RRON Overall Evaluation Report

November 2021

Wavehill: social and economic research

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Introduction

In November 2017, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC), on behalf of six regional operations and the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO), commissioned Wavehill to undertake an evaluation of the six regional operations throughout Wales that aim to reduce the number of 11–24 year-olds who are at risk of becoming NEET. The six regional operations are funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and, specifically, the European Social Fund (ESF).

This report provides an overarching review of the evaluation findings across all six regional operations.

It reviews programme delivery between Summer 2020 and Autumn 2021. This covered a period significantly affected by lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that meant schools and colleges faced rolling periods of closure, delivery of support moved predominantly online or was severely curtailed, and access to some participants was restricted.

Findings and Conclusions

Design
The RRON operations have been designed in a manner that builds on learning from previous operations with an emphasis on flexibility in provision to be as reflective of participant needs as possible. Operations have sought to offer wide-ranging provision to meet this challenge with the flexibility built within operations to respond to participant needs and to adjust to changing contextual situations within which the operations are based.

The planning and design of provision has been undertaken in manner that has sought to, where necessary, fill gaps in the overall support landscape within target areas, particularly amongst the 11-16 cohort.

16-24 cohort delivery has built on existing capacity to address the wellbeing needs of young people, enhancing the pastoral care support and, in some areas, providing counselling provision. For Careers Wales, again the provision offers similar added value, building capacity to deliver additional employment-orientated services to young people, particularly those in year 10 and 11.

Early identification and assessment
The approach to assessing level of risk to identify eligible participants for regional operations varies amongst JBs who target support at 11-16 year olds. Whilst risk is framed primarily around indicators associated with attainment, attendance and behaviour, different approaches to data capture (particularly around behaviour) mean that it is not possible to apply a consistent approach to measuring risk. Some JBs have also utilised supplementary indicators in the aim of refining the risk assessment of potential participants. The

interpretation and scoring of these risk factors also vary leading to fluctuation in the determination of risk and therefore the threshold of eligibility for participating in an RRON intervention.

The role and nature of professional judgement (a key feature of identification models during the pandemic) in assessing risk also varies considerably between regional operations (and to a more limited extent within operations). The majority of JBs identified the value of this element in supplementing assessments of risk and in enabling a more nuanced approach to the risk assessment to refine assessments of eligibility. The integration of professional judgement appeared to be particularly useful when incorporated into multi-agency panel meetings (or similar).

For 16-24 year olds EITs are used to some extent within FE Colleges, there is a greater reliance on referrals from tutors, other staff members, or through young people self-referring to the service provision than for younger age groups. In these instances, the EIT is sometimes used retrospectively to illustrate the scoring criteria. The reliance upon tutors for referrals illustrates the importance of their role and of their awareness of the provision available.

The delivery of the operation

Participants have presented additional, more complex needs than anticipated at business planning stage which has necessitated longer term support than the operations had anticipated. Some operations have described how the Covid-19 pandemic has accentuated these issues, particularly those associated with a young person's mental wellbeing, and had a temporary impact on referral numbers to the operations and on the ability to engage with participants with a virtual approach to service delivery forced upon the delivery teams.

As social restrictions have eased a blended model of service delivery has typically been delivered and whilst this approach has provided efficiencies on sustaining engagement with some young people, for those new to the provision, virtual mechanisms for engagement have proved problematic. That said, for those with caring responsibilities or who are anxious about going to a specific setting, this model of delivery has proved a useful approach.

More widely, the transition to virtual delivery has created efficiencies in relation to multi-agency panel meetings, which have typically shifted online, avoiding the need to travel for delivery staff and allowing them to use the time gained to deliver additional support provision to young people.

There is a wide range of service provision available to young people, however the key worker approach and the intensity of support provided through this model is widely valued by participants and staff. Staff described participants' easy access to staff, the trusting relationship built between participants and staff and the tailored and flexible nature of support as responding directly to participant needs and providing positive and sustainable outcomes.

The accessibility of that support though is a key factor in the success of the regional operation with staff highlighting the importance of their availability and of the ability to deliver service provision in a discreet location for the young person.

The importance of building trust and a strong rapport with young people was expressed by the vast majority of staff. For some operations, the delivery staff cited the important role of their distance travelled/soft outcomes tool in facilitating that discussion. Staff also described how subsequent usage of the star assessment generated more accurate readings, providing justification for its repeated usage throughout a young person's journey through the provision.

Stakeholders also praised operations for effectively 'filling a gap' in the services available through schools, colleges and other organisations and providing an essential service in a readily available fashion.

The additional emphasis on wellbeing support, in response to a growing concern around young people's mental health and wellbeing and where operations were able or had sufficient resource to redirect to this agenda was valued by delivery staff. Staff described how it had ensured that there is a 'go to' person in each education setting that is embedded within that educational context, encouraging participants to trust that they can go to them if needed which in circumstances around mental health can be an important mitigation for a worsening of such conditions for a young person.

Outcomes, impacts and contribution towards CCTs

Regional operations are performing reasonably well against target result indicators, particularly when the challenges associated with COVID-19 are taken into consideration. Where regional operations are compared there is considerable variation in the proportion of participants expected to secure a result indicator and also in terms of the profile of service delivery with little clarity as to why this variation exists.

The pandemic has impacted on the ability to use key data for determining risk (and for recording a reduction in that risk), however there has been considerable flexibility from WEFO on this matter enabling the use of other mechanisms to inform this judgement, aiding JBs.

Participants and stakeholders are widely consistent in the perceptions on the role and added value of support received. They all refer to the one-to-one relationships and the role these play in creating a positive environment for young people with support helping their confidence and self-esteem. The data also shows that amongst past participants a high proportion of young people remain within some form of EET. The past participants place a high level of attribution to the support they received.

Delivery against cross cutting themes is variable with the strongest examples being provided of successful activities against equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, and sustainable development. Further examples showing performance against themes - promotion of the Welsh Language; tackling poverty and social exclusion, and particularly the Future Wellbeing of Generations Act where no specific examples have yet been identified.

1 Introduction

In November 2017, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC), on behalf of six regional operations and the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO), commissioned Wavehill to undertake an evaluation of the six regional operations throughout Wales that aim to reduce the number of 11–24 year-olds who are at risk of becoming NEET.

The six regional operations are funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and, specifically, the European Social Fund (ESF) with the aim 'to invest in our young people to create a vibrant and responsive workforce with the skills needed to respond to the needs of a challenging knowledge-based economy'.

One of the Specific Objectives under this Priority Axis is to 'reduce the number of those who are most at risk of becoming NEET, amongst 11-24 year olds'.

The operations are managed by "lead beneficiaries" responsible for coordinating activity and running the operation. To deliver on their objectives, the lead beneficiary works with several joint beneficiaries (as set out in Table 1.1 below), including other local authorities, Careers Wales, and local FE institutions.

Table 1.1: The six regional operations

Operation	Lead beneficiary	Joint beneficiaries
TRAC East Wales (TRAC EW)	Denbighshire County Council	Flintshire County Council Wrexham County Borough Council Coleg Cambria Careers Wales
TRAC West Wales and the Valleys (TRAC WWV)	Denbighshire County Council	Denbighshire County Council Conwy County Borough Council Gwynedd County Council Anglesey County Council Grwp Llandrillo Menai Careers Wales
Inspire 2 Achieve (I2A) East Wales	Newport City Council	Newport City Council City of Cardiff Council Monmouthshire County Council The Vale of Glamorgan Council Coleg Gwent Cardiff and Vale College Careers Wales

Operation	Lead beneficiary	Joint beneficiaries	
Inspire 2 Achieve (I2A) West Wales and the Valleys[1]	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council[2] Bridgend County Borough Council Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Torfaen County Borough Council Coleg y Cymoedd Coleg Gwent The College, Merthyr Tydfil Careers Wales	5
Cynnydd East Wales	Powys County Council	Powys County Council Careers Wales	
Cynnydd West Wales and the Valleys	Pembrokeshire County Council	Pembrokeshire County Council Carmarthenshire County Council Coleg Sir Gâr Ceredigion County Council Coleg Ceredigion Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Neath Port Talbot Group of Colleges City and County of Swansea Gower College Swansea Pembrokeshire College Careers Wales	

1.1 Research objectives

The evaluation has been commissioned to provide a critical assessment of the Regional Operation (and the various approaches within each operation), examining issues associated with:

- The planning, implementation and management of the six regional operation teams and the associated monitoring systems used to manage and monitor operational performance.

- The early identification and assessment tools used in identifying and monitoring those participants considered to be most at risk and in measuring/demonstrating the reduction in risk.

- The delivery of the operation — the suitability of the interventions offered to the needs of the participants.

- An assessment of the short- and medium-term outcomes of the operations and, if possible, the longer-term impacts of the operations for the participants and their

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[1] Caerphilly County Borough Council plans to begin its I2AWWV delivery during September 2021

[2] Based on a further review of business plans for each regional operation, only Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council would appear to operate as a Lead and Joint Beneficiary.

employment or engagement within education (and any demographic variations in performance).

- The contribution of the operations to the crosscutting themes set out by the WEFO associated with equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, sustainable development, and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Each operation has also identified a sixth, regionally specific issue that the regional reports are each tasked with responding to.

Since the commencement of the evaluation, the regional operations applied for — and secured — extensions to their operational timeframes. The extension to operational timeframes enabled a restructure of the evaluation to incorporate this second interim evaluation phase with the revised end dates now being:

- TRAC EW – summer 2022
- TRAC WWV – summer 2022
- I2A EW – December 2022
- I2A WWV – December 2022[3]
- Cynnydd WWV – December 2022
- Cynnydd EW – March 2023 (subject to confirmation of an extension)

1.2 Reporting

The planned phasing and scope of each evaluation phase are as follows:

- **Inception report** — **completed in autumn 2018** — which summarised the approach to each regional operation, particularly the early identification and assessment tools for identifying the risk of becoming NEET and then accounting for any change in that risk. Moreover, the report set out the theory of change and evaluation framework for all regional operations.

- **First interim report (all operations)** — **completed spring 2020** — which explored the implementation and delivery processes of each operation (and each joint beneficiary within each operation) up until the end of the 2019 academic year.

- **Second interim report (this report)** — **planned for completion by summer 2021** — this phase of the evaluation aimed to capture detailed evidence on the delivery models, progress and success of each regional operation based on a range of fieldwork with those referring to, delivering and receiving support through the regional operations. The Covid-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on delivery of the programme, it also restricted fieldwork for the evaluation to the summer term 2021. Prior to the summer term (and just prior to the second and third waves of the pandemic) an additional reporting phase for the evaluation took place which culminated in a report in January 2021. This focussed on the impact and operational response to the pandemic.

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[3] I2A WWV have submitted a further application for a no cost delivery extension to March 2023 with project closure scheduled for May/June 2023.

This report draws together and summarises the key findings from the five regional reports to represent an overarching, interim report for the programme.

- **Final reports** — a final evaluation will involve fieldwork through the 2021/22 academic year with participants, detailed analysis of patterns of success in the performance of the operation, and where possible, identification of the scale and nature of impact and legacy plans associated with each operation.

1.3 Methodological Approach

1.3.1 Methodological Overview

The second interim evaluation has involved:

- A **desk review** of key management, delivery and monitoring systems for each regional operation in order to aid the measurement and assessment of patterns in the performance and progress against targets.

- Virtual **interviews (telephone and via MS Teams) with 188 staff involved in the management and delivery of services**. A portion of these were delivered in autumn 2020 to capture perspectives and feedback on the early impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of the operation and to explore what would be the most suitable way to engage with participants once lockdown restrictions had eased. Interviews conducted in the spring of 2021 have focused on the processes adopted in the delivery model for the regional operation, revisited the impact and influence of COVID-19 on the delivery model, explored key areas of success or improvement and discussed the potential legacy of the regional operation.

- **Interviews with 272 current participants**, either on a one-to-one basis or through focus groups (all delivered virtually), to gather their feedback on the provision that they have received and the perceived usefulness of this service. These interviews were supplemented by an online survey distributed to current participants which secured 334 responses. The survey included a similar emphasis to the virtual interviews albeit with an emphasis on 'closed answer' questions to aid the analysis of responses and collective equates to the engagement of over **600 current participants of RRON operations**.

- An online survey of **116 past participants** to gather their reflections on the support they received and its impact.

- Virtual interviews (telephone and via MS Teams) with **192 'partner stakeholders'** to capture their perspectives on the role and added value offered by [regional operation] alongside their views on the effectiveness of the delivery model.

Methodological limitations

The previous phase of the evaluation found engagement with participants of the programme a challenge. The design of the evaluation had focussed on 'in-person' engagement often tied in with observational research of service delivery. When coordinating observational visits, the primary model of participant engagement with most Joint Beneficiaries was found to be one-to-one rather than through one to many (group session) delivery, with attendance at one-to-one sessions by a participant, variable. Identifying suitable slots to shadow and observe service delivery and engage with participants was therefore found to be problematic and sometimes resulted in little (and rarely, any) engagement with participants. On reflection, this approach to participant engagement was limited in both its efficiency and effectiveness with the interim evaluation suffering from low volumes of participant feedback to draw upon.

To address this issue, the methodological design for this phase of the evaluation placed emphasis on flexibility of engagement, encouraging the use of virtual engagement and recording of participant experiences (through, for example video diaries), providing survey tools, and engaging with participants at multiple points during their support to better understand the journey and benefit of the support on that individual. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that it was not possible to engage with participants until they had returned to school in April 2021 whilst FE Colleges have retained a blended delivery model throughout the 2020-21 academic year. Virtual means of engagement have therefore remained the prime vehicle for delivering fieldwork with engagement restricted to a narrow window between May and July 2021.

Where participants were identified for one to one (virtual interviews) the evaluation team have been reliant upon delivery staff identifying and recruiting participants to participate in the interviews. It is possible that the interviewed participants were selected because of their progress through the support or because they face fewer complex challenges than other participants.

1.3.2 Report Structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:
- **Section 2** – summarises the contextual situation (and specifically that relating to COVID-19) within which the regional operations are being delivered.
- **Section 3** - provides an overview of the various Regional Operations outlining any differences in approach
- **Section 4** – explores how the delivery models have evolved over time, reflecting on the challenges and opportunities faced and the role these played in influencing the approach to delivery
- **Section 5** – summarises the performance against target for each operation and explores the perceived impact of support amongst participants, staff and wider stakeholders.
- **Section 6** – provides a series of conclusions and recommendations on the research.

2 Context

2.1 COVID-19

On the 23^{rd of} March 2020, the first national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was announced by the UK Government. [4] This meant that all UK households were required to remain at home and not mix with individuals outside their household for a period unspecified at the time.

Of particular importance to the RRON operations was the fact that all schools and colleges shifted to remote learning, presenting significant challenges to accessing the young people they were working with, or those subsequently referred to them. However, all had been making some preparations for restrictions on access to participants from early March 2020, although none had forecast the 'full' lockdown that came into effect in late March.

Some easing of the restrictions for schools and colleges was announced in early June 2020 with a return for small cohorts of students taking place at further education colleges from 15th June, and schools from 29th June.[5] This was intended to enable students and staff to prepare for the full return to education from September 2020 and for most schools meant around a third of all students being in school at any one time for a period of three weeks[6]. However, during this time, outside organisations (including teams of the Regional Operations) were not permitted to enter schools to work with supported pupils.

Local lockdowns were subsequently adopted in the autumn term in response to local spikes in coronavirus cases which restricted the ability of individuals to enter or leave a local authority area. Whilst educational establishments remained open (in the main) during this period, FE Colleges operated with either a remote delivery model or a blended learning approach whilst secondary schools operated with strict class bubbles, placing constraints on support workers engaging with target pupils.

On the 23^{rd of} October 2020, (at the start of the autumn half term) a national 'circuit break' for the whole of Wales was implemented where people were required to stay at home except for very limited purposes. Primary schools and childcare settings remained open whilst only Years 7 and 8 were able to attend secondary schools with the remaining year groups participating in online learning for the first week of school after the half term.

A further lockdown was then announced on the 19^{th of} December 2020 which resulted in pupils being taught remotely once more. These restrictions remained in place until 12th April when all children and students in Wales returned to face-to-face education.

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[4] See https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-23-march-2020 for full details of the announcement.

[5] Details on the limited reopening can be found here: https://gov.wales/guidance-published-help-schools-colleges-and-childcare-settings

[6] However, the local authorities of Conwy, Pembrokeshire, and Powys decided to extend the school year for another week, so students returned in this limited way for four weeks instead of the three weeks in all other local authority areas in Wales. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-52833506 for more details.

The pandemic and the response to tackling the severity of the waves of infections have had a considerable impact on the delivery of support services associated with the RRON operations, the pandemic has also placed considerable constraints on fieldwork as part of the evaluation. The implications and response to these issues is explored in further detail in the next chapter. Below we explore the impact of COVID-19 through statistics on the young people NEET population in Wales.

2.2 Socio-economic situation

Data to explore the potential influence of COVID-19 on the numbers of young people who are NEET in Wales shows a mixed picture. Figure 2.1 below presents data from the Statistical First Release data which is published annually and derived from a range of primary sources.[7] The data represents year end data and suggests that, at the end of 2020, the proportion of young people NEET had fallen when compared to the previous year (thereby suggesting little impact on the numbers of young people NEET since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic). More widely, the data illustrates a considerable fall in rates of young people aged 19-24 who were NEET over the last 10 years from 23.1 per cent in 2010 to 14.6 per cent in 2020. Amongst 16-18 year olds the rate is relatively stable throughout that period.

Figure 2.1: Proportion of young people NEET in Wales – SFR data[8]
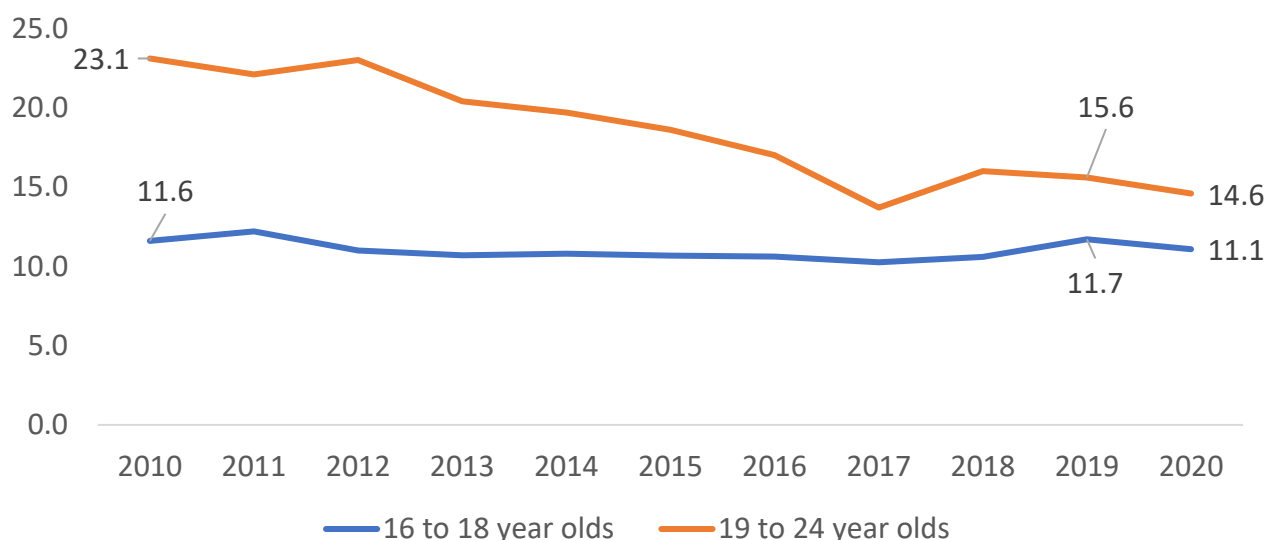
The proportion of young people NEET can also be analysed through data obtained through the annual population survey which, whilst less robust (relying on one data source rather than multiple datasets), offers a more recent indication of the potential impact of the pandemic.

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[7] Including PLASC, LLWR, HESA population estimates from ONS and the APS.
[8] WG Statistical First Release (SFR 287/2021) Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market

The data presents a slightly different picture to that outlined above, illustrating a considerable uplift in young people NEET amongst 16 to 18 year olds, rising from 7.9 per cent at the end of 2020 to 10.4 per cent in quarter 2, 2021. This is the highest reported rate for young people NEET for over five years.

Figure 2.2: Proportion of young people NEET in Wales, APS data
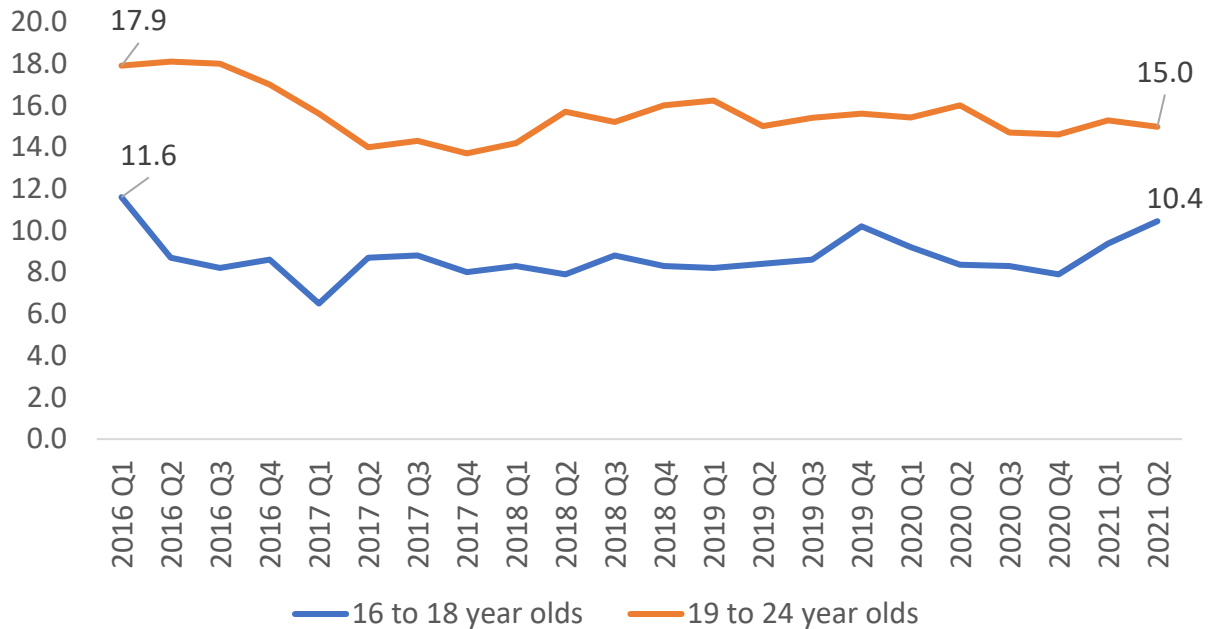
Whilst a degree of fluctuation can be attributed to the margin of error associated with the annual population survey, the data suggests an emerging increase in the numbers of 16-18 year olds who are NEET. The data will be explored in further detail as part of the final phase of the evaluation.

3 Overview of RRON Operations

This chapter provides additional context for the regional projects with a summary of the broad approach to delivering reduced risk of NEET (RRON) services across Wales, highlighting some of the most notable differences in approach.

3.1 Project targets

Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the numerical targets associated with key indicators for the six RRON operations. It illustrates that collectively, the regional operations are seeking to engage with almost 30,000 young people aged 11-24, with the aim of reducing the risk of becoming NEET for just over 50 per cent of those who are engaged.

Table 3.1: Target Indicators by RRON Operation

Indicator	Cynnydd EW	Cynnydd WWV	I2A EW	I2A WWV	TRAC EW	TRAC WWV	Total
Participants at Risk of becoming NEET - Total	779	7,717	3,895	11,751	1,893	3,689	**29,724**
Participants at Risk of becoming NEET - Female	n/a	3,192	1,587	5,417	961	1585	**12,999**
Participants at Risk of becoming NEET - Male	n/a	4,525	2,308	6,334	932	2104	**16,546**
Participants at Risk of becoming NEET gaining qualifications upon leaving	140	1,159	768	471	199	532	**3,237**
Participants at Risk of becoming NEET at reduced risk of becoming NEET upon leaving	390	4,770	2,389	5,876	619	1054	**15,008**
Participants at Risk of becoming NEET into education/training upon leaving	n/a	n/a	910	2,350	95	224	**3,579**

Table 3.2 below provides analysis on the proportional targets for the outcome and result indicators for the RRON operations. Whilst the proportional differences in gender breakdown are relatively minor, it is notable that TRAC East Wales anticipate more females than males participating in the programme whilst I2A East Wales and Cynnydd WWV anticipate that just 41 per cent of participants would females.

The variance between RRON operations in anticipated delivery of result/outcome indicators is also quite marked:

- Less than one in 20 participants on the I2A WWV operation are expected to gain qualifications upon leaving the operation whereas one in five are expected to do so on the I2A EW operation.
- Less than one in three (29%) participants are expected to secure a reduced risk of NEET upon leaving on the TRAC WWV operation, however almost two thirds (62%) are expected to do so on the Cynnydd WWV operation.
- Only one in 20 (5%) of participants of the TRAC EW operation are expected to enter education or training upon leaving whereas almost one quarter (23%) of participants on I2A EW are expected to do so.

It is unclear the extent to which proposed target indicators were shared between operations prior to submission or indeed the extent to which, as part of the application process, proposed targets were compared for each operation. These may have provided useful lines of enquiry for each lead beneficiary in exploring the different delivery models being proposed and such a focus would be warranted in planning around regionalised support provision for these at-risk groups in future.

Table 3.2: Target outcomes as a proportion of participants enrolled

Indicator	Cynnydd EW	Cynnydd WWV	I2A EW	I2A WWV	TRAC EW	TRAC WWV	Total
Participants at Risk of becoming NEET	779	7,717	3,895	11,751	1,893	3,689	**29,724**
% of Participants at Risk of becoming NEET– Female	n/a	41%	41%	46%	51%	43%	**44%**
% of Participants at Risk of becoming NEET - Male	n/a	59%	59%	54%	49%	57%	**56%**
% of Participants at Risk of becoming NEET gaining qualifications upon leaving	18%	15%	20%	4%	11%	14%	**11%**
% of Participants at Risk of becoming NEET at reduced risk of becoming NEET upon leaving	50%	62%	61%	50%	33%	29%	**50%**
% of Participants at Risk of becoming NEET into education/training upon leaving	n/a	n/a	23%	20%	5%	6%	**12%**

3.2 Delivery Model Overview

Despite the differences around target indicators, there is, at an overarching level, considerable similarity in the delivery models associated within each regional operation. The approaches are linked to the YEPF model and built around:

- Early identification of young people most at risk of becoming NEET
- Initial engagement, needs analysis, and action planning
- Activities delivered / brokered
- Tracking and monitoring

Within these four elements there are differences in approach both within and between regional operations linked to:

- **Early identification of young people most at risk of becoming NEET**
  - The timing, structure, scoring, and therefore, assessment of degree of risk amongst young people
  - The role and influence of professional judgement in that score
  - The age parameters for targeted engagement, particularly amongst the 11-16 cohort with some JBs targeting young people from Year 6 (11 years old) onwards, some targeting those at the point of transition (Year 6 and 7, Years 10 and 11) whilst others are targeting Year 11 only.
  - Amongst 16-24 year olds, the extent to which self-referral is a feature of the model and the associated degree of reliance on tutors or other staff to refer potential participants to the operation.

- **Initial engagement, needs analysis, and action planning**
  - The position of a key worker/coach/pastoral support provider funded through RRON operations in 11-16 settings (embedded within a single school, working across multiple schools etc.)
  - The eligibility of individuals (and the associated approach) to those young people EOTAS
  - The extent to which a distance travelled tool[9] is used to inform action planning and the monitoring of a young person's journey/progress

- **Activities delivered / brokered**
  - The degree to which procurement frameworks have been used as opposed to direct delivery of services
  - The range of referral organisations being drawn on to deliver specialist provision
  - The nature of relationship with Careers Wales and the extent of integration and involvement of Careers Wales in delivering employability/careers services through an operation

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[9] The Workstar was commonly used for this purpose.

- **Tracking and monitoring**
  - The duration of support available for young people
  - The complexity/sophistication of monitoring systems and the scale of information captured on activity provision
  - The extent to which post activity insight is captured from participants of the regional operations

These areas of differentiation are explored in further depth in the following sections.

3.3 EIT review

The delivery model in each operation is built around risk identifiers which are informed using Early Identification Tools (EITs) in each regional operation.

In accordance with the YEPF, each Local Authority has developed an Early Indicator Toolkit (EIT) that identifies the characteristics that contribute to a participant's risk of becoming NEET. A range of indicators are used, however all EITs analyse attendance, behaviour and level of attainment complemented by an assessment of other factors that may contribute toward their risk of becoming NEET.

The characteristics are given a score and each participant's total score is graded, their level of risk is determined, and access provided to the programme should a specific threshold of risk be reached.

The evaluation identified a degree of variation in the ways in which EITs had been developed and implemented by operations, particularly for 11-16 age groups.

11-16
The frequency with which the EIT is used and the speed at which the evidence has been shared has caused frustration for some JBs. While there is wide variation in its usage, EITs are typically being implemented twice yearly. In one instance (Monmouthshire) the local authority has direct access to the SIM[10]s data and has been able to run its own EIT on an ad hoc basis. This is proved particularly useful in overcoming concerns regarding the time lag between evidence gathering and risk assessment, whilst through this process, responsiveness of the approach is maximised.

Other challenges related to the comprehensiveness of supplementary information associated with individuals identified as at risk (red). Multi-agency meetings have proved useful in this respect, furnishing operation teams with contextual information and insight to help them prepare how they approach and engage with an individual.

With the EIT system itself, there are differences in how the weightings are measured and scored by each JB and therefore no consistency within and between regional operations as to what is a red/amber or green list exists. Stakeholders felt this to be a weakness of the EIT

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[10] School Information Management System

approach as a young person in one area may be eligible for additional provision, but they would not be if they moved to another local authority area.

The role and usage of professional judgement within the assessment has varied considerably across areas, although it has generally increased its prominence following the COVID-19 pandemic, due to a lack of available data against which to judge risk. Where individual JBs have requested the use of professional judgement in their initial assessment it is understood that this has been rejected by WEFO (with a desire for consistency in the approach adopted across a regional operation). However, the role and influence of panels in assessing the eligibility of young people and in providing the opportunity to obtain clarification on some of the specific circumstances faced by individuals varies considerably and there is evidence of them being used to inform eligibility without an explicit request for the use of professional judgement. That said, it seems entirely appropriate to draw on the insight of multiple agencies in this manner to supplement the evidence obtained through the EIT and accepting a variable approach to its usage would appear to be a pragmatic response to the issue.

The multi-agency/panel approach is also useful in identifying alternative routes to support other than those offered through the regional operation.

16-24
Whilst there are mechanisms available for measuring and assessing extent of risk amongst FE colleges and similarly, these are focused on attendance, behaviour and attainment, there is a greater role for tutors and the young people to refer to available provision. In some areas, the tutor's perspective compliments the evidence generated by the EIT which can also help in identifying and sharing the specific issues that may be contributing to the issues identified through the EIT.

There is also considerable variance in the role and relationship between local authorities and FE colleges. Some colleges utilise evidence captured by Schools to identify young people in need of support. Others have limited engagement with them and therefore gain limited insight into issues faced by that young person prior to enrolling at the college. In several areas, FE college representatives are assigned a feeder school(s) where they attend panel meetings to ensure they are aware of any issues for transition participants.

One key area of divergence across 11-16 and 16-24 cohorts relates to whether an operation has adopted a **composite** approach to measuring risk and reduced risk (where a basket of indicators of risk are scored, the score then combined and compared to an eligibility threshold) or a **non-composite** model where each of the core elements of Attendance, Attainment and Behaviour are assessed individually. Whilst the composite model is used amongst JBs delivering to 16-24 year olds, it is typically used to verify a tutor/self-referral. Amongst 11-16 provision TRAC used a composite approach through the use of a Learning Profiling Tool (LPT). However, the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that gathering the information that would inform this assessment (attendance rates or behavioural scores for instances) is no longer feasible and the operation has shifted to assessing the RAG status of each element individually.

3.4 Activities delivered/brokered

Once assessed as eligible for an operation a participant is typically engaged by a key worker who undertakes a needs assessment and action planning process with the young person.

11-16

All provision at 11-16 across the regional operations is geared around and informed by a key worker role dedicated to an individual (either in a coaching, youth work or mentor type model) whose primary aim is to build trust and a strong rapport following engagement and to devise an action plan whose content is led on and shaped by the young person.

Regional Operations seek to provide a broad range of learning provision that supports the acquisition of both vocational and higher-level skills. Most JBs seek to deliver alternative curriculum provision that it is hoped will improve participants' attendance and subsequently, their attainment. Furthermore, and primarily through support from Careers Wales (CW), there is a range of support available in each JB to equip young people for the labour market and to encourage linkages between career choices and longer-term labour market trends. The main emphasis of the CW support involves engaging young people, who with support, would be work ready through interactions with employers through work placements, taster courses, group discussions with employers etc.

Across Wales, JBs have identified an increased need for mental health support. However limited resources have meant that it is only specifically targeted through the operations in one or two JB areas and more widely across the TRAC Regional Operation. There is, however, more widespread resource and use of Wellbeing Support staff in targeted areas (at 16-24), often supplementing existing wellbeing staff within FE colleges.

16-24

The support provided by FEIs is typically more consistent than the 11-16 provision across each JB. It focuses on providing pastoral care to young people primarily through one-to-one mentoring typically focussing on emotional support. They often provide a 'drop-in' service to support students in crisis situations, supplementing the scheduled appointments service that all FEIs provide.

A common approach across each FE JB is the inclusion of an advocacy and triaging aspect whereby lead workers liaise closely with other agencies within the area where there is an urgent need to bring in external support and expertise around e.g., homelessness and substance misuse.

3.5 Tracking and Monitoring

All regional operations are required to complete comprehensive enrolment and monitoring forms to determine eligibility and monitor progress and the delivery of activity.

Regional Operations are utilising various approaches to capturing wider insight into a participant's wellbeing and the specific issues or barriers they face including through a distance travelled or self-efficacy tool. These are initially used early on during engagement

with participants. However, some JBs noted how participants might be more likely to tell key workers what they thought they wanted to hear rather than a more honest self-assessment of their situation at that point. Subsequent usage of these tools several weeks into the provision were widely felt to be more accurate in determining and individual's situation as trust between the young person and key worker has been built.

Forms are also used to capture the destination of participants to capture their progression route. Some regional operations also seek to capture a participant's situation four weeks and six months after leaving to gain a further sense of the sustainability of the outcomes that they have achieved and where things have changes for those participants an explanation as to why.

3.6 Measuring a reduced risk of becoming NEET

A key result indicator for the RRON operations is a reduced risk of becoming NEET. Approaches to account for a reduced risk differ between the operations.

Table 3.3 overleaf provides an overview of the measures used in each regional operation to determine whether a participant is at reduced risk of becoming NEET. The evidence presented is derived from research associated with an earlier phase of the evaluation. The table illustrates that evidencing that reduction in risk is consistently framed around the core areas of attendance, attainment and behaviour. It should be noted that the TRAC model for evidencing a reduction in becoming NEET has now been adjusted away from the composite model as outlined earlier within this section.

Table 3.3: Overview of Approaches to Measuring Reduced Risk of NEET by Regional Operation

Operation	Attendance	Attainment	Behaviour	Soft skills	To claim a reduction in the Risk of becoming NEET
I2A WWV	10% improvement over a 3 month period	The achievement of their expected level or for KS3&4, an improvement in their literacy and numeracy scores or one or more qualification. For Further Education (FE) participants, the attainment of their expected grade or their elected subject	Reduced no. of incidents per day from the start of the participant's enrolment to the end of the academic year	Outcomes Star	An improvement in one of the primary drivers accompanied by improvement in Star Assessment
	Post 16 – The FEIs have applied a composite model that is guided by a participant screening tool based on attendance, attainment and behaviour alongside an additional series of 'at risk' indicators				30 points reduction in 'at risk' score.
TRAC EW/WWV	The Learner Profiling Tool (LPT) uses the key indicators of attendance, attainment, behaviour, Special Educational Needs / Additional Learning Needs, Free School Meals, looked after status, change of school episodes, change of address episodes, offset (repeated years), and generate an individualised score for the individual. Reviewed twice annually in October and May.

The post 16 tool uses the following indicators: Attendance, Well-being of Client Group, Behaviour, Attendance, Additional Learning Needs, Academic Achievement and Basic Skills Level. The data relating to the Participation indicator, will be received from the Careers Wales Career Data Check. Reviewed monthly. | | | Youth Star | 10% reduction or more in LPT score –composite indicator |

Operation	Attendance	Attainment	Behaviour	Soft skills	To claim a reduction in the Risk of becoming NEET
I2A EW	10% improvement over a minimum 10 week period	Achieve expected level of improvement from current level at KS3&4. Post 16 achieve current programme of study. Pre and Post 16 Additional qualification gained through I2A	Reduced number of recorded incidents or improved observed behaviour (termly) by school/FE and EI toolkit	Star Assessment	Evidence of two or more of the four measures (attendance, attainment, behaviour, soft skills) improving
Cynnydd WWV	Measured at start and end of intervention – sustained improvement by 10% for at least 12 weeks	KS3 reading and numeracy (year-on-year comparisons) Gain one or more DAQW quals KS4 attaining level 1 or 2 or gaining one or more DAQW qualifications Post 16 – successful completion of learning area programme – re-tiering from Tier 4 to Tier 5	No. of exclusions /exclusion days – either a reduction or no worsening over a 12-month period	Self-Efficacy Template (SET)	Evidence of improvement of "primary driver" combined with well-being improvement. Or evidence of entering employment/work-based learning

Operation	Attendance	Attainment	Behaviour	Soft skills	To claim a reduction in the Risk of becoming NEET
Cynnydd EW	Measured at start and end of intervention with scoring criteria (every % point below 100% attendance – 3 points)	Consideration was given to monitoring attainment alongside attendance and behaviour, but due to the possible subjectivity and inconsistency across year groups, it was decided against this. It is argued that an improvement in Behaviour and/or Attendance will invariably have a positive impact on Attainment	Number of exclusions. Every half-days' worth of exclusion = 5 points across a 12-month period.	Distance travelled tool (derived from TAF) focussed on soft outcomes/ well-being	Composite approach applied - A reduction by a third of the score gained at the beginning of the intervention – run monthly

4 Project delivery

This chapter explores how the delivery model outlined in the previous section has evolved over time and differs within each of the regional operations, reflecting on the challenges and opportunities faced and the role these played in influencing the approach to delivery.

4.1 Engagement

4.1.1 Delivery Model Adaptations

The approach to engaging participants across the regional operations has tended to be subjected to refinement over time rather than substantive changes at pinch points within the operation's programme.

These refinements have typically included:

- Strengthening relationships with multi-agencies to increase the role of professional judgement in the assessment of risk.
- Enhancements to the content/information associated with referrals to ensure that delivery staff are more fully informed of the context and background of those individuals who have been referred.
- Enhancements in the promotional activities (at 16-24) to raise awareness of the offer and to help increase the proportion of young people self-referring.

COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic represented a key influence on the delivery model. Whilst the pandemic forced a substantive change in the delivery model to a service more heavily reliant upon virtual or remote service provision, for initial engagement this approach gained limited traction with participants. Referral and engagement numbers consequently fell to very low numbers across all regional operations for the first 3-6 months (March – August 2020) following the outbreak of the pandemic whilst school premises remained closed to pupils.

Whilst some in-person education recommenced from September 2020 alleviating many of the barriers to support for the operations, constraints on RRON delivery staff have remained. These have been particularly acute for staff where they operate across multiple establishments (which meant that in some instances they were unable to enter a school due to the risk of spreading infection) or where delivery staff may have been restricted to specific year group bubbles.

Elsewhere, adaptations to the delivery model were evident; adaption to TRAC (as alluded to earlier within the report) led to a widening of engagement to those in Year 6 in January 2019 in response to need identified by primary heads and transition staff to provide early intervention support to vulnerable pupils.

Assessing Risk of NEET

A further area of adaptation within the TRAC delivery model related to the use of the composite model for assessing risk of becoming NEET. This was in part influenced by the loss of historical data on attendance, attainment and behaviour brought about by the pandemic and subsequent school site closures. The shift to a new approach for the operation no longer requires an aggregation of measures and considers each of the three elements (attendance, attainment or behaviour) independently with a red or amber status leading to automatic eligibility. The amendment has been positively received by staff who felt it enabled them to better identify the young people at greatest risk. Furthermore, it has widened the potentially eligible cohort of young people who can then be discussed at panel meetings as the filtering process was less extensive than that delivered through the composite model.

Amongst FE Colleges, the use of an EIT approach is far less prevalent with referrals typically coming from tutors and other college staff (and the participants themselves). Some staff members may be less familiar with the support, or prefer to support the students themselves, or might take more time to flag up issues. These delays can be detrimental to participants' ability to engage. Thus, the reliance on colleagues to generate the bulk of referrals and to do so in a timely manner does represent one of the main challenges in delivering an effective service

Figure 4.1 below provides detail on how participants recalled engaging on the programme. Across most indicators there is a high degree of consistency of response when comparing those aged 11 to 16 with those aged 16 to 24. It is notable how prominent the role of tutors/teachers are in promoting the provision and also how word of mouth and awareness of the provision (and self-referrals) played some role in the engagement of around 13% of participants of provision geared towards those aged 16-24.

Figure 4.1: How did you get involved with the project?
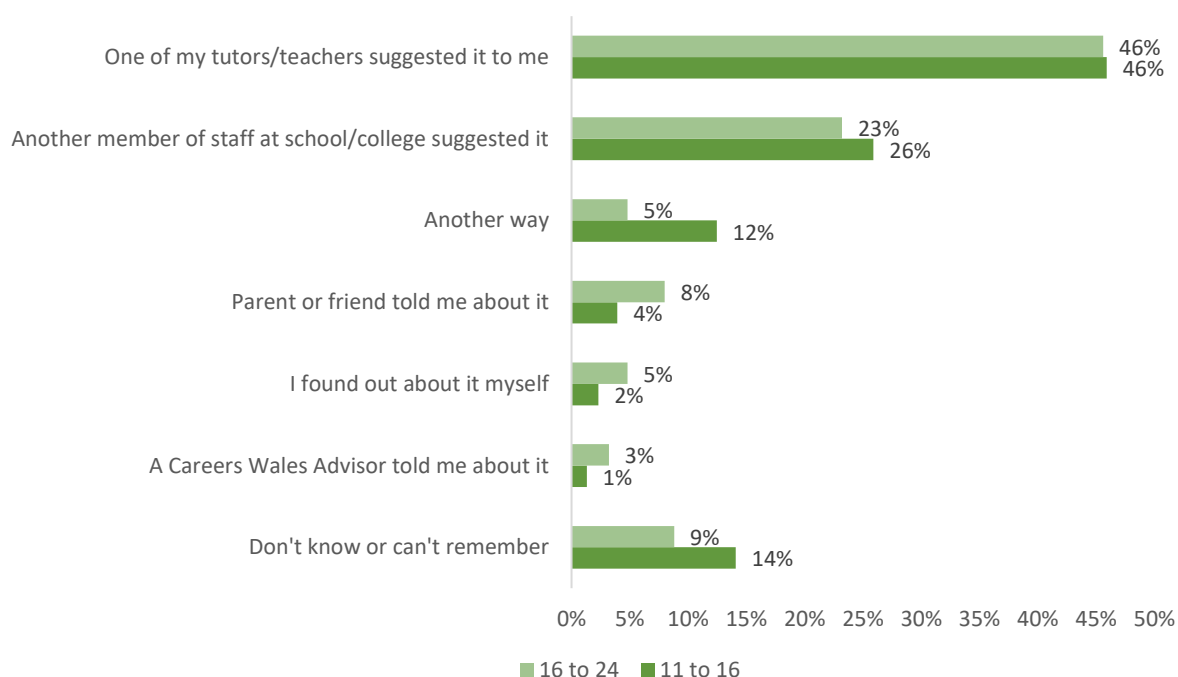
N = 305 (11-16), 125 (16-24)

Across the RRON operations, 42% of participants are aged 14 or under. Analysing participant age profiles by regional operation however shows considerable variations in age at enrolment. It illustrates that 11 to 14 year olds represent 61% of Cynnydd EW participants and 59% of TRAC participants, however they represent just 30% of I2A WWV and 36% of I2A EW participants (see figure 4.2 below)

Figure 4.2: Participant age on enrolment
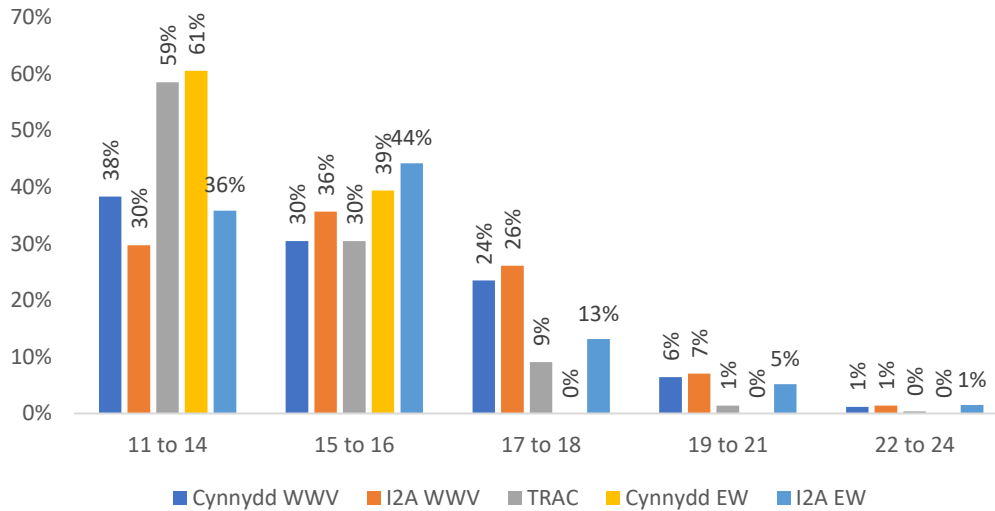
Figure 4.3 below outlines the participant's perceived reasons behind involvement with their respective RRON project. The chart shows a clear distinction in feedback between the two age cohorts with concerns about their behaviour perceived as the primary reason for those aged 11 to 16 engaging with the project yet for those aged 16-24 their own desire to engage (primarily around help with their studies) with the project is evident in the responses received.

Figure 4.3: What were the reasons you got involved with the project
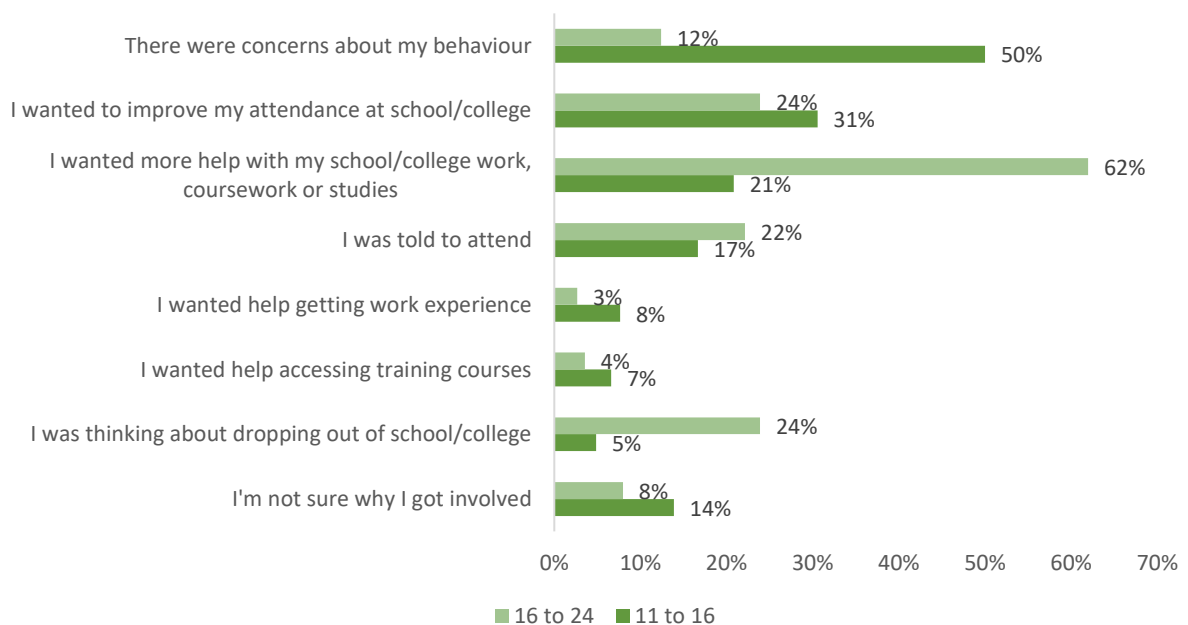
N=288 (11-16) and 113 (16-24)

4.2 Building Trust/Action Planning

Following that initial enrolment onto one of the regional operations, for many JBs the assessment of an individual's wellbeing plays a central role (within both the 11-16 and 16-24 year old cohorts) in the engagement process. It provides an understanding of the issues faced, building trust and in establishing an action plan to respond to the identified issues.

> "*It is a good talking point to start with and prominent in the offer but not appropriate for some* [in some instances] *you could almost do it after they gone, they are telling us the issues then sometimes we put a score and then get them to verify for agreement*".

Whilst all JBs would adopt a process of assessment, the prevalence of a distance travelled type tool varies. Where models are used, the approach applied when using the various assessment models differs from one JB to the next and often from one participant to the next.

However, the timing of its usage is important with staff illustrating that when it's used early on with provision, there is a tendency to respond with what they think the support staff wish to hear rather than an honest assessment of their situation. The more honest assessment tends to emerge through subsequent use of the tool, after several weeks of provision as trust is built between the young person and the key worker. This illustrates the value, where a tool contributes to the dialogue with a young person, offer revisiting an individual's progress against that tool at multiple points through their journey to track progress and change for that young person.

This then enables the key worker to identify the most relevant components of service delivery that might best benefit the young person in question.

4.3 Service delivery

A wide range of provision is offered by JBs with, as outlined earlier within the report, varying degrees of direct delivery or procured provision. In terms of the services received, figure 4.4 below illustrates that one-to-one support from a key worker or mentor is by far the most likely element of support to be considered the most helpful by participants. The additional emphasis on wellbeing support is evident amongst the 16-24 age cohort with almost 10% referencing the counselling support they had received as being the most helpful provision.

Figure 4.4: what support or help form the project did you find most helpful?
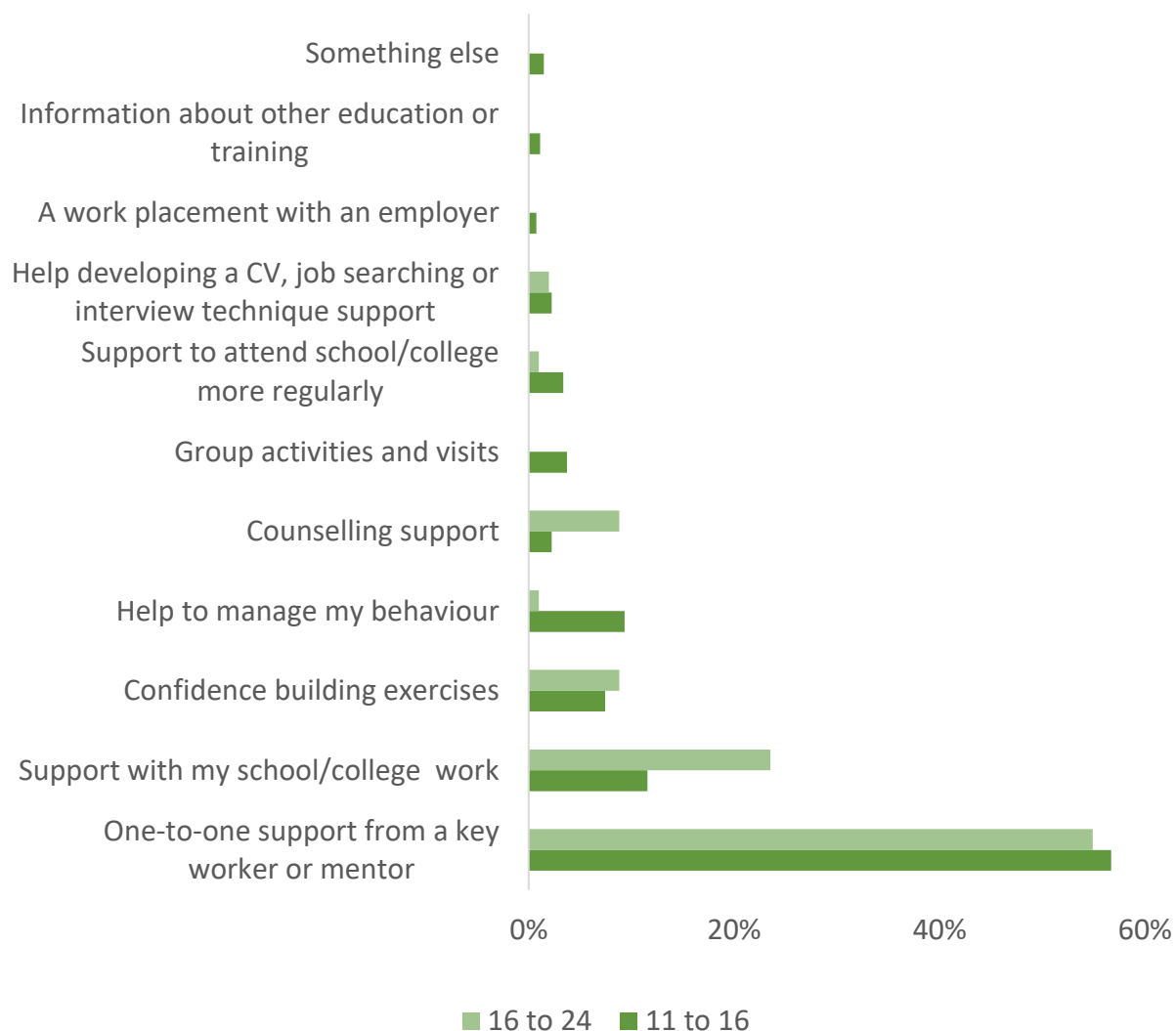
N=268 (11-16) and 102 (16-24)

Participants expanded on their responses by describing the importance of having a trusted person they can talk to and rely on. They also flagged the value of having someone in their educational setting who was separate from their studies but who can help them with various concerns and needs.

> 'Having someone that was able to advise and support with things I had no clue about. I have no family support and was at risk of being homeless but had no idea who to speak to or how to address it. Best thing was having xxx to advise me and support me with attending groups and housing appointments.'

4.3.1 Duration of support

Several regional operations have spoken of the need to provide more extensive support to participants than they had initially envisaged at business planning stage. Staff spoke of courses planned through their RRON provision that had initially been developed as 12 week courses subsequently being extended to 20 weeks (for example). Support staff also referred

to additional complexities and barriers faced by participants with the young people often taking significant time to *"open up"* so that providers can then tackle the issues creating the risk of becoming NEET, thereby necessitating more sustained support. Figure 4.5 below illustrates that the average duration of support for young people ranged from 8.5 months on I2A WWV through to 16.2 months on TRAC. It is also worth noting that whilst 22% of participants in I2A WWV and EW had been supported for over a year, this figure rose to 55.4% on the TRAC operation. The age at which young people engage with the operation is likely to influence their length of participation (with for example, TRAC actively engaging participants from Year 6). It is also unclear as to the extent variation in the **intensity of support** whilst participating in a RRON Operation that may influence the duration of participation.

Figure 4.5: Average duration (months) on regional operation
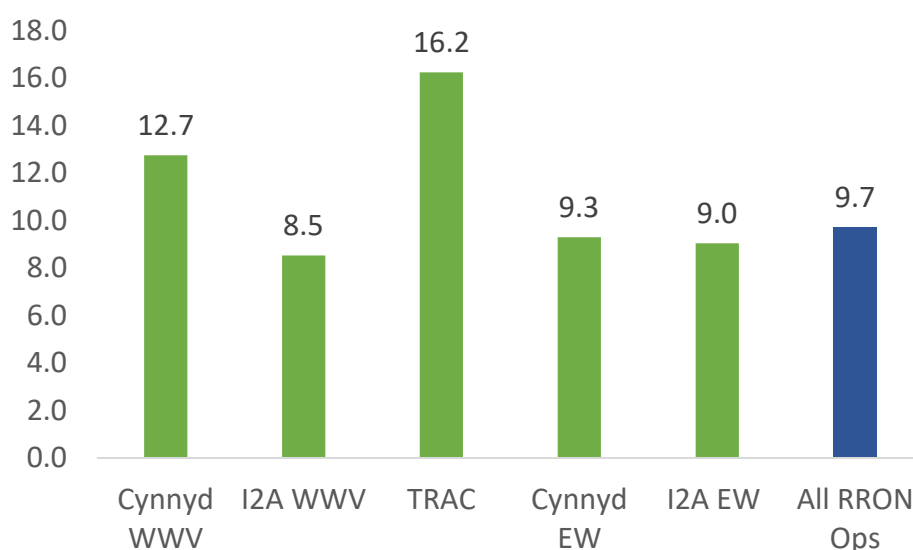
The next chapter considers the progress of the regional operations in delivering against their target indicators and the impact this provision has had on the young people and related services based on the perspectives of participants and stakeholders.

5 Progress, outcomes, and impact

5.1 Introduction

This section summarises the performance against target for each of the regional operations and the feedback from participants, staff, and wider stakeholders on the perceived impact of the support received.

In terms of performance to date, figure 5.1 below illustrates how each operation is progressing against target in relation to participants engaged. The figure highlights performance against profiled target (i.e. where the operation had anticipated being at this stage) and the overall target for the entire operation. It highlights that TRAC WWV is the only operation that is ahead of profile in relation to participants enrolled, however I2A EW is closest to meeting the target for the entire operation.

<u>Figure 5.1: Performance of regional operations against overall and profile targets for participants enrolled (% of target attained)[11]</u>
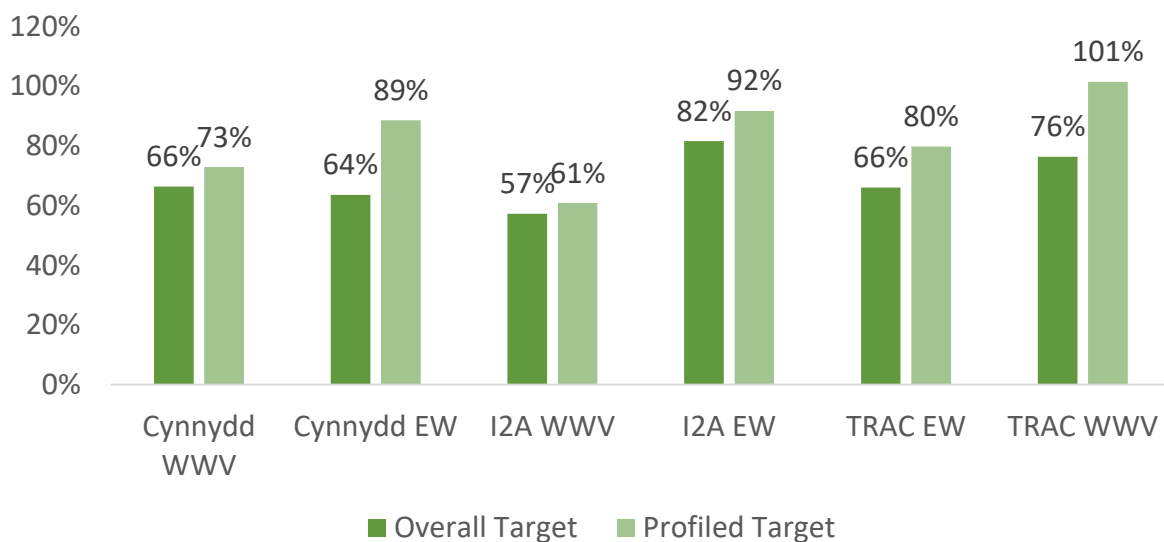
Figure 5.2 below analyses performance of each regional operation by gender and shows that whilst performance is largely consistent with profile across the RRON operations, performance does vary against profile targets by gender. Consequently, Cynnydd WWV and I2A WWV have made more progress against their profiled target for female participation than for male participants, whilst I2A EW has had more success in achieving its male participant target than its female participation target.

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[11] It should be noted that the timing of the recorded performance figures varies between regional operation. I2A EW and WWV –March 2021, TRAC (EW and WWV) and Cynnydd EW and WWV –May 2021.

Figure 5.2: Participant enrolment by gender – performance against profiled target[12] [13] - proportion of target achieved by regional operation
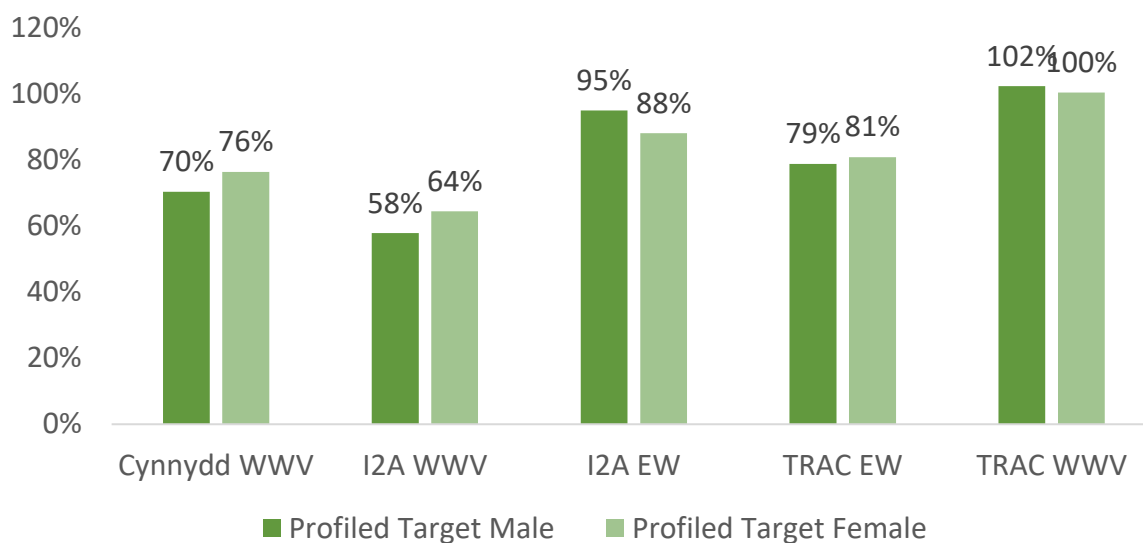
5.2 Outcome/Result Indicators

5.2.1 Qualification Delivery

Figure 5.3 below presents the performance of regional operations in delivering against result indicators for the operation. The chart shows performance in relation to gaining qualifications upon leaving and illustrates that all regional operations are currently short of profiled target with TRAC EW particularly so. Those regional operations that are performing most strongly against this target (Cynnydd WWV, I2A WWV, and TRAC WWV) are typically those that include JBs who benefit from being accredited centres, or where specialist tutors work alongside key workers to support qualification attainment. Whilst I2A EW would appear to be performing relatively poorly against profiled target it benefits from the fact that result profiles are less weighted towards the end of the operation compared to the other regional operations and therefore should be in a stronger position to deliver against the overarching target over time (illustrated by the fact that 55% of the target for the entire I2A EW operation has been achieved which is the highest of all regional operations).

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[12] No Cynnydd EW as the gender breakdown isn't available

[13] It should be noted that the timing of the recorded performance figures varies between regional operation. I2A EW and WWV –March 2021, TRAC (EW and WWV) and Cynnydd EW and WWV –May 2021.

Figure 5.3: Participants Gaining Qualifications Upon Leaving[1415] - proportion of profiled target and proportion of overall target achieved by regional operation
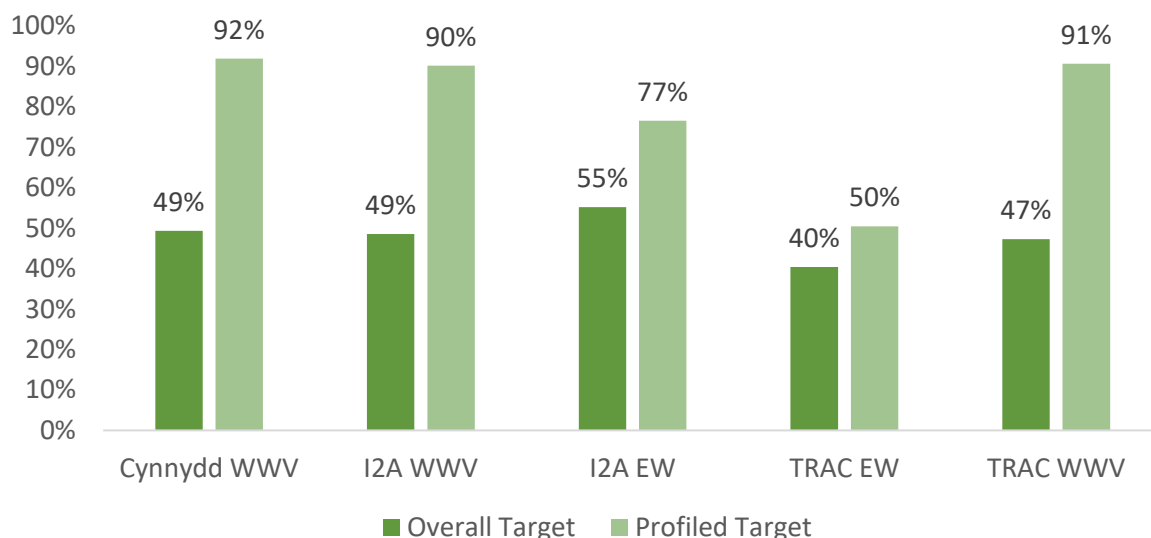
5.2.2 Reduced risk of becoming NEET

Figure 5.4 shows progress in relation to the result indicator 'being at a reduced risk of becoming NEET upon leaving'. There is considerable variance in performance against this profile and overall target indicators with I2A EW noticeable in terms of surpassing profile target by a considerable margin however it has the lowest level of performance when compared to the target for the entire period of operation. This variation suggests the operation has a steep upward trajectory in the profile of delivery against that target indicator for the remainder of the operation.

Figure 5.4: Participants at a reduced risk of becoming NEET upon leaving[16] - proportion of profiled target and proportion of overall target achieved by regional operation

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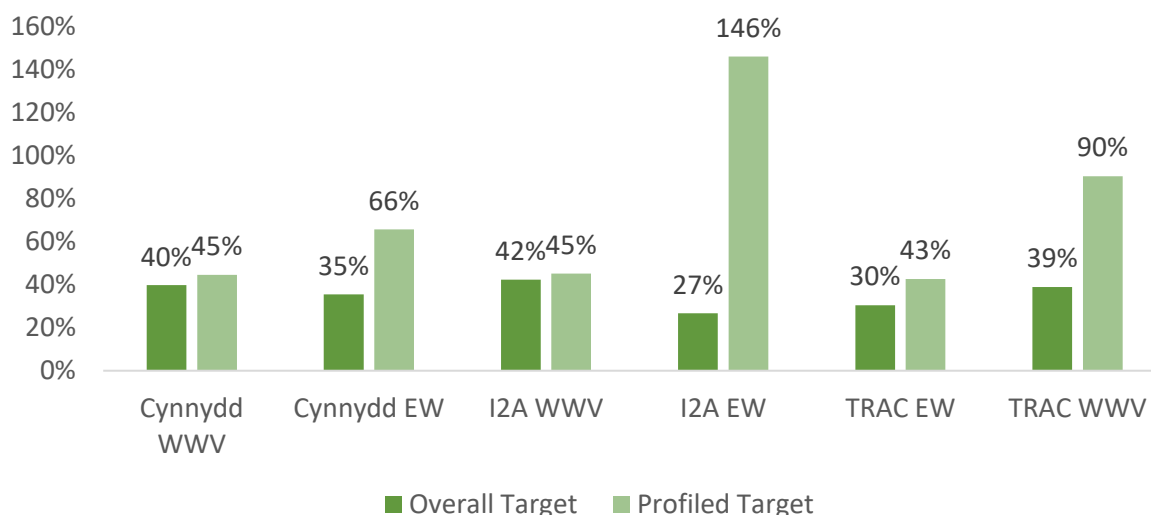
[14] It should be noted that the timing of the recorded performance figures varies between regional operation. I2A EW and WWV –March 2021, TRAC (EW and WWV) and Cynnydd EW and WWV –May 2021.
[15] No targets for Cynnydd
[16] Ibid.,

In terms of evidencing a reduced risk of becoming NEET there were mixed views on the various requirements. One of the most common areas where concerns were raised related to attendance rates (which typically necessitated an increase in 10 percentage points) which some described as particularly challenging. Other challenges (as highlighted earlier) included the inability to capture evidence on risks (or the reduced risk) because of remote learning and inconsistencies in the nature of data captured in relation to behaviour.

5.2.3 Into education and training

Finally, a comparison of performance against the result indicator of entering education or training upon leaving is presented in Figure 5.5 below. I2A EW and TRAC WWV are performing close to target on this indicator. However, TRAC WWV has delivered the lowest proportion of its overall target for the entire operation, illustrating a markedly different profile of target delivery compared to other regional operations.

<u>Figure 5.5: Into Education or Training Upon Leaving[171819]- proportion of target achieved by regional operation</u>
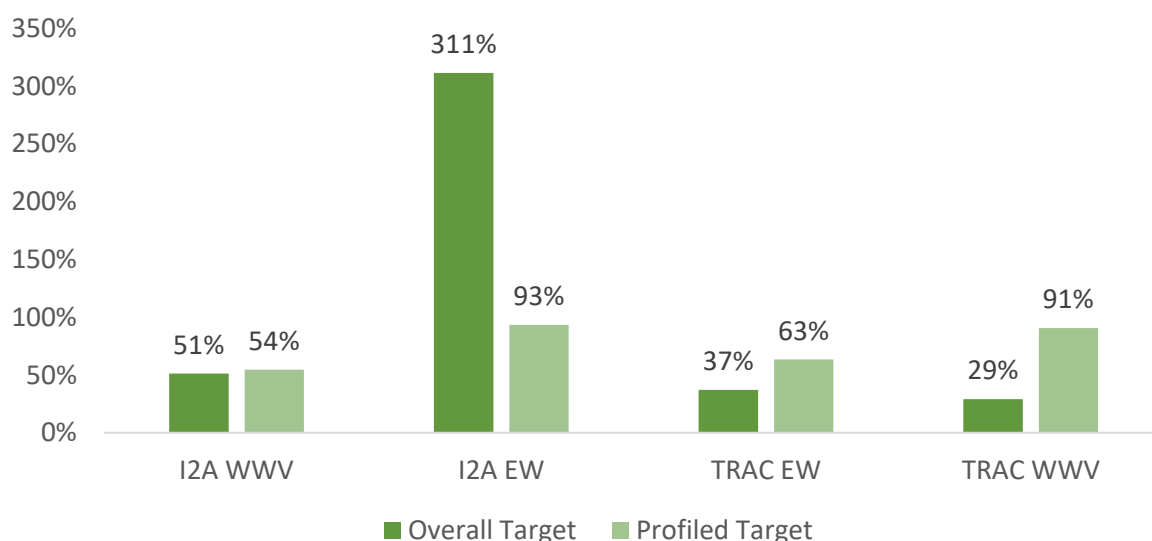
5.3 Perceptions of support

Whilst the various indicators above provide a sense of progress on the operations this needs supplementing with feedback from participants on the value and benefit, they have gained from the support. From the (current) participants' perspective, when asked what the best thing was about the support they had received, respondents, regardless of age cohort, referred to the importance of the relationship with their coach/mentor. Amongst the 16 to 24 cohort, 40% of participants referred to the role the support had played in improving levels of attainment (compared to 28% amongst 11-16 year olds). For 11-16 year olds, they were more likely to refer to improvements in behaviour or attendance, and improved relationships than the older cohort.

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[17] Ibid.,
[18] There are some discrepancies with the targets for I2A EW
[19] No data available for Cynnydd EW

Figure 5.6: What has been the best thing about the support that you have received?
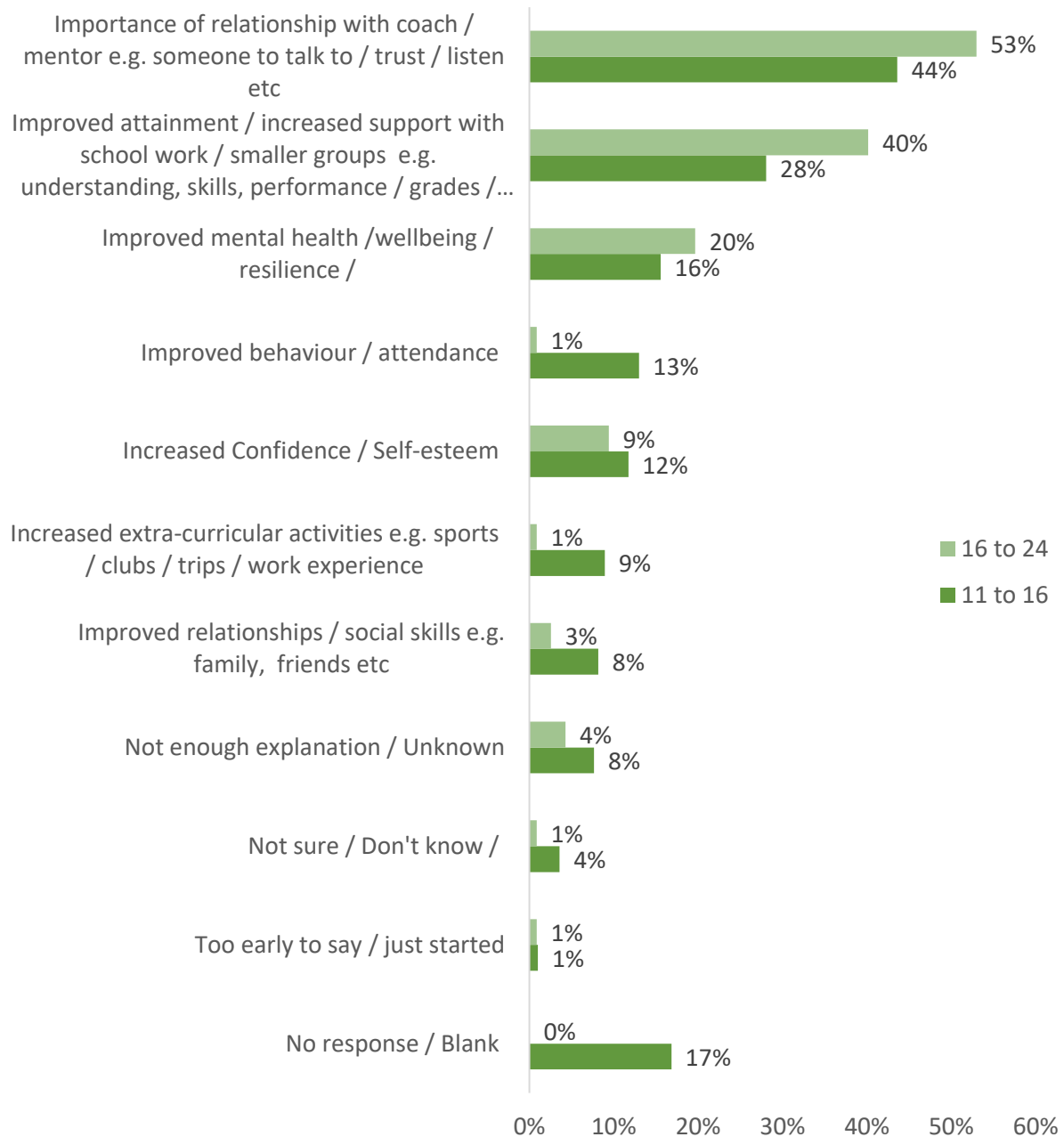
N= 392 (11 to 16) and 117 (16 to 24)

Participants engaged as part of the **post-intervention survey** presented a similar pattern of responses with the one-to-one support most favoured by 61% of the 11 to 16 age group and 58% of the 16-24 year olds. The patterns illustrated above for other response categories were also reflected in the post intervention participant survey.

From the (current) participant's perspective, when asked "how has the support they received made their life better?", participants most commonly referred to improvements that are closely related to their wellbeing (increased self-confidence and feeling happier). These elements of wellbeing improvements were particularly evident amongst the 16-24 year group with 45% of respondents describing how they felt less worried or anxious.

Figure 5.7: How has the support you received made your life better?

I'm more confident — 57% / 48%
I feel happier — 58% / 45%
I've learnt new skills — 33% / 37%
I've improved my behaviour at school/college — 18% / 35%
I attend school/college more regularly — 33% / 31%
I feel less worried or anxious — 45% / 31%
I'm better at understanding and managing my emotions — 40% / 30%
I get on better with my family and friends — 18% / 24%
I have a better idea of what I want to do next — 34% / 20%
I've improved my grades — 36% / 20%
I've gained a qualification — 22% / 16%
I know how to get a job — 16% / 10%
I want to get a job now — 17% / 5%
In another way — 3% / 3%

■ 16 to 24   ■ 11 to 16

N=341 (11-16) and 101 (16-24)

Stakeholders were also asked for their perspectives on the impact of the support on young people. Figure 5.8 below shows how stakeholders described the positive experiences of the support on young people which, in turn had typically led to increased levels of attendance and improved self-confidence. Interestingly, qualifications, skills, and behaviour are far less prevalent amongst the stakeholder responses, reinforcing the emphasis of benefit on softer elements associated with a young person's wellbeing.

Figure 5.8: What impact do you feel this project has had on the young people who benefit from the support?

Category	Percentage
Positive and meaningful relationships/experiences	30%
Re-engagement/increased attendance	24%
Development of self-esteem/self-confidence	22%
Guidance eg. For the future	20%
Support of the most vulnerable/specific support	18%
Generally positive	18%
Qualifications/skills	12%
Positive impact on behaviour	5%
General negativity	2%
Nothing	3%

n=187

Collectively therefore the evidence illustrates the importance of one to one relationships with young people and the positive emphasis of these in laying the foundations for improved attendance, strengthening self-confidence and self-esteem and which in turn leads to a positive impact on attainment.

5.3.1 Sustained impact

To gain a sense of the extent to which the positive impacts outlined above are sustained beyond the provision, the perceived benefits of support were explored with past participants. Within the post-intervention survey, past participants were asked about their current situation. Figure 5.9 shows that encouragingly, only a minority of participants could be considered NEET (c. 4% of those who had participated in 11-16 provision and 15% of those who participated in 16-24 provision).[20]

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[20] These calculations have been derived from combining responses stating, 'I am looking for work' (which suggests the participant is unemployed) and I am not working or looking for work (which suggests the participant is economically inactive).

Figure 5.9: Which of the following best describes your current situation?
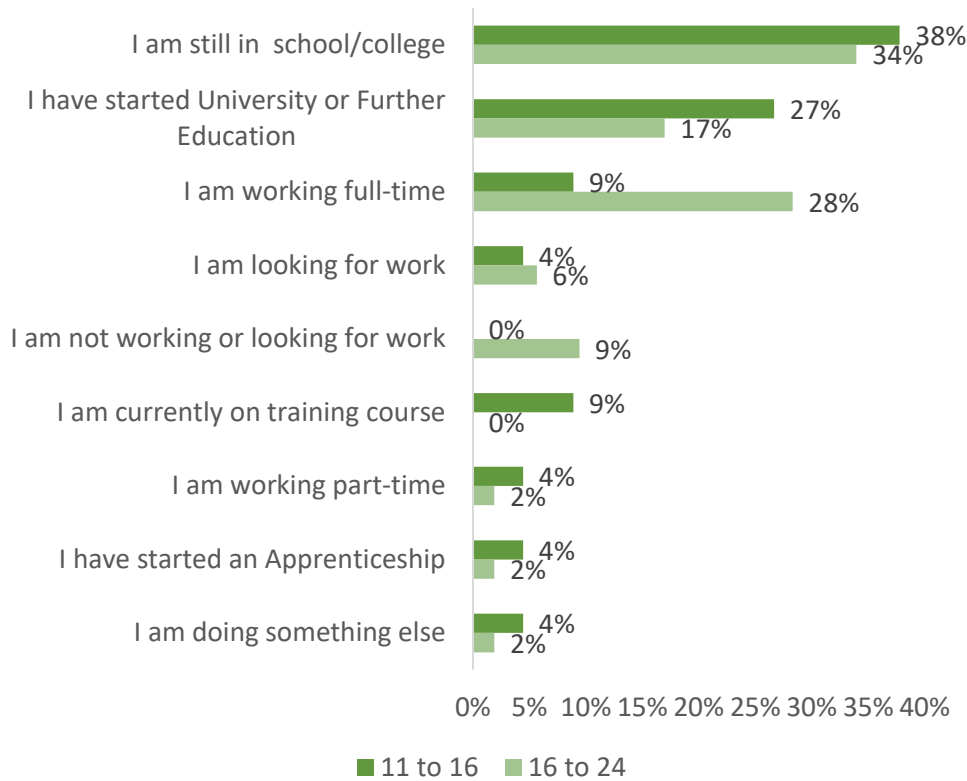
n=45: 11-16 and n=53:16-24

When asked, 'to what extent do you feel that the project helped you get to where you are now?' figure 5.10 below illustrates that the vast majority strongly associate their current situation to the support that they received through the operation. This is particularly so for those in some form of education or training.

Figure 5.10: To what extent do you feel that the project helped you to get to where you are now?
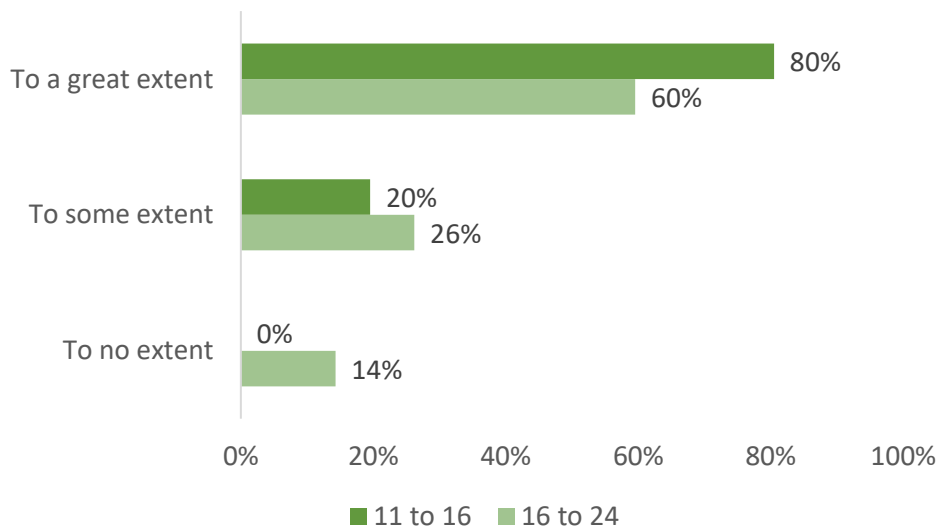
n=41: 11-16 and n=42:16-24

To help determine the contributory factors that led to their situation participants were asked in what ways the project had helped them. Most commonly this related to a building of self-confidence. Supporting young people to understand or control their emotions was also prominent amongst both age cohorts. For those who participated in 16-24 provision, help with school/college work or support to overcome a particular issue were particularly prominent.

Figure 5.11: in what ways did the project help you to get to your current situation?
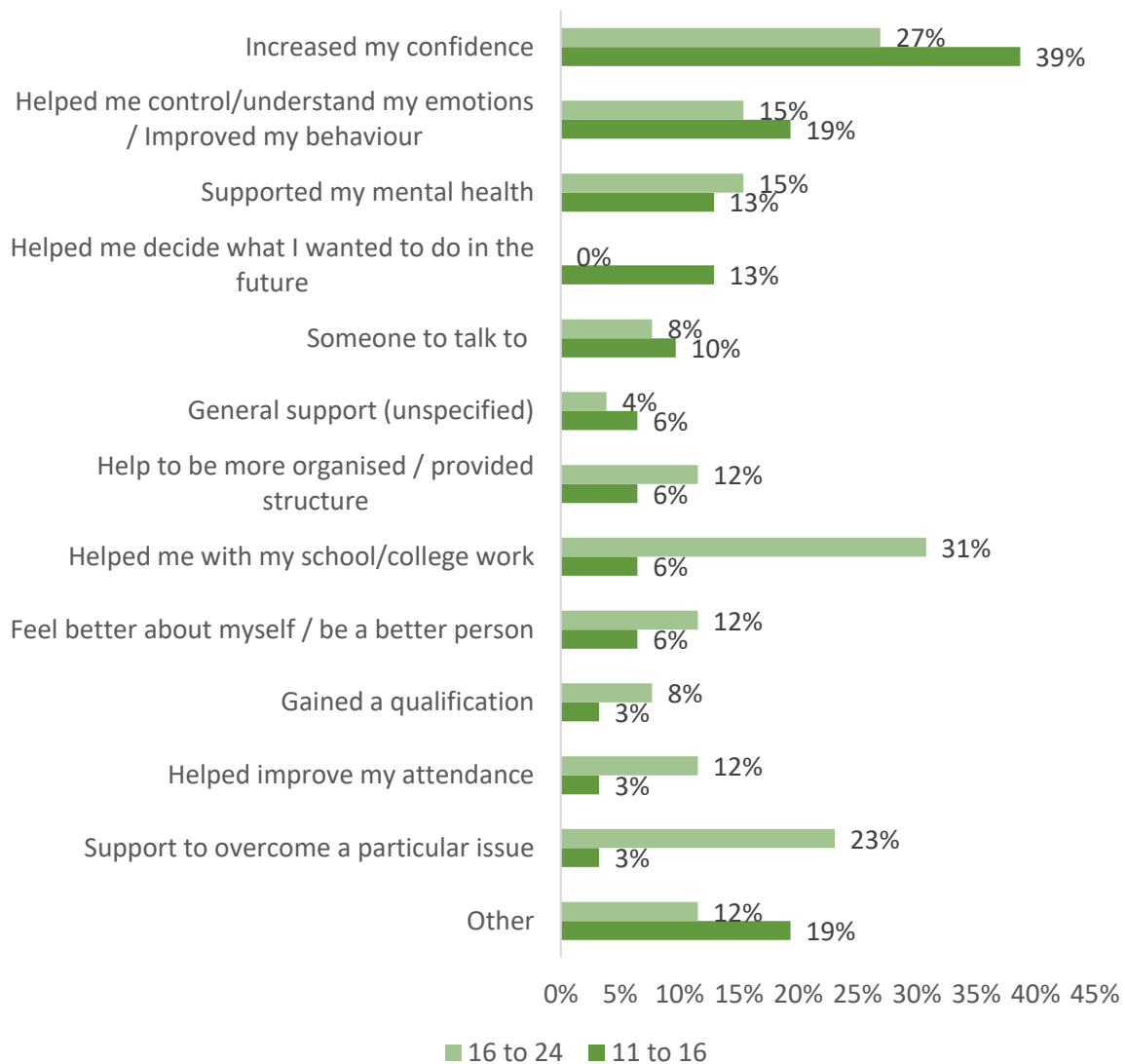
n=40: 11-16 and n=39:16-24

A selection of the quotes from respondent participants that were categorised in figure xx above are set out below.

> *"It gave me a motivation to get out and get a good life and work so hard in what I do"*

> *"It really helped me to come out of my shell and get me on the path to getting better I don't think I would be where I am today if I didn't have the support from i2A"*

> *"[it] helped me by talking about any issues and helped build my resilience and gave me coping strategies"*

> *"[When] I first started at Coleg sir gar, I was in a very dark place mentally and was really struggling with depression. It came to the point where I stopped enjoying the things I loved most and no longer enjoyed time with my family and friends. I would begin to hide myself away from people and avoid communication with those I loved most. I even thought about taking my own life and believing that the world would be a better place without me, but due to the help of the Cynnydd team and counselling I received within the college. I am still here today and am very grateful for the life I am living now."*

Finally, post intervention participants were asked how their situation might be different without having received the support. Figure 5.12 shows how the responses have been categorised and illustrates a range of situations that the young people perceived they may have found themselves in, in the absence of the support. It also illustrates clear discrepancies between the perceived counterfactual situation of those supported through the 11-16 provision (where the emphasis is on attendance and confidence) and those supported through 16-24 (where the emphasis is on progression, exclusion and mental health issues).

Figure 5.12: If you hadn't been part of this project, how would your life or current situation be different?

My attendance would be poor — 5% (16 to 24), 20% (11 to 16)
Wouldn't be as confident — 8% (16 to 24), 20% (11 to 16)
Behaviour would still be bad — 8% (16 to 24), 15% (11 to 16)
Wouldn't have progressed — 23% (16 to 24), 13% (11 to 16)
Dropped/kicked out of school/college — 26% (16 to 24), 10% (11 to 16)
Would be struggling with school / college — 8% (16 to 24), 10% (11 to 16)
Wouldn't know what to do — 3% (16 to 24), 10% (11 to 16)
Mental health would be worse — 28% (16 to 24), 8% (11 to 16)
No one to talk to — 0% (16 to 24), 5% (11 to 16)
No friends / less friends — 0% (16 to 24), 5% (11 to 16)
Wouldn't have gained qualifications — 13% (16 to 24), 3% (11 to 16)
Grades wouldn't be as good — 10% (16 to 24), 3% (11 to 16)
Other — 13% (16 to 24), 13% (11 to 16)
Don't know — 8% (16 to 24), 8% (11 to 16)

■ 16 to 24   ■ 11 to 16

n=40: 11-16 and n=39:16-24

A selection of the quotes in response to that question which informed the above analysis are outlined below.

> *"Very different! I wouldn't be in university right now! I was shown different options and pathways to achieve my university goal. If it wasn't for the project I wouldn't be where I am today"*

> *"I think relationships at home would have been more strained and I would not have been confident to progress on to college."*

"I strongly believe that it would have been terrible I never would have finished college if I didn't have the support, I never would have gotten on the path to getting better and I don't think I'd be working in the job I am now without them"

"I would have been kicked out of college and probably would've ended up on the streets and in trouble with the police. I definitely wouldn't have my qualifications and wouldn't have been able to get my dream job that I now have at a xxx that I will be starting as soon as I've finished college."

"If I had not been part of the project I…would not have told anyone about my mental health and the way that I was struggling the most. I also believe that I would not be here today. Without the help of the project, I would not have the qualifications I have today. I would have left college a lot sooner and missed out on a lot of opportunities. I am very grateful for the team's support."

5.3.2 Wider Impact

To provide insight into wider trends associated with the proportion of young people that are NEET figure 5.13 below presents analysis of the percentage of year 11 leavers known to be NEET based on data gathered through the year 11 destination survey[21]. The chart shows the percentage point change between 2016 (around the commencement of the regional operations) to 2020. Across most local authority areas (16/22) a reduction in rate of NEET is evident, however there are a minority of local authority areas (including those who do not participate in the regional operations) who have experienced an increase in rate of NEET. However, rates of Year 11 leavers who are NEET at the point of the destination survey have fallen by 0.3 percentage points over that period. The latest rates of NEET are presented in figure 5.14 below.

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[21] https://careerswales.gov.wales/careers-professionals/pupil-destinations

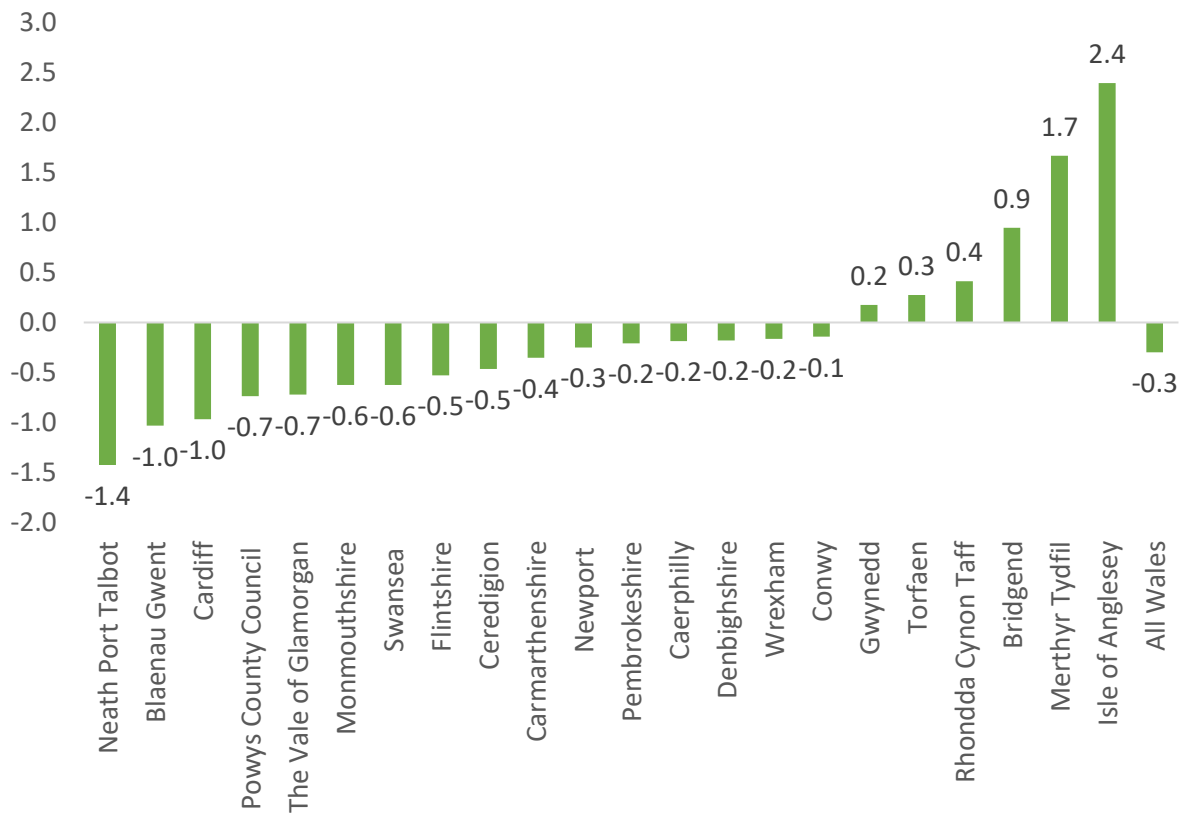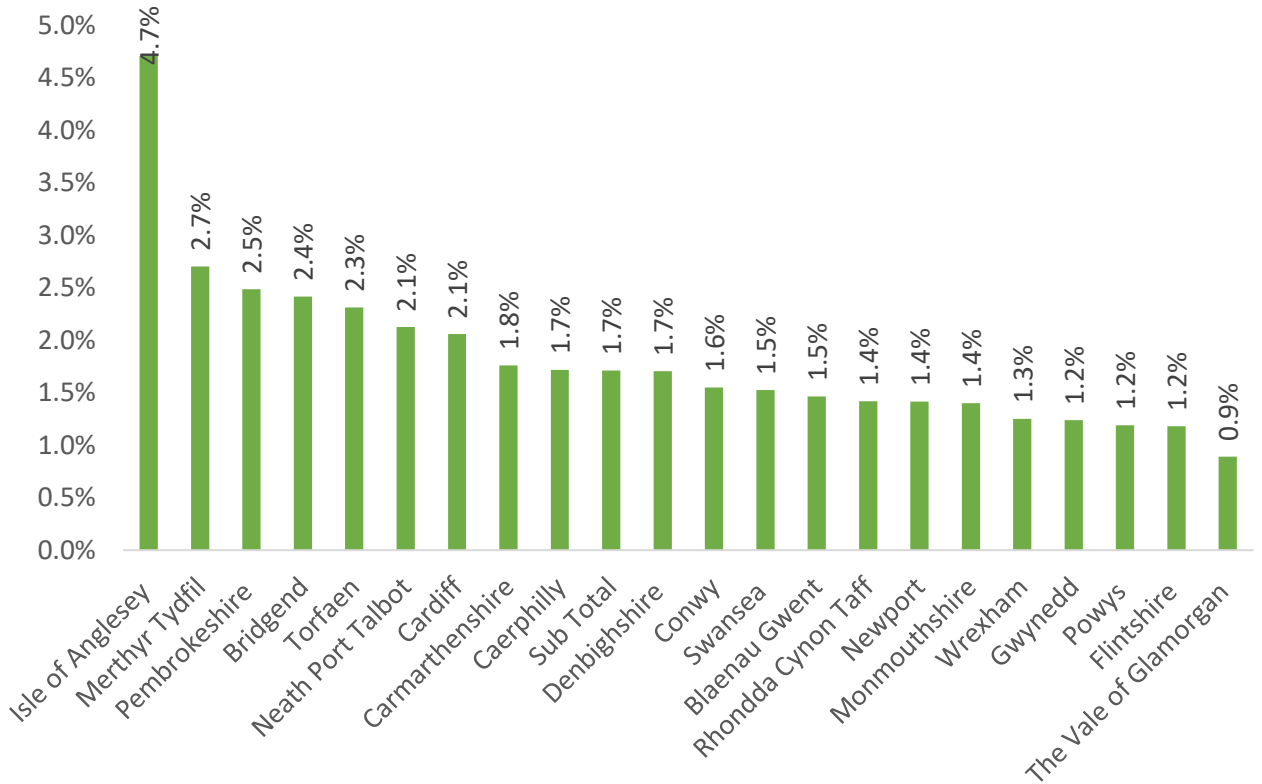Figure 5.13: Percentage point change in yr. 11 NEET – destination survey 2016-2020[22]

Figure 5.14: Rate of Year 11 leavers who are known to be NEET – October 2020

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[22] Note that Rhondda Cynon Taff and Caerphilly were not involved in the RRON operations during this period.

5.4 Outcomes and impacts

Regional operations are performing reasonably well against target result indicators, particularly when the challenges associated with COVID-19 are taken into consideration. Where regional operations are compared there is considerable variation in the proportion of participants expected to secure a result indicator and in terms of the profile of service delivery with little clarity as to why this variation exists.

The pandemic has impacted on the ability to use key data for determining risk (and for recording a reduction in that risk), however there has been considerable flexibility from WEFO on this matter enabling the use of other mechanisms to inform this judgement, aiding JBs, which should be commended.

Participants and stakeholders are widely consistent in the perceptions on the role and added value of support received. They all refer to the one-to-one relationships and the role these play in creating a positive environment for young people with support helping their confidence and self-esteem. The data also shows that amongst past participants a high proportion of young people remain within some form of EET. The past participants place a high level of attribution to the support they received, providing further evidence of the impact of the service offer.

5.5 Cross Cutting Themes

All ESF funded projects are required to demonstrate that they have met the following Cross-Cutting Themes (CCTs), which are as follows:
- Equal opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming (including the Welsh Language)
- Sustainable development
- Tackling poverty and social exclusion

In addition, the legislative process in Wales requires that all RRON operations demonstrate how they contribute to specific goals in of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

This sub-section of the report will explore how the RRON programme has met the CCTs. In the sections below, we highlight that performance across these measures is mixed across JBs and that there remains more work to do around JB partnership working to support cross cutting theme delivery, and for some regional operations to make claims of outcomes against them. This is particularly the case against the cross cutting theme Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming and identifying the contribution to the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

5.5.1 Equal opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming

In relation to the CCT of Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming, JBs highlighted delivery against the following case level indicators:
- Positive action measure – women
- Female participation in STEM
- Occupational segregation activity

- Activity supporting speakers of the Welsh language[23]

Table 5.1 below provides further insight into the diversity of those engaging with the RRON operations. It shows that almost one in eight participants of the I2A EW programme are from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background whilst one in seven participants on the Cynnydd WWV operation are reporting a disability of some form. Across all operations one tenth of participants have some form of disability whilst nine per cent reported a work limiting health condition.

Table 5.1: Participant background by Regional Operation[24]

Cross Cutting Theme indicators	Cynnydd (WWV)	Cynnydd (EW)	Inspire 2 Achieve WWV	Inspire2 Achieve EW	TRAC 11-24 EW	TRAC 11-24 WWV	Total
Disability	14%	10%	11%	7%	7%	9%	10%
Work limiting health condition	7%	6%	4%	7%	8%	7%	9%
From a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background	5%	2%	2%	12%	2%	2%	6%
Primary carer of disabled adult (18 and over)	4%	0%	3%	7%	5%	3%	6%
Received provision partially in Welsh	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	13%	6%
Received all provision in Welsh	1%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	2%

JBs have therefore had some engagement with participants across a range of demographic groups, and regional reports highlight that JBs are working flexibly to ensure that participants receive the appropriate support for them individually regardless of their demographics and background.

A range of positive examples are highlighted including:

- **In Cynnydd WWV** – provision of English as an Additional Language and additional learning needs support including targeted temporary removal from the school environment for some participants to reset to facilitate a return to full time school.
- **In I2A EW** – promotion of STEM subjects to all participants and the use of work placements to provide insight to all about the role of health and safety in the workplace.
- **In I2A WWV** – establishment of Year 9 nurture groups support female participants with early intervention.
- **In TRAC** - Therapeutic group sessions working with year seven girls who had all experienced the loss of a parent; targeted recruitment of male key workers; development

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[23] This case level indicator will be explored further in Section 6.4.2.
[24] It should be noted that the timing of the recorded performance figures varies between regional operation. I2A EW and WWV –March 2021, TRAC (EW and WWV) and Cynnydd EW and WWV –May 2021.

of a young woman's self-esteem framework and targeted work experience opportunities in non-traditional female occupations including motor vehicle maintenance, and trips to STEM-related workplaces and organisations.

There remains work to do to continue to capture the work delivered by JBs and to look at ways of sharing the insight on delivery of this theme across all JBs involved in RRON operations.

5.5.2 Promotion of the Welsh Language

As part of the CCT of Equal Opportunities, the operation included a case level indicator to actively support speakers of the Welsh Language.

Upon joining the RRON programme, participants provide a preferred language of communication and identify the ways in which they would like to receive support from the operation. Table 5.2 shows that in terms of Welsh language provision across all operations, 6% of participants have received at least part of the support in the Welsh language -with Welsh language provision particularly prominent in northwest Wales (TRAC WWV)-, whilst 2% of participants have received all provision in Welsh – with I2A EW the most prominent in the provision of Welsh language (delivered in entirety through one JB - Cardiff City Council).

Table 5.2: Participant background by Regional Operation[25]

Cross Cutting Theme indicators	Cynnydd (WWV)	Cynnydd (EW)	Inspire 2 Achieve WWV	Inspire2 Achieve EW	TRAC 11-24 EW	TRAC 11-24 WWV	Total
Received provision partially in Welsh	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	13%	6%
Received all provision in Welsh	1%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	2%

Progress reports and interviews indicated that local teams are making a concerted effort to promote opportunities via the Welsh Language, provide all resources bilingually and ensure that their teams include bilingual members of staff where possible.

It is also understood that, using local labour market information, Careers Wales is promoting Welsh language opportunities within growth sectors to TRAC participants.

Most delivery staff in interviews across the programme highlighted that demand from participants was often limited though this may be through lack of awareness and the focus on promotion of Welsh language resources, teaching and support provision to participants needs to maintain throughout their engagement with the programme.

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[25] It should be noted that the timing of the recorded performance figures varies between regional operation. I2A EW and WWV –March 2021, TRAC (EW and WWV) and Cynnydd EW and WWV –May 2021.

Examples of the ways in which this was undertaken by JBs highlights approaches that other regional operations may wish to take on including:

- **In Cynnydd WWV** – work with employers to encourage Welsh Language use during placements and more widely in the workplace.
- **In I2A EW** – Use of Agored Cymru Entry Level qualifications to build knowledge and awareness of the key features of Wales and the Welsh Language and how participants can influence decision making.
- **In I2A WWV** – accompanying participants to Welsh Clubs and other Welsh Language activities.
- **In TRAC** – Participant sharing bilingually her project experiences on S4C and digital videos for Careers Wales.

5.5.3 Sustainable development

<u>Awareness-raising and educational and training programmes</u>

There is evidence across all regional operations of delivery against the programme indicator on awareness raising and educational training programmes around sustainable development. Most examples highlight specific courses or activities run by JBs that offer education, training and experiential learning for participants around the principles and practice of sustainable development.

Examples[26] of activities (case and project level indicators) that contribute to the delivery against this programme level indicator include:

- **In Cynnydd East** – an Eco-Code developed in one school was adapted to work across the region demonstrating co-design work with participants and schools.
- **In Cynnydd WWV** – activities with participants included bushcraft courses, voluntary litter picks and the use of other partners' (Prince's Trust Down to Earth project) Eco project to provide participant experience in this area.
- **In I2A WWV** – using alternative education provision projects to deliver environmental sustainability projects that also provide a safe space for participants facing anxiety issues to participate.
- **In TRAC** - For National Gardening Week, the Year 6 team sent participants gardening packs to provide them with a rewarding well-being activity during lockdown. Giving young people the chance to grow and nurture seeds encouraged them to go outside, provided structure, and encouraged overall, whilst others took part in a course at the Woodland Skills Centre in Bodfari. Within this course, participants built up their confidence and skills while learning about foraging, cooking and how to identify edible plants. Participants also gained a First Aid qualification and built their own wooden stools.[27]

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[26] This indicator does not apply to I2A EW delivery and was removed from their CCT requirements in November 2021.

[27] It is understood that further evidence has been gathered by the regional operations in relation to delivery against this CCT indicator which will be included in the final phase of the evaluation.

There remains a need for ongoing reminders for all participants of the principles and practice of sustainable development in addition to their participation in the courses and activities run by JBs.

All regional operations address the sustainable development cross cutting theme through the following case level indicators:
- Development of an Eco Code
- Development of an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives

Eco Code

In line with these requirements, all regional operations have developed an Eco Code which demonstrates commitment to reduce its negative impact on the environment and aim to continually improve their reduction of environmental impact. Within these Eco Codes, regional operations also outline a range of ongoing commitments including to uphold legislative requirements and environmental standards, aspiring to the key requirements of the Green Dragon Standards.

Within these, the Eco Codes commit the regional operations to:

- Reduce, reuse, recycle to minimise waste
- Encourage more environmentally friendly ways of travelling (including public transport, vehicle sharing, and reducing the need for travel)
- Encourage project teams to adopt practical ways of saving energy
- Encourage others to adopt similar measures.

This is an area where projects are drawing on a long history of delivery from previous ESF programmes and it is key that regional operations keep their codes under annual review to identify further refinements. These refinements should focus on emerging local sustainability priorities and such review is especially important for those operations that have applied for further extensions to operation to ensure the continued relevance of their Eco Code for the future.

Sustainable transportation

All regional operation business plans, identify a focus on sustainable transportation and identify that where possible all staff, particularly those in rural areas, carshare where possible or use other greener methods of transportation e.g., public transport. The COVID pandemic has also significantly reduced demands for transport use following the moves to online delivery during lockdowns. This has illustrated that are further options for all JBs from blended approaches to learning and more frequent use on online or remote engagement with participants reducing the need to travel for project staff.

Consequently, all JBs may wish to further review their sustainable transport plans considering the learning from delivery during the pandemic to identify how transport use could be further reduced.

5.5.4 Tackling poverty and social exclusion

As part of funding requirements, all regional operations address the mentoring and advocacy activity as a case level indicator within the tackling poverty and social exclusion theme. It represents one of the key features of RRON programme delivery that is consistent across all JBs and is a key common critical success factor for participants highlighted in the survey results identified in section 5.3.

As illustrated by Table 5.1 above, the RRON programme caters for a wide range of young people, many of whom face severe barriers e.g., risk of homelessness, poor mental health and/or disability. Interviewed staff across all JBs highlighted that, because of the flexible key worker approach, they were able to respond to individual needs and wellbeing on a case-by-case basis. Within this, staff were able to mentor and advocate for participants which, in turn, resulted in participants feeling that they were able to trust and rely on their key worker. Through this support participants have also been provided with a wide range of support including wellbeing-support, counselling (where required), access to transport funding, IT resources such as laptops and tablets (where required) and a range of framework qualifications to ensure that, where participants are facing poverty or social exclusion, they are supported to engage with the RRON programme and take positive next steps despite these barriers.

Examples of this delivery include:

- **In Cynnydd East** – the use of focussed mentoring and coaching support around emotional literacy and self-esteem development.
- **In Cynnydd WWV** – Range of additional support thought mentoring including raising awareness of financial management and importance of employment.
- **In I2A EW** – Work with local charity to provide food parcels and hygiene products to the most vulnerable learners.
- **In I2A WWV** – Use of a specialist physical activity provider to deliver a personal development programme so lead workers can concentrate on providing targeted mentoring activity.
- **In TRAC** – Intervention by a mentor to secure a return to college and support to find a part time job around study.

5.5.5 Future Wellbeing of Generations Act

Alongside the RRON programme's approach to and promotion of the CCTs and case-level indicators, the aims of the operation to support young people flexibly based on need and improve their health, economic outlook and general life prospects directly align with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act wellbeing goals:
- A prosperous Wales,
- A resilient Wales,
- A healthier Wales,
- A more equal Wales,
- A Wales of Cohesive Communities,
- A Wales of Vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and

- A globally responsible Wales.[28]

The need to support individuals' wellbeing, and ensure the wellbeing of Wales as a whole, as outlined above, is underpinned by the principle of supporting future generations to achieve, at least, the same quality of life as is available now. Within this, it is important to emphasise support for young people, which aligns with the Act, should be sustainable and preventative. These objectives are supported by the operation which has stressed the importance of positive outcomes, alongside a measured RRoN and integrated wellbeing and mental health support as key elements of service delivery.

This focus on well-rounded sustainable and preventative support is evidenced through the programme's widening of scope to include Year 6 and Year 9 students in some areas to ensure that early intervention supports vulnerable participants and the wider focus on participant transitions to ensure that participants' development through school and beyond is sustainable.

5.6 Partnership /Collaboration

The RRON operations cannot operate in isolation however with alignment and integration to other provision critical to their success. Regional operations are collaborating with a range of other service provision including local authority youth services, CAMHS and various progression schemes (including other ESF initiatives) to support 16-24 year olds who are NEET.

Within the wider stakeholder survey, undertaken across the regional operations, strong network links with other provision, stakeholders suggested, ensure that support feels integrated, connected, and limits the risk of duplication.

With regards to the wider survey, Figure 5.15 below provides a sense of the spread of representation amongst those who responded to the survey. It illustrates that the largest portion of respondents to the survey were individuals indirectly associated with the regional operations with services typically available at the site where they work.

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[28] The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act wellbeing goals can be accessed here: https://gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales

Figure 5.15: Role of stakeholder in the Regional Operation
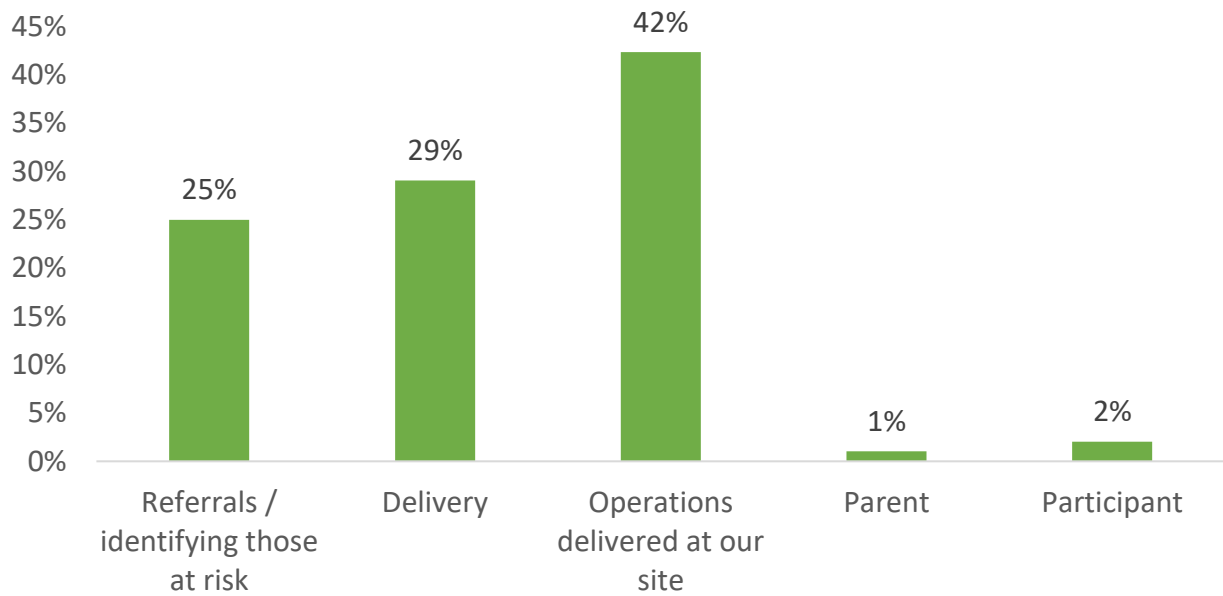
n=196

In terms of perceived partnership effectiveness, 89% (173/195) rated the effectiveness of the partnership between their organisation and the regional operation as 4 or 5 out of 5 with similar scores regardless of whether they described themselves as a teacher or tutor, a support worker or a training provider.

When asked as to why they had rated the effectiveness of the partnership at this level, stakeholders spoke of the quality and depth of support offered to participants through the operations, which has helped to strengthen the partnership with schools and college staff (and others). They also spoke of the productive relationships forged by the staff with the young people and the effectiveness of communication between teams thereby illustrating the extent of integrated support.

Elements that impact negatively on the scores included the limited resources associated with each operation which some partners found frustrating, and the paperwork and bureaucracy associated (in particular) with determining eligibility for the regional operations.

Figure 5.16: Why did you choose this score?

High level of 1-2-1 support offered
- 42%
- 39%
- 43%

Effective communication between teams
- 33%
- 41%
- 34%

Positive and productive relationships with students
- 32%
- 27%
- 28%

Students have been fully engaged
- 13%
- 5%
- 17%

Limited resources/Changing staff
- 8%
- 9%
- 11%

Limited added value
- 0%
- 2%
- 9%

Important organisation/additional support
- 3%
- 2%
- 9%

Too much paperwork/bureaucracy
- 7%
- 5%
- 4%

Limited student engagement/too many students unable to receive help
- 5%
- 4%
- 4%

Some sessions less effective/could be better
- 1%
- 5%
- 4%

Duplication/overlap
- 3%
- 2%
- 2%

Flexible team
- 5%
- 7%
- 2%

Don't know
- 4%
- 4%
- 0%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45%

■ Operations delivered at our site ■ Delivery ■ Referrals / identifying those at risk

n= Operations delivered at our site 76, Delivery 56, Referrals/identifying those at risk 47

When asked about the impact of the operations on services provided by stakeholder organisations, stakeholders spoke of the positive impact of the project on participant lives and how the provision had helped to enhance support for young people both in terms of broadening that provision and enabling support to be more targeted and responsive to participant need. Their responses illustrate the clear and significant supplementary role that the regional operations play to enhance the impact on young people with only a small minority of stakeholders citing no impact due to the overlap with existing provision.

Figure 5.17: What impact do you feel this project has on the services you/your organisation provides?

Category	Operations delivered at our site	Delivery	Referrals / identifying those at risk
Positive change in student's lives	43%	38%	34%
Helped us to provide additional/more targeted support to young people	36%	27%	26%
Widening support/additional capacity	11%	9%	19%
Has provided additional support to our staff	14%	11%	19%
Extra education/resources eg. Drugs and sti's	13%	25%	15%
Stability and lasting relationships	7%	7%	11%
Effective partnership	6%	5%	6%
Positive and safe environment	10%	13%	4%
Administrative burden	1%	2%	0%
No impact as services already available	1%	5%	0%
Referral/access to further services	6%	0%	0%
Other	8%	11%	11%

■ Operations delivered at our site ■ Delivery ■ Referrals / identifying those at risk

n= Operations delivered at our site 72, Delivery 55, Referrals/identifying those at risk 47

Finally, stakeholders were asked of the likely impact were the support no longer available. There were concerns, particularly amongst those involved in referrals to the programme of the likelihood of greater suffering for the vulnerable/disadvantaged young people whilst those based at sites where services are delivered (typically teaching/tutoring/support or leadership staff) raised concerns regarding engagement and attendance and the loss of intensive support.

Figure 5.18: what do you think the impact would be if the support was no longer available?

Vulnerable/disadvantaged students suffer more
- 18%
- 17%
- 35%

Increase in NEETs
- 29%
- 25%
- 33%

Less engagement/attendance in school
- 36%
- 25%
- 28%

Less available/intensive support
- 28%
- 23%
- 19%

No support to develop skills/less knowledge about direction
- 4%
- 4%
- 9%

Lose networks
- 3%
- 0%
- 5%

Impact on other services (social, crime, mental health)
- 4%
- 6%
- 5%

Reduced opportunities
- 6%
- 2%
- 5%

No difference
- 6%
- 4%
- 2%

Unsure
- 1%
- 10%
- 0%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40%

■ Operations delivered at our site ■ Delivery ■ Referrals / identifying those at risk

n= Operations delivered at our site 72, Delivery 55, Referrals/identifying those at risk 47

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Planning implementation and management

The RRON operations have been designed in a manner that builds on learning from previous operations with an emphasis on flexibility in provision to be as reflective of participant needs as possible. Operations have sought to offer wide-ranging provision to meet this challenge with the flexibility built within operations to respond to participant needs and to adjust to changing contextual situations within which the operations are based.

The planning and design of provision has been undertaken in manner that has sought to, where necessary, fill gaps in the overall support landscape within target areas, particularly amongst the 11-16 cohort. For FE college provision to those aged 16-24 there has been more of an emphasis on building on existing capacity to address the wellbeing needs of young people, enhancing the pastoral care support and, in some areas, providing counselling provision. For Careers Wales, again the provision offers similar added value, building capacity to deliver additional employment-orientated services to young people, particularly those in year 10 and 11.

6.2 Early identification and assessment

6.2.1 11-16 year olds

The approach to assessing level of risk to identify eligible participants for regional operations varies amongst JBs who target support at 11-16 year olds. Whilst risk is framed primarily around indicators associated with attainment, attendance and behaviour, different approaches to data capture (particularly around behaviour) mean that it is not possible to apply a consistent approach to measuring risk. Some JBs have also utilised supplementary indicators in the aim of refining the risk assessment of potential participants. The interpretation and scoring of these risk factors also vary leading to fluctuation in the determination of risk and therefore the threshold of eligibility for participating in an RRON intervention.

More widely there has been a tendency (where these were in place) to move away from composite models for assessing risk (specifically within TRAC) with that shift to measuring each vulnerability indicator independently, valued by staff.

Recommendation 1
Whilst acknowledging the need of nuances of approach, consideration should be given to an increased level of standardisation to the assessment of risk of becoming NEET. Such an approach may aid a more consistent assessment of scale of young people at risk of becoming NEET in each operation area.

The role and nature of professional judgement in assessing risk also varies considerably between regional operations (and to a more limited extent within operations). The majority of JBs identified the value of this element in supplementing assessments of risk and in

enabling a more nuanced approach to the risk assessment to refine assessments of eligibility. The integration of professional judgement appeared to be particularly useful when incorporated into multi-agency panel meetings (or similar) as in doing so, it meant that the approach would be less likely to be overly reliant on one individual's opinion (which had led to a reluctance to adopt this model in some areas).

Staff in some areas spoke of the frustrations associated with infrequent and/or delays in running an EIT assessment that led to a slow response to some young people who may begin displaying heightened risks of becoming NEET. The ability to run an EIT assessment independently of schools is possible in at least one JB area and has enabled the process to be undertaken in an ad hoc manner, heightening the responsiveness of this delivery model.

Recommendation 2
To explore the feasibility of JBs (local authorities) running the EIT independently of schools on an ad hoc basis to increase the responsiveness of the approach for identifying risk.

The variability in the judgement of risk is also likely to influence the role and ease of fulfilling changes in variables that result in a reduced risk of NEET assessment. By way of example, if a lower attendance threshold is used in one area – that ability to secure a 10 percentage point increase in rates of attendance may be more achievable than in another area that administers a higher initial threshold.

6.2.2 16-24 year olds

Whilst EITs are used to some extent within FE Colleges, there is a greater reliance on referrals from tutors, other staff members, or through young people self-referring to the service provision. In these instances, the EIT is sometimes used retrospectively to illustrate the scoring criteria. The reliance upon tutors for referrals illustrates the importance of their role and of their awareness of the provision available.

Recommendation 3
It is important for the regional operation teams to develop strong links with colleagues within (primarily 16-24) settings to ensure the referral process is embedded.

6.2.3 Target age groups

Amongst the 11-16 cohort, there is a wide age range that are being targeted for engagement; some JBs are actively targeting young people from Year 6 onwards whilst there are JBs who are restricting their engagement to young people in year 11 only. This means there is something of a postcode lottery in terms of eligibility for the service provision, regardless of a young person's level of risk in becoming NEET. There are of course additional mechanisms of support in each local authority area that may meet the need for those ineligible for the RRON operations. There is also little evidence of a narrow age group of eligibility for these operations influencing rates of becoming NEET, however this is an element that the team will monitor for the remainder of the operations.

6.3 The delivery of the operation

Participants have presented additional, more complex needs than anticipated at business planning stage which has necessitated longer term support than the operations had anticipated. Some operations have described how the Covid-19 pandemic has accentuated these issues, particularly those associated with a young person's mental wellbeing.

COVID-19 also had a temporary impact on referral numbers to the operations and on the ability to engage with participants with a virtual approach to service delivery forced upon the delivery teams. As social restrictions have eased a blended model of service delivery has typically been delivered and whilst this approach has provided efficiencies on sustaining engagement with some young people, for those new to the provision, virtual mechanisms for engagement have proved problematic. That said, for those with caring responsibilities or who are anxious about going to a specific setting, this model of delivery has proved a useful approach.

More widely, the transition to virtual delivery has created efficiencies in relation to multi-agency panel meetings, which have typically shifted online, avoiding the need to travel for delivery staff and allowing them to use the time gained to deliver additional support provision to young people.

> ### *Recommendation 4*
> Retention of any post-COVID aspects of the new approach that have worked well. For example, lead workers should continue to use virtual forms of communication with participants who can't access the support at the settings or potentially prefer not to. The initial engagement should, however, be conducted face to face where possible.

There is a wide range of service provision available to young people, however the key worker approach and the intensity of support provided through this model is widely valued by participants and staff. Staff described participants' easy access to staff, the trusting relationship built between participants and staff and the tailored and flexible nature of support as responding directly to participant needs and providing positive and sustainable outcomes.

The accessibility of that support though is a key factor in the success of the regional operation with staff highlighting the importance of their availability and of the ability to deliver service provision in a discreet location for the young person.

> ### *Recommendation 5*
> The operation should continue to take steps to make the support as accessible as possible to all participants by offering to provide the support in a discreet location

The importance of building trust and a strong rapport with young people was expressed by the vast majority of staff. For some operations, the delivery staff cited the important role of their distance travelled/soft outcomes tool in facilitating that discussion. Whilst there were concerns with the accuracy of the initial assessment it was felt that the tool facilitated a discussion that became young person led and helped shape a plan of action for that young

person. Staff also described how subsequent usage of the star assessment generated more accurate readings, providing justification for its repeated usage throughout a young person's journey through the provision.

Staff and participants most commonly identify improvements in self-confidence and wellbeing amongst participants because of the support received. This illustrates the importance of capturing insight of the progression by participants on this kind of support programme through some form of progression/distance travelled system.

Recommendation 6
Where a distance travelled measurement system is a key element of the service offer it should be used on multiple occasions during a participant's journey to help shape support, trigger discussion about needs, measure progress against soft indicators, demonstrate to participants the progress they are making, and underpin action planning.

Stakeholders also praised operations for effectively 'filling a gap' in the services available through schools, colleges and other organisations and providing an essential service in a readily available fashion. Staff flagged the value of engaging in out of school activities with training providers, employers, or just for informal activities. These activities have often been used as a way of motivating participants to engage with their mainstream education by making that a precondition to taking part in the activities.

The additional emphasis on wellbeing support, in response to a growing concern around young people's mental health and wellbeing and where operations were able or had sufficient resource to redirect to this agenda was valued by delivery staff. Staff described how it had ensured that there is a 'go to' person in each education setting that is embedded within that educational context, encouraging participants to trust that they can go to them if needed which in circumstances around mental health can be an important mitigation for a worsening of such conditions for a young person.

Recommendation 7
Future provision should consider the value of the key worker model and, where possible, integrate support workers into educational settings, particularly as a mechanism to provide early forms of support for emerging mental health issues.

6.4 Outcomes, impacts and contribution towards CCTs

Regional operations are performing reasonably well against target result indicators, particularly when the challenges associated with COVID-19 are taken into consideration. Where regional operations are compared there is considerable variation in the proportion of participants expected to secure a result indicator and in terms of the profile of service delivery with little clarity as to why this variation exists.

The pandemic has impacted on the ability to use key data for determining risk (and for recording a reduction in that risk), however there has been considerable flexibility from WEFO on this matter enabling the use of other mechanisms to inform this judgement, aiding JBs, which should be commended.

Participants and stakeholders are widely consistent in the perceptions on the role and added value of support received. They all refer to the one-to-one relationships and the role these play in creating a positive environment for young people with support helping their confidence and self-esteem. The data also shows that amongst past participants a high proportion of young people remain within some form of EET. The past participants place a high level of attribution to the support they received, providing further evidence of the impact of the service offer.

Delivery against cross cutting themes is variable with the strongest examples being provided of successful activities against equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming, and sustainable development. Further examples showing performance against themes - promotion of the Welsh Language; tackling poverty and social exclusion, and particularly the Future Wellbeing of Generations Act where no specific examples have yet been identified.

Recommendation 8
There remains a need to identify and provide information/case studies which demonstrate activity delivered in relating the case level indicators not yet claimed by the operation. Regional leads should also investigate opportunities to disseminate best practice examples of theme delivery to all JBs to support their own attainment of cross cutting theme outcomes.

6.4.1 Future/forward strategy

There is continued uncertainty around the future of funding for provision beyond the timeframes of the regional operation. Where this uncertainty continues, and as the funding period comes to an end, there is an increased risk that staff leave their posts for employment opportunities that offer longer term security.

Recommendation 9
Management staff should continue to develop contingency plans for the final year of operation to ease the risk and impact of staff shortages where possible.

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