

Evaluation of Central London Forward's Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

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Executive summary

Overview of the Trailblazer

Full Potential is London's Youth Guarantee Trailblazer, delivered as part of the national *Get Britain Working* initiative to address youth unemployment and economic inactivity. It responds to persistent inequalities faced by care experienced young people (CEYP), who are significantly more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) than their peers and to experience ongoing barriers linked to disrupted education, poor mental health, housing instability and gaps in support as they move into adulthood. In London, these challenges are often intensified by high living costs, out-of-borough placements and fragmented services, alongside a recognised "cliff edge" in statutory support beyond age 21. Full Potential is designed as a test-and-learn programme to strengthen pathways into education, employment and training for CEYP, while improving coordination across systems.

The programme is coordinated by Central London Forward (CLF) and delivered across the 12 central London boroughs that form the CLF sub-regional partnership. Each borough delivers a locally tailored intervention as part of Full Potential, aligned to shared objectives, typically combining personalised one-to-one support, employer engagement, paid placements or internships, skills development and holistic wraparound support. While delivery models vary, all interventions focus on improving engagement, building confidence and skills, and supporting progression into education, employment or training for CEYP. The programme will generate insights to inform future Youth Guarantee delivery in London and nationally.

Methods

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to assess delivery and early outcomes of the Full Potential programme across 12 London boroughs.

- **Quantitative analysis** drew on borough management information covering participant characteristics, engagement and education, employment and training outcomes, alongside a short soft skills assessment completed by CEYP at the start and end of their participation to capture changes in confidence, motivation, employability skills and wellbeing.
- **Qualitative research** provided depth and contextual understanding. This included 12 scoping interviews with borough leads, 46 interviews with delivery staff, employers and stakeholders, and 19 interviews with CEYP, alongside nine interviews with professionals supporting them.

Evidence from all sources was triangulated to understand how the programme was implemented, how it was experienced, and what contributed to progress, with findings focused on interim outcomes and learning given the pilot timeframe.

Key quantitative findings

Quantitative analysis of management information (MI) and soft skills assessment data highlights several key patterns:

- MI data indicate that Full Potential is delivering early outcomes, with 134 participants progressing into employment (18 per cent of total participants) and 342 into education or training (47 per cent of total participants).
- The soft skills assessment indicates that the programme has been successful at increasing the participants' employability, confidence and motivation, with consistent improvements across all boroughs, particularly in employment-related skills.
- Boroughs are working with distinct populations, with MI data demonstrating variation in demographics, prior educational attainment, and health status, reflecting different local contexts and needs.
- MI data show that participants face a wide and complex range of barriers, most commonly related to skills, job availability and confidence, alongside physical and mental health, as well as SEND-related needs.

Key qualitative findings

Qualitative evidence from interviews with CEYP, delivery partners, employers and local stakeholders highlights several factors that underpinned effective delivery and positive outcomes across the Trailblazer. The key findings are:

- Relationship-based, trauma-informed support was critical to engaging and retaining CEYP, particularly those furthest from the labour market.
- Low caseloads and flexible delivery enabled more personalised, holistic support, addressing wider barriers such as wellbeing, confidence, housing and finances alongside employability.
- Ring-fenced placements and paid opportunities were highly valued and helped overcome structural barriers to accessing work experience.
- Practical support (e.g. travel costs, equipment, interview clothing) played a significant role in enabling participation and progression.
- Strong coordination between leaving care, employment, skills services and employer partners was a key enabler of effective delivery and positive outcomes.

Recommendations

The evaluation highlights a number of key priorities for strengthening delivery of Full Potential and informing future Youth Guarantee programmes.

Recommendations for CLF's Full Potential programme

- **Invest in long-term, place-based partnerships with strong coordination:** Prioritise strategic partnerships with trusted, specialist providers (e.g. Drive Forward Foundation), supported by dedicated coordination capacity, clear roles and shared processes. Map existing provision, address gaps through local capacity building, and align funding to sustain delivery over the long term.
- **Ensure continuous, flexible support before, during and after employment:** Design support as a continuous journey, including preparation, in-placement support, and post-employment follow-up. Avoid fixed time limits and apply progress benchmarks flexibly to reflect non-linear journeys, maintaining support for those who disengage and re-engage.
- **Grow the employer pool and strengthen employer support:** Expand employer engagement through tiered opportunities and targeted outreach to new sectors. Provide structured preparation (including trauma-informed training), ongoing support, and clear communication to enable employers to effectively host and support CEYP.
- **Promote co-location to improve access to wider support:** Embed employability support within trusted settings and align with services such as housing, mental health and benefits. Co-location enables warm handovers, reduces barriers and supports more holistic engagement.
- **Reduce administrative burden and support onboarding:** Streamline compliance processes, reduce duplication and maintain safeguards while improving efficiency. Provide hands-on support to help young people complete documentation and sustain engagement.

Recommendations for other Youth Guarantee Trailblazer areas

- **Adopt a focused approach to early delivery:** Start with a clearly defined cohort (such as CEYP) or geographical focus to enable targeted support, stronger coordination and effective testing of delivery models, before scaling to wider groups and areas.
- **Guarantee and promote ring-fenced paid work placements:** Ensure programmes include clearly communicated, ring-fenced paid placements to drive engagement and provide accessible routes into work, particularly for financially independent young people.

Recommendations for national policy stakeholders

- **Commit to long-term funding and timely mobilisation:** Provide multi-year funding, confirm programme parameters early, and allow sufficient lead-in time for delivery, partnership-building and test-and-learn approaches.

- **Widen the Youth Guarantee offer:** Expand eligibility to cover the full 16–24 age group to reach more young people.
- **Expand and better target the Job Guarantee:** Broaden eligibility to include young people NEET for extended periods (including those not on benefits), with targeted outreach and high-quality paid placements.
- **Ensure that work pays and that this is clearly communicated:** Improve communication around benefits and work, promote existing protections (e.g. return to benefits), and equip advisors to confidently support young people in understanding financial outcomes.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and context

NEET landscape and context for care experienced young people

Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) continue to face significant and lasting disadvantages in their transition to adulthood. In England, prolonged periods of NEET status are associated with poorer employment prospects, lower earnings, reduced wellbeing and a greater likelihood of long-term economic inactivity and reliance on public services. Longitudinal analysis shows that many young people who become NEET remain disengaged for extended periods, increasing the risk of long-term “scarring” effects on labour market outcomes.¹

In London, youth unemployment and economic inactivity among young people remain a persistent challenge. While London's NEET rate for 16-24-year-olds is generally below the England average (11.6 per cent compared with 12.8 per cent nationally)², it remains substantial and unevenly distributed across boroughs and demographic groups. Evidence shows that barriers to participation in London are intensified by high living costs, housing insecurity and the complexity of navigating fragmented employment, skills and support systems across borough boundaries.³

London is home to around 15,000 to 16,000 care experienced young people (CEYP), who are disproportionately affected.⁴ National data show that around 40 per cent of CEYP aged 19 to 21 are NEET, compared with 12.8 per cent of their non-care experienced peers.⁵ The persistence of this rate, which has remained between 38 per cent and 41 per cent over the last decade, points to entrenched structural barriers, including disrupted education, lower qualification attainment, higher prevalence of mental health needs and unstable housing situations.⁶

In London, these barriers are often intensified by the high cost of living and the prevalence of out-of-borough placements, which can reduce access to local services, trusted professionals and employment networks.⁷ Evidence also highlights a recognised “cliff edge” in statutory support, particularly beyond age 21, when formal

¹ Ralston, K. et al. (2021) [Economic Inactivity, Not in Employment, Education or Training \(NEET\) and Scarring: The Importance of NEET as a Marker of Long-Term Disadvantage](#). British Sociological Association.

² Youth Futures Foundation (2026) [NEET Data Dashboard](#). Youth Futures Foundation.

³ London Councils (2024) [Breaking Barriers: Addressing Youth Unemployment in London](#). London Councils.

⁴ London Councils (2024) [Pan London Care Leavers Compact](#). London Councils.

⁵ Department for Education (2025) [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#). DfE.

⁶ Drive Forward Foundation (2026) [Care experienced young people still locked out of work at three times the national rate, despite decade of youth employment initiatives](#). Drive Forward Foundation.

⁷ London Assembly (2025) [Careers after care: helping care experienced young Londoners fulfil their potential](#). Greater London Authority.

duties to track and support care leavers reduce, leaving some young people without coordinated assistance at a critical stage in their transition to independence.⁸

Objectives for Full Potential - London's Youth Guarantee programme

The Youth Guarantee Trailblazer in London, named 'Full Potential', forms part of the national [Get Britain Working](#) initiative, through which the UK Government has provided funding to test new approaches to reducing youth unemployment and economic inactivity. London was awarded funding to deliver a Youth Guarantee programme that responds to the capital's distinct labour market conditions, service landscape and levels of inequality.

There are two key objectives for the Full Potential programme. First, it aims to strengthen pathways into education, employment and training for young people furthest from the labour market. Second, it seeks to improve coordination across systems, reducing fragmentation and ensuring that young people can access the right support at the right time, regardless of borough boundaries. Full Potential is explicitly framed as a test-and-learn programme, designed to generate evidence about what works and to inform future Youth Guarantee delivery in London and nationally.

Overview of CLF role and borough delivery

Central London Forward (CLF), one of London's four Sub-Regional Partnerships, is responsible for coordinating the delivery of the Full Potential programme across 12 central London boroughs: Camden, City of London, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster.

CLF provides strategic oversight, programme management and coordination for Full Potential, while individual boroughs design and deliver locally tailored interventions aligned to shared objectives. This model enables boroughs to respond to local need and build on existing infrastructure, while contributing to a coherent sub-regional programme focused on improving outcomes for CEYP and strengthening local systems of support. The programme was initially funded for a one-year delivery period, commencing in April 2025, with confirmation in October 2025 that Trailblazer funding would be extended for a further year.

1.2 Overview of the 12 borough interventions

Delivered across 12 boroughs, the programme supports CEYP aged 17–25 who are NEET or at risk, combining tailored, relationship-based support with practical employability activities. This includes low-caseload one-to-one support from dedicated staff, paid work placements or internships, employer engagement, functional skills development, and holistic wraparound support addressing barriers

⁸ Palmer, A., Norris, M. and Kelleher, J. (2022) [Accelerated adulthood, extended adolescence and the care cliff: Supporting care leavers' transition from care to independent living](#). Child & Family Social Work.

such as housing, mental health, digital access and financial insecurity. Many boroughs are embedding trauma-informed practice and involving CEYP in the design and refinement of provision.

Several boroughs are using Full Potential to test approaches such as employer-hosted placements (where the council is the employer), creative models for delivering functional skills, peer mentoring and advocacy roles, and internal “family business” pathways within local authorities. Delivery is typically supported by a mix of in-house provision and commissioned partners, including adult learning services, voluntary and community sector organisations, and specialist employment charities. A key partnership in five boroughs is with Drive Forward Foundation (DFF), a charity which specialises in providing employment support to CEYP and has a wide range of employer partnerships to support this.

While the specific mix of activities varies, the 12 interventions collectively aim to increase engagement, build confidence and skills, and support progression into education, employment or training, while generating learning about effective practice for care leavers across different local contexts.

1.3 Purpose of the evaluation

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned as the learning and evaluation partner for Full Potential to deliver a robust evaluation of the programme's design, implementation and outcomes. This evaluation covers the first year of delivery and was conducted between July 2025 and April 2026. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which Full Potential is achieving its intended outcomes for CEYP; to understand how different delivery models operate in practice; and to identify the factors that enable or hinder effective engagement, progression and partnership working. A further aim is to support continuous improvement during delivery by sharing emerging learning with CLF and boroughs, and to contribute to the wider evidence base on what works in supporting care leavers into education, employment and training. Given Full Potential is designed as a Trailblazer, the evaluation also seeks to generate insights to inform future Youth Guarantee design at borough, sub-regional, London-wide and national levels.

1.4 Evaluation questions

The evaluation is guided by a set of key questions which focus on implementation, outcomes and learning. These include:

- To what extent has the Full Potential programme engaged CEYP who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET?
- What outcomes have been achieved for participants, including progression towards education, employment or training, and wider changes in confidence, wellbeing and skills?

- How have different borough delivery models been implemented, and what approaches appear most effective in supporting CEYP?
- How have partnerships with employers, training providers and other stakeholders contributed to delivery and outcomes?
- What barriers and challenges have been encountered, and how have boroughs sought to mitigate these?
- What learning from the Full Potential programme can inform future Youth Guarantee delivery and wider systems change?

1.5 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** sets out the evaluation methodology, including the overall design, quantitative and qualitative methods, and limitations.
- **Section 3** presents the quantitative findings, drawing on management information and soft skills tracker data.
- **Section 4** reports key qualitative findings from interviews and thematic analysis across boroughs.
- **Sections 5 and 6** present the borough practice-based case studies and care leaver journey case studies.
- **Section 7** summarises the overall conclusions.
- **Section 8** sets out recommendations for boroughs, CLF, London partners and national stakeholders.

2. Methodology

2.1 Evaluation design

The evaluation adopts a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate robust evidence on the implementation, outcomes and learning from Full Potential across the 12 CLF boroughs. The design reflects the complexity of the programme, which comprises a range of locally tailored interventions aimed at improving education, employment and training outcomes for CEYP, while also contributing to wider systems change. The evaluation focuses on understanding what works, for whom, and in what contexts, as well as identifying enabling factors, barriers and lessons for future Youth Guarantee delivery.

Data from multiple sources are triangulated to strengthen the validity of findings. Quantitative data provide evidence of reach, participation and outcomes, while qualitative research offers in-depth insight into delivery practices, participant experiences and local innovation. A 'test and learn' ethos underpins the design, enabling emerging findings to be fed back throughout the programme to support continuous improvement. Interim findings were shared with boroughs throughout the programme, and two test-and-learn events were delivered by CLF and the L&W, supporting boroughs to share challenges, exchange best practice, and identify opportunities to strengthen delivery.

2.2 Quantitative methods

Soft skills assessment analysis

Throughout the programme, boroughs use a soft skills assessment to capture changes in participants' skills, confidence and wellbeing over the course of their engagement with Full Potential interventions. CEYP are invited to complete the assessment at two points: at, or just prior to, the start of their participation (baseline) and following completion of support (follow-up).

The assessment was developed specifically for the programme to measure a range of outcomes relevant to progression towards education, employment and training, including employment skills, confidence, and motivation. Changes between baseline and follow-up responses are analysed to assess self-reported distance travelled and indicative impacts associated with participation in Full Potential.

Management information data analysis

A common approach to management information (MI) data collection was implemented across all 12 boroughs to support consistency and comparability. This approach is based on a DWP-issued MI template, which boroughs are required to complete as prescribed. MI data draw on boroughs' existing monitoring systems and include:

- participant demographic profiles (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, care status, disability or health conditions, prior qualifications);
- participation, retention and completion information; and
- recorded education, training and employment outcomes where available.

MI data were reviewed at both midpoint (November 2025) and endpoint (April 2026) stages of the evaluation. These data were used to monitor delivery progress, assess reach across different groups of care leavers, and contextualise outcome patterns across boroughs.

Quantitative data from the soft skills assessment and MI datasets were analysed using descriptive and comparative techniques. Analysis focuses on identifying overall patterns of participation and outcomes, as well as variation across boroughs and participant characteristics where sample sizes permit. Midpoint analysis was used to support formative feedback and emerging learning, while final analysis integrates baseline and follow-up soft skills assessment findings with end-line MI data to inform summative conclusions. Quantitative findings are triangulated with qualitative evidence to aid interpretation and strengthen causal insight.

2.3 Qualitative methods

Scoping interviews

As part of the scoping phase, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with leads in each participating borough to develop a detailed understanding of local delivery plans and contexts. Interviews explored the borough context for CEYP strategic priorities, delivery models and partnerships, approaches to engaging care leavers, and any innovative or test-and-learn elements within the Trailblazer initiatives. The interviews also focused on practical considerations for evaluation delivery, including management information availability, data-sharing arrangements, integration of baseline and follow-up surveys into provision, and potential risks or capacity constraints.

Interviews with delivery staff and employers/stakeholders

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 46 key stakeholders involved in delivery across each borough. This includes 26 members of delivery teams and borough leads, nine employers and 11 wider stakeholders engaged in supporting Full Potential initiatives. Interviews explored delivery models, partnership working, innovation, perceived effectiveness, implementation challenges and contextual factors influencing outcomes. These interviews provided insight into how interventions operate in practice, the added value of different approaches, and lessons for future delivery at borough and pan-London levels.

Interviews with young people

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were undertaken with 19 care experienced young people participating in Full Potential interventions, as well as nine professionals directly supporting these young people throughout their engagement with the programme. Where possible, interviews were conducted with both the young person and a corresponding practitioner, allowing for triangulation of perspectives across most cases. These interviews explored experiences of referral and engagement, expectations and motivations, perceptions of support received, factors that helped or hindered progress, and perceived outcomes. The approach was youth-centred and trauma-informed, with topic guides shaped with input from care experienced advisors to ensure interviews were accessible, respectful and relevant.

2.4 Limitations and mitigations

Several key limitations are acknowledged:

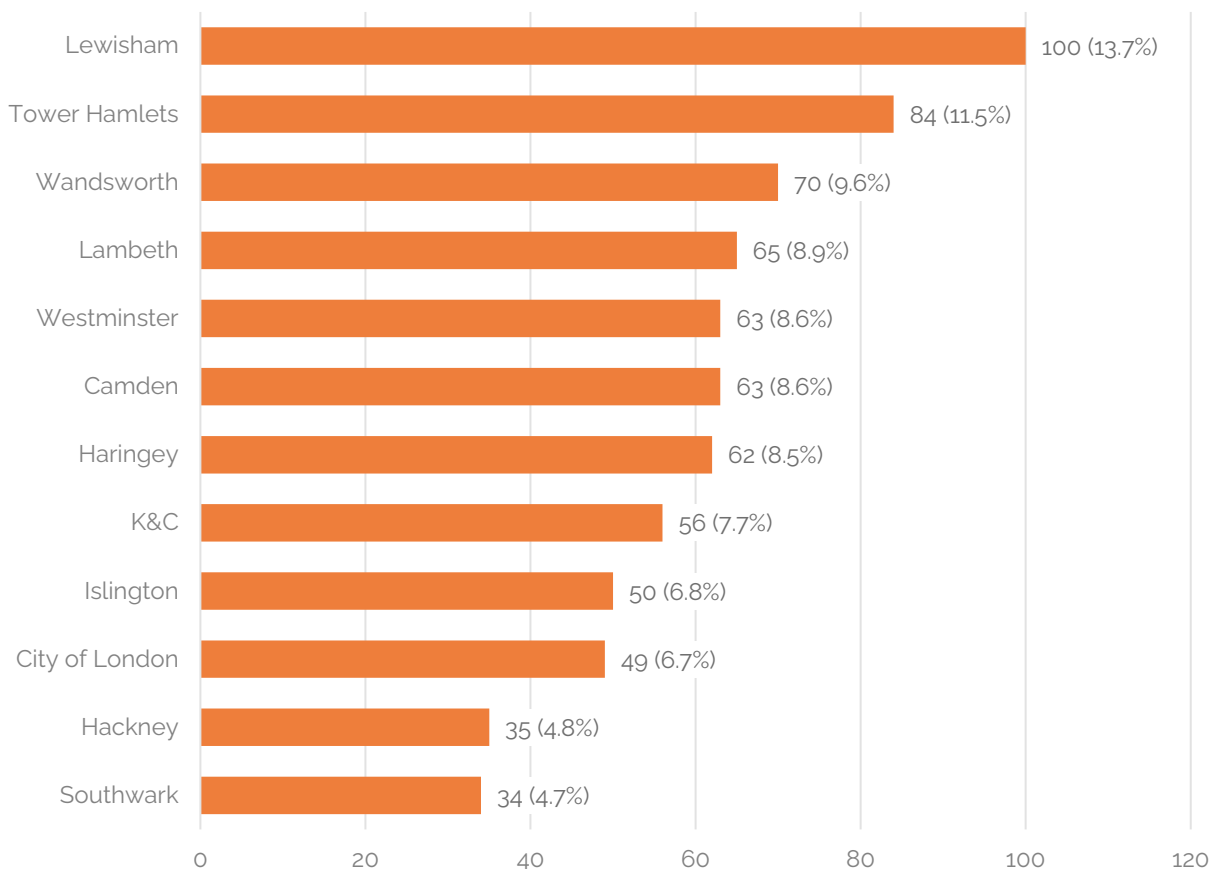
- Variation in delivery models and data systems across boroughs affected consistency and completeness of soft skills assessment data. Two boroughs were impacted by a cyber-attack, restricting their ability to share MI data.
- Response rates to baseline and follow-up surveys are limited due to the short delivery timeframe and the complex circumstances of participants.
- MI data for outcomes and barriers are drawn from different datasets, which limits the ability to directly link individual barriers to outcomes. As a result, the analysis is primarily descriptive, and there is limited scope for more detailed analytical exploration of how specific barriers may have influenced participant outcomes.
- The absence of a control group means that causality cannot be definitively established. Instead, the evaluation adopts a contribution-focused approach, triangulating multiple data sources to build a credible assessment of how and why outcomes were achieved. Qualitative evidence is used to contextualise quantitative findings and explore mechanisms of change.
- Fieldwork was conducted during early delivery, and therefore may not be fully representative of programme implementation at maturity. Some boroughs were still scaling up provision, refining delivery models and establishing partnerships, meaning findings should be interpreted as reflecting an early snapshot rather than steady-state delivery.
- Given the relatively short duration of the Trailblazer, longer-term outcomes may not yet be observable. The evaluation therefore focuses on interim and intermediate outcomes, learning and implementation insights, while highlighting areas for future follow-up and research.

3. Quantitative findings

3.1 Management Information (MI) data analysis

Based on management information up to 31 March 2026, 731 young people had engaged with one or more Full Potential interventions. Figure 1 shows that Lewisham accounted for nearly 14 per cent of all participants, closely followed by Tower Hamlets with 12 per cent. Hackney and Southwark had the smallest number of participants.

Figure 1: Number of participants by London borough (per cent of total)



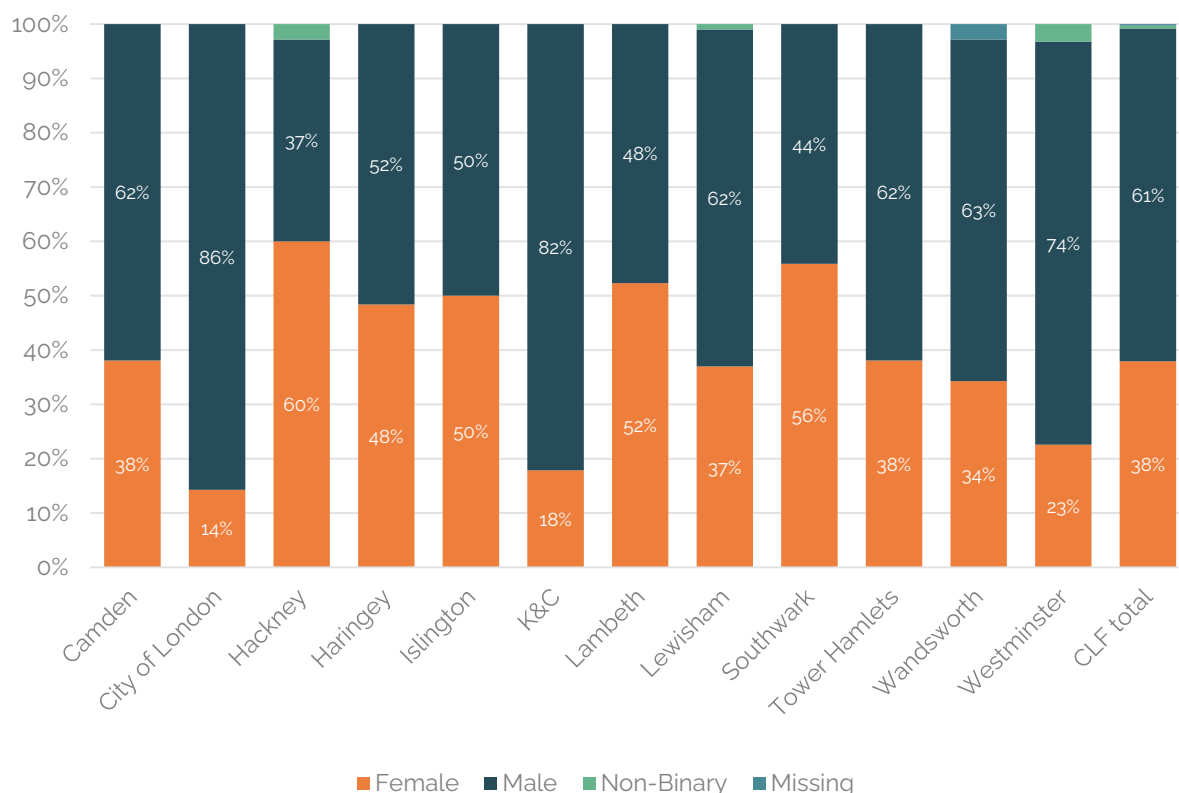
Variation in participant characteristics across boroughs

MI data indicate that boroughs have been working with distinct target populations, with notable variation in demographic profiles.

Gender

Figure 2 shows that there were clear differences in gender composition across the boroughs. Overall, around two-thirds of participants were male, but this varied significantly between boroughs. For example, City of London (86 per cent), Kensington and Chelsea (82 per cent), and Westminster (74 per cent) had predominantly male cohorts, whereas Hackney (60 per cent), Southwark (56 per cent) and Lambeth (52 per cent) had a more balanced or majority female intake.

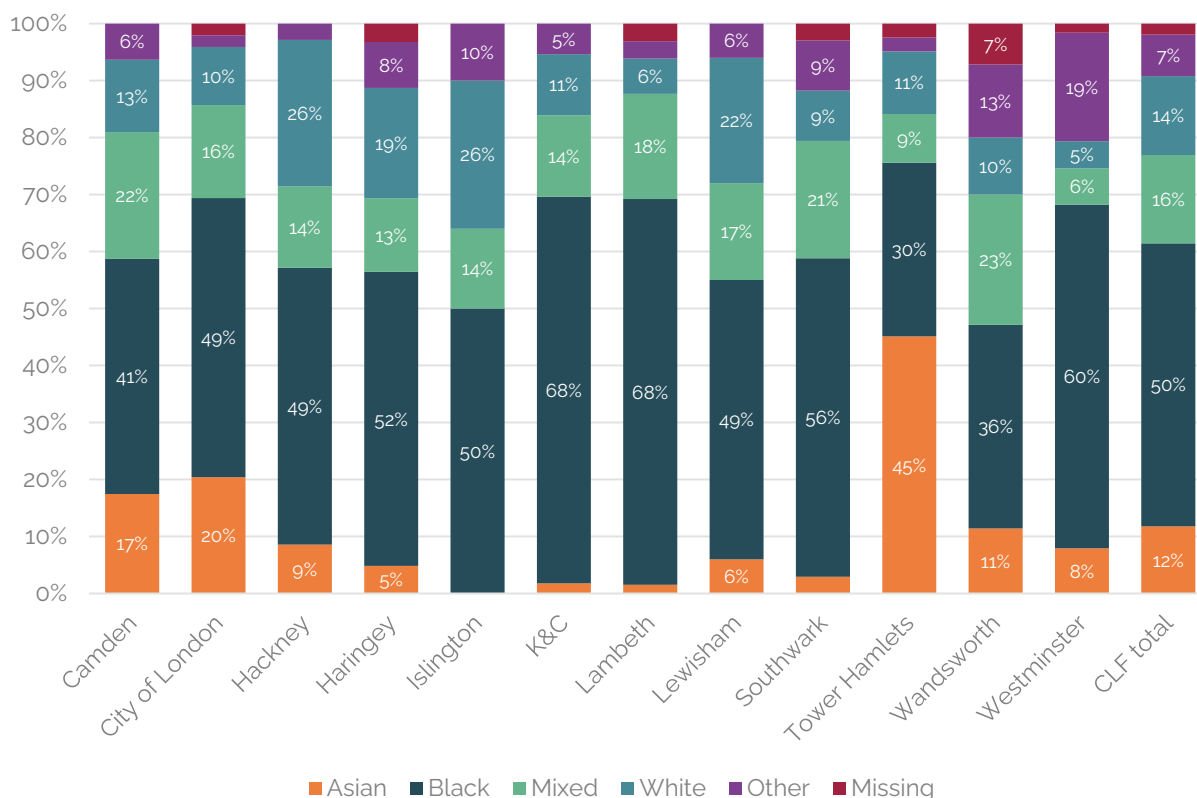
Figure 2: Percentage of participants by gender



Ethnicity

There was also variation in ethnicity. Figure 3 shows that, overall, half of participants identified as Black, with smaller proportions identifying as Mixed (16 per cent), White (14 per cent) and Asian (12 per cent). However, boroughs worked with different populations. Tower Hamlets had a higher proportion of Asian participants (45 per cent), Kensington and Chelsea and Lambeth (68 per cent) had higher proportions of Black participants, while Islington and Hackney (26 per cent) had relatively higher proportions of White participants than the programme average.

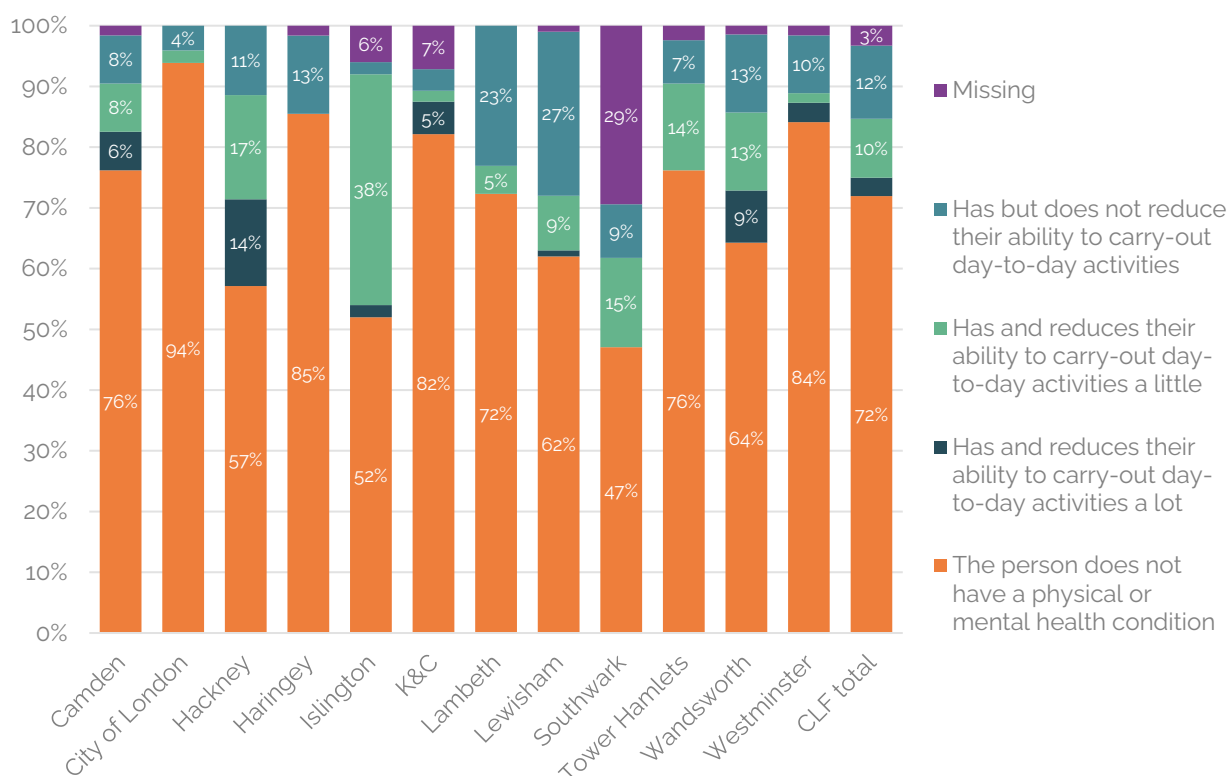
Figure 3: Percentage of participants by ethnicity



Health status

Differences were also evident in health status. Figure 4 shows that a quarter of participants (25 per cent) reported a physical or mental health condition. A total of 13 per cent of participants stated that their physical or mental health condition reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities a lot (three per cent) or a little (10 per cent). Hackney (14 per cent) had more participants whose health condition greatly affects their ability to carry out day-to-day activities compared to other boroughs, while Islington (38 per cent) had more participants whose ability is affected a little. In contrast, City of London (94 per cent), Haringey (85 per cent) and Westminster (84 per cent) had high proportions of participants without a physical or mental health condition.

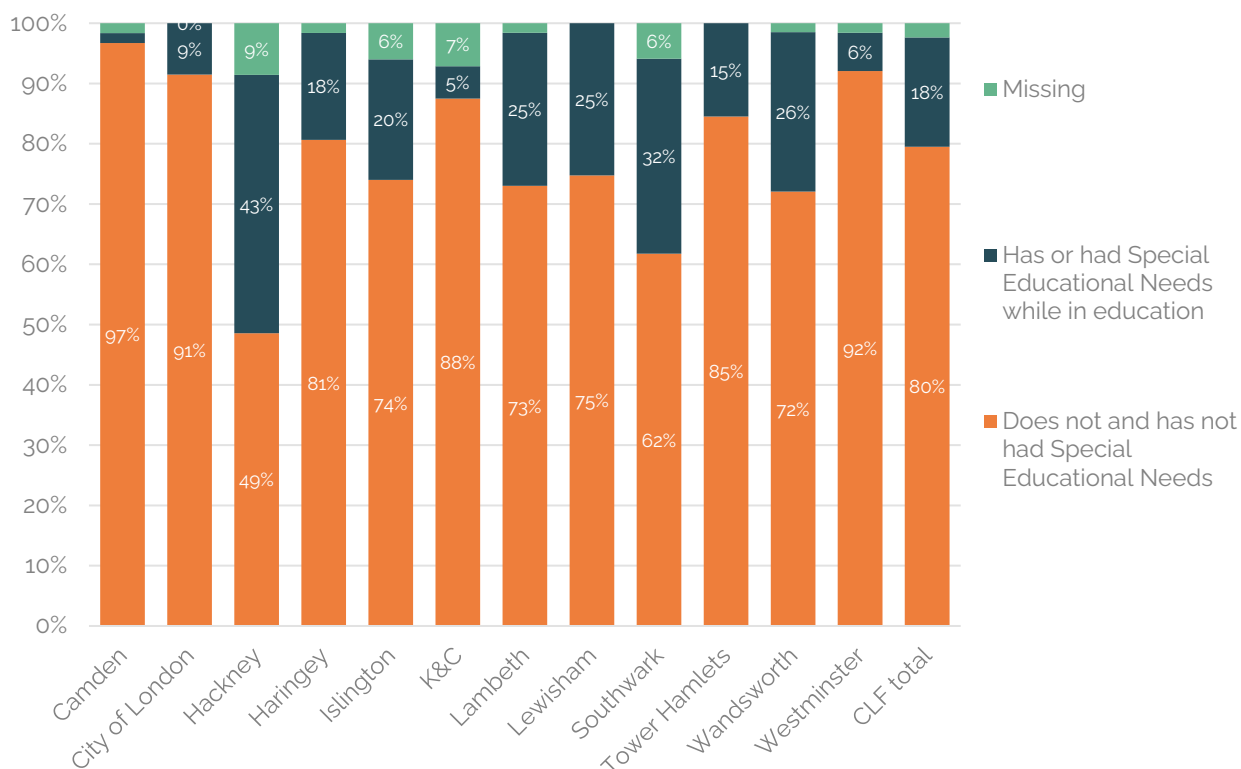
Figure 4: Percentage of participants by health status



Special Education Needs (SEN)

Similarly, Figure 5 shows that 18 per cent of participants had a history of special educational needs, with much higher proportions in Hackney (43 per cent) and Southwark (32 per cent), compared to very low levels in Camden (three per cent) and Westminster (eight per cent).

Figure 5: Percentage of participants with special educational needs

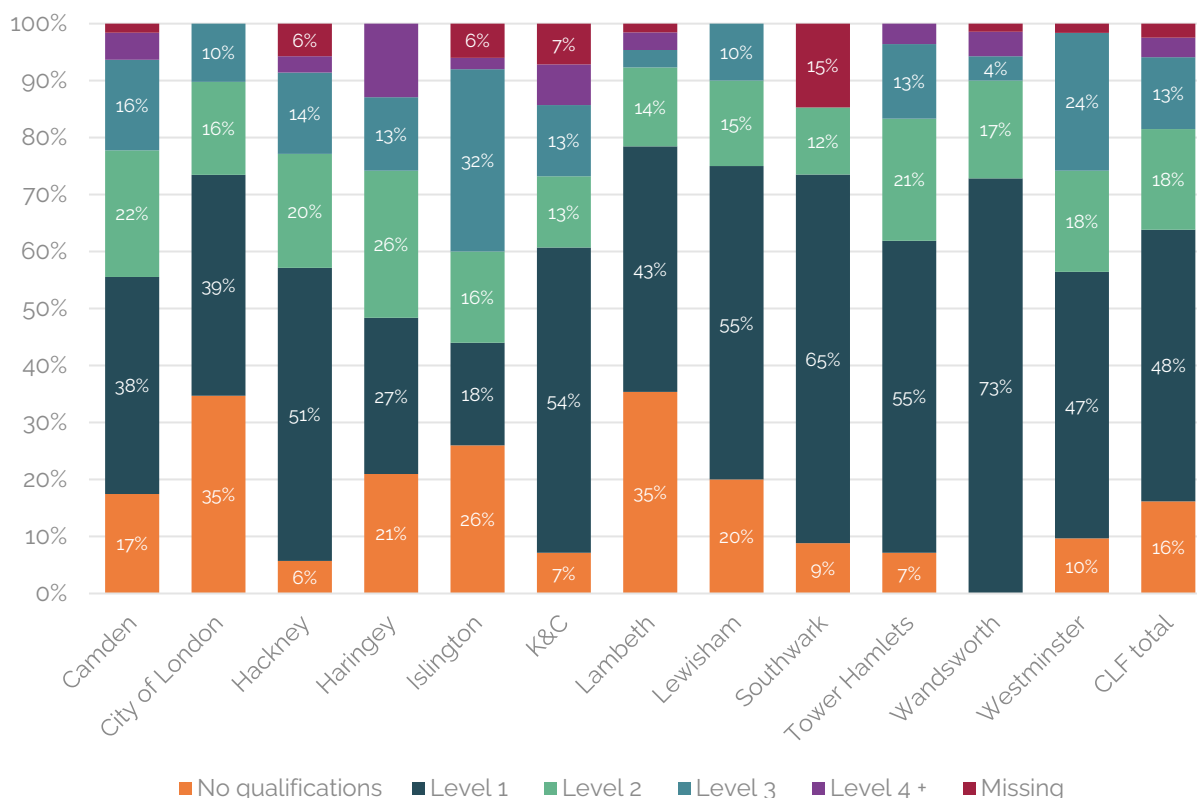


Qualification level

The data also underline a challenging starting point in terms of qualifications.

Figure 6 demonstrates that nearly two-thirds of participants (64 per cent) had Level 1 qualifications or below, and only three per cent had Level 4 or above. Some boroughs were working with particularly low-qualified cohorts; for example, 35 per cent of participants in Lambeth and the City of London had no qualifications at all.

Figure 6: Percentage of participants by qualification level (NVQ)



Employment status at the start of provision

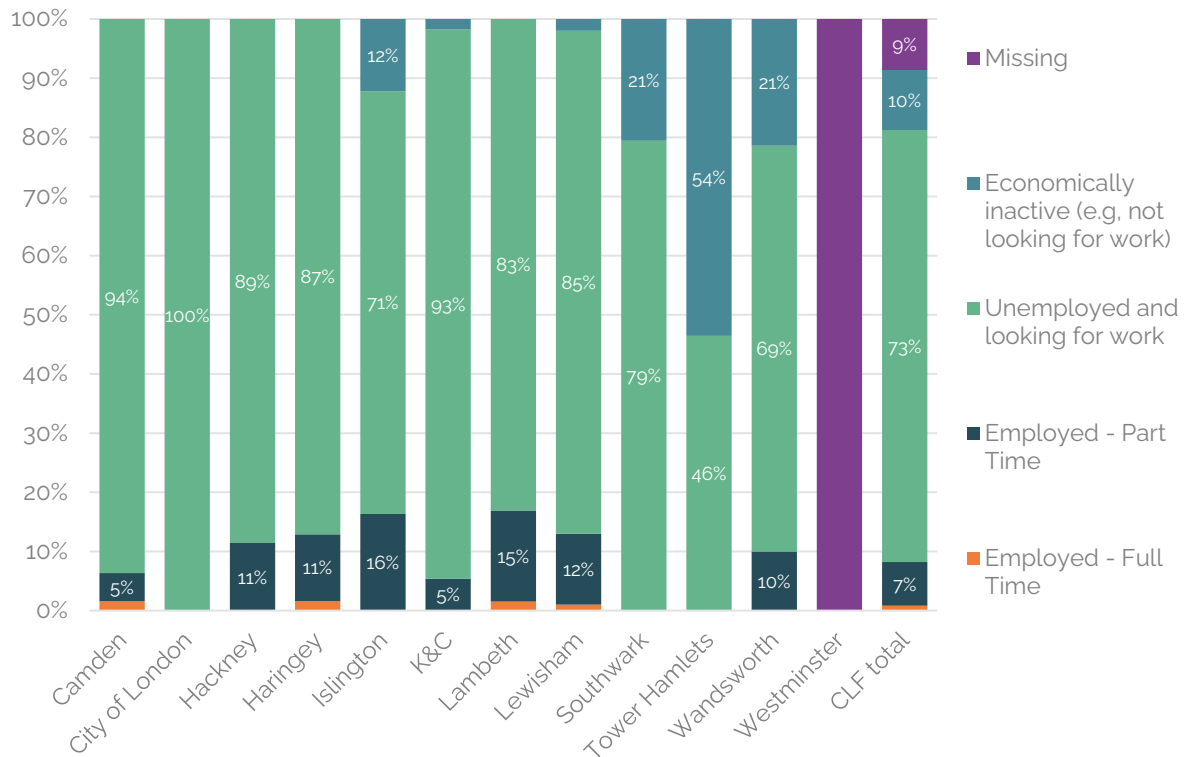
At the start of provision, most participants were not engaged in employment, highlighting the significant distance from the labour market faced by the cohort. Figure 7 shows that, overall, nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of participants were unemployed and actively looking for work. A further one in ten (10 per cent) were economically inactive, while only small proportions were in work, including seven per cent in part-time employment and fewer than 1 per cent in full-time employment.

It should be noted that participants recorded as being in employment were classified as 'at risk of NEET', reflecting cases where young people were engaged in minimal or irregular hours of work while remaining primarily reliant on benefits. This is consistent with the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) approach, where young people may be considered at risk despite nominal employment where multiple risk factors for disengagement are present.

There was also considerable variation between boroughs. For example, all participants in the City of London were unemployed at the point of entry, indicating a particularly high level of need. In contrast, Tower Hamlets had a much higher proportion of economically inactive participants (around 50 per cent) than other boroughs, suggesting different starting points in terms of readiness for work.

Overall, these data indicate that the programme was largely reaching young people who were furthest from employment, often requiring substantial support to move towards work.

Figure 7: Percentage of participants by employment status at the start of provision



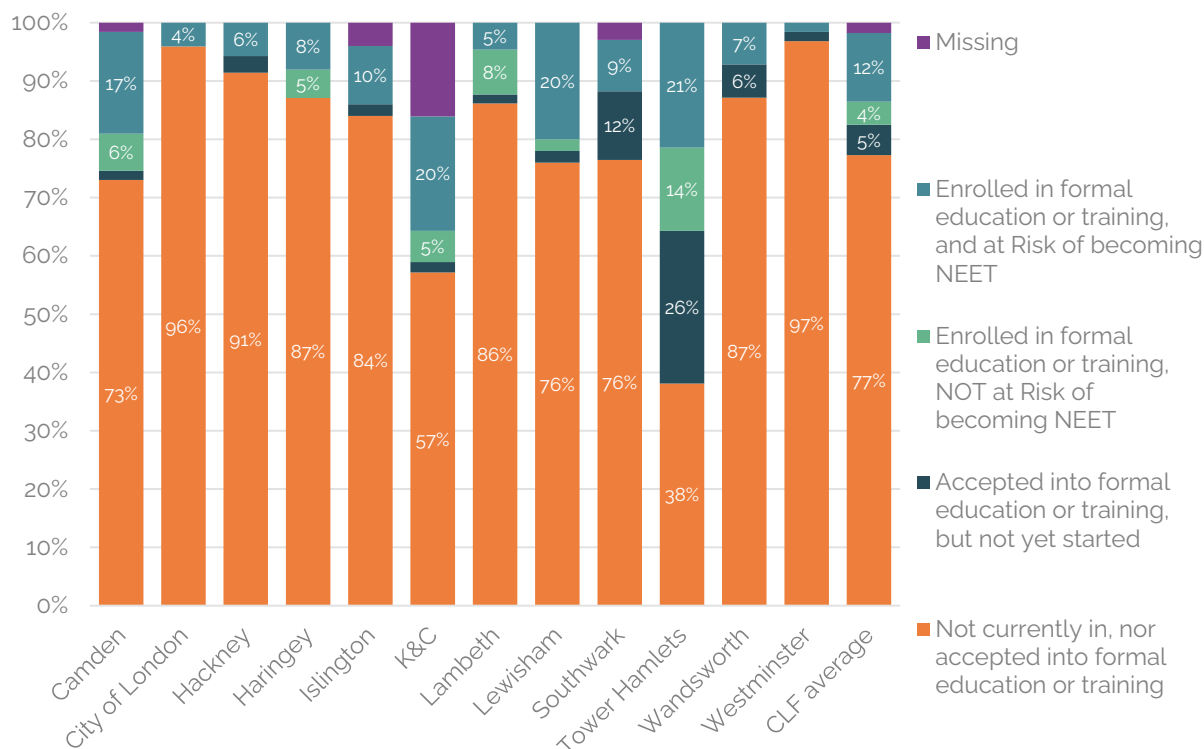
Status of formal education or training at start of provision

At the start of provision, most participants were not engaged in education or training, reinforcing the significant distance from learning pathways as well as employment. Figure 8 shows that, overall, more than three-quarters (77 per cent) were not enrolled in, or accepted into, any form of education or training. A further five per cent had secured a place but had not yet started, while only 16 per cent were already participating in education or training at programme entry.

There was substantial variation between boroughs. For example, very high proportions of participants in Westminster (97 per cent), the City of London (96 per cent) and Hackney (91 per cent) were not engaged in education or training at the outset. In contrast, Tower Hamlets, Lewisham and Kensington and Chelsea had relatively higher proportions of participants who were already enrolled or had secured places.

Among those in education or training, a large majority (around 75 per cent) were identified as being at risk of becoming NEET, indicating that even those engaged in provision often required additional support to sustain participation.

Figure 8: Percentage of participants by status of formal education or training at start of provision



Taken together, these findings demonstrate that boroughs were not working with a uniform cohort, but rather operating in distinct local contexts with populations that differed substantially in demographic profile, prior attainment and support needs. These differences should be considered when interpreting outcomes.

Barriers

In addition to demographic differences, boroughs were supporting young people facing different types and levels of barriers to employment and education.

Table 1 shows that, overall, **most barriers were non-health related (67 per cent)**, while a smaller proportion (24 per cent) related to health (19 per cent reported mental health barriers and five per cent physical health barriers). Nine per cent of participants reported SEND as a barrier.

However, the mix of barriers varied substantially between boroughs. In Hackney (45 per cent) and Southwark (38 per cent), a relatively high proportion of barriers were health related. In contrast, barriers in the City of London (96 per cent), Kensington and Chelsea (87 per cent) and Tower Hamlets (81 per cent) were overwhelmingly non-health related.

There were also differences in the type of health-related barriers reported. Mental health barriers made up a particularly high share in Haringey (36 per cent), Southwark (33 per cent) and Hackney (32 per cent). Hackney also had the highest proportion of physical health barriers (13 per cent), while nearly a quarter of participants in Southwark (24 per cent) reported SEND-related barriers.

Many participants faced multiple, overlapping challenges. Table 1 shows that, across the boroughs, around a third (31 per cent) had both health-related and non-health-related barriers. This was significantly higher in Islington and Lewisham (46 per cent), but much lower in City of London (four per cent).

Table 1: Summary of barriers by borough

Borough	Mental health	Physical health	SEND	Non-health-related barrier only	Both health related and non health related barriers
Camden	16%	3%	3%	62%	22%
City of London	2%	2%	0%	96%	4%
Hackney	29%	11%	14%	34%	43%
Haringey	26%	0%	3%	42%	34%
Islington	26%	6%	14%	50%	46%
K&C	13%	0%	0%	82%	18%
Lambeth	26%	6%	8%	57%	43%
Lewisham	24%	5%	13%	51%	46%
Southwark	21%	3%	15%	24%	29%
Tower Hamlets	5%	2%	12%	80%	20%
Wandsworth	10%	10%	16%	60%	40%
Westminster	13%	6%	2%	78%	21%
CLF total	17%	5%	8%	61%	31%

The most common non-health-related barrier was a lack of skills, reported by around one-third of participants across the programme (31 per cent). This was followed by a lack of suitable jobs (25 per cent) and low confidence (16 per cent). However, the pattern of barriers varied across boroughs. For example:

- In City of London, lack of skills was particularly prominent, reported by over three-quarters of participants (76 per cent).

- In Lambeth, a lack of suitable jobs was the most reported barrier (60 per cent).
- In Tower Hamlets, confidence issues were especially common, affecting 39 per cent of participants.
- Language barriers were reported by relatively high proportions of participants in Kensington and Chelsea (23 per cent) and Camden (21 per cent).
- Practical barriers also emerged more significantly in some areas, including childcare in Lambeth (14 per cent) and transport in Southwark (11 per cent).

Table 2: Main non-health-related barrier by borough

Borough	Skills	Suitable Jobs	Confidence	Other	Language Barrier	Childcare	Transport	Prefer not to say
Camden	11%	19%	19%	23%	21%	0%	6%	0%
City of London	76%	8%	4%	0%	8%	0%	4%	0%
Hackney	17%	17%	10%	40%	0%	0%	0%	17%
Haringey	26%	50%	9%	0%	2%	2%	9%	2%
Islington	51%	0%	31%	14%	2%	2%	0%	0%
K&C	11%	11%	14%	36%	23%	2%	0%	4%
Lambeth	20%	60%	3%	0%	3%	14%	0%	0%
Lewisham	39%	36%	11%	2%	8%	2%	1%	0%
Southwark	0%	0%	0%	72%	6%	11%	11%	0%
Tower Hamlets	30%	0%	39%	25%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Wandsworth	9%	39%	29%	6%	14%	4%	0%	0%
Westminster	60%	31%	0%	2%	4%	2%	0%	2%
CLF total	31%	25%	16%	14%	8%	3%	2%	1%

These differences highlight that, while skills, job availability and confidence were key challenges overall, boroughs were responding to distinct local barriers shaped by their participant populations and labour market contexts.

Outcomes

At the time of reporting, **18 per cent of all starters (134 participants) had entered employment**. Figure 9 shows that there was substantial variation across boroughs; for example, Lambeth recorded the highest employment outcome rate (34 per cent), while City of London reported no employment outcomes.

Figure 9: Employment outcome rates by borough

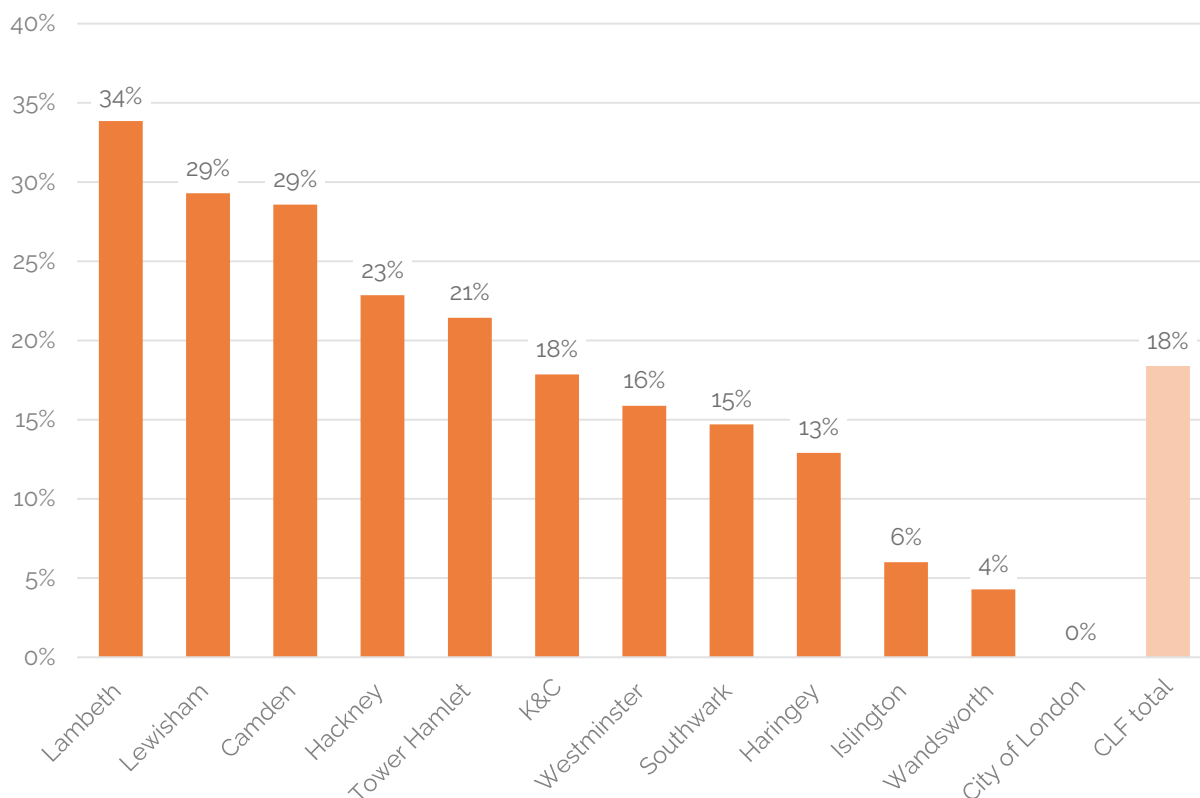
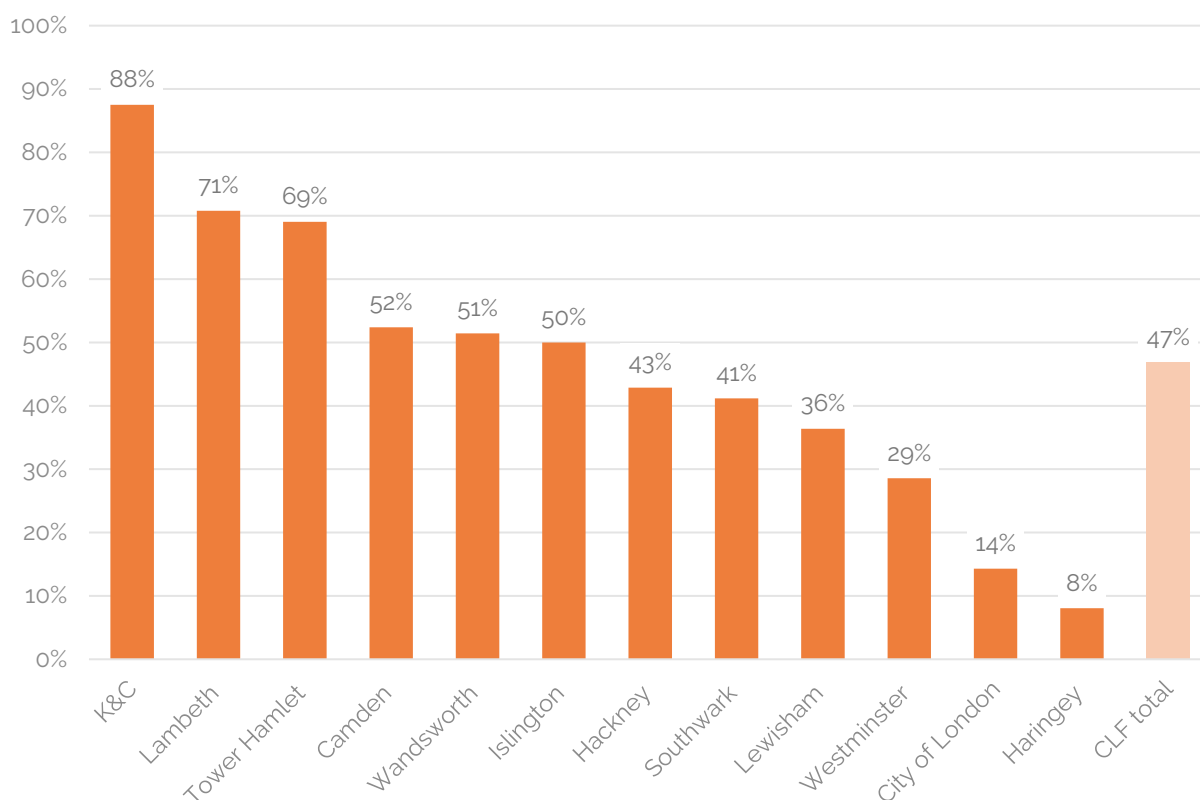


Figure 10 shows that **a larger proportion (342 participants/47 per cent) of participants progressed into education or training**. Again, outcomes varied widely; for example, Kensington and Chelsea achieved the highest rate (88 per cent), followed by Lambeth (71 per cent) and Tower Hamlets (69 per cent), while Haringey recorded the lowest rate (eight per cent). In some cases, outcomes reflect starting points. Tower Hamlets had a relatively high proportion of participants already engaged in education prior to the programme, which may have influenced its higher education outcome rates.

Figure 10: Education or training outcome rates



3.2 Soft skills assessment

Boroughs use a soft skills assessment to capture changes in participants' skills, confidence and wellbeing over the course of their engagement with Full Potential interventions. CEYP are invited to complete the assessment at two points: at, or just prior to, the start of their participation (baseline) and following completion of support (follow-up).

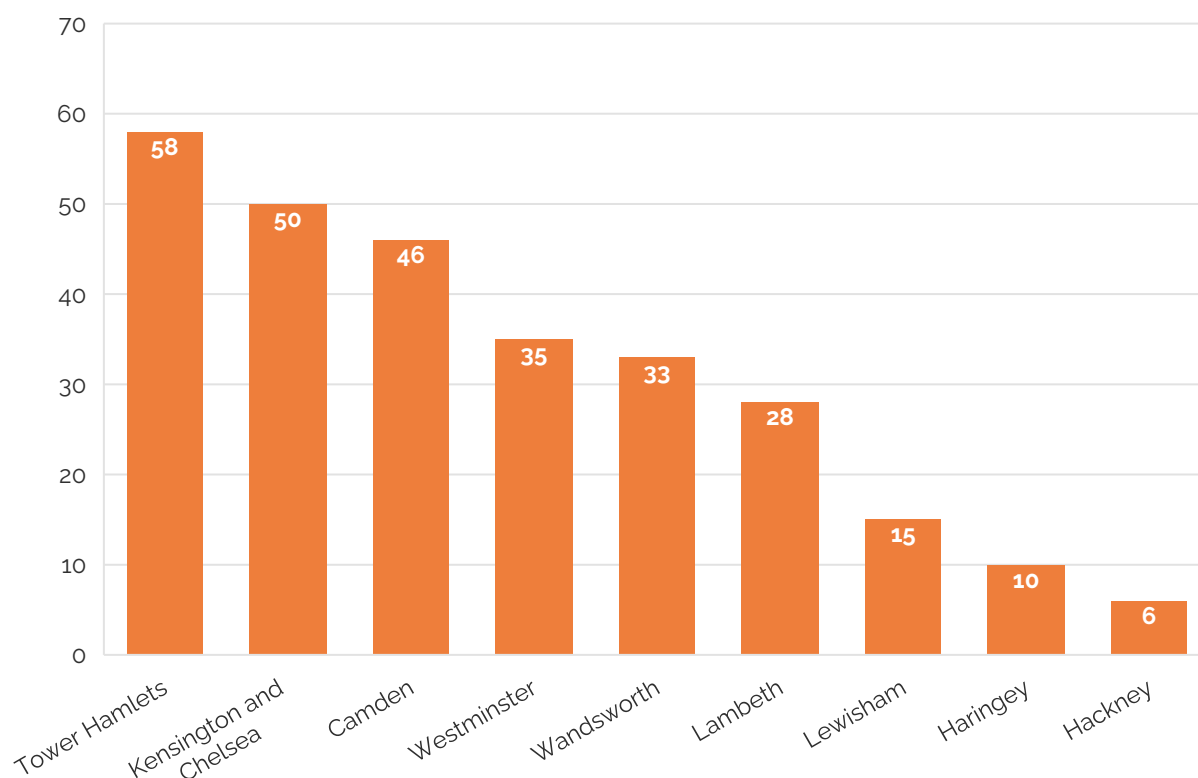
The assessment measures a range of outcomes relevant to progression towards education, employment and training, including employment skills, confidence, and motivation. Changes between baseline and follow-up responses are analysed to assess self-reported distance travelled and indicative impacts associated with participation in Full Potential. Each skill area is rated on a scale from one to 10 to provide a quantifiable measure of growth and to inform future development plans:

- A score of 1 indicates minimal competence or confidence in that skill (i.e., requiring significant development).
- A score of 10 reflects excellent competence or confidence, indicating the individual is highly capable and self-assured in that area.

This analysis is only based on the 281 participants who completed both a pre- and post-survey at the point of reporting. Figure 11 shows the number of participants that

completed both a pre- and post-survey for each borough. Results for Lewisham, Hackney and Haringey should be treated with caution due the small sample sizes. It cannot be assumed that any distance travelled results⁹ are representative of all those that participated in the programme. It is also worth noting that boroughs began delivery at different times and operated within varied local contexts, including differing levels of deprivation and need among their population. Comparative results should therefore not be interpreted as an indication of the quality or efficacy of individual boroughs' initiatives.

Figure 11: Number of participants that completed a pre- and post-survey by borough



The soft skills tracker provided pre- and post-scores to measure the distance travelled in three categories: employment skills, confidence, and motivation. A series of skill areas were used to measure competence or confidence in these three categories, with a score out of 10 assigned to each at the beginning of the programme and at the end of the programme. Table 3 outlines the key measures:

⁹ Distance travelled" measures changes in participants' self-reported outcomes between pre- and post-surveys, providing an indication of progress made during the programme period.

Table 3: Key soft skills assessment measures

Employment skills	Confidence	Motivation
Interview skills	Confidence in interviews	Setting an alarm and getting up on time
Applying for jobs	Speaking to employers	Following a routine
Writing a CV	Engaging in group discussions	Attending appointments on time
Using job search websites	Asking questions and clarifying information	Completing tasks independently
Attending job fairs	Meeting new people	Seeking out job opportunities
Completing application forms	Presenting oneself professionally	Attending Interviews
Practicing mock interviews		Setting and achieving personal goals

Key results

The soft skills assessment indicates that Full Potential has been successful at increasing the competence and confidence of participants in the three categories measured. The average score for all participants included in the analysis, for all categories combined, was 5.2 at the pre-survey stage. This increased to 6.8 at the post-survey stage, a difference of 1.6 or a 31 per cent increase. While there is no direct benchmark or comparator to assess the level of improvement, the consistency of positive change across all categories and boroughs suggests meaningful progress over a relatively short delivery period.

The programme was particularly successful at increasing participant competence regarding employment skills. The average score for all participants included in the analysis was 4.5 at the pre-survey stage. This increased to 6.3 at the post-survey stage, a difference of 1.8 or a 41 per cent increase. For confidence, the average score was 5.2 at the pre-survey stage. This increased to 6.9 at the post-survey stage, a difference of 1.7 or a 33 per cent increase. For motivation, the score was 5.9 at the pre-survey stage, increasing to 7.3 at the post-survey stage – a difference of 1.4 or a 23 per cent increase.

At the borough level, Tower Hamlets had very low average scores at the pre-survey stage for all measures, in most cases followed by Lambeth. In contrast, Haringey and Hackney generally had the highest average pre-survey scores followed by Wandsworth and Camden. However, results for Haringey and Hackney should be treated with caution due to the small sample size.

Tower Hamlets had the largest positive differences between the pre- and post-surveys scores for all measures and therefore the largest percentage increases. Camden and Kensington and Chelsea consistently had the smallest point differences between the pre- and post-surveys. Tables 4 and 5 outline the average pre- and post-survey scores, as well as the difference between pre- and post-survey scores, by London borough.

Table 4: Pre- and post-survey scores by borough

Borough	Average score pre-survey				Average score post survey			
	Employment skills	Confidence	Motivation	Total	Employment skills	Confidence	Motivation	Total
Camden	5.7	6.8	7.2	6.5	6.9	7.6	7.9	7.5
Hackney	6.4	7.5	8.0	7.3	7.7	8.1	8.6	8.1
Haringey	6.8	7.0	7.7	7.2	8.9	9.1	9.3	9.1
K & C	4.5	5.1	5.8	5.1	5.6	6.1	6.5	6.1
Lambeth	3.3	4.3	5.2	4.3	5.6	6.4	6.7	6.2
Lewisham	4.9	5.3	6.6	5.6	7.0	7.5	8.5	7.7
Tower Hamlets	3.0	3.4	3.8	3.4	5.7	6.1	6.3	6.0
Wandsworth	5.8	6.3	7.7	6.6	7.4	7.9	8.5	7.9
Westminster	4.1	5.1	5.9	5.0	5.9	6.9	7.3	6.7
All	4.5	5.2	5.9	5.2	6.3	6.9	7.3	6.8

Table 5: Difference between pre- and post-survey scores by London borough

Borough	Diff.				% Diff.			
	Employment skills	Confidence	Motivation	Total	Employment skills	Confidence	Motivation	Total
Camden	1.2	0.8	0.7	0.9	22%	12%	10%	14%
Hackney	1.3	0.7	0.6	0.9	21%	9%	7%	12%
Haringey	2.2	2.1	1.6	1.9	32%	30%	20%	27%
K & C	1.1	1.0	0.8	1.0	25%	19%	14%	19%
Lambeth	2.3	2.1	1.5	2.0	69%	49%	30%	46%
Lewisham	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.1	43%	42%	29%	37%
Tower Hamlets	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.6	90%	78%	66%	77%
Wandsworth	1.6	1.6	0.8	1.3	28%	26%	10%	20%
Westminster	1.8	1.9	1.5	1.7	45%	37%	25%	34%
All	1.8	1.7	1.4	1.6	41%	33%	23%	31%

Figures 12 to 19 show the scores for each of the three main categories by borough and a total for the whole programme. The scores are based on the average score for all the skill areas under each of the three categories. These charts show the scores at the pre- and post-stage along with the differences between the two. Additional charts show the differences ranked from largest to smallest by borough.

All measures

Figure 12 shows consistent improvement from pre- to post-survey across all boroughs, with post-survey scores higher in every case. Figure 13 shows that the largest increases are seen in Tower Hamlets and Lewisham, while Camden and Hackney show more modest gains, resulting in an overall average improvement of 1.6 points.

Figure 2: Average pre- and post-survey scores by borough – all measures

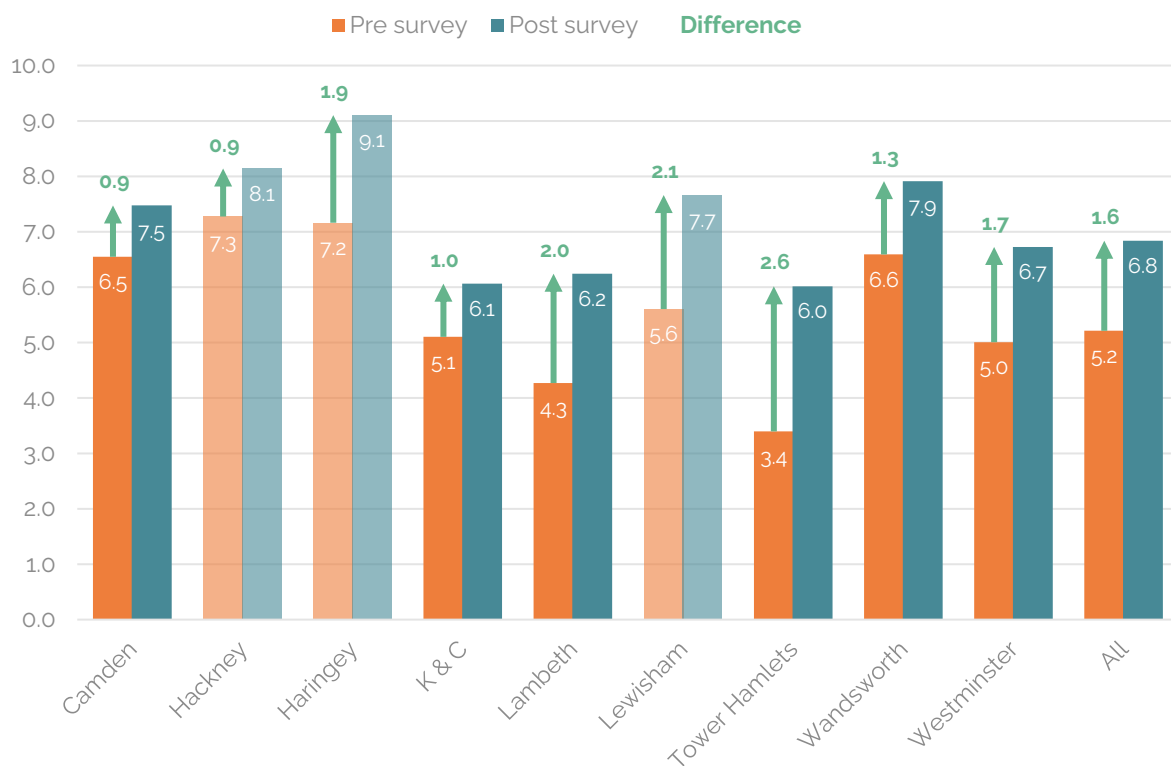
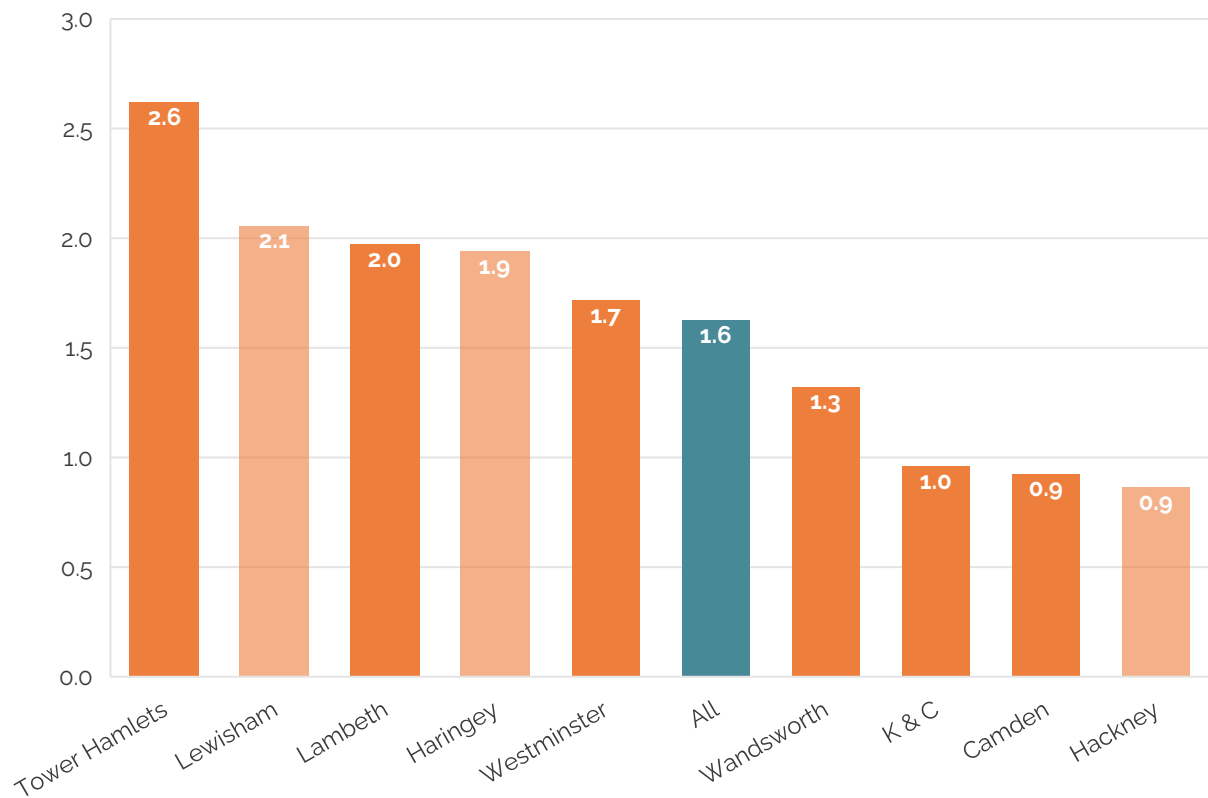


Figure 13 Difference in pre- and post-survey scores by borough – all measures



Employment skills

Figure 14 shows that, across all boroughs, post-survey scores are higher than pre-survey scores for employment skills, indicating consistent improvement in every measure. Figure 15 shows that the largest gains are seen in Tower Hamlets and Lambeth, while even the smallest increases still reflect positive change, contributing to an overall average increase of around 1.8 points.

Figure 14: Average pre- and post-survey scores by borough – employment skills

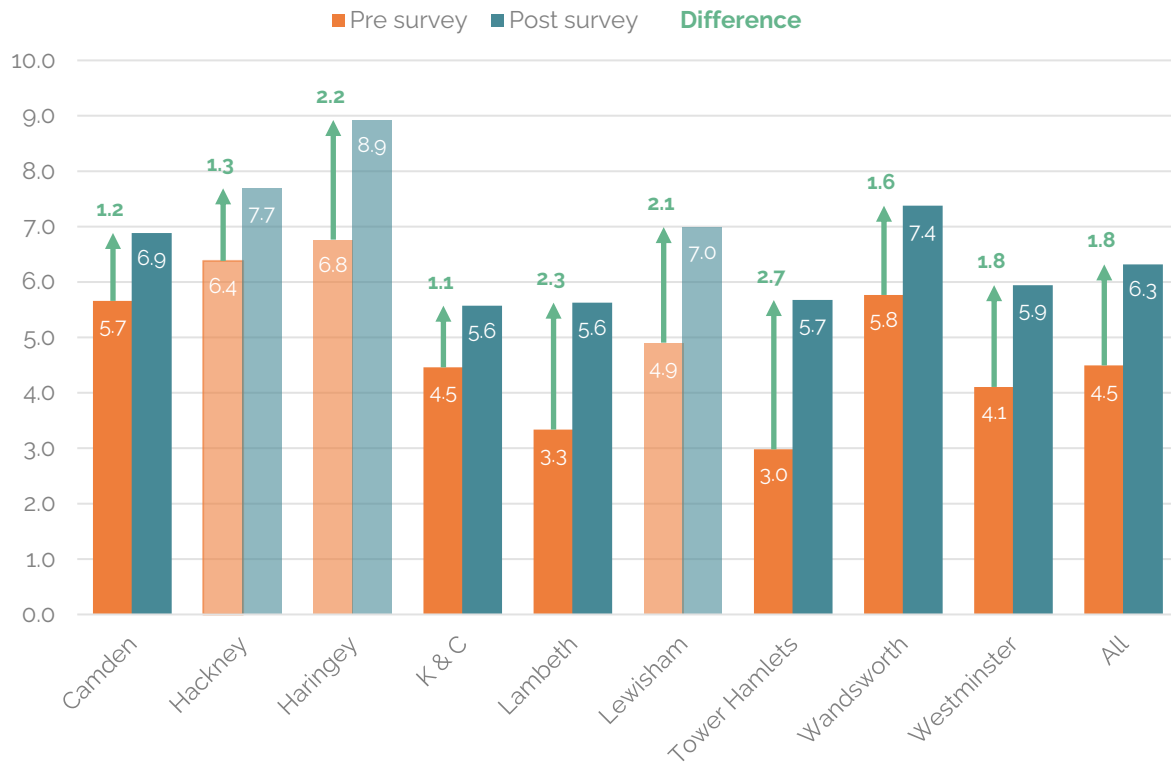
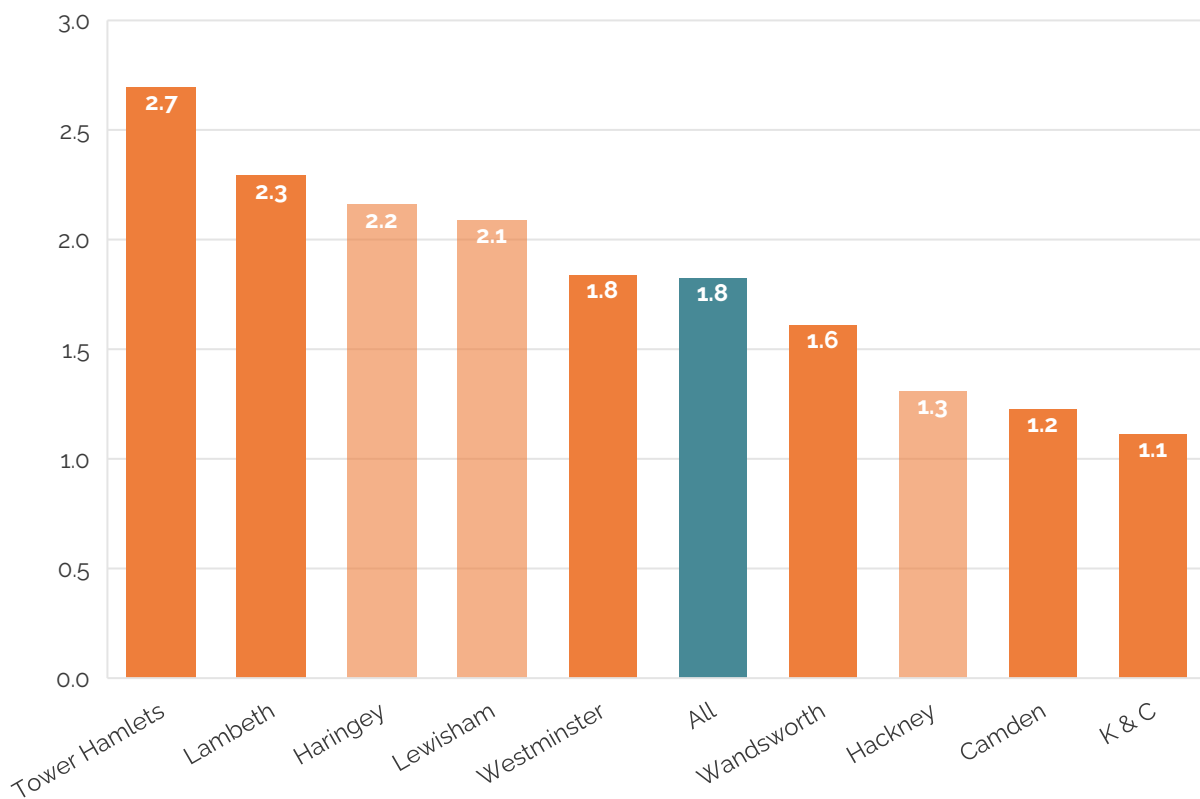


Figure 15: Difference in pre- and post-survey scores by borough – employment skills



Confidence

Figure 16 shows higher post-survey scores compared with pre-survey scores for confidence measures across all boroughs, indicating consistent improvement in participants' confidence overall. Figure 17 shows that the largest increase was in Tower Hamlets while Camden showed smaller but still positive gains, contributing to an overall average increase of 1.7 points.

Figure 16: Average pre- and post-survey scores by borough – confidence

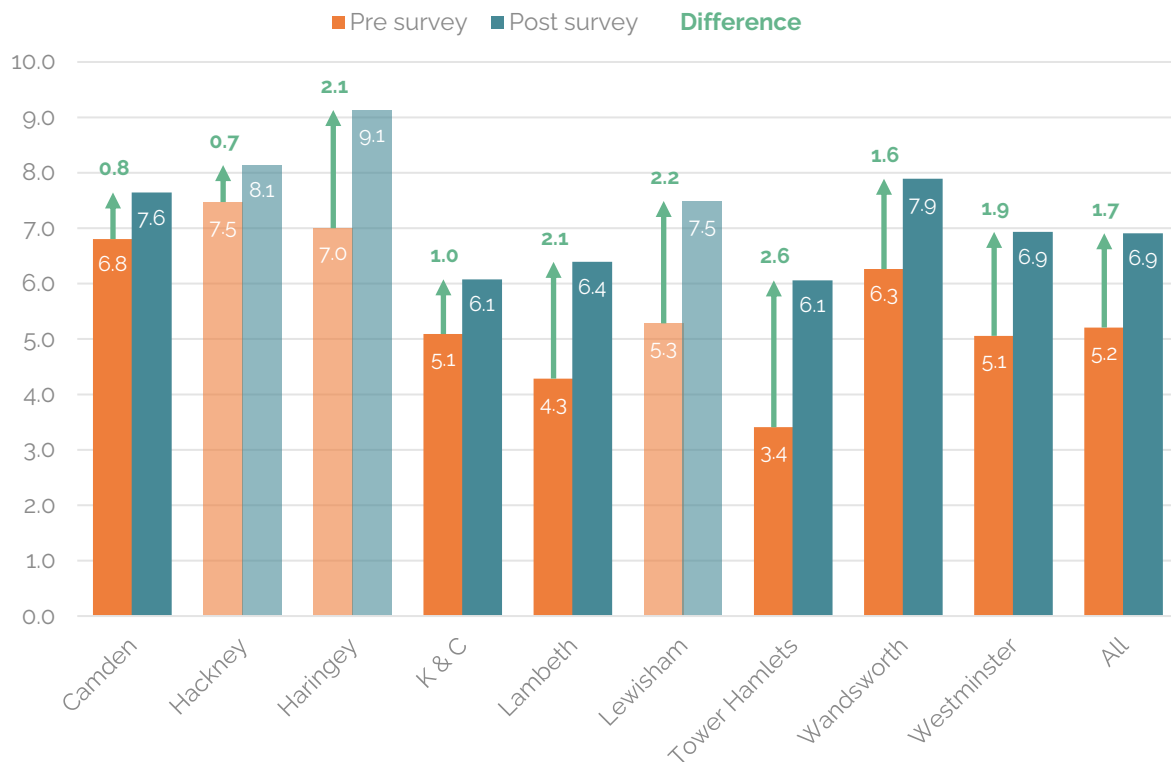
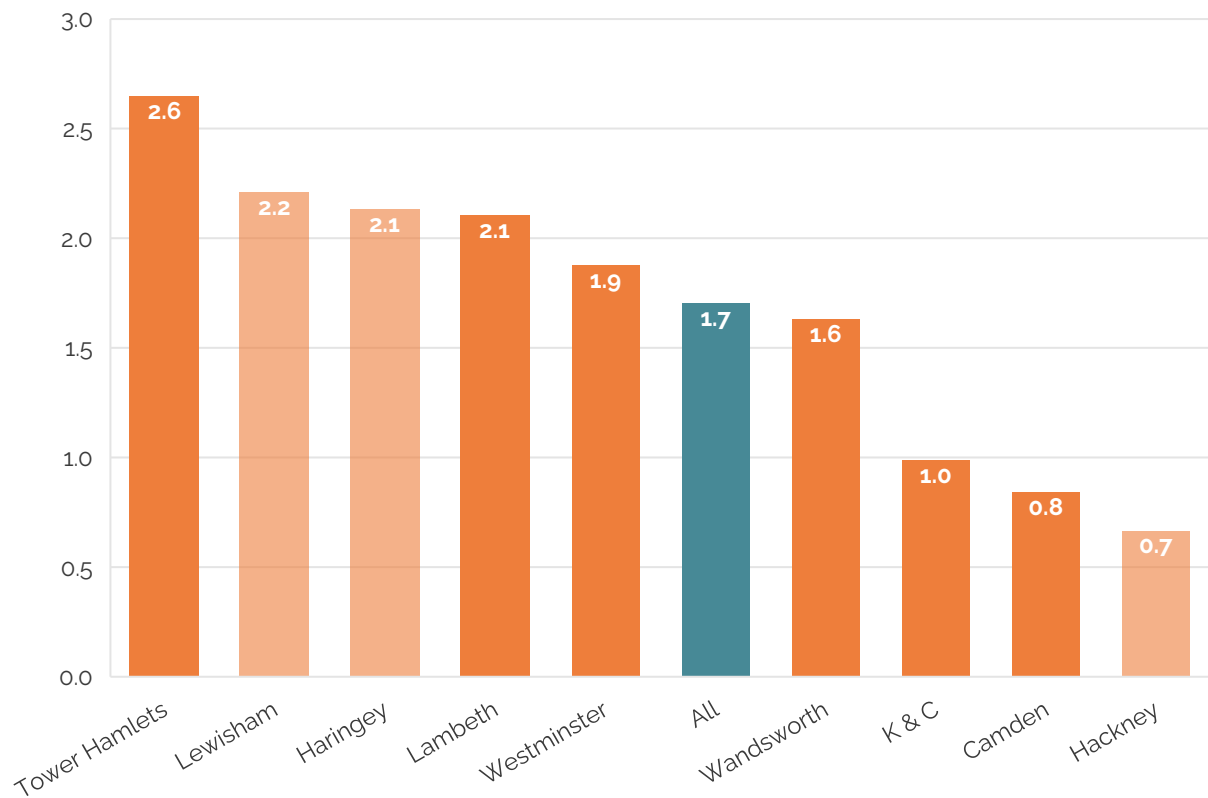


Figure 17: Difference in pre- and post-survey scores by borough – confidence



Motivation

Figure 18 shows a consistent increase between pre- and post-survey scores for motivation across all boroughs. Figure 19 shows similar trends, with improvements particularly strong in Tower Hamlets, while gains in Camden are smaller but remain positive, resulting in an overall average increase of 1.4 points.

Figure 18: Average pre- and post-survey scores by borough – motivation

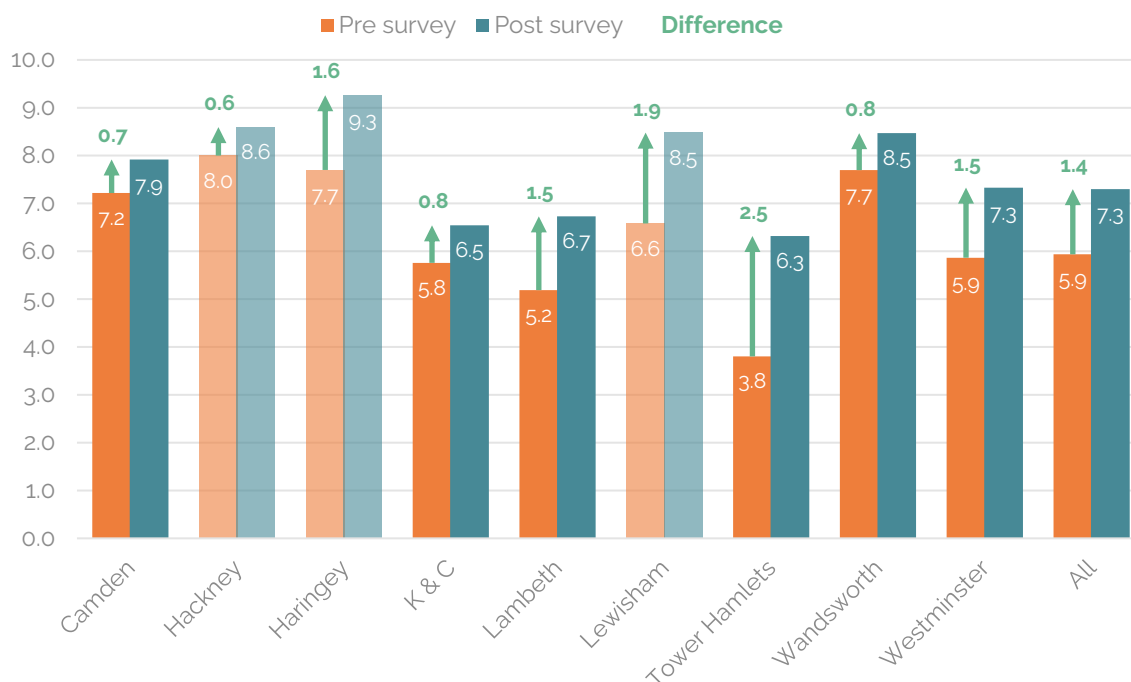
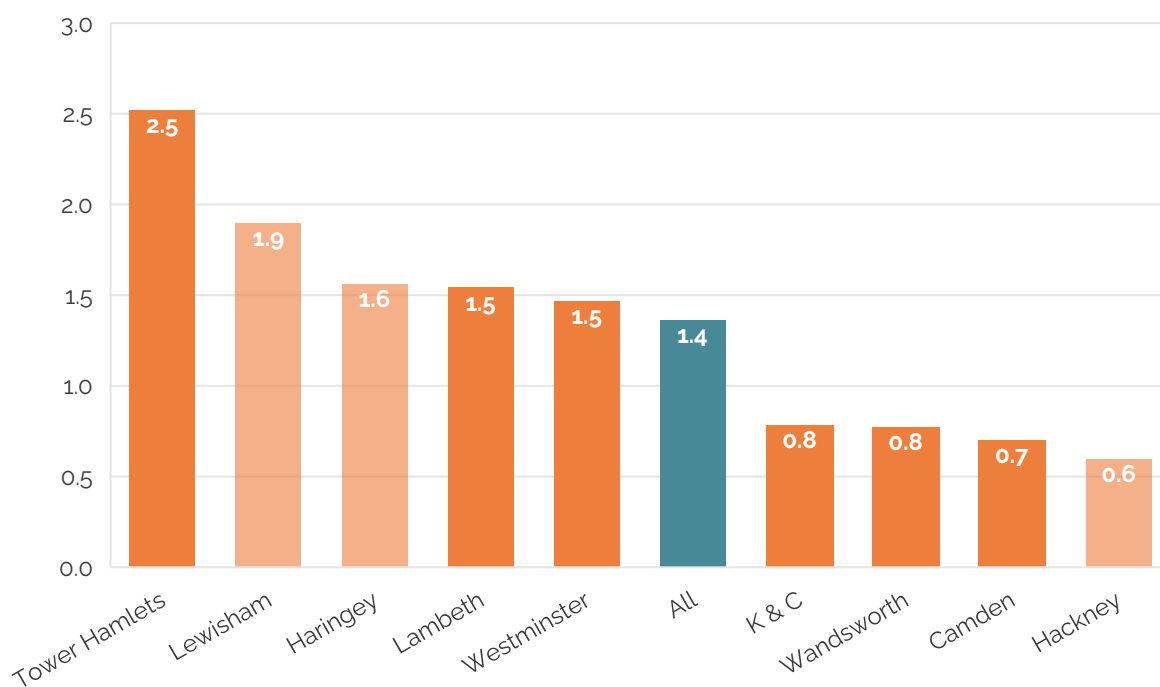


Figure 19: Difference in pre- and post-survey scores by borough – motivation



City of London

City of London measured distance travelled using a different set of measures. They also scored each measure in a different way: participants were asked to enter a number from 1 to 5, where 1 is 'strongly agree' and 5 is 'strongly disagree' (i.e. a smaller number is positive, while a higher number is a negative response). The results were

based on 49 participants. Table 6 and Figure 20 show the average pre- and post-survey scores along with the difference.

Table 3 shows positive outcomes for nearly all measures, with particularly large gains in confidence-related indicators such as having a CV they are happy with (61 per cent increase), knowing who to contact if facing abuse (53 per cent increase), and feeling confident speaking in front of a group (40 per cent increase). Many of the measures associated with getting a participant closer to getting a job all had large increases.

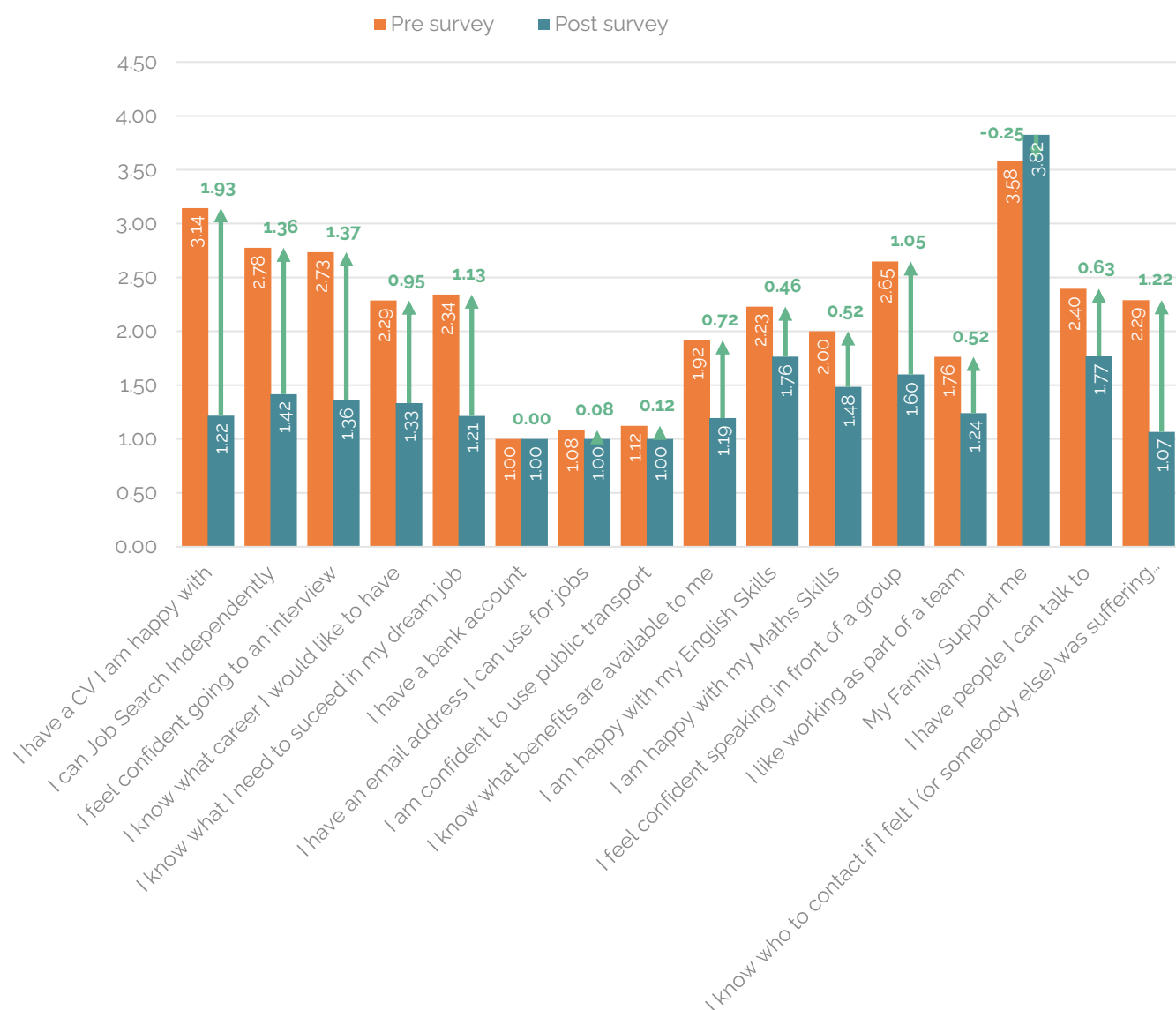
Smaller or no changes are seen in practical access measures such as having a bank account or email address, which had the lowest pre- and post-scores. Family support is the only area showing a negative outcome (seven per cent decrease). This measure had the highest pre- and post-scores.

These findings should be interpreted in the context of the City of London's distinct local profile. Compared to other boroughs, it has a very small resident population, often working with a more transient cohort, including young people accessing services across borough boundaries. This can result in different starting points and engagement patterns, influencing both the baseline scores and the scale of change observed.

Table 6: Difference between pre- and post-survey scores, City of London

	Start	End	Diff.	% diff
I have a CV I am happy with	3.14	1.22	1.93	61%
I can job search independently	2.78	1.42	1.36	49%
I feel confident going to an interview	2.73	1.36	1.37	50%
I know what career I would like to have	2.29	1.33	0.95	42%
I know what I need to succeed in my dream job	2.34	1.21	1.13	48%
I have a bank account	1.00	1.00	0.00	0%
I have an email address I can use for jobs	1.08	1.00	0.08	8%
I am confident using public transport	1.12	1.00	0.12	11%
I know what benefits are available to me	1.92	1.19	0.72	38%
I am happy with my English Skills	2.23	1.76	0.46	21%
I am happy with my Maths Skills	2.00	1.48	0.52	26%
I feel confident speaking in front of a group	2.65	1.60	1.05	40%
I like working as part of a team	1.76	1.24	0.52	30%
My family support me	3.58	3.82	-0.25	-7%
I have people I can talk to	2.40	1.77	0.63	26%
I know who to contact if I felt I (or somebody else) was suffering abuse	2.29	1.07	1.22	53%

Figure 20: Difference in pre- and post-average scores, City of London



Islington

Islington's survey was based on just three measures: Speaking, Planning and Problem solving, each rated on a 1–5 scale (where higher scores indicate more positive outcomes). In total, 22 participants completed both the pre- and post-survey. Figure 21 shows the average pre- and post-survey scores along with the difference. It shows that all three measures had a positive outcome. Although 'Planning' had the smallest points difference, it showed the largest percentage increase (29 per cent). The other two measures increased by 23 per cent.

These findings should be interpreted considering Islington's local context. Compared to some other boroughs, Islington is working with a cohort where care experienced young people are significantly more likely to be NEET or economically inactive, but

where there is also a relatively mature and well-integrated support infrastructure in place. Delivery builds on established partnerships between leaving care, education and employment services, meaning participants may benefit from stronger baseline support, which can influence both starting points and the scale and nature of progress observed.

Figure 21: Difference in pre- and post-survey average scores, Islington



4. Qualitative findings

4.1 Delivery models

Commissioning of delivery

A range of approaches are used to deliver Full Potential across the boroughs. Only two boroughs have commissioned out all their activities. Both Lambeth and Lewisham have commissioned DFF to deliver most of the individual work with CEYP, with some additional group sessions and workshops being delivered by other local partners.

"We could recruit our own career specialists or Employment Advisor officers within the council, but I think it's probably the specialism of the corporate partnership and engagement stuff in Drive Forward that I like." (*Borough delivery staff*)

Four boroughs are delivering their Full Potential interventions entirely in-house. The reasons for this varied: some felt that they already have strong offers across their local authority which they can join up into a more comprehensive set of support for CEYP; others had found it challenging to commission external organisations in the shorter-than-expected timeframe of the project.

The remaining boroughs are utilising a blend of in-house and externally commissioned provision to deliver the programme. This mainly involves keeping dedicated one-to-one support delivery in-house and commissioning external organisations to deliver group activities or programmes based on their area of expertise, such as mental health, financial management, employability skills or employer engagement. In practice, this often reflects the extension of an established delivery model, with Full Potential enabling boroughs to scale specialist provision from organisations such as DFF across more young people and areas.

Types of interventions delivered

Most activities being delivered by borough staff and commissioned partners are one-to-one, focused on supporting individual CEYP to identify and overcome the barriers they faced to education, employment and training. In fact, half of the boroughs are only delivering one-to-one activities as part of Full Potential so far. Two of these boroughs were planning to deliver group activities around work readiness and Functional Skills but the delays to the start of the programme have made this challenging to commission in the timeframe. Key one-to-one activities include:

- **Tailored one-to-one support from a dedicated worker:** This is a key feature of all boroughs' Full Potential offers. Delivery staff (either internal or from delivery partners) meet regularly with young people and provide wraparound support to address barriers to employment, help clarify their goals, and refer them to other sources of support or activities, including courses, mental health support and

benefits advice. The Full Potential funding has also enabled boroughs to offer specialist one-to-one support. For example, Camden has funded private mental health counselling for some participants.

- **One-to-one employability support:** All boroughs are delivering individual employability support to young people on their programmes. This is often delivered by their dedicated worker, but some boroughs have brought in specialist services such as JCP or DFF to deliver this. Support includes sessions on career goals and interests, interview skills, CVs, job applications, job searching, communicating with employers and mock interviews. Tailored career coaching often continues after young people secure internships, placements and jobs, supporting their transition into employment, though young people often felt that this tapered off quickly once they were in work.
- **Work placements and internships:** Nine boroughs have incorporated work placements or internships into their Full Potential programmes. This was seen as a crucial offer to help young people gain experience and take their first steps into a career. These vary considerably in length, from two weeks in one borough to six months in others. So far, most placements have been internal with other council departments, though a small number of young people were placed with external employers. In most cases, boroughs used Full Potential funding to ensure these opportunities—whether internal or external—are paid. Some boroughs, such as Southwark and Tower Hamlets, require young people to complete employability skills training before starting a placement.
- **Financial support:** All boroughs are using Full Potential funding to remove financial barriers to education, employment and training opportunities for young people. This includes paying for transport to work placements, courses or support meetings; paying for interview clothes and work clothes for those on internships; covering course fees or equipment, including laptops; and paying for lunches on programmes, courses or placements.
- **(Peer) mentoring:** Three boroughs are delivering or commissioning mentoring programmes for CEYP assessed as being furthest from the labour market. Lewisham has commissioned peer mentoring from older care leavers who could act as role models to those not yet considering employment or training. Similarly, Kensington and Chelsea and Islington have both established mentoring programmes for more vulnerable young people, matching them with mentors in sectors they are interested in. Lambeth has taken a more informal approach, organising networking events where CEYP can meet their peers and socialise.

"I've commissioned three really interesting providers to do some mentoring, but with mentors who are kind of six or seven years removed from having been care leavers themselves. The intention is that these are for young people who are further away from the labour market, and the intention is about building resilience and essential skills to be able to engage with employment related services."

(Borough delivery staff)

Six boroughs are delivering group activities as part of their Full Potential programmes. These include:

- **Skills workshops and courses:** These range from one-off workshops on employability skills and confidence building topics, through to more substantial programmes of learning. For example, Wandsworth has developed an ESOL employability programme for CEYP, while Lambeth has commissioned The Skills Spot to deliver a range of wellbeing, fitness, Functional Skills and employability programmes. Several boroughs are using Full Potential funding to pay for CSCS card and SIA badge courses to help young people move into construction and security work.
- **Employer activities:** Four boroughs are delivering group activities involving employers. Westminster is working in partnership with a local employer to deliver a careers day on their site; Camden also delivered a career day with High Speed Two (HS2); and both Southwark and Lambeth are delivering events where young people can network with a range of employers. These activities aim to provide informal opportunities for CEYP to meet with employers, talk about their sector, roles and values, and potentially secure a job with a local business.

Three boroughs are taking a more structured approach to the delivery of their programmes. Islington, Kensington and Chelsea and Tower Hamlets each took time at the start of the year to identify the key barriers their young people face and develop a programme of support which addresses these. In each borough, this has resulted in three strands of support, for broadly similar groups:

1. **For those furthest from the labour market:** one-to-one support, coaching and mentoring to change their attitudes towards work and start seeing themselves as being able to move into employment.
2. **For those who were interested in work but lacked skills or experience:** confidence-building, employability skills and wellbeing workshops or short courses, to build confidence, routine and gain qualifications relevant to the workplace.

3. **For those who were ready for work but not yet in employment:** intensive one-to-one employability support to help with job applications, alongside ring-fenced paid work placements or internship opportunities.

This structured approach reflects wider evidence from the interviews that young people require different types and intensities of support depending on their distance from the labour market. Stakeholders in these boroughs described this model as helpful in structuring delivery and clarifying progression routes, although there is limited evidence to compare its effectiveness against other approaches.

Tailoring for care experienced young people

Boroughs agreed that Full Potential is enabling them to deliver more specialist support to CEYP, tailoring their offer to the specific needs and challenges faced by this cohort. This included opportunities better matched to their interests and goals, regular one-to-one contact with advisors, and flexibility in how support was delivered. In addition, the programme brings together employability support with wider, holistic provision, such as wellbeing support and referrals to specialist services, reflecting the complex and overlapping barriers faced by many CEYP. The need for tailored delivery is reinforced by MI data showing wide variation in participants' needs, including high rates of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in some boroughs and large proportions with low or no qualifications.

Some boroughs have also commissioned specialist services such as DFF to provide expert support to CEYP, not just into work but throughout their placements and internships. Others are drawing on specialisms of local organisations addressing specific challenges that their young people face; for example, Camden can refer young people to their Spear programme which supports young people with SEND.

Care experienced young people recognise that the support provided through Full Potential is more tailored and understanding of their needs than other programmes they have accessed. Participants described feeling comfortable explaining their situations and delivery staff responding with flexible, personalised support and opportunities aligned to their goals and confidence levels.

"At the start, it was very much like, 'What do you want to do? What's your ideas? What's your hobbies? Would you like me to...?' I felt like it was very tailored to me." (*Young person*)

While this included individual-level tailoring, such as adapting meeting formats or matching opportunities to interests, it also reflected a set of common approaches across boroughs specifically designed for CEYP. These included trauma-informed, relationship-based support; flexibility in pacing and progression; and the integration of employability support with wider help around wellbeing, confidence and life stability.

These features directly respond to the complex and overlapping barriers faced by CEYP, including mental health challenges, financial instability and a lack of support networks. For example, relationship-based support and consistent contact from trusted advisors help to build confidence and engagement where young people may otherwise disengage, while flexibility in delivery allows support to be adapted to those experiencing instability or competing life pressures. The integration of employability support with wider wellbeing and practical assistance reflects the need to address underlying barriers alongside progression into work.

Boroughs also consistently addressed practical barriers faced by care leavers, for example by providing funding for travel, equipment and interview clothing, and by offering ring-fenced, entry-level placements designed to provide a supported first experience of work. In addition, support was typically ongoing and open-ended rather than time-limited, recognising that progression for this group is often non-linear and requires sustained engagement.

This followed through into work placements and internships, where young people also felt that their managers were understanding and flexible with, for example, their working hours, the types of work they were expected to do, and their approach to managing misdemeanours.

"They're very patient with me and they're not expecting me to do anything, like, professional off the bat. I think they're just going to work me up to it, which is like ideal and less nerve wracking." (*Young person*)

However, some felt that the employability training offered through Full Potential was too generic. Those who secured EET outcomes had often been employed previously or attended university, and reflected that young people further from work would need more intensive support on topics such as confidence to engage with people, body language, expectations in the workplace and communication skills. Young people in a small number of boroughs also expressed that they would have liked more tailored support when applying for specific jobs. When boroughs did offer this kind of support, young people appreciated the individual coaching on tailoring CVs and cover letters to specific job roles.

Practice features and innovations

In many boroughs, Full Potential is enhancing what councils are already offering to CEYP. The programme has acted as a catalyst for different departments within the council to work more closely together and coordinate their offer of support for CEYP. In many cases, this involves drawing on the expertise of different teams to create a comprehensive support package. This includes social care in supporting CEYP; skills and employment in offering employability support; adult education in offering skills courses; clinical services in providing wellbeing advice; and employer engagement in involving businesses. This has been most effective when different teams were

involved in developing the bid and bringing together their ideas and expertise at the inception of the programme.

"We're trying to bring things more under the Full Potential programme. There's more cohesive working in terms of the support for the young people. It's enabled us to offer more, you know, things like paid internships for example." *(Borough delivery staff)*

The additional funding secured through Full Potential is enabling boroughs to test out new approaches to supporting CEYP. Key amongst these is the ability to offer paid, ring-fenced placements and internships, in and outside of the council, at the right entry level for care leavers. This was highlighted by several boroughs as something that they would not have been able to deliver without the programme, and that has been successful in moving young people closer to work.

"Because in the past we haven't had that, whilst now we can push these young people and seize opportunities which builds their confidence and self-esteem and feel that they can achieve something." *(Borough delivery staff)*

The flexibility and test-and-learn approach of Full Potential is encouraging boroughs to take a more individualised and young-person-led approach to their support for CEYP. While there is limited evidence of formal, structured test-and-learn processes, such as systematically piloting and evaluating specific approaches, there are clear examples of iterative adaptation during delivery. Borough staff described refining support and opportunities based on young people's interests, engagement and progress, including adjusting the types of roles offered, sequencing training and placements to better prepare participants, and introducing new activities in response to identified needs.

The programme funding has also provided additional staff capacity to engage young people in the development of their approach. For example, Wandsworth has established a governing board to guide the development of their programme, which includes CEYP. With the board's input, they have developed some bespoke learning programmes to meet young people's needs and interests. These include a Jamie Oliver Ministry of Cooking course, an AI and employability course and an embedded ESOL and employability programme.

Some boroughs have used Full Potential funding to commission new workshops, support or training on wider issues that impact young people's access to and sustainment of work. For example, Islington are commissioning financial literacy workshops while Tower Hamlets worked with a partner to develop a remote digital skills course which aims to address young people's gaps in digital skills and challenges associated with travelling to in-person courses. These topics are usually outside of the

borough team's remit, but the holistic nature of Full Potential enabled them to develop these offers.

While specific provision varies across boroughs, common themes emerge in the types of support delivered. These include employability skills (such as CV writing and interview preparation), confidence-building and communication skills, essential workplace readiness (such as timekeeping and routine), digital skills, and sector-specific training linked to entry-level employment routes. In addition, several boroughs have incorporated wellbeing, financial capability and functional skills support, reflecting the broader barriers faced by CEYP. This suggests that, despite local variation, Full Potential provision is converging around a core set of needs, which may be important to consider in the design of future Youth Guarantee programmes.

Novel approaches piloted through employer and stakeholder partners

Borough teams have also adopted new approaches to delivery through their stakeholder and employer partners. The group employer activities being delivered by Camden, Lambeth, Southwark and Westminster described above are all new activities developed as part of their Full Potential offer. These activities have been successful in providing more relaxed, informal opportunities for employers and CEYP to build connections, learn from one another and potentially even match a young person looking for work with a vacancy.

"[The employer] had a casual conversation with young people rather than like a structured interview, just to see whether they would be well suited to the work. And as well, just trying to understand better as to why they want to get into employment. You know, it's all good and well, yeah, you want money, but do you have the work ethic to match it?" *(Borough delivery staff)*

Many of the boroughs were able to utilise their networks of existing partners in new ways for the programme. Where before local charities and companies were viewed as mainly providing services for residents, the Youth Guarantee encouraged borough staff teams to look at potential employability options within these organisations, particularly in terms of offering placements.

"If we speak to like Centrepoint and they already know us, but it's in a new capacity. So, it's a relationship that we already have with the employers, but it's coming from a different angle this time. We're just trying to say, 'Will you take a young person on?'" *(Borough delivery staff)*

Young people's perceptions of what felt "new" or different

Young people highlighted several programme elements that stood out as new and effective in supporting them to move towards employment.

One aspect of Full Potential which young people identified as different to the usual support they received from their PAs and social workers is the funding available to cover the costs of accessing education, employment and training. Young people spoke about receiving financial support for interview clothes, travel, laptops and equipment for courses as being unexpected but crucial in overcoming cost barriers to starting work or learning,

Young people also highlighted engagement with employers through the programme as a new and valued experience. Those who had opportunities to meet or network with employers said that this had helped them learn about new and different opportunities and career routes, boosted their confidence in speaking to employers and improved communication skills.

"The networking events and speaking to senior professionals... I think that's been really helpful and useful to me, and I don't think I would have been in those rooms or spoken with those people if I hadn't had the help from Drive Forward... so they've given me the skills to add to my CV that can make it a lot easier to navigate employment in the future." *(Young person)*

Similarly, young people identified the opportunity to go into workplaces—either through placements or visits—as a novel and valued aspect of the programme.

"Going into locations where people actually do the work, and then giving us a bit more information on the work itself and what your day to day could consist of, wherever you are in, has allowed me to possibly consider being in that space, which isn't something that I was open to before." *(Young person)*

As well as engaging with employers, young people valued the new opportunities to network with other CEYP offered by some boroughs.

"When I'm in these environments, it's more comforting to know there's other young people alongside me that are in the same situation, we're able to connect. And again, the networking is just really helpful." *(Young person)*

Having bespoke support and advice on CVs, applications and potential careers was also identified as a new experience for many young people. Some spoke about previous support in this area being very generic, and they appreciated the intensive, tailored one-to-one support that boroughs put in place through the Youth Guarantee. This meant that the opportunities they were talked through were tailored to their interests and needs, which in turn made them more likely to take them up. Some

mentioned having opportunities shared with them in sectors or roles they would not have thought of or known about with their dedicated worker.

Linked to this, many young people highlighted the perseverance and commitment of the workers on the programme as a different experience. Some reflected that they had received support from many different services and their Full Potential worker stood out as someone who genuinely cared and stuck with them despite the challenges they were experiencing.

"I was quite impressed because they did support me a lot. I've been in social services for a long time, and I think out of all the services I've had, they've been the ones that have helped me the most for sure."
(Young person)

4.2 Engagement and access

Targeting and referral routes

All boroughs designed their referral pathways around professionals who had established, trusting relationships with care experienced young people (CEYP).

These include social care teams, Personal Advisors (PAs), Virtual Schools and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) work coaches. Borough teams described sharing information about Full Potential with the heads of these services and establishing referral pathways with workers to enable "warm" handovers of young people. This is reflected in MI data, which shows that over nine in ten participants (92 per cent) were referred through internal local authority routes, highlighting the central role of social care and local services in engagement.

Some borough teams have good relationships with their local JCP sites who also refer young people to Full Potential. MI data shows that five per cent of participants were referred through JCP. However, Wandsworth and Lewisham are struggling to build referral routes with JCP, likely due to the capacity of work coaches. Some boroughs have received a small number of referrals from voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, but this is uncommon across the programme.

Most boroughs have also developed posters and leaflets to promote Full Potential directly to young people. These include either a QR code or email address which young people can scan or contact to sign up. Some boroughs have put these up in local children's centres and youth hubs; others have emailed them to support services to share with young people. Consequently, a small number of young people have signed up through self-referrals, but the main source of referrals is professionals already working with CEYP.

Some young people explained that they signed up directly through delivery partners on the programme, for example, the Kings Trust or DFF. This was usually through a

flyer promoting the programme or because they were already aware of or accessing support from this organisation.

Two boroughs are taking more innovative approaches to outreach. In Haringey, DFF hosted a session to raise awareness of Full Potential among all stakeholders.

"In the first three weeks of when Full Potential was launched, we did a big promotion, big information sessions as well with the local authority, so that helped to make everybody kind of aware of the support and to galvanize support from everyone." *(Stakeholder)*

Similarly, DFF in Lewisham are hosting promotional events for young people which include free food and hearing from other care leavers who have successfully moved into work. This has been an effective way to draw in other young people.

"[At the barbecue] she introduced me to another young person who had literally just been offered a job, and it was in civil service. And... when I spoke to the young person about, like, her journey, I felt like, 'Yeah, this is the right support. This is the support that I need.'" *(Young person)*

Some boroughs have adopted a co-location approach to building referral pathways. Staff in these borough teams are basing themselves at locations where young people already access support. For example, the City of London borough lead attends Hackney JCP on the day when the lead work coach for care leavers meets with CEYP. Similarly, the Full Potential delivery officer at Westminster works from their social services offices so that PAs can encourage young people to speak to them straight after their regular meetings. Both boroughs found these approaches to be effective in boosting sign-ups to the programme.

"So, if they have any young people that they're meeting, tell them to come chat to me after, and then we'll speak about the programme, how I can support them, and that really boosted our numbers." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Content of borough communications

Outreach and communication about the programme are effective when there is clear information about the offer, the support available and how support can be tailored to young people's career interests and goals. When asked what encouraged them to take part in the Trailblazer, young people said they were looking for support to get a job in a particular sector, find more secure or better-paid work, or gain specific qualifications related to their career ambitions (for example, Security Industry Authority (SIA) badge, Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card, textiles course). As such, the offer of a work placement or training was a key motivator for young people

to engage, as this was seen as a tangible step towards their career goals, especially if it was in a sector or subject of interest to them.

Some young people also highlighted the fact that the programme is aimed at care leavers as a motivating factor. They felt this meant they would have a chance to secure placements and internships because they were ring-fenced, but also that workers would understand their experiences and support needs and respond flexibly to their requirements.

"I just thought like it's worth a shot, because I literally have been struggling for so long, and I think all the suggestions that were made to me, none of them were actually ring-fenced to like only care leavers, so I thought that this might be a bit different." (*Young person*)

Onboarding approaches and flexibility

Once a young person is referred to the programme, all boroughs have an onboarding process which involves a Full Potential staff member having an initial one-to-one meeting with the young person. This involves completing signup paperwork, discussing the young person's interests, goals and support needs in relation to employment and training, and creating an action plan for the programme. Staff then use this to shape the one-to-one support they offer to help the young person navigate barriers, build confidence, develop employability skills and gain work experience.

The format of this initial meeting varies. Some borough staff have an initial phone call with young people to introduce themselves and then arrange to meet in person. Borough staff felt that this approach helps some young people to overcome anxiety and feel more comfortable meeting new professionals. Others send an initial form asking for more information from the young person to inform their initial meeting. Some staff meet young people where they are. For example, Camden's employability officers visit hostels where young people are staying to engage them.

Most young people found the sign-up process straightforward. They described being referred by their social worker or PA, then being contacted by a member of the borough's Full Potential team to explore their interests and goals. Those who self-referred had to complete a simple form to get this initial contact. None felt that the process was overly bureaucratic and there were no mentions of lots of paperwork on entry.

However, this contrasts with the perspectives of delivery staff, who described the underlying compliance and monitoring requirements as administratively burdensome. This suggests that while onboarding appears simple and low-touch from the young person's perspective, this is partly enabled by staff managing significant back-end processes, effectively absorbing the administrative burden to maintain a streamlined front-end experience.

The attitude or “vibe” of the staff member young people initially met to discuss the programme was crucial in determining CEYP’s ongoing engagement with the programme. A few participants mentioned that they were warm, welcoming, and seemed genuinely interested in what they wanted to do, tailoring action plans to their goals and needs. This reassured them and encouraged them to sign up.

“...she made me feel comfortable to tell her like, this is what I’m going through and I kind of need help with it.” (*Young person*)

Young people also highlighted the quick turnaround between their initial meeting and the promised support, placement or course starting as important in a positive onboarding process. This appears to have been supported by relatively streamlined referral routes, often via existing relationships with advisors or caseworkers, alongside direct and responsive contact from delivery staff, which enabled timely matching to opportunities and reduced delays between engagement and delivery. The quick turnaround times helped young people to build trust with professionals and show that they will follow through on agreed actions. It also meant that young people’s motivation did not wane between initial engagement and starting the programme.

Complementary support and overlaps with other services

Borough staff reflected that Full Potential fits in well with local and national initiatives to address the rising number of young people NEET. Care leavers are cited as a priority group in most boroughs’ local plans to boost youth employment. As such, Full Potential provided timely focus and complements existing activities boroughs are implementing to boost support for CEYP. For example, two boroughs (Hackney and Lambeth) are setting up care leaver hubs as “one-stop-shops” of support for CEYP.

Similar programmes mentioned by borough staff include Connect to Work, borough-specific employability services for residents (such as Work Path in Tower Hamlets and Families and Communities Employment Service [FACES] in Kensington and Chelsea), previous European Social Fund (ESF) programmes and government initiatives such as Skills Bootcamps. Some boroughs draw on the additional support offered by Connect to Work and their in-house employability services in their delivery of Full Potential, where this provides added value for the CEYP they are working with. However, borough staff feel that Full Potential is much more specific than other programmes in its tailored approach to care leavers, and more flexible in how it can be developed and delivered to meet young people’s needs.

For delivery partners such as DFF and the King’s Trust, involvement in the programme is a natural development of their existing partnership with the council. Both organisations already had offers in place for CEYP in these boroughs so Full Potential is strong fit with their organisational aims, values and existing delivery. For DFF, Full Potential provided the added value of significantly more financial support to offer participants, as well as closer working relationships with different council departments.

This suggests that Full Potential often builds on and extends existing provision, particularly where established delivery partners such as DFF were already supporting CEYP.

Many boroughs spoke about the “family business” model that their local authority has adopted, where councils—through their corporate parenting role—view it as their responsibility to leverage their connections and networks to provide opportunities for care leavers to take their first steps into work, much as parents would do for their own children. This provides a positive context for borough staff to speak to other departments about hosting work placements and providing other opportunities for young people on the programme.

4.3 Partnership working

Nature and strength of local partnerships

Most boroughs are engaging with employers as part of their Full Potential programme. Some are delivering this through commissioned partners such as DFF and King's Trust, but many are utilising the support of their employer engagement teams to directly build partnerships with employers for the programme. Engaged employers are of varying sizes and sectors and are involved in a range of activities. In the main, employers are hosting work placements for young people, but in four boroughs they are also taking part in career days, workplace visits, speed networking events, job fairs, employability workshops and mock interviews.

A key partnership in five boroughs is with DFF, while one borough is working with the King's Trust. Both organisations have taken on the role of delivering frontline employability support to CEYP through a combination of tailored one-to-one and structured group programmes or activities. In addition, King's Trust is delivering support for self-employment so CEYP can explore the option of starting their own business. The boroughs who have commissioned these partners have found their support to be effective in freeing up time for delivery staff to focus on more strategic and partnership-building opportunities.

"Drive Forward do a lot of the legwork that's needed on a day to day one, and their hard work and legwork allows the local authorities to do the other stuff and more strategic things and get opportunities."

(Borough delivery staff)

In many cases, Full Potential enabled partners such as DFF to expand their reach and deliver more intensive support, rather than introducing entirely new forms of provision.

JCP is also a key partner in delivering specialist employability support in some boroughs. Similar to DFF, JCP work coaches provide young people with tailored advice on career options, CVs, applications and sharing relevant opportunities based on their career interests. Some also provide expert information and advice on benefits

and the impact of working on care leavers' entitlements. In City of London, JCP is a key referral source for the Full Potential team, as they base themselves in the Jobcentre once a week when the lead work coach for care leavers has their appointments with CEYP.

While there is some overlap between the employability support provided by JCP and Full Potential, the qualitative evidence suggests that Full Potential primarily complements rather than duplicates this provision. JCP support is typically targeted at young people who are actively claiming benefits or have job search requirements, whereas Full Potential is designed to engage all CEYP within the age range, including those not in contact with JCP. In addition, Full Potential offers a broader and more intensive package of support, combining employability advice with ring-fenced work placements, financial support to remove participation barriers, and more flexible, relationship-based delivery. This enables boroughs to work with CEYP who may not yet be ready to engage with JCP or sustain job search activity, as well as providing more holistic and ongoing support alongside JCP input.

Boroughs are also utilising existing relationships with external training providers and their own adult skills services to offer courses to CEYP. These covered topics such as Functional Skills, confidence building and wellbeing, and short courses on general employability topics such as health and safety, food hygiene, customer service and digital skills. Many of these courses were existing learning programmes offered by boroughs' adult education teams, who had a wide offer that Full Potential delivery staff could tap into for CEYP. However, some commissioned specific courses for Full Potential. For example, Wandsworth developed specialist one-to-one English and maths provision and an embedded ESOL employability programme, while Lambeth commissioned The Skills Spot to deliver Functional Skills and wellbeing courses specifically for CEYP.

Many boroughs reflected that Full Potential has enabled them to strengthen partnerships across internal council departments, enhancing their support for CEYP. In the main, the programme has led to stronger links between their employment and skills, adult education, leaving care and Virtual School teams, as a result of improved communication, more regular collaboration and—in some boroughs—the co-location of delivery across teams. Some boroughs are also working with their clinical services to provide mental health support and their business engagement teams to source placements with external employers.

"I think our partnership with the virtual school...[has] really been strengthened through this programme. I think we had a relationship, but I think it's definitely you know, grown and strengthened and there's much more synergy in the way that we're working on the programme."
(Borough delivery staff)

Leaving care teams, social workers and Virtual School staff were involved across all boroughs in three main ways:

- They were key in promoting the programme to CEYP and referring those they worked with to the delivery teams, facilitating the sign-up process by supplying ID documents and other compliance information
- They supported participants' initial engagement, facilitating "warm handovers" and joint meetings with Full Potential staff, and
- They would often stay in touch with the Full Potential team and receive updates on young people's progress, stepping in to support them to re-engage if their momentum on the programme waned. Several boroughs mentioned this partnership as a useful, multi-pronged approach to boosting the engagement of young people.

"...if we just gave them a list of young people and said, 'yeah, crack on', it would never work. It's all about relationship and relational working."
(Stakeholder)

In at least three boroughs, the Heads of Service of leaving care teams were involved in the development of the initial proposal to Central London Forward. These boroughs highlighted this as a strength as it enabled closer working between council teams from the start of the programme and ensured that there was a strong understanding of CEYP's needs built into the initial programme design.

"It was key to actually get all the departments to buy in and share the vision and the goal that we want to achieve better outcomes. And I think once you get that buy in from senior leadership team, everything else falls into place naturally." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Southwark are also closely involving their leaving care forum, Speakerbox, to influence the ongoing development of their Full Potential programme. Early in delivery, Speakerbox delivered focus groups and consultations with CEYP. Through these, they found that care leavers wanted to look beyond just getting a job and explore long-term career options. They were also keen to have mentors provide informal support. Southwark built this feedback into their ongoing Full Potential offer.

Local youth centres and voluntary organisations are also involved in delivering wider wellbeing and specialist support on a small number of boroughs' programmes. For example, Camden are working with several organisations and initiatives to provide wraparound support for their participants. This includes the Hive Youth Centre which offers support with mental health, cooking, sexual health and fun activities; the SPEAR programme for specialist SEND support; and Catch22 for tailored support on leaving care issues.

Employer routes into the programme and motivations for engagement

Employer and stakeholders' initial engagement with borough teams varied depending on their role in the programme. Stakeholders include key delivery partners such as DFF and Kings Trust; local employers hosting work placements and delivering employability activities; other council departments hosting internships; local training providers involved in delivering skills programmes and workshops; and VCSE organisations delivering wellbeing activities.

Staff are utilising their borough's network of contacts to identify employers to engage in Full Potential. They often draw on social value clauses in their council's procurement processes to leverage placements and other opportunities with large companies delivering work for councils, for example, construction companies, HS2 and housing organisations. For example, HS2 embeds Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) targets within contractor work packages, setting out priority groups to be supported.

"We have a lot of employers who are very keen to get involved because we have written into our procurement process that they have to add social value." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Boroughs also tend to have established programmes which involve employers in supporting local residents into work, enabling staff to engage these warm contacts to provide opportunities for young people on Full Potential.

"We run a two-week project in the summer called Summer Plus, which is specifically for our CEYP when they get a work experience placement during the summer. And some of our external partners that have been part of that programme, we then said to them, 'would you be willing to take on some of our young people for another six months?'" *(Borough delivery staff)*

A few boroughs have contacted employers already publicly committed to supporting CEYP, such as John Lewis and Channel 4. Staff are also directly approaching employers in particular sectors to source opportunities which match CEYP's career aspirations. In some boroughs, this is done by dedicated employer engagement officers, which frees up borough staff's time to deliver one-to-one work with CEYP. However, in general, employers engaged through these "cold" routes were only just starting to offer work placements, showing that it takes time to develop relationships with employers and get them on board with a programme such as Full Potential.

Employers are often willing to engage in Full Potential due to their existing relationship with either the council or the commissioned delivery partner (such as DFF). These businesses are already committed to supporting local residents into employment and have had positive experiences of taking people on placement from the council or delivery partners previously. Some also felt that this was a less risky way

of providing opportunities to young people who face additional challenges to entering the labour market.

"...we're a limited company at the end of the day, so whilst we want to work with and support young people from care experienced backgrounds, who have lived experience of homelessness, we needed a partner that could be accountable in that kind of sense." *(Employer)*

When asked why they wanted to get involved in the programme, employers commonly said that it aligned with their values around supporting local young people and those who have additional vulnerabilities. They understood that CEYP may find it harder to enter the world of work, and that they were in a position to provide a first step into employment for this group.

"We really wanted to give young people the opportunity to have a job, to have training, because we know how the job market is actually really hard, and people without experience, people less privileged normally don't have the opportunity to work, so we give them a foot in the door." *(Employer)*

For some smaller businesses, having young people on a funded placement fulfilled a business need, as it added much needed resource to small teams. Some employers also recognised that CEYP could bring something valuable to their business including different ideas, perspectives, energy and resilience.

"This group of young people have faced so many hardships in in their journeys, which arguably makes them so much more resilient than a usual staff member and have such a wealth of experience, particularly in the charity sector. They're... a very empathetic person, which definitely helps in our type of role. So yeah, there was honestly no reason as to why not to do it for us." *(Employer)*

Where this initial engagement worked well, borough teams took the time to build employers' understanding of the nature of care leavers' experiences and what the placement would entail. In Hackney, for example, borough staff worked with employers prior to them hosting a work placement, to ensure there was a role description in place. Borough staff completed a risk assessment and delivered trauma-informed training to the employer's staff.

"You have to have a plan in place that sets out what they're going to be doing, make sure that the learning that they're going to do is meaningful... Is this an environment that the young person can thrive in?" *(Borough delivery staff)*

Partnership enablers

Borough teams identified several factors that enabled them to build strong internal and external partnerships in the delivery of their Full Potential initiatives. These included:

- **Building on existing relationships and warm contacts** through previous or concurrent programmes and initiatives. Utilising known contacts who had previously engaged in similar activities was a go-to starting point for most boroughs. Borough teams, employers and stakeholders alike reflected that where there was already an established relationship, there was a stronger shared understanding of how this programme was likely to work and the types of support the target cohort would need.
- **Leveraging national and local initiatives** to engage partners and employers. Boroughs mentioned leveraging social value clauses with contractors, the council's corporate parenting role with internal council teams, and commitments to support local residents and young people among wider stakeholders.
- **Working with organisations and employers whose values align with the aims of the programme.** When discussing who they had approached to partner on the programme, boroughs highlighted the importance of partners' attitudes and values in their approach to working with young people and the council. This ensured that partners participated due to a genuine interest in supporting CEYP, rather than viewing the programme as a source of free labour. Alignment with the programme's values and aims was a key reason that stakeholders and employers gave for engaging in the programme.
- **Having a lead team or staff member to coordinate employer engagement.** Many borough delivery teams reflected that having their employer engagement team or a dedicated coordinator to source ring-fenced opportunities for CEYP was an effective way of engaging appropriate employers in the programme. The employer engagement team often had the contacts and expertise to identify and bring on board employers, and Youth Guarantee staff could then match opportunities to young people's interests and needs. This not only provided one key contact for employers but also alleviated pressure from frontline delivery staff who could focus on supporting young people on the programme. It also increased the range and number of opportunities available to young people.

"We've got a work experience coordinator who will just contact all the employers and give them all the information about Trailblazer, that it is a new programme, and that we want you to be on board with that, so that works really well." *(Borough delivery staff)*

- **Providing funding to cover the costs of placements** was an incentive for employers to get involved, especially small businesses who could not otherwise afford to offer a role to a young person.
- **Early communication about the target group and their needs.** This was important to effectively engage partners, not just external stakeholders and employers, but also internal stakeholders including leaving care and delivery staff. Borough teams appreciated PAs and social workers sharing background information on young people's additional needs and challenges, so they could tailor their support accordingly. Similarly, employers felt it was important to have upfront information about the young person they would be taking on placement, so they could prepare and plan an appropriate set of tasks for them to undertake. Three borough teams took the time to train employers on care leavers and trauma-informed support, agree a plan for the placement and introduce the young person to the employer before starting a placement.

"We always introduce a young person to the employer, take them down, meet them before, you know, I'll normally have at least a couple of conversations or meetings with them, and then take the young person down and meet them to make sure it's right for both." (*Borough delivery staff*)

- **Ongoing communication and support for partners and employers.** This was crucial in ensuring that employers felt able to manage a care experienced young person on placement and provide the support they may need, thereby increasing the chances of a young person successfully completing their placement. In addition, boroughs described having regular meetings with delivery partners - to keep track of young people's progress and make adaptations to delivery plans and support - and leaving care teams to increase awareness of the programme and maintain referral streams.

"Myself, the work placement coordinator, and the Drive Forward advisor, would meet up on a weekly basis, just to narrow down... how things are going and what progress we've made, or what lack of engagement or barriers that we're facing." (*Borough delivery staff*)

However, some young people reported a reduction in support once they entered placements, suggesting that ongoing support was not always experienced consistently by participants, even where coordination between staff and partners remained strong.

- **Co-location of borough staff in other services**, for both referrals and delivery, was seen as effective in building relationships between partners, but also boosting young people's engagement in the programme.

"So that's kind of that's been a real positive to kind of get them engaged because they're coming in to see [work coach], so they can see us all in one place. They're not having to go everywhere." *(Borough delivery staff)*

4.4 Supporting progression and next steps

A consistent feature of delivery across boroughs is the absence of a fixed programme 'end point'. Rather than a time-limited intervention, support is designed to flex around individual need, with young people retaining access to guidance and practical help for as long as they wish to remain engaged. Most delivery staff emphasised that engagement is defined by the young person's readiness and circumstances rather than a set timescale. This flexibility allows staff to continue working with young people through periods of progress, setbacks and change, recognising that transitions to next steps are not always linear.

"There's no time period. You can have a young person for a year, could be 18 months. It's a flexible programme. There's no cut-off date. That's what's good about it." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Boroughs maintain engagement even after an initial employment, education or training outcome has been achieved. Delivery staff routinely stay in contact with young people after they move into work, offering check-ins and remaining available for ad hoc support when challenges arise. The frequency of check-ins depends on the young person's needs but could be weekly, fortnightly or monthly. The young people can determine for themselves when they no longer need or want support, meaning that take up of in-work check-ins varies in practice.

"We don't just leave them, we then offer them a bit of aftercare so that they're doing something after that, you know." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Some boroughs also reported offering financial support to young people that have progressed into an internship or job, for example help with their first month of travel costs, lunch and interview clothes. However, some young people reported that support reduced once they moved into work, suggesting the consistency of in-work support varied in practice.

"If I have any problems with the placement, they've told me to contact them, but apart from that, not much to be honest.... it's surprised me that they wouldn't be maybe once every two weeks or once every week, just kind of checking up with you, seeing how you're finding the work placement." *(Young person)*

However, the absence of a clear end point also creates challenges, particularly for reporting and performance management. Because support can continue well beyond the point at which an outcome is recorded, ongoing delivery work may not be

formally captured. One borough described the limitations of current reporting frameworks, highlighting a tension between the relational, long-term nature of support and the outcome-based funding or monitoring mechanisms, which may underestimate the full scale of intervention required to support young people furthest from education, employment or training (EET).

"Once they get a job or training, then that's all we can claim for. But then if they lose that job and then we're still doing loads of work, loads of intervention, loads of staff time, and then they get another job, we can't report on that." (*Borough delivery staff*)

While this flexible, young-person-led approach to supporting transitions into next steps is consistent across boroughs, the way it is operationalised across individual borough delivery models varies. In some boroughs, structured progression routes are embedded within council provision or internal brokerage systems. For example, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth link placements or courses directly to council-led pathways, such as apprenticeships or job brokerage services, with ongoing follow-up for those who do not progress immediately. In Southwark, progression planning is built into the final stages of placements, with delivery staff working alongside Jobcentre Plus work coaches and exploring employer partnerships to strengthen routes into longer-term opportunities.

Other boroughs place stronger emphasis on managing endings and preventing a return to NEET, with delivery staff actively supporting young people to apply for roles before placements end and maintaining post-placement engagement. This approach is evident in Kensington and Chelsea and City of London, where staff anticipate sustained check-ins with both young people and employers after placements.

"There's every possibility that they'll drop out because of silly little things... And it's best to be open and honest and say, actually, I could do with some support with that. And if they don't have the voice or the confidence to do it, then I won't abandon them. We offer six months of support after they're into work." (*Borough delivery staff*)

However, across several other boroughs, where no clear pathway exists at the end of support or placements, approaches to next steps and sustained EET progression have been less clearly defined. While boroughs aimed to support young people after their work placement finishes, in practice the amount of support after the end of the work placement varies. An employer placements manager in one borough reported that, while they've tried to support young people who have finished placements the best they can with one-to-one support and careers advice, they are limited due to being unable to offer a permanent position at the end of the placement.

"There's not a lot you can do if an intern is stressed about the fact that the end is coming, there's really not much you can do to stop that. We've given them one-to-one support, like career sessions, we've been sending over job applications for them to do." (*Borough delivery staff*)

The relationships built between staff and young people are important for supporting progression at the young person's pace. Delivery staff understand that care experienced young people have complex needs and sometimes disengage due to life responsibilities, and caseworkers try to balance progression with meeting the young person's needs.

"It's about knowing what the young person's expectations are, also the issues, sort of some of their issues, so that then you can walk slowly with them. Some just need one day a week, two, you know, three or four hours in a charity shop because they're trying to get back into or they've not done anything before." (*Borough delivery staff*)

Borough staff aim to provide positive reinforcement when young people complete a programme, so that they have a sense of achievement to encourage them to keep progressing towards EET outcomes. This aligns with the idea that borough teams are focused more on distance travelled rather than pushing care experienced young people towards long term outcomes if they are not ready. For example, in Southwark, borough staff hold an open day with the staff and young people who have completed their four-week placement to celebrate their achievement and receive a certificate.

"We want them to walk away from the programme with because, as I said, for a lot of them, they haven't done anything like this before, and it's, you know, it's a real journey for them, and a real sense of, we want them to feel pride that, yes, you've achieved that; it's fine if you don't instantly get a job." (*Borough delivery staff*)

Borough staff and employers from internal council placements also highlighted the need to balance young people's needs with accountability. While staff take a trauma-informed approach to supporting care experienced young people and are empathetic and patient to their needs, they try to ensure that the young person understands discipline around time management and workplace etiquette.

"A lot of them come with traumas. A lot of them have never been able to be in this type of environment. So, I believe that being patient, having empathy, and also having discipline to let them know that this is the real world. (...) and in the real world, people might not be like that with you." (*Employer*)

Some employers have permanent roles available, but this is not always the case. Others may offer a position at the end of the programme if a young person performs well and seems suited to a permanent role. When no roles are available, employers may provide positive references, encourage young people to stay in touch, or alert them to future opportunities. Employers may also signpost to other programmes. For example, an Islington employer connected a young person to a sister charity's scheme that could lead to a fully paid corporate placement.

"We have said, you know, if this is an open door, anytime you need us, anytime, you know, if you're looking for something, we can't promise that we will be able to or that it will be the right time. But you know, please do just contact us." *(Employer)*

Employer support for a young person's progression varies based on the employer's capacity to support the placement. Small businesses may not have the staff resources to offer full tailored support to the young person. Some employers will discuss skills progression with the young person. For example, in Islington, an employer utilised the skills builder framework at the start of the placement to identify skills and experience that the young person would like to get out of the programme.

"But beyond that, we also went through what her career goals were, what she feels her strengths are, what she feels her weaknesses are, what it is that she wanted to get out of this experience. And she did say she wanted to have as, obviously understanding that this is an entry level role, as much responsibility as we would be willing to give her." *(Employer)*

The strongest progression was seen among young people who were already closer to being work ready, with fewer complex barriers and who were proactive or already motivated to progress and find a job. Some young people expressed that they wanted to enter work but needed support with their confidence and self-belief as well as access to opportunities to get their foot in the door. In these cases, work placements and ring-fenced opportunities for care leavers have been important in achieving EET outcomes. Meanwhile, young people with complex needs still had some barriers to progression towards employment such as mental health, attitude to work and understanding workplace etiquette.

Generally, many young people reported feeling more ready for work following the Full Potential programme. Many young people attributed this increase in work-readiness to having gained referenceable work experience when applying for future roles. Some young people were able to gain work experience in their career sector of interest which is directly relevant for future job applications in that field. Others who completed work experience in sectors they aren't necessarily interested in still appreciated the value of having work experience to reference on their CV. Some noted

that they were able to get a better understanding of the different types of jobs that exist and begin developing their career aspirations.

Some young people also reported that developing skills through their work placement - such as communication, teamwork and digital skills - made them better prepared for the workplace. More generally, an understanding of what a professional environment is like after completing work experience was also a contributing factor to young people's work-readiness.

"I mean, it's definitely made me feel more comfortable, confident about applying for like, jobs revolving like office jobs and stuff like that."
(*Young person*)

Some young people also said they felt better prepared to handle job applications as a result of employability support received through Full Potential, such as help with creating or updating their CV, and interview preparation, particularly mock interviews.

However, while some young people became more confident to apply for jobs, others still felt uncertain about their progression following work experience placements and worried about rejection during the job application process.

"I do have the fear that I'll do the 12 weeks, I'll do very good in those 12 weeks, I'll learn a lot of things, but I'll still be in the same position after the 12 weeks of applying to jobs and not getting results." (*Young person*)

4.5 Outcomes

Progression into education, employment or training

Evidence from interviews with delivery staff, employers and young people indicates that Full Potential has supported CEYP into education, employment and training. These qualitative findings are consistent with MI data, which indicate that 18 per cent of participants moved into employment (134 young people) and 47 per cent into education or training (342 young people).

Young people have progressed into a range of outcomes, including education, training, employment, apprenticeships, volunteering and internships and work placements, either within the council or with external employers and organisations. Employment outcomes have included civil service internships ring-fenced for care leavers, and permanent roles in various sectors including construction, administration, customer service, retail, hospitality, personal training, tech and NHS.

Where young people performed well, the availability of full-time roles was seen as an important progression mechanism, particularly within council services or partner organisations able to offer ongoing opportunities. Some young people who have undertaken work experience within the council have progressed into internships or full-time positions within the council, and several young people on external

placements have been offered full-time roles at the employer organisation. In some cases, young people progressed into roles with increased responsibility. One employer in Lambeth described young people stepping into mentoring and leadership roles within their placement:

"Five young people engaged in the programme; we've got two young people who have stepped up to leader roles, like more mentoring roles who are working with me." (*Employer*)

Across boroughs, delivery staff and employers observed that young people gained meaningful work experience that could be referenced on their CVs, alongside the opportunity to build professional networks, even if a permanent position was not available at the end of their placement. One employer described being willing to provide a positive reference for a young person who had demonstrated commitment and growth during their placement. Beyond immediate work-readiness, these experiences were seen to support longer-term progression by helping young people build professional networks, gain references, and develop familiarity with workplace environments. These experiences were widely viewed as strengthening young people's future employability, even where progression into paid work did not immediately follow.

Employers and delivery staff also highlighted softer progression milestones, such as young people securing interviews, enrolling on relevant training or developing a clearer route towards apprenticeships. From the young people's perspective, access to the programme widened their sense of what was possible in the future. This suggests that the Full Potential programme may be contributing to longer-term employability by expanding social and professional capital, rather than solely through immediate job outcomes.

"It's opened up different doors and helped me network with different people." (*Young person*)

Work readiness and career outcomes

Young people and delivery staff interviews indicated that young people had a better understanding of what happens in a workplace after completing their first work experience placement. This contributed to an increased desire to start working after completing work experience. Exposure to employers through networking events, experience days, careers fairs, workshops and placements has allowed young people to learn more about different sectors and speak to mentors or people who have moved into a career in that sector, contributing to a better understanding of available career paths.

Young people generally felt more ready for work. This was closely linked to gaining work experience to put on their CV, although a few young people also attributed the

improved work readiness to CV help and interview preparation provided by their support worker. Undertaking their first work experience placements also gave young people an insight into day-to-day working life, such as having a regular schedule and workplace attire, with some delivery staff noting greater professionalism in young people's communication and behaviour.

"I think I'm more work ready. I think it helps now being in something and when I'm doing interviews for grad schemes, there's a lot of experiences and things that I can bring up." (*Young person*)

Social and emotional outcomes

Delivery staff, employers, stakeholders and young people reported a range of social and emotional outcomes from the Full Potential programme. For many participants, these changes in early personal development appeared to underpin subsequent progress towards education, employment or training outcomes.

Across boroughs, delivery staff repeatedly emphasised that "distance travelled" was a critical measure of success, particularly for care experienced young people with limited prior engagement in education, employment or services. For some participants, outcomes were not best captured by movement into employment, but by early behavioural and attitudinal shifts, such as attending insight days, completing a course for the first time or sustaining engagement long enough to finish a placement.

Confidence was described as a key outcome by most interview participants and was often the first outcome to be mentioned. Delivery staff and young people reported a growth in confidence among young people, for example in speaking to others or participating in various employability activities like courses, networking events and work experience. In some cases, young people progressed from having very low confidence to proactive engagement, including initiating contact, applying independently for roles and seeking further opportunities. Some employers reported observable increases in young people's confidence at work, including a growing willingness to share opinions, contribute ideas and solve problems independently. One employer described a shift in a young person's sense of professional identity and belonging:

"I've heard him mention [...] someone asked him something and he referred to us as his team. Oh, that's my team over there or like, you know, and it's that sort of seeing himself as a professional." (*Employer*)

These qualitative findings are consistent with analysis of the soft skills assessment which found that young people reported a 33 per cent increase in confidence measures after taking part in the programme.

Growth in young people's aspirations and self-belief were important outcomes.

Young people were more motivated to find work after receiving support from the Trailblazer and taking part in employability activities or work experience opportunities. Many support workers reported that young people felt more capable of work, particularly in terms of finding and sustaining a long-term career.

"He's talking about working a nine to five in a way that I've never heard him talk about, you know, as in like this is probably something I'll do is get a job." (*Employer*)

These qualitative findings are consistent with analysis of the soft skills assessment which found that young people reported a 23 per cent increase in motivation measures after taking part in the programme.

Improved wellbeing was also highlighted as a key outcome. A consistent theme across the evidence is the role of structure, routine and identity in supporting improved wellbeing. Placements and work experience were repeatedly described as providing young people with purpose, daily structure and something to look forward to. This appeared to have a direct positive impact on young people's mental health, motivation and independence.

Improvements in confidence often fostered greater resilience in young people.

Several borough staff and young people themselves noted that young people were more willing to try again after rejection, attend workshops or re-engage with opportunities they would previously have avoided. In some cases, young people actively requested to repeat placements in different departments, indicating both enjoyment and perceived value.

The relationships between delivery staff and young people were important in shaping social and emotional outcomes. Consistent and reliable contact contributed to sustained engagement and continued progression. Many young people attributed soft outcomes in areas such as motivation, self-belief, resilience and confidence to the relationship with their support workers.

"She [support worker] made me believe in myself" (*Young person*)

Outcomes observed included reduced social isolation, often through just getting out of the house to participate in support and employability activities, and connection with peers and friendships built through participating in the programme. Some young people reported that Full Potential helped them achieve these outcomes through engaging in social events or support and activities that involved speaking to others.

"I brought forward that I haven't really had a lot of people around me as a young person, so I've been kind of isolated and restricted from a lot of things. Being in these spaces has allowed me to connect with other young people. Information has been exchanged, and I feel like I've also made friends that I could possibly even take forward, supporting each other along the way." *(Young person)*

Skills development

Many young people improved their communication skills by taking part in activities through the Trailblazer programme. Networking, such as using LinkedIn and attending networking events for professional roles, was encouraged by several delivery staff and was key in enabling young people to step out of their comfort zone and quickly gain communication skills.

"Prior to this I didn't even know how to approach senior professionals or just employees." *(Young person)*

Delivery staff reported young people having better time management and being more proactive when responding to opportunities that became available.

"I'm seeing my young people a little more reactive. They're more motivated as well. They're sending me opportunities asking me, 'Should we go for this?', just more active. Quite a few of them have gone back into education and they're looking to multitask. The complacency is not there anymore." *(Delivery partner)*

However, punctuality was still an issue for some, and some support workers and employers reported that young people sometimes struggled with showing up to their work placements. This was sometimes linked to mental health, particularly anxiety.

A few young people reported better teamwork skills from working with colleagues on work placements.

"There [were] quite a few things that I did manage to learn within my placement that helped me out, being more professional with people, especially working along with my colleagues to get along with them." *(Young person)*

Many young people improved their employability skills including CV writing, applying for jobs and interview skills. Many young people highlighted that improving their interview skills was key for applying to jobs. Young people said the support they received with interview preparation – including mock interviews, guidance on techniques like the STAR method and tips on how to perform more confidently – were particularly helpful. Additionally, a few young people mentioned that CV writing support also helped with their approach to job applications.

These qualitative findings are consistent with analysis of the soft skills assessment which found that young people reported a 41 per cent increase in employability skills measures after taking part in the programme.

A small number of young people reported an improvement in their **digital skills**, such as writing emails or effectively using AI to tailor job applications.

"He gave me advice on how I can kind of utilise, like AI, ChatGPT to help me with some things that I struggle with, because he let me know sometimes with CVs and cover letters, it's actually better to make it suitable for the specific role you're interested in." (*Young person*)

Functional Skills were not mentioned by young people, but some delivery staff in boroughs offering Functional Skills reported that young people were undertaking English qualifications to progress towards university.

Accessing wider support and services

Delivery staff and young people reported that participants are made aware of wider support and services, but this did not always result in actual utilisation. While young people often knew that support for housing, mental health or financial issues existed, they did not always engage unless prompted or supported by a trusted professional. Qualitative evidence suggests this reflects a range of barriers, including low confidence in engaging with services independently, competing pressures such as housing or financial instability, and emotional or mental health challenges. As a result, awareness alone was often insufficient to drive engagement without ongoing, relationship-based support. This reinforces the importance of embedded, relational approaches to support rather than signposting alone. Nevertheless, some young people reported a better understanding of wider support services, particularly within the council, which they feel they can access when needed, indicating greater trust in services. A young person said that working in the council has improved his access to wider support:

"I feel like there's a lot of people that I know, not just from one service, from across different departments that I've managed to network with. So, I feel like there's always someone that I can go to if I need some kind of advice or point of direction." (*Young person*)

4.6 Success factors

Effective practices in outreach and engagement

In general, boroughs have had no difficulty identifying enough young people who are suitable for Full Potential support. Staff explained that there has been a steady flow of referrals throughout the programme, from other teams in the council, including social workers and virtual schools.

Across boroughs, delivery staff have significant experience of working with CEYP, which was leveraged when engaging young people on Full Potential. One borough noted how employing personal advisors who were already working for the council on the programme had been particularly effective. These advisors already had longstanding relationships with CEYP, who could be seamlessly enrolled on the programme.

Team members' ability to relate to the cohorts of young people they sought to engage was cited as a key factor in successful engagement. Shared experience was a key driver in building trust between delivery staff and CEYP. In particular, having a care experienced team member helped to encourage young people to take part in the programme. In Camden, a care experienced council employee acted as a 'peer advocate', speaking at an initial engagement event where she shared her story of growing up in care and her career path into working in the council. This helped boost the number of programme sign-ups, as it served as an inspiring success story of what CEYP could achieve through the programme. The team member's understanding of the barriers faced by CEYP also meant she was well-placed to support them in an advisory role.

"There's been one young person who was really, really hard to engage, but me and another employment officer went to do a visit at his living accommodation. And yeah, once I explained to him that I too lived in care and I went through the same employment scheme that like opened him up and actually he showed willingness after that."
(Borough delivery staff)

In Haringey, one staff member explained how he built trust with CEYP by emphasising the similarities in their backgrounds as someone who had also grown up in the borough. He explained that the proximity in their ages also contributed to clearer lines of communication.

"I think sometimes as well, when, when they realise that I'm also not so much older than them...they see me as someone that [they] can really open up to and speak to and be real with, with whatever's going on in their life that's preventing them [from finding work]." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Advisors from within the council and partner organisations focused on building trusting relationships with CEYP participating in the Trailblazer. This was achieved through one-to-one sessions, where delivery staff sought to gauge their expectations of the programme, their employment, education or training interests and the barriers to achieving these. This ensured that CEYP were offered tailored support and provided with opportunities that aligned with their interests. The level of connection between

advisors and each CEYP was felt to be a determining factor in whether they continued to engage with the programme.

"Building trust with the young person, it's not easy, because, from their own experience, they've been let down by the government [and] other organisations. And I think giving them the time to trust us by actually, like when we promise, or when we give them that opportunity."

(Delivery partner)

Advisors emphasised the importance of not 'giving up' on young people when their engagement with the programme waned. When a young person became uncontactable, they maintained appropriate communication to reinforce that support was still available whenever the individual felt ready to re-engage, while avoiding excessive contact. Support workers also described efforts to reach out to the young person's wider network, including their accommodation provider, social workers, and family members, if they failed to attend sessions.

Delivery staff emphasised the importance of efficient processes, including signing CEYP up to the Trailblazer without overburdening them with questioning and then quickly linking them with suitable employers for placements. They explained that CEYP participate in many support programmes with varying levels of success and often feel let down by the services they receive. Ensuring that they quickly see results after taking part in the programme is important in maintaining their interest.

Examples shared by delivery staff included running assessment days where young people could be enrolled in blocks and signing up participants as they attended sessions at JCP sites. Some boroughs offered vouchers to young people as incentives for taking part in the programme, while others encouraged young people to attend sign-up sessions by providing food.

Participants were also encouraged to enrol on the programme when advisors took time to understand them during their initial engagement with the programme. For young people who were initially sceptical, this approach helped them feel valued by advisors and gave them confidence that the support could enable them to achieve their goals.

Partnership-based success factors

Stakeholders shared a range of factors that strengthened collaboration between partners involved in the delivery of the Full Potential programme.

Cross-department collaboration was recognised as a key success factor. This was most effective where delivery teams had a designated delivery manager with overriding responsibility for Full Potential programme management. In some boroughs, delivery leads were proactive in securing buy-in from other council teams.

This required clear communication about the purpose of Full Potential and its value for CEYP, how teams could support delivery and the expectations around their involvement.

"It was key to actually get all the departments to buy in and share the vision and the goal that we want to achieve better outcomes. And I think once you get that buy-in from [the] senior leadership team, everything else falls into place naturally." (*Borough delivery staff*)

Statutory workers within the council, such as social workers and personal advisors, were a key source of referrals to the programme, and delivery teams benefitted from their early involvement in the programme. Delivery teams were also able to draw upon their expertise in supporting CEYP who had complex challenges around health and learning difficulties. With their advice, borough advisors were able to work flexibly and offer tailored support to enable these young people to engage.

Cross-department collaboration was important in sourcing placements. First, there were many examples of council teams hosting young people in roles in the council. Second, delivery staff were also able to leverage the employer contacts of the council's work placements and apprenticeship teams as a source of placements. In some boroughs, these teams were an integral part of the Full Potential programme, who were responsible for matching young people with opportunities. One fruitful approach was to utilise employers' social value commitments. Delivery partners that support young people on the programme could also tap into this resource.

"We've got a big spreadsheet with all of our employers that need to fulfil their social value obligations. So, we go through that list and then contact those employers as well to see if they'll take someone...I mean we have leverage because if they don't fulfil their obligations, there's fees and fines attached to it." (*Delivery partner*)

Collaboration was most effective when partners were well-versed on their responsibilities and educated on how to work with care experienced young people.

There were several examples of delivery staff providing trauma-informed training for employers hosting Full Potential placements and other partners who were less experienced working with this group.

"We also provide this training to local authorities that are hiring young people that are care leavers... we will be providing line managers this training to make sure that they support the young person adequately in the workplace." (*Delivery partner*)

Delivery method success factors

Flexible working, tailored to each young person's needs, was identified as a key success factor.

Borough advisors take the time to conduct a deep analysis of each young person's interests, expectations and the challenges they have faced in participating in the programme and adapt delivery plans based on these. For example, if they require mental health support or are facing difficulties with their housing, advisors can refer them on to these services. It has been recognised that these issues need to be overcome before a participant is ready for work. Additionally, if a participant is unable to travel to the council offices, employment advisors explained that they can utilise Full Potential funding to cover transport costs or visit them at a more convenient location, such as their accommodation or local library.

"The best practice, I guess, with delivery, is knowing as much as you can about the learner, either from the learner or the personal advisor. ... it's trying to match up wherever we can that will meet the learning needs and objective and their own personal objectives, but at the same time being realistic." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Young people were positive about the personalised support they had received through Full Potential.

They generally feel that support is tailored to their needs and goals, and they reflected positively on their relationship with their support workers.

"It's helpful to have someone there in your corner, almost like a careers person that you'd have at school, but just sort of for you." *(Young person)*

Good practice includes hosting regular check-ins with young people and a blend of one-to-one and group sessions.

One-to-one support enables participants to open up to delivery staff without fear of judgement and is particularly useful for participants who experience anxiety or have a low level of English. On the other hand, they also encourage participants to attend group activities, during which they can meet peers with similar backgrounds and develop their communication skills. Advisors seek to find a balance between supporting challenging participants while ensuring they feel comfortable.

"I think what was the most helpful was meeting with her every week because it's kind of just staying on top of it. It's just the consistency [that] really helps." *(Young person)*

In addition to employment-focused group sessions, several boroughs organise social activities for CEYP, who may otherwise be facing social isolation. These were said to foster a sense of community among CEYP.

"We had the celebration event for the care leavers, which was great to see some of the stories of the care leavers, and for them to come out of their sort of inner self and introverted personalities, to be able to speak and be outspoken about the results that they delivered.
(Borough delivery staff)

Several delivery leads highlighted the importance of giving participants the opportunity to share feedback on the Full Potential programme. Examples provided by boroughs include running a 'youth forum' of CEYP to share their experiences, and hosting information sessions, through which feedback can be captured and then implemented in the design of support activities.

"We want to hear information. We had an information session in December, you know, it was very informal. So we had like pizza. There's about 18 young people that showed up and they gave feedback, like what's going well, what they don't like about the programme or what could improve." (Borough delivery staff)

Southwark engages its Children in Care Council, Speakerbox, as a platform to capture CEYP's feedback and uses this to shape how the Trailblazer programme is delivered in the borough. Through consultations, young people fed back that they would like to see a mentoring programme implemented as part of its Full Potential programme, so they can receive support from a mentor in their desired career field. This led to Southwark designing a mentoring programme based on young people's expressed wants and needs.

"They said how they really wanted a mentor in the field that they that they want to pursue, to help them get there, and wanted that tailored one-to-one advice. So we met with them a few times to come up with this mentoring programme and understand, okay, 'What is it that you would like in a mentoring programme?'" (Stakeholder)

From the young people's perspective, the offer of a 'ring-fenced' work placement is the distinct advantage of Full Potential compared to other programmes.

Placements offer young people guaranteed paid work and are viewed as a potential stepping stone to permanent employment. 'Ring-fencing' placements for CEYP is critical: many CEYP face significant barriers to employment including a lack of qualifications and work experience, which makes it harder for them to compete with others when applying for roles. One borough advisor reflected that previous experience of rejection in the job market had left some young people feeling demoralised. For this reason, he particularly valued the access to placements at a suitable level, with employers who understood their situation, through the programme.

Delivery staff discussed the importance of carefully matching young people with roles and employers that aligned with their interests and invested significant resource to this process. Effective job matching increases the likelihood that participants will enjoy their work placement and develop skills and experience to support their longer-term career aspirations. It also benefits employers as they gain more motivated participants who can add value to their organisation and fit with their organisational culture. In Camden, personal advisors develop 'pen portraits' of each young person, outlining their background, skills, the industry they would like to work in and what they would like to learn on their placement. These are then shared with employers who identify suitable candidates. Borough staff then facilitate meetings between the employer and young person. They emphasised that these are informal conversations designed to get to know each other, rather than higher pressure interviews.

Some boroughs also organise events that enabled young people to meet employers directly. These are an opportunity for participants to network with organisations interested in offering placements and to learn more about the types of roles in their industry. One young person described meeting an employer from the charity sector at a careers fair specifically for Full Potential participants, which subsequently led to a work placement.

Several boroughs highlighted the benefits of having a dedicated Full Potential work placement coordinator. Identifying and engaging employers was described as a resource-intensive process, so allocating a colleague to lead this task is valuable. They take the pressure off delivery leads, who can focus on other aspects of the programme, and mean more time can be invested in sourcing placements across a wider range of sectors. In turn, this increases the likelihood of matching participants with opportunities aligned to their interests.

Transferability and scalability

Delivery staff were very positive about the extent to which the support offered through Full Potential is transferable to other groups of young people they worked with. Borough staff noted that other young people using council services face similar disadvantages to those with care experience, including issues with housing, challenges with employment and experience of trauma. As such, elements of Full Potential support were all recognised as something that other young people could benefit from, with suggestions made that it could become a 'universal service'. In year two of the Trailblazer, the programme will be expanded to include young people with experience of Youth Justice, homelessness and SEND young people.

One borough staff member working as a personal advisor noted that care-leavers tend to be the hardest group to engage, so the success they have achieved this year could be translated more widely.

"I've worked with young people over the last 20 years, hard to reach young people. I've been a youth worker, conflict management facilitator, detached youth worker, and care leavers are normally the hardest demographic to engage. So, if you can get care leavers on board, you can normally get any anybody on board." (*Borough delivery staff*)

Delivery staff suggested several successful approaches could be implemented to support other cohorts of young people, including offering funded work placements, hosting insight days for young people to meet employers and tailoring communication approaches.

4.7 Challenges and barriers

Delivery-level challenges

The key challenge raised by borough staff and delivery partners related to the limited delivery timeframe While the planned schedule for Full Potential's first year was already relatively short, this was further constrained by delays in boroughs receiving funding. Stakeholders emphasised that each stage of the programme, including engaging CEYP, providing them with holistic employment support, identifying suitable employers and securing work placements is a time-consuming task which has been further pressurised by delays.

Some delivery staff felt that many of the young people they support have not made the progress, in terms of work readiness, that they had hoped for. Consequently, some boroughs noted that they are falling short of their intended employment outcomes for participants. On reflection, borough staff recognised that they had overestimated the work readiness of some CEYP from the outset. Staff also shared several examples of participants who appeared ready for employment but later disengaged with the programme when nearing the start of, or after beginning, a work placement. They learned that the care experienced cohort often required more intensive employability support than expected, given the extent of challenges faced in their personal lives and a lack of necessary documents or CVs.

"[A lot of] young people will tell you they're ready for work, but when you come to do the work with them, they're not as close to being ready to work as they often think they are. So the idea about things like the placements or the work readiness work with the [delivery partner] is to get them to that point...and we haven't had as long to be able to do that." (*Borough delivery staff*)

This contrasts with soft skills assessment findings, which indicate improvements in CEYP's self-reported confidence, motivation and employability skills over the course of the programme.

While job matching was successful in many instances, there were cases where participants were not well suited to the roles or organisations they were placed in.

Employers indicated that this could stem from participants' low work readiness, emotional barriers, or a lack of genuine interest in the role. Delivery staff noted that these factors can lead to challenging placement experiences, including issues with engagement and punctuality, which risked discouraging employers from working with the council in future.

"You could put them on a placement, and it doesn't go well for them. Again, that is kind of the employer is not overly happy. And we could lose that employer because they, you know, they've said, Look, I'm investing in this young person. And if they decide that they don't want to come in anymore, they're late or whatever, the wrong attitude, it can put our employers off. So, yeah, that can be a little challenging."
(Borough delivery staff)

This evidence highlights the need for patience on the part of support workers. It also underlines the importance of matching young people with the best placement for them, rather than placing them in the first available placement to meet employment targets. Positive outcomes are achieved when advisors take the time to provide tailored support for young people that addresses underlying barriers and find placements that align with their interests.

Delivery staff raised staff capacity as a challenge, driven by the high number of referrals to the programme. For example, one support worker explained that he had a caseload of twelve Full Potential participants at one time, in addition to young people enrolled on other schemes delivered by the council. Support workers reflected that having such a large caseload limits the extent of support that they can provide for participants.

"Another challenge is, I guess, just caseload. So we've been getting quite a few referrals from different spaces, because it seems like there's a limited number of organisations being able to offer this, but it also just means our caseload is sometimes stretched." *(Delivery partner)*

Support workers in borough councils and partner organisations reported that the amount of compliance work required on the Full Potential programme presented is a significant challenge. Support workers face significant administrative burden when enrolling young people in the programme and in measuring and reporting outcomes. Time spent on paperwork was seen to detract from the time available to provide meaningful support to participants and further exacerbate pressures on staff capacity. Several stakeholders recommended streamlining compliance processes and providing clearer, more consistent guidance to delivery teams around compliance processes.

"Make [the process] as simple and easy and clear for all parties so the local authority, for us as a charity, and particularly for the young people, so they're not bombarded with a whole load of compliance things to do, just a simple process, maybe an online signing process, just a quick, easy thing that they can do on their phone." (*Delivery partner*)

Engagement challenges

While boroughs received a large number of referrals to the programme, retaining participants is one of the most significant challenges faced by delivery staff.

Support workers reported that they frequently lose contact with participants, who are prone to missing appointments and disengaging with the programme. Sustaining engagement and achieving positive outcomes depends on a flexible, persistent approach and a strong focus on building trust with participants.

Stakeholders recognised that CEYP often face complex and overlapping barriers that affect their ability to engage. These include prior trauma, poor mental health, financial instability, experience of youth justice and a lack of support networks typically available to other groups of young people. MI data underline the scale and range of barriers faced as around one-fifth (19 per cent) of participants reported a mental health barrier, and one-third (31 per cent) reported both health and non-health related barriers. Given these challenges, CEYP may not have the time or financial resources to expend focusing on employment. During interviews, CEYP highlighted the personal challenges they faced while on the Full Potential programme, which made their participation more difficult.

"Being in care immediately puts you into a lot of disadvantages, because compared to my counterparts, I don't have the security, I don't have typical securities or buffers like family or housing or finances. So I need to manage all of these separate systems myself." (*Young person*)

These findings help to explain why Full Potential places a strong emphasis on trauma-informed, relationship-based support and flexibility in delivery. For example, the provision of more intensive one-to-one support, ongoing engagement from trusted advisors, and financial assistance to cover costs such as travel and equipment directly respond to barriers around mental health, instability and limited resources.

"Emotional challenges, a bit of financial challenges, I let them know of just what I had to deal with prior to in the assessment overall... on particular days that I am feeling maybe a bit more emotionally challenged than others, and that reassurance is helpful just I think.... So, the mindset is going to take a while for me to shift, the mindset into utilising these opportunities." (*Young person*)

Maintaining engagement is a particular challenge for employers hosting CEYP on placement. While employers were generally positive about their experience working with Full Potential, there were several reports of participants arriving late to work or missing shifts. These incidents risk negatively impacting employers' business operations and undermining positive relationships they had with borough councils.

However, many employers understood the barriers faced by CEYP and made accommodations. They recognised that, for many participants, the Full Potential work placement was their first experience of employment so sought to ease them into the workplace. They reported offering young people accommodations around ways of working, one-to-one support and guidance on areas like emotional regulation and workplace expectations.

Stakeholders felt that the compliance processes for Full Potential could deter young people from engaging with the programme. Feedback from both support workers and care experienced young people indicated that questions asked during enrolment had the potential to undermine trust between participants and support workers. Questions were perceived as overly intrusive and particularly inappropriate when working with a vulnerable group who may have experienced prior trauma. Stakeholders felt that this risked hindering rapport-building and undermined the sense that support workers were there to advocate for participants.

Partnership challenges

During interviews, stakeholders shared challenges faced in their boroughs that undermined the effectiveness of collaboration between programme delivery partners. **In general, challenges related to breakdowns in communication and coordination between partners, fragmented systems and time pressures.**

In one borough, stakeholders expressed frustration with the lack of coordination between departments in the council responsible for delivering Full Potential. During interviews, they voiced confusion around the purpose of the programme and how it differed from existing support for CEYP offered by the council, indicating a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. This lack of coordination resulted in significant delays and meant that support workers were unable to utilise programme funding, instead relying on regular council budgets to pay for support activities.

In the same borough, a support worker working for a partner organisation reported difficulty in accessing money for participants and a lack of clarity around how much money each participant was entitled to. In some cases, this meant young people did not receive funding for training courses they had been promised. He suggested that this disappointment risked undermining trust and deterring engagement with the programme.

"There's more red tape involved. It has to go through procurement, and it's just felt that was almost selling the young person's dream when we first signed him up." (*Delivery partner*)

The key challenge raised by employers related to the level of information they received from the council prior to hosting participants on placements. In some cases, they explained that after engaging with Full Potential they received very little information about the purpose of the programme and the level of support they'd receive from the council while hosting placements. In particular, employers felt they would have benefitted from more guidance on managing CEYP and the challenges they face, and instituting workplace changes to accommodate these.

While other stakeholders described examples of effective preparation and support for employers, this evidence suggests that provision was not consistently delivered across all boroughs or placements. As a result, some employers felt underprepared, particularly where placements were arranged quickly or without structured guidance. They suggested that this may have been driven by time pressures to secure work for young people, alongside concerns from delivery staff that providing warnings to employers could deter them from hosting a care experienced young person.

Similarly, prior to hosting placements, employers expected that there would be more in-work support for CEYP provided by the council. In some cases, once a participant secured a placement, they became the responsibility of the employer who was left to facilitate all their support needs. While other stakeholders described examples of ongoing in-work support from delivery teams, this evidence suggests that provision was uneven in practice. Where placements were arranged quickly or staff capacity was stretched, ongoing support appeared more limited or less visible to employers. Employers suggested that this may have been driven by time pressures.

"I thought there would be a lot more support from the council or the programme for ourselves, but also the participant, which I haven't seen, yeah, like kind of preparation, you know? We haven't worked with people who have come from care. It was quite rushed, because they needed to get someone in a placement by October." (*Employer*)

One employer suggested that a lack of upfront information and assurances around in-work support could undermine councils' efforts to engage employer partners. They had experience of engaging corporate partners and explained that many employers were unfamiliar with supporting care experienced young people and may be reticent to engage without more comprehensive guidance materials.

"When you're sending a proposal you need case studies of successes. You need the impact very clearly laid out like a big induction pack. We didn't have that from [borough council]... a briefing document which clearly lays out what your responsibilities are, maybe some example tasks that this young person can kind of engage in...You would honestly be so surprised, the level of hand holding that these people need to feel secure to participate even for the frontline program." *(Employer)*

To strengthen partnership working, stakeholders suggested increasing the level of in-work support for participants and developing standardised information packs for employers. Delivery staff could also learn from good practice in other boroughs, for example by offering trauma-informed training for employers to prepare them for hosting care experienced participants and using 'pen portraits' to provide context on participants' backgrounds and support needs.

In some boroughs, these approaches were already in place and were viewed positively by employers and delivery staff. For example, where employers received upfront information or structured guidance on working with CEYP, they felt better prepared to support participants and more confident in hosting placements. Employers also recommended developing case studies outlining Full Potential 'success stories' which could encourage further engagement from employers.

Structural and policy barriers

Stakeholders also shared several examples of structural barriers that affected CEYP's engagement with Full Potential.

Delivery staff explained that for many care experienced young people, the interaction between benefits and earnings acts as a significant barrier to engagement. Some young people express concerns that securing a work placement could leave them financially worse off with a reduction in overall income, as they lose access to key welfare benefits. This is particularly problematic for participants who are limited to entry-level roles due to a lack of qualifications and prior work experience, and those who face high rents and service charges.

Young people living in shared or supported accommodation often face high rents and service charges, which are typically covered through housing benefit or support from the council. Moving into work risks them losing this benefit, which they worry would leave them unable to pay for living expenses. While delivery staff noted that this is a national issue, they recognised that it is particularly acute in London given higher housing costs.

"I had someone yesterday who can only work three days because if he works more than 16 hours then his benefits are going to be stopped and he, you know, and his service charges like £1000 a month or something." *(Delivery staff)*

Consequently, delivery staff warned that the benefits system could appear to be more certain or attractive to young people than employment through the Full Potential programme. Delivery staff recommended that going forward, the programme should include assurances that engagement in a work placement does not jeopardise a young person's access to benefits.

The eligibility requirements of Full Potential were also identified as a barrier to engagement with the programme. One delivery staff member explained that they have faced difficulties finding the National Insurance number and a valid ID for some CEYP, which are required for the programme. This is a particular issue for CEYP with pending asylum cases with the Home Office.

While delivery staff understood that these documents are necessary to prove right to work, they emphasised that young people without these documents could still benefit from other aspects of the programme.

"I felt that it was unfair for this cohort to actually not access funding because they don't have right to work...they still have right to education, they still have right to other services as a care leaver or a child in care. And with Trailblazer, I felt that we weren't able to give them that right because of the right to work document." *(Borough delivery staff)*

Response strategies and mitigation

Challenges experienced on the Full Potential programme can be broadly summarised into three categories. First, there are challenges relating to the engagement of, and ongoing support for, care experienced young people. Second, challenges associated with collaboration and coordination between stakeholders responsible for delivering key aspects of the programme, including employment support and work placements. Third, structural and systemic barriers -including those related to benefits and earnings, housing costs, and programme eligibility requirements - which affect participation and outcomes.

To address challenges around participant engagement and retention, delivery teams have adopted tailored approaches, which are flexible to an individual's support preferences and barriers. Support workers focus on persistent contact and work to build a trusting relationship with participants over time. These factors encourage participants to remain engaged in the programme, giving them access to consistent employment support and increasing the likelihood of securing a work

placement. Staff also recognise the need for careful job matching and take time to connect young people with roles that align with their interests, which they are placed in when ready for employment. These strategies each contribute to improved outcomes achieved by CEYP.

To foster collaboration between stakeholders, delivery leads have instituted structured approaches to communication, which clarify each organisation's roles and responsibilities ahead of time. This is most effective in teams where one borough staff member has overall responsibility for project management, and where their role is designated entirely to Full Potential. The development of successful relationships with employer partners also requires significant resource. Employers feel prepared to host placements when receive sufficient information around the challenges faced by CEYP and how they could be accommodated, and perceive that delivery staff are on hand to offer continued support to participants during their placement.

Many of the structural barriers faced on the Full Potential programme are outside the control of delivery teams, but they seek to mitigate their impact where possible. This includes advising young people on how employment may affect their benefits and adapting placements to reduce this risk, for example, by organising placements with part-time hours. Stakeholders' reflections highlighted that in future, programme design and eligibility should consider these constraints and wider barriers.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Successes and positive outcomes

Full Potential has delivered a range of positive outcomes for CEYP, participating boroughs and delivery partners, despite the relatively short pilot timeframe. Overall, the programme has demonstrated that a coordinated, flexible and relational approach can effectively engage CEYP who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, and support meaningful progress towards education, employment and training. Key successes and positive outcomes include:

- **Reaching and engaging CEYP.** A key success of Full Potential has been its ability to engage CEYP, including those described by stakeholders as having been previously disengaged or not well served by mainstream employment and skills provision. Across boroughs, engagement is strongest where referral routes were built through trusted professionals such as personal advisers, social workers, virtual schools and JCP work coaches, supported by warm handovers and co-location of staff. This relational approach has helped overcome low trust in services and reduced anxiety about engaging with a new programme.
- **Delivery of tailored, holistic support.** The programme has enabled boroughs to deliver more tailored and holistic support than would otherwise have been possible. Low caseloads, one-to-one delivery and trauma-informed practice have allowed staff to address barriers such as mental health, housing instability, low confidence and financial constraints alongside employability activity. These approaches reflect the specific challenges faced by CEYP, with relationship-based support helping to build trust, and flexible engagement recognising non-linear progression and instability. Financial support for travel and equipment helps mitigate the absence of family safety nets, while integrating employability with wellbeing support enables young people to address overlapping barriers before moving into work. CEYP value the personalised nature of the support, including flexibility in delivery and alignment with their interests. Programme funding to remove financial barriers is a key enabler of engagement and participation.
- **Progression towards education, employment and training.** MI data indicate that Full Potential has supported CEYP to take meaningful steps towards EET, with 18 per cent (134 participants) progressing into employment and 47 per cent (342 participants) into education or training. Qualitative evidence supports this, highlighting that young people have progressed into a range of destinations including paid placements, internships, employment, apprenticeships, training and education. Work placements and internships are central to this progress, especially where they are ring-fenced for CEYP. They provide young people with paid work experience, increase their understanding of workplace expectations and expand their professional networks. Even where placements have not led directly to

permanent employment, they are widely seen as improving longer-term employability.

- **Improvements in confidence, wellbeing and skills.** Beyond EET outcomes, the programme has contributed to significant social, emotional and skills-based outcomes. Soft skills assessment data indicate a 31 per cent increase in participants' soft skills (employment skills, motivation, and confidence). Increased confidence was the most consistently reported change throughout the qualitative research, evident in CEYP's willingness to engage with employers, attend interviews, participate in group activities and articulate career goals. Improved wellbeing is closely linked to the structure, routine and sense of purpose provided by placements, courses and regular engagement with support workers. Young people have also developed transferable skills, including communication, time management, professionalism and digital confidence.
- **Strengthened partnerships and system learning.** At a systems level, Full Potential has strengthened partnership working both within boroughs and with external organisations. The programme acts as a catalyst for closer collaboration between leaving care teams, employment and skills services, adult learning, employer engagement teams and delivery partners such as DFF and the King's Trust. This coordination has improved the coherence of local support offers for CEYP and reinforced boroughs' corporate parenting roles.

5.2 Barriers and ongoing challenges

The evidence also highlights a range of barriers and challenges that have limited outcomes and will need to be addressed in future delivery.

- **Time and capacity constraints.** The compressed delivery timeframe was a significant constraint, largely driven by delays in central government commissioning rather than local mobilisation. Once commissioned, CLF and borough partners moved efficiently to establish a clearly defined programme and delivery offer; however, the late start limited the time available to embed delivery structures, build employer partnerships, engage CEYP and support progression into outcomes. Given that supporting CEYP often requires intensive and sustained intervention, this constrained timeframe placed pressure on staff capacity and limited the number of young people able to fully progress within the pilot period.
- **Engagement and retention challenges.** Sustaining engagement has been more challenging than initial recruitment. Many CEYP face complex and intersecting barriers, including mental health needs, lack of routine, unstable housing, financial insecurity and limited support networks. Periods of disengagement are common, requiring persistent, relationship-based re-engagement by staff. While this approach is often effective, it is resource-intensive and not always compatible with short-term reporting frameworks.

- **Structural and policy barriers.** Structural barriers, particularly perceived risks associated with the interaction between benefits and work, continued to shape young people's decisions and engagement. Anxiety about being financially worse off in work, especially in the context of high housing and living costs in London, act as a deterrent for some CEYP, even where paid placements are available.
- **Employer readiness and consistency of support.** Although many employers are engaging positively with Full Potential, employer capacity and readiness varies. Some employers have felt that they lacked sufficient upfront information and ongoing support to host CEYP effectively, particularly where placements are arranged quickly. Inconsistent in-work support risks placing additional pressure on young people and employers alike, and in some cases limits the sustainability of placements or progression opportunities.
- **Gaps in progression pathways.** Progression pathways are clearest for young people who are closer to work readiness at entry to the programme. For those with more complex needs, movement beyond placements into sustained employment is less consistent, particularly where ring-fenced or follow-on opportunities are limited. This highlights the need for clearer exit routes and longer-term progression planning beyond initial placements.
- **The non-linear nature of progression for CEYP presents challenges for standard funding and monitoring approaches:** CEYP often move in and out of engagement, as they navigate complex and intersecting barriers. Progress is rarely linear, and participants may cycle in and out of needing support over time. This creates tension with funding and monitoring regimes that assume steady progression or fixed timelines, highlighting the need for more flexible approaches that recognise sustained engagement and distance travelled.

5.3 Key evaluation questions

This section summarises how the evidence presented in the report responds to each of the evaluation questions set out in Section 1.4.

- **To what extent has the Full Potential programme engaged CEYP who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET?** The programme has successfully engaged CEYP across all 12 boroughs, primarily through trusted referral routes and relationship-based approaches. Engagement is strongest where warm handovers, co-location and clear communication about the offer are in place. While retention is challenging, the programme has demonstrated that tailored, flexible engagement models are effective for this cohort. However, qualitative evidence suggests that early delivery challenges, including delays in programme mobilisation and funding, affected the pace and scale of engagement in some areas.

- **What outcomes have been achieved for participants, including progression to EET and wider changes in confidence, wellbeing and skills?** Participants have progressed into a range of EET outcomes, including placements, employment, apprenticeships, training and education. Evidence shows improvements in confidence, wellbeing, motivation and employability skills, which are widely regarded as essential intermediate outcomes for CEYP.
- **How have different borough delivery models been implemented, and what approaches appear most effective?** A range of delivery models are being implemented, including in-house, commissioned and blended approaches. Models characterised by low caseloads, one-to-one support, trauma-informed practice, flexible funding and strong internal coordination are most effective in supporting engagement and progression.
- **How have partnerships with employers, training providers and other stakeholders contributed to delivery and outcomes?** Partnerships played a central role in delivery, particularly in sourcing placements, delivering specialist employability support and providing training opportunities. The role of DFF was especially strong and embedded within the programme as DFF's trusted relationships, trauma-informed approach and strong employer networks supported effective engagement, high-quality placements and sustained progression. Opportunities were most commonly in sectors such as council services, administration, hospitality, retail and social care, reflecting both employer demand and entry-level accessibility for participants. Across all partnerships, alignment of values, employer preparation and ongoing in-work support were critical to positive placement experiences and outcomes. In practice, this often reflected the scaling and extension of an established DFF model, with funding enabling greater reach, intensity and flexibility of support rather than a fundamentally new approach.
- **What barriers and challenges have been encountered, and how have they been mitigated?** Key barriers include time constraints, capacity pressures, complex participant needs, perceived benefit risks and employer readiness. Boroughs have been mitigating these through flexible delivery, persistent engagement, careful job matching and the use of programme funding to remove practical barriers, though challenges remain.
- **What learning can inform future Youth Guarantee delivery and wider systems change?** The findings demonstrate the value of a focused, cohort-based Youth Guarantee approach that combines intensive, relationship-based support with ring-fenced opportunities and strong cross-system coordination. Strong coordination between leaving care, employment, skills and employer partners was critical, highlighting the importance of integrated delivery models for future Youth Guarantee roll-out and wider systems change.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for CLF's Full Potential programme

Invest in long-term, place-based partnerships, with dedicated co-ordination

Evidence from this evaluation demonstrates that the presence of anchor institutions, including dedicated support providers with deep knowledge of both the cohort and the local geographical context, has been a key enabler of effective delivery. Boroughs consistently reported that where specialist partners such as DFF or the King's Trust were already embedded, delivery of support through Full Potential is noticeably more efficient, engagement with young people is stronger, and coordination between councils, employers and wider services is smoother.

Future delivery by CLF and other MSA's should therefore prioritise formal, strategic and operational partnerships with trusted, hyper-local intermediaries, alongside explicitly resourced coordination functions as a core design feature. Where such providers already exist, boroughs should establish clear and sustained partnership arrangements that define roles and responsibilities across councils, delivery partners and employers; integrate providers into strategic planning and operational decision-making; and support joint working through shared referral pathways, regular case-conferencing and agreed data-sharing processes. Dedicated coordination capacity is crucial to effective strategic oversight, ensuring accountability across partners, and avoiding duplication or lack of joined up delivery.

CLF should lead a mapping exercise of delivery and strategic partners across the twelve boroughs to identify organisations with the capability, capacity and relationships needed to work effectively with new cohorts. This would support more consistent delivery, reduce start-up friction, and help ensure that future provision builds on existing strengths rather than duplicating or displacing effective local infrastructure.

Where the mapping exercise identifies gaps in local provision, boroughs should move beyond short-term stop-gap solutions and invest in local capacity building. Evidence suggests that this often doesn't happen due to funding constraints. Local capacity building could include support for partnership or consortium models, and phased commissioning approaches that enable emerging local organisations to develop the specialist expertise, employer links and cohort knowledge required. Alongside this, CLF should work with other local areas to make the case for more long-term funding. It should also map and access all local and national sources of funding to create a joined up and integrated network of support for young people. In the longer term, this approach would help ensure that every borough has access to a stable, place-based support function embedded within the local system and capable of sustaining delivery beyond the life of individual programmes.

Ensure continuous support before, during and after employment

Continuity of support before, during and after placements is critical to positive outcomes for CEYP. Evidence from delivery partners indicates that gaps in support at key transition points, particularly at the end of placements, increases the risk of young people disengaging or cycling back into unemployment or economic inactivity. Some young people also reported uncertainty at the end of placements and a lack of clarity around next steps, reinforcing the importance of structured progression support.

By contrast, where a CEYP does successfully progress from support or a placement, into a job, in-work support can be crucial in enabling that individual to overcome initial challenges and sustain the job outcome, particularly in the absence of parental and wider family support. However, the evaluation also found that take-up and visibility of in-work support varied in practice, suggesting that its availability and consistency may be as important as its design.

In future delivery, all interventions that directly support a CEYP to transition into a job should design and structure this as a continuous journey. This should include clear stages - induction and preparation on entry; ongoing in-work support during placements; clear progression planning as placements end; and ongoing in-work support to help the young person sustain the employment outcome. This reflects both the qualitative evidence from this evaluation and wider research on effective support for CEYP, which highlights the importance of sustained, relationship-based support through key transition points. This continuity should be treated as a core component of delivery, recognising its role in building confidence, sustaining employment and reducing churn.

In addition, future delivery should avoid fixed time limits on support, reflecting the non-linear nature of progression for CEYP. While clear benchmarks and expectations for progress are important, these should be applied flexibly rather than used as cut-off points. In practice, this means maintaining support for young people who take longer to progress, including those who disengage and later re-engage, while adapting support intensity to their needs. This approach aligns with the relational, trauma-informed model underpinning Full Potential and is essential to sustaining engagement and improving longer-term outcomes.

Grow the employer pool, and strengthen employer preparation and support

Employer feedback and delivery partner evidence indicate that while many employers were highly motivated to offer opportunities to CEYP, others were unwilling, and some underestimated the breadth of personal, practical and emotional challenges young people might bring to the workplace.

To widen the pool of employers engaged in Full Potential, CLF could develop a tiered approach to engagement. This could include light-touch activities, such as careers talks and workplace visits through to more extensive activities, such as paid

placements. This would enable employers with different staff capacity and levels of readiness to engage in ways that fit with the needs of their businesses. Similar approaches have been used in programmes such as Traineeships, where providers who offered a light touch, supported entry point were successful at engaging new employers, before building up to more extensive offers, such as offering work experience placements. Presenting Full Potential as a supported talent pipeline, with support for employers and a single point of contact, is likely to boost confidence, particularly among small and medium-sized businesses.

CLF could also adopt a more proactive and targeted approach to employer engagement by focusing on sectors and organisations not traditionally involved in youth employment initiatives. This could include growth sectors across the twelve boroughs.

In addition, CLF should build links with national initiatives, such as the Care Leaver Covenant. Visible senior commitment to the Covenant, alongside promotion of employer advocacy has helped to widen the engagement of employers. Employers with positive experiences of Full Potential could be supported to act as champions, sharing practical insights and business benefits with peers.

Feedback from employers indicates that placements are most successful where employers receive structured preparation and continued support, including guidance on trauma-informed practice and clear expectations around supervision and flexibility. Moving into year 2 delivery, alongside focusing on growing the pool of local employers willing to offer placements to CEYP, CLF should also ensure that appropriate training for employers is in place to enable them to work effectively with CEYP and new cohorts of young people (for example, trauma-informed training for employers working with CEYP, through DFF). This training should be embedded as a core part of the employer offer. It should set out employers' responsibilities in creating supportive working environments, managing challenges appropriately, and responding constructively to setbacks.

At the same time, employers are navigating an increasingly complex landscape of youth employment offers, with differing eligibility criteria and support models. CLF could play a central coordination role in: supporting employers to understand which Youth Guarantee, or other offers, are most appropriate for their organisation; setting realistic expectations about the support young people may require; and brokering opportunities that provide young people with access to higher-quality, sustainable career pathways, not just short-term roles.

Promote co-location to strengthen access to wider support

Boroughs that implemented co-location of partners and services found this to be a highly effective enabler of engagement with wider support, particularly for CEYP. While awareness of services is generally high, signposting alone is often insufficient to

secure uptake. Young people are far more likely to access mental health, housing, benefits and wellbeing support where help is embedded within trusted settings and delivered through existing relationships. Co-location can reduce practical barriers, enable warm handovers between professionals, and support more holistic responses to young people's needs.

CLF should therefore continue to promote and, where possible, enable co-located and embedded delivery models as part of Full Potential. This includes supporting boroughs to align employability provision physically and operationally with key services used by CEYP and encouraging partnership arrangements that prioritise shared spaces and joint working. Embedding services in this way helps ensure that wider support is accessible in practice, not just in principle, and reinforces the holistic intent of the programme.

Work with partners to reduce administrative burden

Administrative and compliance requirements, ID requirements and extensive paperwork, created a significant barrier to sustained engagement for some young people. Some young people reported these processes felt intrusive or overwhelming and, in some cases, contributed to early disengagement. Managing administrative requirements required substantial staff resource, diverting time and capacity away from relationship-based support and progression activity.

CLF should therefore work with boroughs, delivery partners and relevant stakeholders to explore how administrative burden can be reduced or better managed within programme design. This includes identifying opportunities to streamline enrolment and compliance processes; avoiding duplication of checks across partners; and enabling trusted professionals to verify information on young people's behalf. In doing so, it will be important to retain appropriate safeguards around eligibility and accountability, while focusing on simplifying processes, reducing duplication and completing requirements as efficiently as possible.

In addition, delivery staff should be supported to work alongside young people to complete required documentation, maintaining engagement during the sign-up process and providing practical help where needed. This supported approach may be particularly important for CEYP who face additional challenges in accessing or organising documentation.

6.2 Recommendations applicable to other Youth Guarantee Trailblazer areas

Adopt a focused approach to early delivery

Findings from Full Potential indicate that the focused, cohort-based approach has been instrumental in enabling effective delivery, learning and coordination during the first year of implementation. Concentrating on a clearly defined cohort, whose needs

are well understood, enables support to be targeted at young people who need it most. It also means that support can be tailored, based on evidence of what works for different cohorts. In CLF this approach has allowed delivery partners to develop shared understanding and test delivery models in practice, rather than stretching capacity across multiple groups with differing needs. CEYP are a particularly appropriate cohort for this approach due to both the strong evidence of need experienced by this group and the practical advantages of a clear legal definition of what constitutes a CEYP. The clear legal definition enables identification and targeting, and supports partnership working across statutory and non-statutory services such as local authority leaving care, employability and employer engagement functions.

Other MSAs commissioned to deliver Youth Guarantee programmes in future should, firstly, undertake mapping of their local NEET population to understand demographic characteristics and geographical concentration within their area. Alongside further mapping of barriers and existing support, MSAs should then consider prioritising a focussed approach first. This could be geographical or cohort-based, where there is strong evidence of need, with one organisation holding clear responsibility for coordination and outcomes. The evidence suggests that this focus supports consistency, accountability and stronger relationships between partners in the early stages of delivery. Full Potential also demonstrates the value of using early cohort-based delivery as a learning platform to inform future expansion. Rather than developing entirely new delivery models for each additional group, a sequenced expansion approach can enable systems to apply learning, build confidence and scale capacity over time, supporting more sustainable and consistent rollout.

Guarantee and promote ring-fenced paid work placements

Ring fenced paid work placements are a major driver of engagement for CEYP. Young people consistently reported that the availability of a clear, guaranteed opportunity differentiates the programme from more generic employability offers and increased their motivation to participate. In addition, many CEYP highlighted the importance of placements being paid, noting that without financial support they would not have been able to take part due to living costs, travel expenses or the need to prioritise immediate income. This reflects the fact that CEYP are often financially independent and lack the family support or safety nets that enable others to take up unpaid opportunities. In this context, it is important that placements are not only paid, but paid at a level that reflects the real cost of living. As a minimum, this should align with the Living Wage, and in London the London Living Wage, to ensure that participation is financially viable.

While generic job search support may be effective for young people who are closer to the labour market, many CEYP benefit most from structured and bespoke pathways that take account of their starting point and wider support needs. Ring-fenced

placements provide a credible progression route and reduced reliance on competitive recruitment processes that many young people perceive as inaccessible.

Evidence from delivery also indicates that paid placements supported sustained engagement, reducing financial pressures and enabling young people to focus on building skills and confidence during the placement period, rather than balancing unpaid work with other income-generating activities.

Other MSAs commissioned to deliver Youth Guarantee programmes in future should therefore ensure that ring-fenced, paid placements are not only guaranteed in principle but clearly communicated and actively promoted as a core element of their offer. This includes distinguishing them from standard employment support and positioning placements within a wider pathway of preparation, in-work support and progression. Paid work placements could be delivered through the Government's Job Guarantee for young people who meet the eligibility criteria or funded through other mechanisms to engage wider groups of young people.

6.3 Recommendations for national policy stakeholders

Commit to long-term funding, timely mobilisation and clear communication

Initial one-year funding, delays to programme launch and early delivery, and short notice extension to two years have had material negative impacts on implementation. Boroughs reported that late confirmation of funding, delivery parameters and timelines resulted in compressed delivery periods, reduced time for relationship-building with young people and employers, and fewer opportunities to innovate, test, refine and adapt delivery models based on early learning. These delays placed additional pressure on delivery organisations, restricted the development of long-term partnerships, limited employer engagement and undermined the ability to embed some of the distinctive features of the Youth Guarantee approach.

Beyond the second year of Trailblazer delivery, the Government should commit to long-term funding of the Youth Guarantee, ensuring coverage across all parts of the country. Future long-term commissioning and design of the Youth Guarantee, and other programmes, should prioritise timely mobilisation and clear, consistent communication from the outset. This includes early confirmation of programme scope, funding arrangements and delivery expectations, as well as sufficient lead-in time to allow partners and employers to prepare, plan, test and learn. Ensuring realistic timelines for mobilisation and learning is critical to avoiding delivery compression and enabling delivery organisations to implement the Youth Guarantee model as intended.

Widen the offer - the Government should expand the age range and focus of the Youth Guarantee

Evidence shows that NEET rates are highest among 22–24 year-olds, yet the age range set by DWP for the Youth Guarantee Trailblazers was narrowly targeted at 18–21

year-olds. The Full Potential programme has adopted a broader 17–25 approach. Expanding the Youth Guarantee to cover the full 16–24 age range would better reflect where need is greatest. This would also better align with the Jobs Guarantee, which recently set a good precedent by extending the age range eligibility to 18–24.

By widening the age range and providing co-located services which ensure that all young people get the support that is right for them, the Youth Guarantee could become a genuinely inclusive offer, improve reach and reduce inequalities in access to support.

Expand and target the Job Guarantee

The recent extension of the Job Guarantee to young people aged 18–24 is a positive step, but the Government should significantly expand and target the programme to those who stand to benefit the most. The current focus on benefit claimants who have been economically inactive for 18 months excludes over three-quarters of young people who are NEET, many of whom face substantial barriers but are invisible to traditional employment service providers. Eligibility should be widened to include young people on health-related benefits and those who have been NEET for 18 months or longer.

As budgets allow, the Government should consider further expansion to maximise impact. This could include extending eligibility to young people who have been NEET for 18 months but are not claiming benefits, where they are referred by an approved organisation, as well as reducing the eligibility threshold to 12 months for specific groups who face entrenched barriers to employment. In time, the Government should work towards expansion to all young people who have been NEET for 12 months. Expansion should be combined with tailored outreach, training, and employer engagement. Evidence shows that well-designed placements—offering real paid work, training, and support—can prevent young people from long-term detachment and improve labour market outcomes. Scaling these placements further, and delivering them through local partnerships and community hubs, would build the confidence, skills, and work experience of young people who currently miss out and help deliver a meaningful reduction in NEET levels.

Ensure that work pays for young people and that this is communicated with confidence and consistency

Anxiety about the interaction between work and benefits remains a significant barrier to engagement and progression for CEYP and others facing disadvantage. CEYP frequently express concerns about losing entitlements, facing intrusive reassessments, or being financially worse off if a placement does not lead to sustained employment. Where clear, proactive and personalised communication is provided, young people are more confident to take up opportunities; inconsistent messaging or limited advisor confidence risks reinforcing misconceptions and deterring participation. Alongside this,

it is important that opportunities themselves are designed so that young people are financially better off in work, including through ensuring that jobs and placements offered through the programme meet appropriate Living Wage standards.

Although tools and benefit calculators already exist, awareness and take-up among young people remains low. These tools should be tailored to young people and actively promoted by work coaches as part of wider communication about the Youth Guarantee, as well as through community organisations that support young people.

Jobcentre Plus should also improve awareness of existing protections within the benefits system, including the right to return to Universal Credit at the same level within six months of starting work, and the 'right to try' measure, which means that moving into work will not trigger a reassessment or award review for people claiming disability benefits. Clear communication of these protections, treated as a core part of programme design rather than informal reassurance, is critical to reducing anxiety and building confidence to take up work.

Future Youth Guarantee delivery should place strong emphasis that being in work leads to young people being better off, compared to being on benefits. This includes proactively challenging misconceptions about benefits and employment, and ensuring advisors are well prepared to undertake better-off calculations and explain benefit interactions accurately and confidently. Guaranteeing and clearly communicating safe routes back to benefits where work does not result in sustained employment is essential to supporting progression and engagement.