engagement with project activities; and
- **'keep in touch' strategies** to overcome barriers caused by high absence levels.

Detailed insights

Evidence drawn from existing literature and comparable national data indicate that the outcomes far exceed what might be expected for the groups receiving support: for example, the most recent national data shows that 82.6% of all young people sustain their education, apprenticeship or employment destinations.⁵

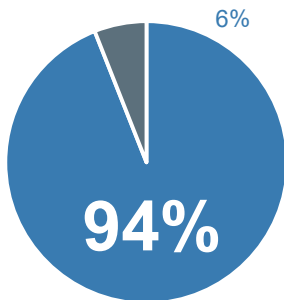
⁵ Official Statistics (2024). Academic year 2021/22: Key stage 4 destination measures. GOV.UK.

- Over 900 of the 1,000+ cohort were still engaged at the end of the programme

Overall, the evaluation shows the Fund has been effective in supporting young people into sustained and good quality post-16 destinations.

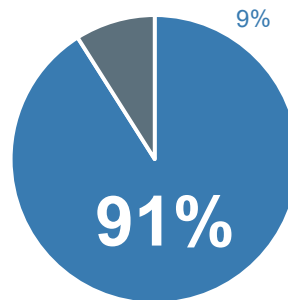
Figure 1 Tracked destinations

September 2023: 882 pupils tracked



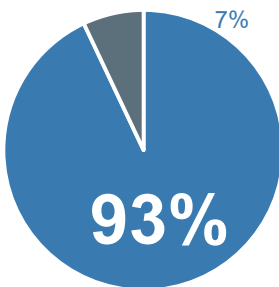
■ Entered post-16 education ■ Other

November 2023: 992 pupils tracked



■ In post-16 education ■ Other

Spring 2024: 906 pupils tracked



■ In post-16 education ■ Other

Source: IES, 2023/2024

This evaluation collected pupil survey data over three waves (baseline, before they started on the projects, midline, and endline after they had moved into their post-16 destination). As well as surveys, interview data, management information and destination data were collected to track progress over time, based on a theory of change framework which closely defined what each project was designed to achieve in terms of improved pupil outcomes.

The data provided indicators as to why young people sustained their destinations:

- Around 90% were happy with their choice of post-16 destination.

- Over 90% were happy with their main subjects/courses.
- Over 90% were happy with their college or training provider.

Importantly, there was no statistical difference between different groups of young people in their level of happiness with their destination.

The evaluation analysed data from the surveys with young people, destinations data and interview data. This showed the importance of targeted and sustained interventions with trusted adults in leading to sustained destinations that young people were happy with. Overall, there were very few statistically significant differences in survey responses on this by different pupil characteristics. This suggests that the tailored nature of the programme did well in addressing the individual needs of different learners.

Pupils' self-reported satisfaction with their destination was significantly linked to their sustained destinations, as was the level of careers coach support that they received. Pupils' positive perception of careers coach support was a predictor of midpoint EET status, where for with each increase in survey score on the following questions, the likelihood of being EET in November/December 2023 increased.

- Feeling listened to and supported when considering their future.
- Feeling that they had a trusted adult that they could talk to about their future plans (e.g. coach).
- The young person survey analysis showed that there was a statistically significant improvement in the scores for these measures over time.

Additionally, the young person survey analysis shows that there was a statistically significant improvement in the scores for these measures over time.

Overcoming barriers

Pupils had multiple barriers and faced intersectional disadvantage which could have affected their chances of progressing to and sustaining high quality post-16 destinations.

- **Poor mental health** was not always medically diagnosed, and pupils were not always externally supported by community mental health teams. Pupils experienced high anxiety and low confidence and self-esteem, as well as poor mental health, which had an impact on their ability to attend and participate in school and project activities. Persistently absent pupils had reduced contact time with teachers, support staff and careers services, meaning that they were less likely to achieve good grades and transition to 'good' destinations.
- **Interpersonal conflicts and challenging group dynamics** were also encountered in delivery. There were difficulties in ensuring that 'generic' careers information sessions were sufficiently interesting and engaging for a diverse group of young people with different interests and ambitions.
- Pupils in the projects often faced **multiple disadvantages**. This included emotional and behavioural barriers, additional support needs requiring adaptations to approaches

and materials, systemic racism, undiagnosed SEND, difficult home contexts (with a lack of parental engagement or support) or faced issues with public transport (lack of access, affordability, or lack of confidence).

Projects worked to address these through:

1. **A holistic approach:** careers coaches and project workers focussed on getting to know young people, building relationships over time, to understand their barriers to progression. This meant responding to their needs and advocating on their behalf with employers and education providers.
2. **Personalisation:** bespoke work placements and employer encounters were sourced for young people and were customised to meet their needs.
3. **Representation:** some projects engaged employers as positive role models to inspire their pupils. They selected employers who had similar disadvantages to those faced by young people so reinforced images of success and increased feelings of self-worth.

Additionally, there were 'system' level barriers to delivery, which also had to be overcome. This included access to school staff who could provide long term support for the project; employers who could support different types of activities (from workshops and visits to extended work experience); contracting and data sharing agreements; and recruiting experienced and qualified careers workers.

Key lessons

Overall, the evaluation evidence shows that the activities in the theory of change helped to generate short-term outcomes such as confidence and motivation, which in turn supported outcomes such as improved decision-making which led to the impacts reported here. There are key lessons that CEC, Careers Hubs, schools and delivery partners can take from the Effective Transition Fund about how future projects like this can be effective for young people.

Building support networks in schools

- 'Buy-in' from a range of school staff supported delivery - from senior leadership, pastoral staff, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and Careers Leaders to ensure support for activities and programme administration.

Responding to young peoples' needs

- Adapting delivery for pupils with SEND, including reducing the length of coaching sessions and work-related activities to ensure pupils are not overwhelmed.
- Additional activities to support mental health and anxiety ensure that pupils are supported in a holistic way.

Persistence and integrity

- Relationships between careers coaches and pupils are central to the successes of the projects and develop over time – requiring consistency in who delivers the support to pupils.
- Coaches demonstrated values, skills and experience that offer a client-centred approach.

Supporting the transition

- Going the extra mile to ensure pupils are enabled to successfully transition into post-16 destinations by providing additional support on exam results day or overcoming barriers in the early phase of the post-16 destination.

1 Background

1.1 About the Fund

The Effective Transition Fund (ETF) was funded by the between 2021 and 2024. The £2 million fund enabled 10 selected Careers Hubs⁶ to design and deliver bespoke careers support interventions for 1,000+ young people at risk of poor post-16 outcomes, identified through receipt of free school meals (FSM) and other factors.

1.1.1 Target groups

Each project identified a cohort of around 100 pupils, the mandatory criterion for all was receipt of free school meals (FSM), but each project elected to combine this with at least one other characteristic such as being at risk of under-achievement, at risk of not participating after the age of 16 and having low attendance. Some Hubs focussed their projects on specific subgroups such as girls or boys, black boys in alternative provision (AP) or at risk of exclusion, SEND in mainstream or specialist provision. These criteria are representative of many of the challenges young people experience which can impact on their ability to achieve positive post-16 destinations. For future iterations of similar funds, fewer subjective criteria such as 'low self-esteem' or 'mildly disengaged' would support the pathway to greater replication so that other Hubs are able to identify and target the same type of cohort. This has been built into the planning for the second wave of the Fund, launching for delivery in 2024.

The chart below shows the criteria and coverage – with FSM covered by each of the 10 projects. These criteria were not exclusive, and projects used more than one or two to reach the young people that they wanted to target.

In addition, parents, other school staff and different types of schools were included in project targeting. The groups targeted by the Fund were (in order of prevalence)

- In receipt of Free Schools Meals (FSM) (mandatory criterion)
- At risk of under achieving / mildly disengaged
- Special educational needs or disability (SEND) or Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)
- Low attendance
- Low self esteem

⁶ At the start of the project, nine out of ten projects were run within existing Careers Hubs, the remaining project became part of a Career Hub during the delivery of the Fund.

-
- Gender
 - Excluded from school or at risk of exclusion
 - Ethnicity.

At the start of the Fund, around two-thirds of participants had been eligible for FSM for between one and five years (66.1%) and around one-third had been eligible for over five years. At most, participants had been eligible for FSM for their entire school career. On average, learners had been eligible for five years. Young people in receipt of FSM experience multiple barriers when compared to their more advantaged peers. The attainment gap for young people on FSM suggests that 42.9% of young people will attain a standard pass (Grade 4) in GCSE maths and English language compared to 71.6% of non-eligible young people (DfE, 2024a). This has remained largely the same over the last decade (Francis-Devine et al., 2023). They are 4.1 percentage points (ppt) less likely to sustain an education destination than their non-disadvantaged peers (Official Statistics, 2024b) and are likely to earn 9% less over their lifetime (Hodge et al., 2021). These qualifications are strong predictors of future good social, economic and health outcomes which demonstrates the risks these young people face.

While the need for additional support for young people eligible for FSM is clear in the data and in wider evidence, project staff were not convinced that this was a complete or comprehensive proxy for disadvantage. They would have liked other criteria such as enhanced pupil premium to be included and there is a rationale for this, as some disadvantaged groups (such as looked-after children) are not eligible for FSM.

Each project brought a rationale for selecting their other targeting measures, for example low attendance and SEND. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on school attendance and the mental health of many young people. The overall absence rate for all young people in school year 2023/2024 was 6.8%, with persistent absence at 20.3% (DfE, 2024b). The relationship between absence and GCSE attainment suggests that those not achieving grade 9-4 in English and maths had an absence rate of 8.8% compared with 5.2% achieving grade 4 in both subjects (Long & Roberts, 2024). One-third of young people (33.0%) who are SEND and on FSM are persistently absent from school while 34.7% of those with EHCPs are absent (Children's Commissioner, 2024). Many of these are on waiting lists for SEND and mental health support (Children's Commissioner, 2024).

Pupils who have a special educational need or disability (SEND) are less likely to sustain an education, employment, and apprenticeship destination than pupils who do not have SEND (88.9% vs 94.6% respectively) (Official Statistics, 2024b). There are several types of support that pupils with SEND need in their post-16 transitions. Mental health is a key concern, as research shows that SEND pupils are more likely to develop mental health difficulties (NHS, 2018; Thompson & Atkinson, 2022).

NEET prevention was not the primary goal of the Fund, which was focussed on better quality post-16 destinations, however in the two years since the Fund launched, the rates of young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) has risen. Currently around 12.0% of young people aged 16-24 are NEET and this has generally

been so since 2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2024), meaning that NEET prevention has become a more prevalent issue.

1.1.2 The participating cohort

The cohort of young people taking part in the projects was mixed and typically reflected the ethnic makeup of the local areas. At the start of the Fund, 74.9% of participants were white. As one project was targeted by gender (male) and ethnicity, and another project targeted males, compared to one project targeting females only, this resulted in more males participating in the Fund than females – 59.6% and 39.5%.

Many young people faced additional barriers, such as English as an additional language (7.6% of the cohort at the start), an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) (16.9% of the cohort at the start) or SEND (41.1% of the cohort at the start). These rates are higher than the national cohort averages, where 4.3% of pupils have an EHCP and 13.0% have SEND (Official Statistics, 2023). Further information on the cohort can be found in the accompanying technical report.

1.2 Evaluation

CEC commissioned a consortium of organisations to support project incubation and design, and then to evaluate the projects: this was formed of the Institute for Employment Studies, the International Centre for Guidance Studies, and the Behavioural Insights Team.

The incubation phase centred on ensuring that each of the 10 projects had clear aims and a theory of change explaining why and how it would achieve these. Each of the project teams was supported by an evaluation account manager and a CEC account manager to develop a theory of change, with specific and measurable outcomes. Following this, the evaluation team created a fund-level theory of change to encapsulate the overarching aims, common activities and outcomes that were relevant to the fund. The fund-level evaluation centred around gathering evidence for the causal pathways.

From the outset, CEC acknowledged that not all interventions would be suitable for a full evaluation and that a mix of evaluation approaches would be required. In practice, three projects were selected for 'depth' evaluations, while the remaining seven were involved in a strategic process evaluation. Overlaying both was a core, fund-level evaluation providing common input and outcome data across interventions and projects.

The fund-level evaluation comprised a three-wave survey of learners (two versions of each survey with one easier to read version for pupils with SEND), analysis of information on their demographic characteristics, activities and outcomes (management information); a two-wave survey of careers workers; and a range of interviews with project delivery staff and wider stakeholders. The depth evaluations also included interviews with pupils, parent/carer observations, and interviews and workshops with delivery staff.

This evaluation report focuses on the main findings from the evaluation activities. Detailed tables and data analysis are provided in the accompanying technical report.

2 Impact of the Fund

Collectively, the projects aimed to achieve three primary outcomes and two secondary outcomes, which are set out in the fund-level theory of change.

■ Primary outcomes:

- i. Successful post-16 transition into EET
- ii. Sustained engagement with their chosen path (after six months)
- iii. Increased quality of post-16 destination.

■ Secondary outcomes:

- iv. Post-16 destination matches the pupil's capability and aspiration
- v. High satisfaction with chosen destination.

Evaluation data on outcomes captured participants' attainment in year 11, initial entry to post-16 destinations and whether these were sustained six months later. In addition, young person survey data captured the participants' satisfaction with their destinations.

2.1 Achieved qualifications

As successful transitions after Year 11 can be dependent on Key Stage 4 attainment, it was important to capture the achieved qualifications of the cohort. Eight in 10 participants had Key Stage 4 attainment recorded by the projects in the management information records (856 out of 1026 records)⁷. Under half of the participants (48.1%) achieved qualifications amounting to level 2, and 39.8% achieved level 1 at the end of key stage 4. Around four in ten were reported to have achieved grade 9-4 in English language and maths (42.1% English Language and 39.5% maths).⁸

Even within the context of grade boundaries reverting to pre-pandemic levels for GCSEs in 2023 with grades generally being lower than in recent years (Ofqual, 2023), much of the cohort did not perform as well as seemingly similar national cohorts. This reflects the intersectional barriers that much of the ETF cohort faced – the socio-economic disadvantage indicated by receipt of FSM, and additional support needs indicated by SEND and EHCP.

Directly comparable national data is not readily available; instead, national data reports on each characteristic separately. Nationally, around half of the 2023 cohort taking GCSEs who were in receipt of FSM achieved 4 or above in English language and maths (51.0%

⁷ 1039 records minus 13 records where the school had withdrawn.

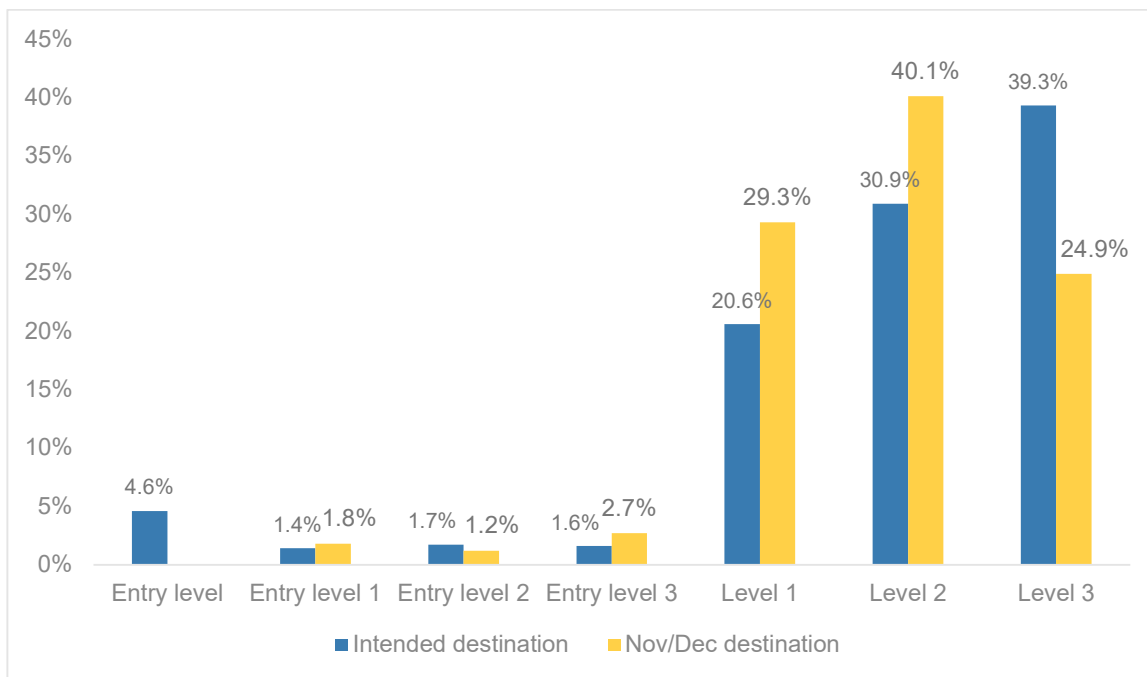
⁸ See the accompanying Technical report for more tables.

English and 52.0% maths) and 42.9% achieve both. The proportion of pupils with any SEND achieving grades 4 or above in English was 41.0% and 42.0% for maths – which is more similar to the ETF cohort (DfE, 2024a).

The midline survey of young people took place in Year 11 and asked whether young people anticipated they would have the grades needed to get onto their first/second choice option. At that stage, 88.4% thought they were on target or making good progress on this. When they were surveyed in year 12 (or equivalent), 40.8% of respondents to the mainstream version of the survey reported not having, or not quite achieving the grades they needed to get onto their first choice.

The outcomes data shows the difference that this made to young people’s destinations. In April 2023, one-third of the cohort intended to enter level 3 study (39.3%), however in November/December 2023, 24.9% were studying at level 3 and more were studying at level 2 and level 1 than anticipated.

Figure 2 Intended and midpoint post-16 destinations (level of study) *



*Using the number of pupils with data in their MI records as the total

Source: Management information, 2021-2024

2.2 Education, employment and training destinations

ETF participants progressed at good rates into post-16 destinations including education at sixth forms and sixth form colleges, further education colleges and independent training providers, as well as into apprenticeships and other types of work.

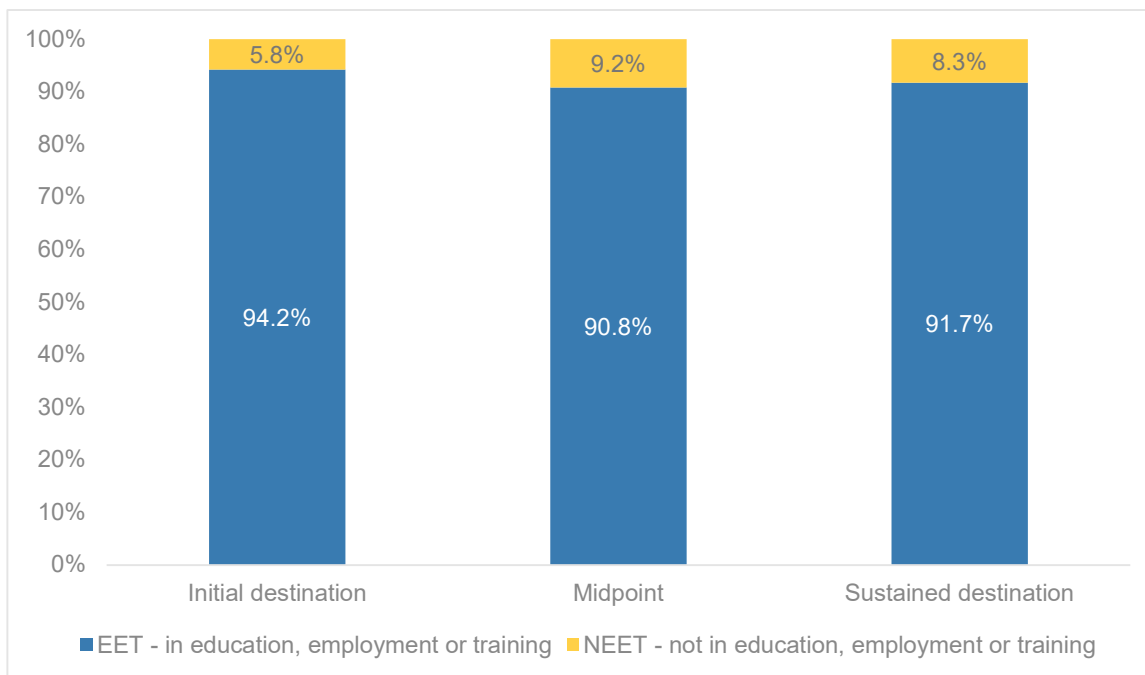
The figures below show that overall, just over nine in ten participants in ETF were in education, employment or training (EET) and under one in ten were NEET.

Project snapshot

The ETF project in East Sussex sat within the Local Authority, which meant that the project could draw on additional data analysis and compare the progression rates of the ETF cohort with a comparable cohort that had not taken part in the project. The NEET rate for the ETF group was 9% compared to 24% of the comparable cohort.*

* please note the ETF and comparable cohorts were not matched using statistical methods so this finding is observational only

Figure 3 Employment, education and training destinations at three timepoints*



*Using the number of pupils with data in their MI records as the base

Source: Management information, 2023-2024

2.2.1 Destinations

A higher percentage of pupils were recorded as being in further education colleges and independent training providers than had planned to be in their recorded 'intended destinations': fewer were in sixth form colleges and school sixths forms.⁹ This is mirrored in the types of qualifications that were being undertaken – with a lower percentage taking A levels than planned and more taking other technical and vocational qualifications. This could reflect greater awareness of technical and vocational options, more realistic options based on feedback from careers coaches and lower attainment, bolder choices in moving away from the school sixth form and making an active decision to go elsewhere for their post-16 courses.

⁹ Detailed information is provided in the technical report.

2.2.2 Sustained destination data

Sustained engagement in EET destinations was recorded six months into the equivalent of Year 12. This showed that 91.7% of the pupils with their status recorded, were in an EET destination and 8.3% NEET, with records for 889 young people. Over 9 in 10 participants (92.9%) were recorded as still being in the same EET destination in March as they were at the midpoint in November/December.

DfE requires that, for a young person to be counted in a destination, they have to be recorded as having sustained participation for a six-month period. The most recent figures available show that 82.6% of young people sustained their education, apprenticeship or employment destinations (Official Statistics, 2024a), meaning that the ETF cohort compares favourably, especially given the intersectional disadvantage that many faced.

2.2.3 Increased quality of destination

The overarching aim of the Fund was not just about preventing NEET, it was that young people would transition to and sustain engagement in a high-quality post-16 destination. The quality of the destination was measured through the young person survey – satisfaction with their destination and perceived ‘fit’.

High satisfaction with chosen destination

The endline survey of young people asked if they were happy with their choice of destination – they overwhelmingly were, with 87.8% and 90.6% (SEND version and mainstream versions of the survey) happy with their choice of post-16 destination.

They were happy with the main subjects/course they were doing with 91.6% of SEND survey respondents and 95.4% of the mainstream version agreeing with this.¹⁰ They were also happy with their college or training providers – with 95.1% of the SEND version, and 95.9% of mainstream survey respondents agreeing that they were happy.

Post-16 destination matches the pupil’s capability and aspiration

Survey respondents were asked if they believed that the course they had selected was a better fit for them than the one they had initially considered. Here, 56.0% of survey respondents to the SEND version and 62.9% of respondents to the mainstream version agreed to some or a great extent that it was a better fit. For 16.3% of mainstream survey respondents this was not relevant as they kept to the same choice.

¹⁰ Asked of respondents who were in education or in an apprenticeship.

2.3 Differences by underlying characteristics

The analysis also looked at whether there were any differences in outcomes by the different cohort characteristics – gender, SEND or EHCP, English as an additional language and attendance rates.

Gender gaps in GCSEs are a long-term trend, with females generally outperforming males (DfE, 2023). When looking at the differences by gender in the ETF cohort, males were overrepresented at entry level and entry-level 3 attainment and underrepresented at level 2. Most girls achieved level 2 (52.9%) followed by level 1 (36.7%), and just under half of boys achieved level 2 (45.1%) followed by level 1 (39.3%), which mirrors national data.

All learners were most likely to be studying at level 2, for females this was followed by level 3, for males it was followed by level 1. However, this was not a statistically significant difference, as some of the numbers in each level were too small to test accurately.¹¹ Males were more likely to report having the grades they needed for their second choice option for post-16 than females – with testing showing that this was very close to statistical significance.

Any differences between happiness with their choice of post-16 destination, their main subjects, or whether they thought their chosen course was a better fit were generally not statistically significant. No matter the previous attendance rates of the young people, whether they have an EHCP or English as an additional language, they were not statistically different in their happiness.

Males were statistically more likely to be happy with their college or training provider (a mean score of 1.5 compared with 1.3 for females). Although not quite meeting the statistical rigour for significance, learners with SEND were more likely than learners without SEND to be happy with their college or training provider (a mean score of 1.5 compared to 1.3 for non-SEND).¹²

¹¹ Statistical significance means that it is unlikely that the results are due to chance.

¹² Further details of the results are provided in the technical report.

3 Causal pathways – how outcomes were achieved

Using the framework and language of the theory of change, the examination of causal pathways brings to the fore the relationship between activities that are delivered as part of the project and the outcomes seen by participants.

3.1 Strategic project management activities

Some activities that were managed by project leads, and in some cases their delivery partners, made a difference to the outcomes experienced by ETF participants.

3.1.1 Theory of change development

One of the first activities undertaken by each project, was the development of a theory of change (ToC) to support their project. This model provided a framework which outlined and illustrated the expected change that would happen and why, because of the intervention. Although this was quite a challenge for some of the projects, it was also an impactful activity as it encouraged project managers to deeply consider their project and to understand what needed to happen to achieve the outcomes. This resulted in an underlying rationale for activities that project leads could refer to when considering making changes to delivery. The ToCs were reviewed regularly throughout the project evaluation with small changes identified over time. This model of working has since been adopted by some of the Careers Hubs, who use it for the formulation of other projects. The strength of adopting a ToC model for the ETF was that it provided the project leads with a tool to help measure outcomes and impact, but it also provided a mechanism through which projects could be compared and the overall fund could also be evaluated.

‘Using theories of change has been hugely beneficial, and this approach has now been implemented across all delivery relating to young people through the combined authority’

Strategic Hub Lead

3.1.2 Partnerships with schools

Across all projects, the relationships with schools and employers were central to success. Those projects with existing relationships with schools were in a stronger position at the start of delivery and invariably were able to maximise the two-year project. Successful relationships with schools were dependent on factors including support from the senior leadership team, a strong relationship with the school’s Career Leader and engagement with a broad range of schools’ staff such as pastoral staff, the special educational needs

coordinator (SENCO) and class teachers. Involving a broader range of school staff meant that engagement with the young people could be better facilitated and reinforced. Projects struggled where they were dependent on only one staff member especially when staff turnover and absence posed a problem.

3.1.3 Employer engagement

The second significant partnership was with employers. Many Hubs used the projects to enhance their relationships with Cornerstone employers and worked with them to create work experience opportunities, provide representative role models and extend young people's knowledge and understanding of sectors and local employment opportunities. For many of the young people, their engagement with these employers was life changing. Young people saw that people who were like them had gone on to become successful.

Project snapshot

The Liverpool City Region Careers Hub worked closely with their Cornerstone employers to build relationships with schools and particularly to help employers better understand many of the challenges that disadvantaged young people face. Some employers became highly motivated and agreed to work with all the schools in the project. A key aim was to provide the young men with examples of employers who came from a similar background to them, were local and might not have had an easy journey getting to where they were now.

'But then for me, on a personal level, I was one of them pupils to be honest. And I left school with no qualifications and [XX] recruited me like 10, 11, 12 years ago and took me on and took a chance on me'.

Liverpool City Region employer

Work experience for some young people resulted in part time jobs, apprenticeship opportunities, and confirmed/rejected career choices which informed post-16 education choices. There were also unexpected outcomes for employers including young people's interest in working for them, enhanced talent pipeline, contributions to their local community and a passion to provide more opportunities for young people with SEND.

3.2 Delivery

Delivery activities and target cohorts varied across the projects and often reflected the labour needs or concerns in the local regions, examples of this include Lancashire which focussed on socially economically deprived areas of the county with higher than local average NEET figures, East Sussex which targeted young people in the county with low attendance at school as they were generally found to be worse off in their post-16 transitions than their peers, and London where the project focussed on the role of social capital in career guidance and the importance of having relatable role models particularly for black young men.

Projects were keen to deliver their programmes in a manner that provided young people with the support and guidance most appropriate for the targeted cohort. Due to the nature

of conducting projects like these with schools and young people, some projects found that their initial plans for delivery necessitated change due to a range of factors including infrastructure, timings, contracting and pupil selection.

While some projects used schools' existing careers advisers, other employed coaches, and mentors from external careers delivery organisations. The projects defined the appropriate workforce and whether there was a need to contract-out the work, based on the needs of pupils within the cohort and perceived match with existing skills. As such, experiences of working with disadvantaged young people, young people who are NEET, or with SEND pupils, were an important consideration as well as experience of careers education, information, advice, and guidance.

The table below outlines each project with the targeted cohorts and the activities undertaken.

Table 3.1 Projects and the main activities undertaken

Hub/Region	Target cohort	Activities
Leicester and Leicestershire	Attend specialist provision school (SEND)	One-to-one sessions, workplace experience and visits
West of England	Poor attendance and risk of under attainment	One-to-one coaching, group sessions, 'world of work' sessions
East Sussex	Persistent school absence	Work placement, resilience workshops
North East	SEND and pupils with EHCPs	Personal guidance, engagement with employers and post-16 providers
London	Black males in alternative provision or in school exclusion units	Mentoring with role models, one-to-one coaching, work experience, parental engagement
Hertfordshire	At risk of disengagement and not achieving	One-to-one mentoring
West Yorkshire	Females with good attendance, with low social capital and low confidence	One-to-one and group sessions, confidence building and creativity sessions, parental engagement
Dorset	Greatest risk of exclusion	Fortnightly careers adviser appointments and work experience placement
Lancashire	At risk of becoming NEET	Extended work experience, or enhanced information advice and guidance sessions, and a combination of the two
Liverpool City Region	Disengaged males	Workshops, employer sessions/encounters, mentoring, employer/HE visits

Source: IES, 2024

The projects were particularly successful in addressing a range of needs through group and individual activities. These built young people's self-confidence, decision making skills, resilience, knowledge of their options, choices, all supporting preparation for managing the transition. The main activities common across the projects are summarised below (reasons for activities being delivered less than planned is discussed in Chapter 5).

Table 3.2 Activities, planned and delivered (up to and including summer break 2023)

	2021- 2022 Planned	2021- 2022 Delivered	2021- 2022 %	2022- 2023 Planned	2022- 2023 Delivered	2022- 2023 %	Total delivered
Tailored one-to-one coaching/mentoring/careers adviser support session	1926	1815	94.2	5559	4069	73.2	5884
Identification of goals and development needs (action plan)	1144	646	56.5	3269	2192	67.1	2838
Post-16 encounters (eg college visits)	437	265	60.4	898	655	72.9	920
Employer encounters (eg taster, visit)	897	601	67.0	896	710	79.2	1311
Work experience placements	242	130	53.7	354	251	70.9	381
Provision of careers information to young person (eg leaflets, websites)	984	1073	109.0	2924	1993	68.2	3066
Group workshop activities (eg promoting skill development)	648	523	80.7	1086	680	62.6	1203

Source: Management information, 2021-2023

3.2.1 One-to-one coaching

All projects in the Fund provided the young people with one-to-one sessions, often mixed with a range of additional activities such as FE/HE and employer visits, which took place around once or twice a term. The one-to-one sessions were considered by multiple projects as being a particularly effective form of guidance delivery which often garnered higher pupil attendance than other delivery activities.

‘For some students who are not good attenders, I think the one-to-one is the one they like attending the most’

Careers Coach

Project snapshot

The North East project’s work with SEND young people both in specialist and mainstream schools was successful due to the relationships that the careers adviser was able to forge with young people. The project lead stated that *‘the engagement with the young people, which is sometimes happening on a day to day basis, has definitely helped the careers adviser develop really good relationships with the young people and has meant that the young people will seek out John* to ask about a course they have found or where to look for resources’*.

*name has been changed

Not only did these sessions provide an opportunity for young people to delve into topics of their interest, but sessions could be highly personalised and flexible. The flexibility of one-to-one sessions can be considered a key means to personalise the experience, achieve outcomes, build impactful relationships and was highly effective across all projects. The ability to be flexible in delivery enabled the coaches/mentors/advisers to adapt their approaches and delivery to suit the needs of each young person they engaged with.

'You set up this, like, coaching role for each kid. Because that's what I'd want my kids to have. And I'd want my kids to be really, really pushed. And given something really good, whether the most academic or the least academic.'

Headteacher

For some projects, such as Hertfordshire, during examination periods, the mentors often found themselves supporting the young people's mental health and wellbeing rather than discussing careers. For other projects such as in Leicester and Leicestershire and the North East that worked with SEND cohorts, it was the ability to adapt the frequency of one-to-one sessions and their duration, to acknowledge the impact that this can have on the young person.

Project snapshot

Leicester and Leicestershire originally planned to carry out termly one-to-one careers education, information advice and guidance (CEIAG) sessions with the young people in the project. Once the project took off and the CEIAG sessions started to take place it soon became apparent that the young people often struggled to focus and deal with one longer session. To tackle this, the Careers Advisers felt that it was more appropriate to adapt these sessions and as such they were typically delivered at least twice per pupil per term. This increased time with Careers Advisers was a key facilitator to pupils devising and following a plan for their post-16 destinations, and also enabled the Careers Advisers to better adapt and modify the sessions to suit the pupils' varied needs.

'I had to come up with creative solutions sometimes, based on the pupils' particular needs. One time I wrote down options for one of them who wasn't very verbal, and then he was able to organise the pieces of papers in relation to what he wanted most.'

Careers Adviser

Building relationships and having consistency was an important factor in being able to deliver the programme of support. Being able to build trust and have a confidante for young people to talk to about their worries or concerns in terms of their post-16 decisions was key. This was recognised by a young person on the fund programme who explained:

'Having chats, building up confidence [in the coaching], so I can be more confident around people and start talking to more people and getting better at relationships.'

Pupil

Project snapshot

The West of England project was part of a depth evaluation, which involved interviews with young people, project staff and stakeholders. In the view of project staff, it was the one-to-one sessions where pupils demonstrated most engagement and these were a vital way to personalise the support that the project could offer. Pupils also expressed positive views about the one-to-one sessions.

John*, said that had liked the one-to-one sessions a lot more than the group sessions. He thought they were very useful because he and the coach talked about his opportunities, *'where I could actually go'*. He said this had been really important to him, as *'I didn't know anything before'*.

Liam*, also reported that he found the one-to-ones 'super helpful'.

'We looked at things I'm good at, bad at, what I enjoy and worked out a career from there. We also talked about how I could improve the things I'm not great at, post-16 options, A level options... It was all very helpful'.

*names have been changed

3.2.2 Group sessions/workshops

Some projects delivered a variety of group sessions/workshops for their pupils. Most of these were delivered as interactive sessions in which group talks would take place with other young people on the programme at the same school. In some Hubs, group sessions were introduced to respond to pupils needs, for example to focus on supporting good mental health or exam support.

Experiences of groups sessions varied across schools and across projects. Group sessions worked well when they were interactive and generic in the topic being delivered, for example, transitions workshops, building confidence, CV writing, and interview preparation. An example of where sessions were made interactive is in the North East project, who during the project started to deliver in the style of themed months – one month there was a focus on job fairs and another a treasure hunt was organised.

3.2.3 Employer encounters and visits

Employer visits and encounters varied across the projects. Some projects aimed to undertake a specified number of employer visits, however once the projects were up and running, they found that this was not feasible. Where employer engagement of any kind worked well, there were pre-existing relationships between the lead organisations (Careers Hubs, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Authorities or County Councils) and the employers. Delivery staff for the projects explained that having existing relationships with local and Cornerstone employers was particularly helpful to the successful delivery of these activities. The projects also helped to educate the employers to better understand the needs of the young people as well as supporting improved work insight for young people.

Employer encounters/visits that worked well were interactive and engaging for the young people, for example, one project had an employer run speed networking sessions with the aim of increasing the confidence of the young people. The delivery staff from across the projects also saw increased awareness of post-16 options by the young people. It was also impactful when young people encountered employers who were similar to them, came from the same area, had similar issues and challenges but became successful despite the barriers they had experienced.

'Because, you know, in theory, we should be pushing on an open door with our Cornerstones employers. And it felt very important to me to link it to the Cornerstones employers, which are often seen as the more aspirational employers'

Employer

Project snapshot

The Applied Creativity Lab (ACL) was implemented in year 11 in the West Yorkshire project. The programme involved participants exploring real-world challenges over multiple sessions with the programme facilitator and visits from experts on the subject. These often centred around issues like pollution, crime, or food waste, with a notable emphasis on climate-related topics due to the positive response from participants in previous runs of the ACL. During these group sessions, participants collaborated to design innovative solutions, fostering creative problem-solving. Subsequently, the participants organised their ideas into a cohesive proposal, culminating in a presentation to external experts who evaluated and provided feedback. Programme facilitators only shared the panels' feedback if it was expected to boost the young people's confidence.

When the pupils from a participating school reached the presentation stage of the Applied Creativity Lab, they became increasingly engaged with the programme. According to their programme facilitator,

'Presenting to adults that weren't from the school terrified them and drove them to put together something that was very high quality...We have an amazing case from this one academy, with a group that presented at a local university. They got really competitive about the presentations with other schools. The feedback that they got from experts was superb. They said, "these girls know so much, these are such good ideas". They were surprised by how well the girls worked on these solutions. They knew more about the topic than they thought they did, and they impressed people that don't expect teenagers to excel in these kinds of topics.'

3.2.4 Further and higher education visits

Visits to further and higher education (FE and HE) institutions were considered by project staff to be beneficial to the young people as they helped to improve aspirations, knowledge of post-16 options/courses and also encouraged engagement in the programme by linking project activities to their next steps. As well as helping the young people to explore options they thought they were interested in, the visits also opened the young people up to different options which they had not considered. Some projects organised for young people to visit FE and HE providers and were supported by widening access partners such as UniConnect. However, other projects left it to the young people to organise their own visits and encouraged them to go with parents/carers. One of the projects that organised extra trips to science festivals, college open days and university

events had not planned to do so but hoped that these would further motivate and engage young people by linking their interests with potential education pathways.

3.2.5 Work placements and work experience

While most projects planned to offer work placements, for many, it was difficult to organise placements for sustained periods. This led to alternative approaches such as sourcing short two-day placements, online work experience, or substituting placements with workplace visits. The project in East Sussex had young people who wanted legal experience with a barrister, however organising this proved a particular challenge. To address this, the project team organised for the young people to sit in on a trial in a courtroom. They were also able to meet with and discuss legal work with the judge. This approach, together with others adopted by the projects, provided young people with innovative solutions where systemic barriers may challenge their opportunities. Where work experience has taken place, it was described as transformational for some young people and given them opportunities that they may have otherwise never received.

Project snapshot

The Lancashire Hub worked with a delivery partner to run extended work placements for young people in the programme.

The Career Leaders experienced initial difficulty in engaging some of the pupils with increased anxiety and behavioural issues in the programme. Staff reported that these issues had become more prevalent since the COVID-19 pandemic, and they were also having to do more preparatory work to get pupils ready for the workplace. Staff and the work experience provider were able to put on additional sessions prior to placements covering timekeeping, use of mobile phones in the workplace and advice about appropriate workplace behaviour.

The work experience provider was able to source suitable placements in most cases and also alternative placements where the original ones broke down. This level of work was only possible due to contracting out this role to a dedicated work experience contractor.

The project delivery team noticed the positive impact that extended work experience had, with some pupils' attendance increasing. Pupils realised the importance of having a school education to get into their preferred careers, and their behaviour improved. The project had examples of pupils being offered apprenticeships and voluntary work as a result of their work experience.

3.2.6 Transition support

The focus for all young people in the project was to achieve a successful and sustainable post-16 destination, this was achieved by over 90% of pupils. The success of this outcome for pupils, all of whom experience disadvantage in some way, is a result of a combination of activities that have addressed the transition process. For many pupils, particularly those with SEND, post-16 transition can present a major life change, for other pupils who have had extensive absenteeism, it can be a new start. Bespoke visits to colleges and employers, workshops on managing stress and anxiety, developing coping strategies and travelling on public transport combined with personalised one-to-one

support all empowered young people and contributed to sustained destinations. While for young people with persistent absence, it did not necessarily cause them to reengage with school, it did give them a focus on their future. Others developed confidence in themselves to make an informed choice about their future and use their career management skills to find alternative options. Furthermore, project staff were able to advocate for young people on their behalf, for example, to post-16 providers to ensure that places on courses were offered.

In addition, some of the projects delivered support over the summer break. This was possible for projects that started later and wanted to continue with the same overall period of delivery. For another project, they utilised qualified careers coaches to support pupils on GCSE results day to support with any changes in plans. The qualified coaches were also employed to help collect destinations data and so were also able to support pupils with extra challenges they were facing in their new setting. Project leads reported that this support made a difference to whether pupils were able to overcome anxieties about going to a new education setting. An example included where a pupil had missed the bus on their first day of college and called their ETF careers coach for advice.

Project snapshot

The Liverpool City Region staff interviews revealed how one student had really benefited from the resilience training/mentor support in ways that they would not have predicted. The young person felt confident enough to change their post-16 destination twice in the space of a few months and is now happy in their final choice. They felt that the ability to do this successfully and confidently would not have been possible prior to the programme delivery.

The impact of transition support was to better prepare young people for their post-16 destinations; they knew what to expect and who to talk to if they were troubled. This is an area which often receives less attention, but it is highly impactful when done well.

Several projects undertook additional activities and delivered support over the summer holidays to aid transition, particularly as a result of having limited access to the cohort during the final term of school due to GCSEs. The London project put on a summer programme to address this with lots of enrichment activities: they took them to employers including a designer fashion brand, a broadsheet newspaper, and a Russell Group university. This helped to keep the young people engaged and maintain relationships. The careers mentors in the Hertfordshire project also engaged pupils over the summer, particularly in terms of support around GCSE results days. The mentors were accessible to pupils via WhatsApp, and the young people were informed of where the mentors would be on results day should they need support or guidance.

Project snapshot

The talent mentors supporting the students in the Hertfordshire project saw their roles change particularly during examination periods where their focus changed from offering CEIAG support to offering general support with managing their examinations. The project lead explained that

'teachers and mentors have said they are noticing clear changes in the cohorts and their attitudes and aspirations. Particularly the development of social and emotional skills has been a

significant outcome...the coping strategies they have been taught and have developed are working as an important factor in facilitating their progress’.

These sessions have consisted of the mentors being a ‘trusted friend’ for the young people and supporting their mental health concerns during this period.

3.2.7 Parental engagement

Parental engagement has been mixed across the 10 projects, although only planned into the design of two of the projects. What worked well was to embed parental engagement from the very outset which led to some positive relationship building and parents feeding back to the delivery team positive messages about their children. For some parents, it was a novel experience to have a positive conversation with project workers about their young person. This also helped to reinforce the benefits of the projects as parents were encouraging their child to be involved and to maximise the opportunity the project offered.

‘We have had some good parental engagement; we make sure they talk to parents regularly through the term. The young people are talking at home about their targets and achieving them’.

Project worker

Where parental engagement had been low in projects intending to achieve this, the projects had resorted to calling the parent/carer of each young person to reach out directly and in some cases, this had positive results. Strategies that worked focussed on modes of flexible communication and adopting a strengths-based approach. This meant parents/carers had regular contact and the discussions focussed on what their young person had done well. The London project for example was able to build positive relationships with many parents through contacting them at times that were more suitable to them such as in the evenings.

3.2.8 ‘Keep in touch’ meetings

‘Keep in touch’ sessions between young people and their coaches, mentors or advisers often developed on an ad hoc basis throughout the delivery. They were used as an alternative format of engaging with young people who were frequently absent from school for various reasons. WhatsApp and text messaging were popular tools used to engage with young people and support them when they were not present in school.

While in many cases there were benefits for the project workers to be seen as separate from school staff, when they were only on the school premises occasionally, this could mean that if a pupil missed their session on that day, they might not engage with the project for most of the term. Some delivery staff also organised to meet the young people off the school premises to get the young person re-engaged. This form of engagement was also used by project and delivery staff across the projects when examinations were taking place, and there was infrequent access to the young people. One project developed a programme of activities offsite to help build relationships with young people and to encourage them to positively engage in the project. This helped to build a

'buddying' relationship between the young people, so there was peer support as well as project worker support.

4 Effecting positive change in young people

As a result of participating in the projects and activities, young people achieved short term (proximal) outcomes that were instrumental to their final destinations. These are explored here, reporting on the statistically significant results from the young person survey (measuring difference between baseline and endline), plus data from the careers worker survey and interview data.

4.1 Awareness and knowledge

Careers coaches aimed to support greater awareness of the range of options available for young people after year 11. Pupils demonstrated their increase in awareness and knowledge of different post-16 education options over time. For example, awareness of apprenticeships increased by 24 percentage points (ppt) during the programme to 91.6% for participants in the mainstream survey. Comparable data from the same question in the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) shows an increase to 81.9% over time.¹³

Increases in understanding of traineeships also compared favourably to national FSQ data – while ETF participants reported lower levels of understanding at the baseline survey, by the endline survey 33.7% of ETF pupils and 35.3% of pupils in the national sample reported a good level of understanding.

For ETF pupils, there was a

- 7.8ppt increase in understanding of A levels over time, ending at 76.6% reporting a good understanding.
- 19.9ppt increase in understanding of BTECs and other vocational qualifications to 58.3% of ETF pupils.
- 29.9ppt increase in understanding of T levels from a low base of 8.3% at baseline understanding this option.

While these figures are lower than the national average, they still show good progress in understanding of different education options over time.

¹³ As the survey included some questions from the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ), pupils' responses to these questions at baseline (Year 10) and midline (Year 11) were compared to those of a national longitudinal sample of 3,939 pupils attending 72 schools.

4.1.1 Knowing their strengths, skills and interests and how these might apply to further learning and work

In interviews, careers coaches reported that they had seen a stark improvement in young people's confidence in their strengths and skills compared to the start of the programme.

'Even the change from January to April, some of the students you can really see them go from being very shy to being interviewed by an employer by themselves. It is very heartwarming'

Careers Adviser

As young people increased their knowledge and employability skills through the projects, coaches saw them increase in confidence as they also recognised their increase in skill. Having a plan and making progress toward it also increased confidence in their abilities.

4.1.2 Being able to identify a career that will allow them to live the life they want to lead

Over nine in ten (93.7%) respondents to the endline careers worker survey reported that young people made progress towards greater clarity on long-term goals and career options.

Interviews with project staff showed that tailored one-to-one support helped young people to have conversations about career goals that gave them time to specifically explore their own goals including career paths, specific professions, and education opportunities.

4.2 Motivations and aspirations

The theory of change also described short term (proximal) outcomes relating to young people becoming more motivated and having more realistic, or in some case raised aspirations. The statistically significant improved measures from the learner survey are reported here.

4.2.1 Feeling motivated to engage in learning

When asked about young people's progress towards increased motivation to engage in learning, the percentage of careers workers responding positively to the survey increased from three quarters (75.7%) in the baseline to 89.8% in the endline survey.

In the depth evaluations where young people were interviewed, they reported that the programme had increased their motivation at school as they now had a better understanding of what they needed to achieve to reach their desired destinations.

'I gained more respect for school because I understand what I need to earn to get into the colleges'

Pupil

Careers adviser interviews suggest that the Autumn and Spring term career sessions were instrumental in raising the pupils' awareness of career paths, which in turn boosted their motivation. This effect seems to have been driven particularly by the mentoring sessions in the Autumn 2022 term.

4.2.2 Being able to see a link between achievements at school and their chosen career goal

Almost all (95.9%) respondents to the careers worker survey thought that young people progressed in making a link between education and work. The interviews with project staff suggested that one-to-one sessions and employer visits helped lead to an increased understanding of how their education pathway could lead to a career they want to pursue.

Project snapshot

For the Leicester and Leicestershire project, focussing on young people with SEND, their work to link young people up with employers helped young people to see how many employers were able to accommodate special needs.

4.2.3 Feeling able to continue to work for their career goal even when they get frustrated or hit a barrier

In the endline careers workers survey, around nine in ten (87.2%) respondents felt positively about young people's progress towards them feeling motivated to work for a career goal even with setbacks. This was a 24ppt increase from the baseline survey.

Project staff reported the increased maturity that young people developed over time, citing the development of social and emotional skills, and improved behaviour as significant outcomes of the activities undertaken. Action planning, vision boards and setting out small steps in one-to-one sessions helped young people visualise their goals and stay motivated in working towards them. This was also the case for some young people who changed their plans, and the one-to-one sessions were instrumental in identifying new alternatives and motivating them to pursue them.

4.3 Taking action

There were two statistically significantly improved proximal outcomes in the learner survey relating to young people being able to take action.

4.3.1 Being confident that they could apply their knowledge of course and jobs to their own situation

Almost all (97.0%) careers workers in the endline survey thought that young people had made progress towards increased knowledge of the availability and suitability of post-16 options. This increased by 25ppt compared to the baseline survey.

Project staff reported that through the variety of activities they led, young people increased their knowledge of both the availability and suitability of opportunities. This developed through the one-to-one sessions and visits to employers, careers fairs and college open days.

4.3.2 Finding it easy to take the action they would need to in order to continue in education or training after school

In the endline careers worker survey, 87.3% of respondents said that young people had improved their perception of how easy it would be to choose and pursue post-16 options, a 15ppt increase from the baseline.

Interviews with young people in the Spring 2023 for the depth evaluations indicated that project sessions led to them feeling more confident about their chosen post-16 destinations because they had been given more time to reflect, make sure they were making the right decision and, in many cases, carry out visits. Project staff reported that one-to-one sessions were important for young people to think of alternative plans that aligned with their needs and abilities.

4.4 Other proximal outcomes

There were two proximal outcomes from the theory of change that did not have direct questions in the young person survey i) increased intent and self-efficacy to explore post-16 options, and ii) improvement in attendance. Most (89.3%) respondents to the endline careers worker survey thought that young people had made progress in their intent and self-efficacy to explore post-16 options. This was an increase of 16ppt from the baseline. The management information recorded the intended destinations: nine in ten young people still enrolled on the projects in the summer term 2023 had an intended destination submitted by the projects.

Improvement in attendance was measured by collecting attendance data each term. While projects hoped that attendance would increase as a result of taking part in the project, and while there was some qualitative data suggesting there had been a positive effect, the data was mixed. Project leads and delivery staff highlighted that it was a very nuanced issue; some young people were struggling in school and subsequently had low attendance rates, while others found it to be a safe haven and had higher attendance rates. It may be that the projects did not improve school attendance but increased likelihood of attendance post-16 because destinations are well matched, however it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to measure.

4.5 Differences by underlying characteristics

As with the outcomes data, there were very few statistically significant differences in responses in the young person survey between pupils with different characteristics. This suggests that the tailored nature of the programme did well in addressing the individual needs of different learners. There was a statistically significant difference to 'feeling able to continue to work for their career goal even when they get frustrated or hit a barrier'.

This was more likely to be reported by young people with higher attendance rates (over 80% attendance in Year 9 compared with an attendance rate of 79% and under), suggesting a relationship between being able to attend school more frequently and being able to continue with their career goals.

4.6 Linking survey measures and outcomes

Analysis revealed that some survey measures were predictors of the outcome measures. A model that combined learner satisfaction with their destination and a tendency to score positively on job focussed survey questions was a statistically significant predictor of initial EET status (September 2023), midpoint EET status (November/December 2023), and also the likelihood of staying in the same EET destination by the six-month tracking point. For example, for each increase in survey scores for satisfaction with the destination, the likelihood of staying in the same EET destination increased in a 4.6:1 ratio.¹⁴ This shows the importance of initial happiness with their chosen destination and their sustained engagement in the same EET destination.

A model with pupils' perceived careers coach support as a predictor of midpoint EET status was also found to be statistically significant. It suggested that for each increase in survey scores around perceptions of careers coach support, the likelihood of being EET in November/December 2023 increased in a 3.6:1 ratio.

¹⁴ Further detail of this testing is provided in the technical report.

5 Barriers to progress

Despite the positive destinations data and positive self-reported measures, there were factors that moderated the progress that could be made: these could be clustered around those affecting the individual and those within the wider system.

5.1 Moderating factors for individuals

As described earlier, the chosen targeting criteria for the ETF projects meant that the cohort generally faced multiple disadvantages. Some targeting criteria created challenges for delivery and continued engagement in the projects.

5.1.1 Mental health

Multiple projects reported young people struggling with mental health and low confidence, often resulting in high anxiety levels. The consequence of this was that projects faced struggles with engaging young people in certain activities. This affected work experience and placements, where attendance could be poor. Projects reported anxiety and confidence levels as being a key factor, with some young people being described as not ready to be in a workplace. This was common with SEND pupils, particularly in specialist support. SEND pupils in mainstream provision had fewer additional support needs therefore fewer barriers than those in specialist provision.

On identifying these high levels of anxiety, projects adapted activities to better suit young people, with examples including shorter work placements, or more workplace visits instead, and increasing support given to the young people to acknowledge these concerns and issues.

'Proper work experience isn't going to work for all young people at that school, but what is working is visits. It doesn't have to be all or nothing, there is something in between.'

Careers Adviser

5.1.2 Group dynamics

Group dynamics were a moderating factor for individuals and led to adjustments being made where group sessions and workshops were being delivered. Projects reported there could be friction among some young people resulting in groups being split up and sessions being delivered to smaller groups at a time. Careers Coaches in one project noted how sometimes it was the case that

'the pupils did not get along, or just were not able to gel and remained mostly silent around each other'.

Careers Coach

This affected the dynamics of the groups, attendance at sessions, and engagement. Having said this, other projects found group sessions to be a positive experience where the young people gave peer-to-peer support and acted as positive reinforcement. This suggests the need to consider who to include in which groups and the best way for them to work together.

Delivery staff also noted how there were difficulties in engaging pupils in group sessions where topics/sector did not align with pupils' interests. There was acknowledgement that it was difficult to satisfy the needs and interests of all the young people in groups focussed on employment options given preferences and aspirations varied. Personalisation was central to meeting young people's needs and keeping them engaged.

5.1.3 Pupils with complex additional support needs

The complexity of additional support needs of pupils taking part was frequently noted as a barrier to progression, particularly for young people with SEND or an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). This was firstly because until the project started delivery there was not an in-depth understanding of how complex some of the needs were, including pupils who were non-verbal. As such, adaptations to delivery and materials were frequently made to suit the needs of each pupil.

Project snapshot

Gina*, a Careers Adviser in the Leicester and Leicestershire project, started developing booklets for the young people to use for the duration of the programme, based on their specific interests and needs. These adapted the programme content to what she saw as a more suitable format, such as using tick boxes and exploring their skills through accessible examples, like everyday responsibilities they carry out at home. She regularly adapted the activities to the interests and immediate challenges the pupil was facing.

'A lot of research goes into tailoring the sessions for every particular student'.

*name has been changed

Pupils with low attendance were a focus for only two of the projects, however persistent non-attendance became a barrier for most of the projects over time. It was a constant challenge to meet up with these pupils on the school premises. A project that included low attendance as a target group had plans for how to keep in touch with pupils and their parents, with delivery staff needing patience and persistence to work with pupils off-site if necessary. However, where projects that had not intended to have a cohort with low attendance started experiencing this with their pupils, it took time for them to find successful strategies. Projects found that absence was often an identifier of underlying complex needs including in the household context, such as relationships, socio-economic

disadvantage, or in the individual, such as undiagnosed SEND or worsening mental health and anxiety.

Additionally, young people with identified SEND or an EHCP, often experienced illnesses and hospital visits which took priority and reduced attendance on the project. The North East project found that it was more difficult to keep young people in specialist schools engaged because some pupils were frequently off school with a variety of different health and wellbeing needs.

In some cases, schools had safeguarding concerns for young people, which meant they were unable to be released for activities away from school premises.

5.1.4 Transportation

Transportation was both a systems and individual barrier. The prohibitive costs of transporting pupils outside school affected some of the activities that projects could offer.

Public transport was an issue for many young people, particularly those in rural areas, and some pupils with SEND. In one area Local Authorities no longer provided bus passes for SEND pupils, which meant some parents struggled to pay for travel. This resulted in barriers for pupils attending college or other post-16 destinations without funding.

Travelling by public transport caused anxiety for pupils who were not used to it. To address this some projects provided support to pupils which included travel training, accompanying them on buses and helping them to build their confidence to travel alone.

5.2 System barriers

In the wider system, progress could be derailed where projects could not foster sufficient support from schools or wider stakeholders. A range of systemic barriers were identified. These provided learning for all the projects and for CEC and have been considered in project design for the second wave of ETF funding.

5.2.1 Delays in contracting and fund management

While some projects initiated delivery relatively seamlessly in the Autumn term of 2022, others faced delays with contracting which had a knock-on effect on recruitment and delivery. Projects found that the delays meant that schools could be reticent to adapt to the changes. While some projects had planned to deliver a two-year programme, in actuality delivery commenced in summer term of Year 10, resulting in a 12-month programme. The concentration of delivery in Year 11 was also hampered by the key stage 4 examination period. For example, one project aiming to deliver long-term work experience found that in Year 11 this did not work well, and many placements broke down during mock exams as pupils took time out for revision and employers were not aware of the reasons for their absence.

5.2.2 School support

Schools are busy and structured environments, and the requirements of the projects were secondary to school priorities. There were considerable challenges that projects had to overcome including accessing data, young people, IT equipment and appropriate space. There were frequent examples of pupils not turning up to sessions, employer engagement activities being cancelled (when the employer was on site) and projects losing momentum due to school staffing changes.

Organising and agreeing with schools for the release of the young people frequently caused issues and projects reported it was difficult to work around timetabling to schedule activities. This resulted in delays to activities and was a particular problem during examination time, including mock GCSEs which were not on the projects' radar or pupils' timetables. This meant that delivery staff found themselves having to actively track down pupils who had missed sessions, resulting in duplication of activity.

5.2.3 Staff turnover in delivery organisations

Consistency in delivery staff was a key enabler in the successful delivery of the projects and engagement of young people. Where barriers emerged for some projects was where there was staff turnover in the delivery organisations, resulting in the young people losing a trusted careers coach. While projects worked hard to integrate new staff and ensure that young people were updated and reassured, it meant new staff had to spend time rebuilding the confidence and trust of the young people.

5.2.4 Knowledge and expertise of delivery staff

The need for knowledgeable and experienced delivery staff was reported by both projects with a SEND delivery focus. While they acknowledged the positive work that delivery staff had undertaken, there were concerns over being able to recruit staff that already had the required levels of knowledge about SEND and EHCPs that was needed. Stakeholders to these projects noted the need for delivery staff to understand: the complexities associated with having SEND and an EHCP, how to work with SEND young people, and the logistical and policy concerns in this space. Projects identified a risk for future iterations of such projects focussed on SEND, where there is a lack of experienced careers advisers able to meet the varied and complex needs of the pupils on the programme, highlighting the need for greater numbers of well-trained careers professionals.

5.3 Overcoming barriers

5.3.1 Individual

Although potential barriers were identified within the projects' theories of change, they were limited in what they could do to affect change outside of the scope of delivery or address personal contexts. Within-project delivery mitigations focussed on two key

interventions; the persistence of the careers workers to foster young people's engagement, and the integrity of the project staff in delivering what they promised to young people. These combined with the longevity of the projects and the skills and expertise of the project delivery staff contributing to developing relationships with young people that have changed their lives.

Holistic approaches

Holistic approaches were adopted to support the young people within their own contexts. The project workers were able to respond to emotional difficulties that young people brought to sessions and were accepting of them. They provided the support the young person needed at that time, for example for pupils who were not attending school they helped them focus on the future and plan for what they could do next – *'it was important to keep the conversation going'*. This future focus was highly important and helped the young people to plan their next step, apply for college and to achieve a successful transition. For pupils with SEND, a key issue was being able to explain their needs. This, for some, was the key for a successful transition. If they could not explain what they needed, they would be less likely to achieve in their new post-16 environment.

Integrity was central to establishing trusting relationships with the young people. Project workers endeavoured, and in the main succeeded, in doing what they said they would do, and young people trusted them to deliver. This resulted in young people feeling they had someone on their side, someone who cared about their future. Interviewees highlighted the importance for young people of having careers coaches who keep their word, follow through and do what they said they would.

'With these young people, consistency is very important. It's about building trust. Once they know you're not going to leave they open up. If they know you're going to come when you say you're going to come that changes things, they open up.'

Careers Coach

The young person survey analysis shows that there was a statistically significant improvement in the scores for the questions about coach support:

- Feeling listened to and supported when considering their future.
- Feeling that they had a trusted adult that they could talk to about their future plans (e.g. coach).

The careers worker survey also found increases in these questions over time.¹⁵ In addition, there were many anecdotes of pupils contacting project workers on results day, admitting they needed more help as they had not got their first choice or calling to tell them they had missed their bus to college and were worried they would be in trouble if they arrived late. These all demonstrated an important relationship had been established.

¹⁵ The number of respondents meant that it was not possible to test this for statistical significance.

Project snapshot

The ETF project in Dorset focussed on working with young people who were at the greatest risk of becoming NEET. Working with each student holistically as an individual providing intensive career counselling was an important part of the programme, which was informed by the COM-B model. To provide a more integrated approach for students, careers advisers set up WhatsApp groups with the young person, the careers adviser and their parent. This helps to provide the support for young people when they are transitioning to their post-16 destination as the young person can contact someone directly.

Being reactive to young people's needs ensured the projects integrated activities that they recognised the young people needed. Additional workshops, particularly addressing managing stress, anxiety and transition were added to one programme using matched funding to ensure the young people were able to effectively transition.

Personalisation

Personalisation to meet young people's needs was central to ensuring project success.

'It's personalisation for everybody and starting it early enough to make a difference. Because...I've got a really strong view that careers is done incredibly badly in lots of schools. And I'm quite convinced that we don't do it in that way. We do it really well.'

Headteacher

Although project delivery plans had been established at the start of the project, personalisation and being flexible were paramount. Young people were more likely to engage in employer events if they had an interest in the occupation/sector, project staff invested time and resource in understanding young people's interests and recruiting employers who would fit the brief.

The young person survey analysis showed that 'being aware of some of the types of businesses or employers in their area' and 'being able to identify employer and organisations relevant to their career interests' increased statistically significantly over time – meaning that the projects had a proven effect on pupils' job focus.

Recruiting employers relevant to pupils' career interests was highly successful in projects with a work experience focus where engagement was enhanced for those who were matched to jobs they were interested in. Shortening placements to aid accessibility was another positive example.

Representation

Additional to this was the importance of representation, specifically young people seeing, interacting, and being mentored by people like them. This was explored in 3.1.3 where the importance of selecting the right employers and role models to exemplify aspiration was highlighted. Where projects used partners who were relatable to the young people, they

not only increased aspiration, but helped young people explore options they might not have previously considered such as going to university or working for a firm in the City.

Project snapshot

The London project focussed on supporting excluded young black men in alternative provision (AP) or at risk of exclusion. The programme adopted multiple methods to demonstrate positive examples of representation and role models, including mentoring by successful young black men, peer support, the project progression coaches and opportunities to meet with successful black men working with high profile London based companies.

‘For those that engage, representation is a massive thing. They need to see people who look like them. This helps their confidence to grow and encourages progression. When they walk into a workplace and see young black men it makes a difference’.

Progression Coach

Exposure to positive experiences with people who looked like and sounded like the pupils helped to raise aspiration and contribute to increased self-worth.

5.3.2 System-level solutions

School relationships

Maintaining relationships with schools was challenging at times and a key success criterion. Projects that generally were able to deliver over two years were those with existing and good working relationships with schools. Through understanding school culture and meeting regularly with senior leaders, projects were able to ensure support and staff resources were available. In turn schools valued the project and more importantly saw that it was making a difference. Successful projects in this regard made sure they were meeting senior leaders termly and contacting them when problems arose. Relationships with Careers Leaders were vitally important, as was building connections with other staff to support the project, such as pastoral staff. These could make sure that young people were directed to attend sessions, demonstrating through conversations with young people that the projects were ‘joined up’ with school activities and acted as important administrative support to the data collection required by the evaluation.

Creativity

Creativity and flexibility, especially around helping young people to access employer-related opportunities was central to success. Where pupils had specific requests such as legal or fashion, it was harder to secure work placements. The project in East Sussex developed a programme of activities which included visiting a textile company for a young person interested in fashion. This experience provided the young person with a broader view of the fashion industry and also the employer gave them lots of fabrics to take away and use to experiment with to continue their interest. In London, the project accessed an opportunity for their group of young black men to attend a black-tie business event; there

was no funding to support this, so the project crowd-sourced the necessary monies. This presented the group with examples of representation and successful role models. This experience offered the young men an opportunity they were unlikely to have in their 'normal' school lives. The projects were highly inventive in creating resources such as Leicester and Leicestershire's 'Unbox your Future'¹⁶ which has raised aspirations for many of the SEND young people in the project.

¹⁶ Unbox your Future is a four-week careers and employability programme.
<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/unbox-your-future-resource>

6 Key lessons

Key lessons can be drawn from the success of the projects and the high level of sustained post-16 destinations. Many of these are inter-related and the importance of the relationships between the young people and project staff cannot be underestimated.

6.1 Project Preparation

While the project incubation period was welcomed by many projects, others felt it distracted them from getting started. However, shaping a theory of change helped to deliver successful, well thought through projects and changed how they now plan new projects. Lessons here focus on the importance of having identified schools, preferably ones where relationships exist. Projects and funders should not underestimate the amount of time required to ensure that the required data protection agreements and memoranda of understanding are put in place. It was essential to ensure that schools understood the data they were expected to provide and the relevant timelines.

6.2 Building support networks in schools

Support from senior leaders was a key requirement for projects to function well. In addition, 'buy-in' from a wider range of school staff was beneficial. Having a dedicated person to work with the project who could make sure pupils were where they needed to be, had dedicated space and supported data provision was essential. Working with pastoral staff, SENCOs, and as part of interagency teams contributed to a more holistic approach. Therefore, ensuring that all staff who had pupils on the project were aware of it and understood the commitment enhanced the experience for pupils and reduced duplication of resource for careers workers.

6.3 Responding to young people's needs

Flexibility was a key requirement: both from CEC through the commissioning process and the projects being able to respond to the needs of the pupils and the environment. A flexible mindset from the start contributed to organic developments and ensured that review and reflection were central to project success.

The specific needs of the pupils have become evident as the projects have evolved. Young people with SEND have complex needs which needed further consideration, resulting in changes in length of time of coaching sessions and work-related activities. The bitesize approach has worked well and ensured pupils are not overwhelmed. Other needs around mental health, anxiety about transition and post COVID-19 socialisation, all necessitated additional activities to build confidence and resilience. In addition, the

careers coaches introduced new sessions, and brought in guest speakers to hold interest for their cohorts, increasing relevance and delivering increased awareness of future career paths which boosted motivation.

The reactive nature of the projects has ensured that young people's real needs as opposed to their perceived needs have been addressed as they have been identified. This has been exemplified in the realism that careers coaches brought to the conversations with young people, who in the large majority have sustained EET destinations, yet they are studying at a lower level than they anticipated and in some cases at different provider types. Importantly, they are happy with these destinations.

6.4 Persistence and integrity (having the right people)

Relationships between careers coaches and young people have been central to the success of the Effective Transitions Fund. The longitudinal nature of the project allowed careers workers who were in post for the duration to build trusting relationships over time. The role of a trusted adult was exemplified as someone who cared about the young person's future, who demonstrated integrity (they did what they said they would do), they were a positive role model, provided holistic support based on the young person's needs and persistently attempted to meet the young where they were. Careers workers were not seen as school staff, which raised their profile with young people and parents. Careers workers offered a mix of skills and experience, some were professionally qualified careers advisers, others were specialist NEET workers. They demonstrated the values, skills and experience to deliver personalised, client-centred approaches.

6.5 Supporting the transition

The Fund originally conceptualised the support offered as being delivered over two full years in Year 10 and Year 11. Due to some of the delays in starting delivery this model changed, with some projects mitigating for this by continuing support over the summer break and into the 2023 academic year. While this was outside of the original delivery model, project leads reported benefits to the approach. The delivery over the summer period allowed for meeting outside of school premises in more informal settings. On GCSE results day, coaches were available to support pupils to change their plans or advocate on their behalf to post-16 providers if achieved grades were not as expected. For a small number of individuals, the relationship with the coach meant the difference between making it to the first day of their post-16 course or not. Future iterations of support focussed on transitions into post-16 should consider how this extended support can be planned from the beginning of the projects and workshops included to address young people's transition concerns and to help them find solutions.

6.6 Working with Employers

The established network of the Cornerstone employers was highly effective in delivering employer engagement for young people. The impacts were four-fold: young people gained work experience or accessed employer visits, role models inspired them, they

developed a deeper understanding of local industries and an enhanced knowledge of careers generally. There were unintended impacts for employers who developed relationships with the local community, a talent pipeline, and a better understanding of the needs of local young people. This was particularly evident with employers working with SEND schools and young people. The ETF projects presented as many benefits for employers as for the young people, which will support sustainable employer relationships for the Careers Hubs.

6.7 Working with parents

Parents are considered the primary influence on young people's career decision making and positive reinforcement by parents can be both powerful and undermining. For many projects, working with parents was a challenge, with an underestimation of the complexity of building positive relationships. Despite the progress made, there is still learning to be achieved about the most effective way to engage with parents on projects such as this.

Where projects were more successful in engaging parents, it was due to building relationships with parents from the start. Being able to contact them directly (rather than schools communicating on their behalf) helped, as did identifying appropriate modes of communication. Telephone and WhatsApp were most effective, emails were not, and contacting them in the evenings helped. Positive relationships helped the project through positive reinforcement by parents, and also helped when collecting final destination data.

6.8 Conclusions

The first phase of the Effective Transition Fund has achieved substantial outcomes for groups of young people who are multiply-disadvantaged. Evidence drawn from existing literature and comparable national data indicate that the outcomes far exceed what might have been expected for the groups receiving support.

The aim of the fund was to support young people into better quality post-16 destinations, marked by sustained engagement in their destinations and self-reported satisfaction. On these measures, the projects have been successful with 91.7% of pupils in a sustained EET destination. The surveys of young people show that around 90% were happy with their choice of post-16 destination, over 90% were happy with their main subjects/course, and around 95% were happy with their college or training provider¹⁷.

While there were some commonalities among the cohorts taking part (namely, eligibility for free school meals), there were also key differences in characteristics that projects targeted, ranging from having an EHCP in place, to low self-esteem. It is important to note that not all of the young people when selected to take part were on track to become NEET. Given the diversity in the cohort, the activities delivered through the Fund have been diverse. Importantly, they have often been tailored to individuals' potential career paths and organised by dedicated careers workers who have developed relationships of

¹⁷ Approximate figures are used here in lieu of listing the score from both the mainstream and SEND version of the survey – detailed percentages are given earlier in the report.

trust with pupils over time. Statistical testing of the survey results and outcomes data show little if any variation by pupil characteristics, showing that this tailoring has been impactful.

The evaluation of the Fund aimed to add to the evidence base about how young people can be more effectively supported. Following on from research from the Behavioural Insight Team, which recommended a methodological framework for evaluating such career support interventions, the evaluation was based on programme theory and utilised theory of change in the approach. Overall, the evidence shows that the causal pathways in the theory of change are an effective guide to the operation of the fund and that there is confidence in the predictive power of the theory. The strongest mechanisms from the young person survey data are those that relate to coach support and the young people having a job focus. Some new mechanisms have also emerged – the integrity of the coach (keeping their word), improvements in behaviour, and engaged school staff.

For funders, project leads and delivery teams, the lessons drawn out from this research will enable young people to be supported effectively. CEC is currently working with JPMorganChase on a second iteration of the Effective Transitions Fund and many of these findings have already been incorporated into the planning for the next wave of delivery.

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Inclusive Terminology

The terminology used to define ethnicity continues to evolve, and greater awareness has arisen about gender, cognitive differences as well as of disability. IES seeks to be a learning organisation; as such we are adapting our practice in line with these shifts. We aim to be specific when referring to each individual's ethnicity and use their own self-descriptor wherever possible. Where this is not feasible, we are aligned with Race Disparity Unit (RDU) which uses the term 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all ethnic groups except white British. RDU does not use the terms BAME (black, Asian, and minority ethnic) or BME (black and minority ethnic) as these terms emphasise certain ethnic groups and exclude others. It also recommends not capitalising ethnic groups, (such as 'black' or 'white') unless that group's name includes a geographic place. More broadly, we understand that while individuals may have impairments it is society that disables them, hence we refer to disabled people. Not all people identify with male or female and we reflect their self-descriptions in our work and use the term non-binary should abbreviation be necessary. We value neurodiversity. Where possible we always use people's self-descriptors rather than impose categories upon them.

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